



Asia Network of School Social Work

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Editor: Kyoungbyeon Park

'Child Abuse and School Social Work in Asian Countries'

On the 12th October, 2019, school social workers and related people from four Asian countries including Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore gathered for an international conference at Seinan Gakuin University, Fukuoka, Japan. There, participants agreed to make Asia Network of School Social Work(ANSSW). The temporary representatives for each countries are Koji Kadota(Professor at Kurume University, President of Fukuoka Association of School Social Workers, Japan), Woong Choi(President of Korea Association of School Social Workers), Kyoung-Hyeon Park(3rd President of Korea Association of School Social Workers), Min-Yu Liao(Associate Professor at Chinese Culture University, Executive Director of Taiwan Association of School Social Workers) and Wound Yuh Ju(Peace from National University of Singapore on behalf of the Singapore Association). ANSSW aims to communicate and cooperate for the development of school social work, and ultimately contributing to the well-being and healthy growth of students.

Announcement: The 2nd ANSSW conference will be held in Taiwan on September 25th, 2021. This is the invitation of Min-Yu Liao, TASSW's Executive Director.

TASSW will host a conference on September 25th(Saturday), 2021. The theme is "school social work during the Covid-19 pandemic". We sincerely invite everyone to join us in this year.

More often than not, school social workers have shared and exchanged valuable experiences on how to balance epidemic prevention and provide professional services when facing the challenges of the Covid-19. We sincerely hope that everyone can come to Taiwan. However, considering the prevalence of pandemic in various countries with different epidemic prevention regulations, we would like to hold a video conference simultaneously to allow partners who cannot come to participate with us.

The schedule of the conference is as follows (tentative):

10:00-12:00 Working Experience sharing of School social work during the Covid-19 pandemic (Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan)

12:00-13:30 Asian Network of School Social Work meeting (Video Conference if needed)

*(*The sharing time for the representative of each country is 20 minutes, please provide written or PPT in English in advance, and there is no restriction on the language of the speaker.)*

Please let us know how you and your members will attend this conference. We look forward to seeing you in various forms in Taiwan.

** The following articles are placed according to the alphabetic order of the names of the country.*

Young Carers in Japan and School Social Workers

Koji Kadota

(President of Fukuoka Association of School Social Workers)

Young carers are “children whose rights are at a risk of being insufficiently protected because they undertake adult responsibilities on a daily basis, such as household work and care to family member, which consequently restrict their opportunities.” Some examples of these tasks are shopping, cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry for family member with disability or illness; caring or providing direct care to family member with disability or illness; looking after younger siblings; translating for family member whose first language is not Japanese and interpreting for family member with disability.

The UK have lead research on young carers and carried out surveys since 1988, identifying children who were providing care at home. From around 2000, these surveys and the support programs began to receive recognition in Japan as a means of supporting caregivers. In 2010, researchers in Japan carried out a survey to identify young carers in Japan. In 2020, The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare conducted the first nation wide survey and compiled a survey report in March 2021. Based on this survey results, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare and the Ministry of Education will be establishing a project team to organize support measures by May 2021.

The March 2021 Survey Report showed that 46.4% of all Junior High Schools and 49.8% of all Senior High Schools in Japan responded to having students who may be identified as young carers. The type of caring activities with higher percentages were “care to younger siblings” and “household works” in Junior High Schools, and “care to younger siblings” and “work part time to financially support the family” in Senior High Schools. When compared to students who are not carers, those with caring responsibilities showed poorer health conditions and higher percentages of school absence, lateness, and early leave. Students’ answers to current problems and concerns included expenses for education such as tuition, financial situation of the household, and about the ill or disabled family member.

When schools need to support students who come from difficult homes, School Social Workers are called on to provide the appropriate measures. From time to time, there have been cases where School Social Workers identified young carers while conducting home visits, a part of an outreach, and were able to implement the necessary measures. This indicates that the future policies will likely to have high expectations for School Social Workers to play a crucial role in supporting young carers in Japan.

Child Abuse in Japan and School Social Worker Interventions

Satoshi Ikeda

(School Social Worker, Fukuoka City Board of Education)

1. Child Abuse in Japan

1. The Development of Countermeasures Against Child Abuse

After World War II, the countermeasures against child abuse in Japan were taken under the Child Welfare Act. But the content of this legislature was not efficient and it did not address certain issues such as defining the term “child abuse.” Awareness on Child Rights began to rise in Japan when the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. People became more involved in child abuse issues and NGO groups in Osaka and Tokyo rolled out prevention measures. In response to these movements, the welfare ministry at the time issued intervention manuals and notices concerning the application of the Child Welfare Act and aimed at conducting early identification and intervention of child abuse.

But as the public deepened the understanding of the issues, it became evident that measures taken in accordance with the Child Welfare Act had limits. Thus, in 2000 the Child Abuse Prevention Act was enacted and enforced. This Act defined the term of child abuse, prohibited child abuse, and clarified the roles and responsibilities of the national and municipal governments. The Child Abuse Prevention Act and the relevant laws have been amended numerous times since then, to develop a more efficient system. Examples of these revisions include information-sharing between institutions of the municipality about the abused child and the custodian; establishing Regional Councils to coordinate the appropriate support measures, placing lawyers in Child Consultation Centers, and establishing Child Care Support Centers to provide extensive care from prenatal period to parenting. Moreover, in 2017, the principles of the purpose of the Child Welfare Act was reviewed and made clear that children are the subjects of their rights.

2. Recent Circumstances of Child Abuse

Despite the substantial efforts made to strengthen the measures, investigated report cases of child abuse have been on the rise, soaring up to 193,780 in 2019 (Figure 1).

In the Child Abuse Prevention Act, types of abuse are categorized as 1. Physical Abuse 2. Sexual Abuse 3. Neglect 4. Emotional Abuse (Table 1). At the time of the enforcement, the most reported cases were physical abuse. But in the recent years, emotional abuse has been significantly increasing (Figure 2). This is partly due to the increase of referrals made to the Child Consultation Center by the police on cases where violence against a spouse occurred in the physical presence of the child.

Even after the cases are investigated, only about 30 percent of the abused children are placed in the Child Welfare Center in Japan. Many will continue to live at home and receive the support there. Thus, providing support at municipal institutions that are close to troubled homes, such as the Regional Council, is inevitable. However, in the recent years, we continue to see severe child abuse cases where the abuse had been identified by the Child Consultation Center and other institutions but no effective interventions were implemented.

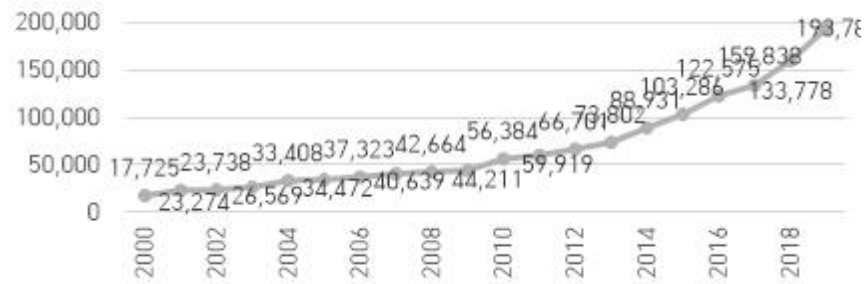


Figure 1. Numbers of Investigated Child Abuse Report Cases in Japan

Table 1. Definition of Child Abuse

Physical Abuse	Assault the child in a manner that will cause or is likely to cause external injury on the body of the child.
Sexual Abuse	Engage in indecency against the child or cause the child to engage in indecency.
Neglect	Materially fail to perform the duty of custody as a custodian, for example, substantially reduce the amount of food for the child, abandon and neglect the child for a long period of time, take no action in response to physical, sexual, emotional abuse by a non custodian who lives with the custodian and the child.
Emotional Abuse	Use significantly violent language or take an extreme attitude of rejection against the child, use physical and/or verbal violence upon one's spouse or partner at home where the child is living, or otherwise speak or behave in a manner that would be significantly traumatic to the child.

	2000	2005	2010*	2015	2019
Physical Abuse	8,877 (50.1%)	34,472 (63.6%)	21,559 (38.2%)	28,621 (27.7%)	49,240 (25.4%)
Sexual Abuse	754 (4.3%)	1,052 (1.9%)	1,405 (2.5%)	1,521 (1.5%)	1,730 (1.1%)
Neglect	6,318 (35.6%)	12,911 (23.8%)	18,352 (32.5%)	24,444 (23.7%)	33,345 (17.2%)
Emotional Abuse	1,776 (10.0%)	5,797 (10.7%)	15,068 (26.7%)	48,700 (47.2%)	109,118 (56.3%)

**this data omits Fukushima Prefecture due to the Great East Japan Earthquake*

Figure 2. Reported Numbers of Child Abuse Cases in Japan by Type

II. Interventions by School Social Workers

The following are two cases of child abuse interventions taken by School Social Workers (hereinafter SSW) of Fukuoka Prefecture. Some details have been changed for privacy purposes.

Case-1. Intervention for Neglect

(A), an elementary school student, was often seen sleeping in classes before noon. (A) also could not get the appropriate school supplies promptly. The school was very concerned and kept contacting (A)'s home, but often times could not get a hold of the custodian. So the school interviewed (A) and was told that (A) basically does not eat breakfast in the morning and that sometimes (A) will have no dinner to eat.

The case was consulted by the school and the SSW to implement the following intervention: serve a light meal for (A) to eat in the teachers room upon (A)'s arrival to school each morning. As a result, (A) stopped sleeping during classes before noon and it was apparent that (A) became motivated in class works. The school also engaged in reporting these positive changes to (A)'s home. This led the school to

have better communication with (A)'s home and the student was provided with all the necessary school supplies.

Case-2. Intervention for Emotional Abuse

(B) is a Junior High School student whose custodian has mild intellectual disability. The custodian engages in self-injurious behavior when anxious, and when the situation worsens, (B) would come late to class or be absent for a prolonged period.

The SSW interviewed (B) when the student came late to school. (B) explained that on the night before, (B) had a quarrel with the custodian, who then pulled a knife on (B). The SSW asked what (B) had hoped to be done, and the reply was to continue living at home. So first, the SSW and (B) considered the measures to be taken in an event of emergency. Then they confirmed all the possible places to seek help and people to rely on. After these consultations, (B) gave consent to let the SSW interview the custodian.

Through the interview with the SSW, the custodian revealed that he/she became unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and felt emotionally distressed. The SSW and the custodian discussed the matter together and found a part-time job at a nearby convenience store. To work there was just a first step, but this eased the custodian's emotional anxiety. As a result, (B)'s late arrival and absences began to improve.

These examples clearly indicate that Japan's current ways of taking measures against child abuse inevitably place the local municipality as the main source of providing support. However, it could also mean that schools can play a significant role as well, because that is where children spend most of their day. With the cooperation of teachers and staffs, SSW can make school into a safer and more secure environment as a means to support homes that are at a high risk of abuse.

When carrying out the necessary measures against child abuse, the views and opinions expressed by children must also be regarded because they are subjects of rights. It is important to communicate effectively with them and discuss the children's wishes together before taking concrete measures.

School Social Work in South Korea

Woong Choi
(President of KASSW)

Current Status

South Korea is still under the influence of COVID-19, especially in Seoul and metropolitan areas. Schools are doing both online learning and intermittent school attending. School social workers are conducting far more phone calls, communication through social media, and home visits than ever before to prevent students from neglect or abuse, physical and emotional difficulties and accumulation of learning deficits in the COVID-19 situation. In addition, by closely communicating and cooperating with teachers and community welfare institutions, we are working to ensure that students are not hindered by healthy growth and development during infectious diseases. In order to cope with the threat of infectious diseases, the government decided to establish a new organization in the Education Welfare Priority Support Project (Education Welfare Project, in short). It is the "Education Welfare Safety Net Center", which is expected to serve as a hub for community education welfare services and to support the case management of vulnerable students in schools who do not have educational welfare workers. 90% of education welfare workers are qualified social workers, and the Education Welfare Project is the representative job position for school social workers. The specific dates are slightly different, but in 2021, Education Safety Net Centers were launched in 14 regional offices of education out of 17 metropolitan local governments.

Implementation of the National Qualification of School Social Workers

It was only in the late 1990s that social workers worked full-time as temporary workers and staff in schools and provided school social work services in line with the school curriculum. Social workers were state-qualified, but school social workers were still not enough to gain trust and social recognition from the education community. Finally, in 2018, almost 20 years after the revision of the Social Work Services Act, school social workers were specified in the law as one of the specialized fields of social work practice, thus creating a system as a national qualification. Under the new law, a university or graduate school must complete all required and optional courses in social work, pass the first-class national examination, and complete a total of 1,000 hours of training over a year.

Table 1. Training Contents of National Qualification of School Social Workers

Domain	Hours	Contents
Theory	150 hours	School Social Work Law and Policy/ Ethics and Philosophy/ Theory and Practice/ Planning and Administration
Field Practice	830 hours	Understanding of School Environment/ Assessment and Evaluation/ Systematic Intervention/ Crisis Intervention/ Administration and Financial Management
Academic Activity	20 hours	Matters Deemed Necessary by Supervisor and Supervisee under School Social Work Training
total 1,000 hours		

An institution that can provide training is a school that is in charge of school social work services with a person with more than 5 years of school social work experience after obtaining the school social work qualification. As of May 2021, as the first group of supervisee, 12 social workers are under supervision in six schools (5 districts). The small number of supervisee believed to be due to the lack of publicity in the first year of implementation, low interest, restricted access to outsiders in schools due to Covid-19, and fewer schools participate as training institutions. From 2005 to 2020, 1,598 school social workers who have obtained school social worker license through the private qualification system by the Korea Association of School Social Workers (<https://www.kassw.or.kr/>) will be converted to state license after completing 12 hours of special education course.

Child Abuse in Korea and School Social Work

Hee-Young Kim
(Chairman of International Sub-Committee in KSSSW)
Kyoung-Hyeon Park
(The 3rd president of KASSW)

Beginning of child abuse protection service in Korea

In Korea, child abuse protection services are supported under the ‘Child Welfare Act’ and the ‘Special Act on Punishment of Child Abuse Crimes (Child Abuse Punishment Act)’. First of all, the ‘Child Welfare Act’, which was completely revised in January 2000, provided an opportunity to intervene in child abuse at the national level, and through this amendment, the term, child abuse, was specified for the first time.

Child abuse refers to “adults, including their guardians, who engage in physical, mental, or sexual violence or harsh behavior that may harm the child's health or welfare or impede normal development, and the child's guardian abandons or neglects the child.”(Article 3(7)) In the scope of child abuse, even simple corporal punishment and discipline were clearly included. The amendment also established 17 child abuse prevention centers in 2000 in the form of private entrustment of local organizations, and increased to 69 child protection agencies in 2020. The child protection agency has become a nationwide child abuse response system responsible for the detection, protection, and treatment of abused children in the community and the prevention of child abuse.

The Child Abuse Punishment Act 2014 was enacted to promptly protect victims of child abuse and to strengthen punishment for perpetrators. The Child Abuse Punishment Act stipulates 25 types of duties, including teachers, medical personnel, child welfare facilities’ heads and employees, child welfare officers, private academies, and other public officials and employees of welfare-related facilities as mandated reporters.

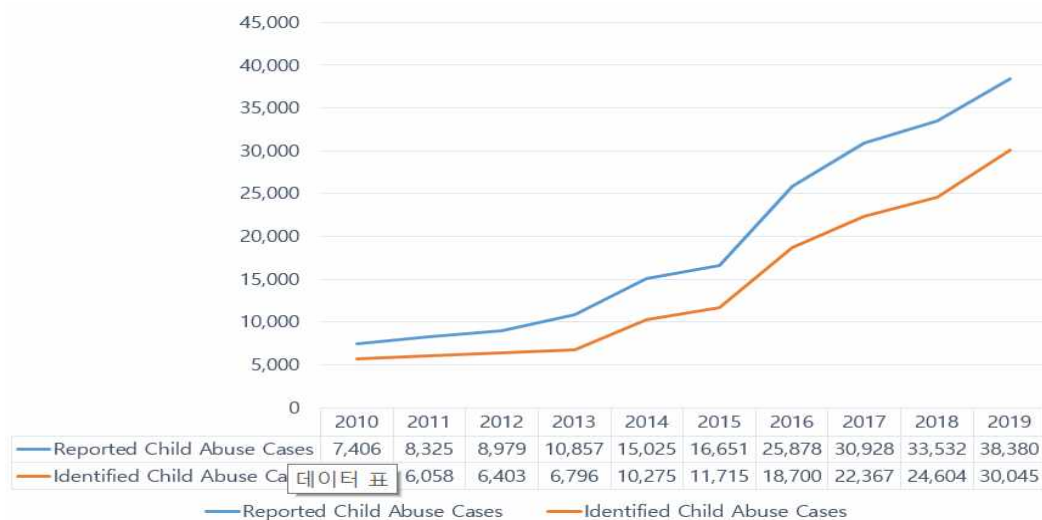


Figure 1. Child Abuse In Korea

Despite the establishment of a child abuse prevention and protection service system following the revision and enactment of the child abuse-related laws and child abuse protection systems, child abuse in Korea has increased. According to the 「2019 Key Statistics on Child Abuse」, the number of child abuse cases reported steadily increased from 7,406 in 2010 to 38,380 in 2019, of which 10,027 cases were identified child abuse in 2014 to 30,045 cases in 2019.

Changes in child abuse protection services in Korea

In 2019, the child abuse response system was reorganized from the private-led to the government-led in accordance with the Inclusive Nation's Child Policy to expand national responsibility for children. In 2020, through the revision of the Child Welfare Act and the Child Abuse Punishment Act, the separation of child abuse investigations and case management, which had been conducted by child protection agencies, began.

In order to prevent child abuse and support victims of child abuse, local governments should have a public official in charge of child abuse who is qualified as a social worker. On-site investigations were carried out by public officials in charge of child abuse or judicial police officers, and case management was conducted by child protection agencies.

A public official in charge of child abuse conducts an intake, a field investigation, a child protection plan establishment, an action, an initial safety assessment, and transfers cases judged to be abused to a child protection agency. Child protection agencies provide case management plans and services, including treatment and counseling programs for victims, their families, and child abusers. Finally, in order to determine the closing of the case, after examining the parenting status and evaluating the child abuse risk, the local government decides whether to terminate the case intervention of a child protection agency. After the case is closed, the child protection agency provides follow-up management through home visits and phone calls.

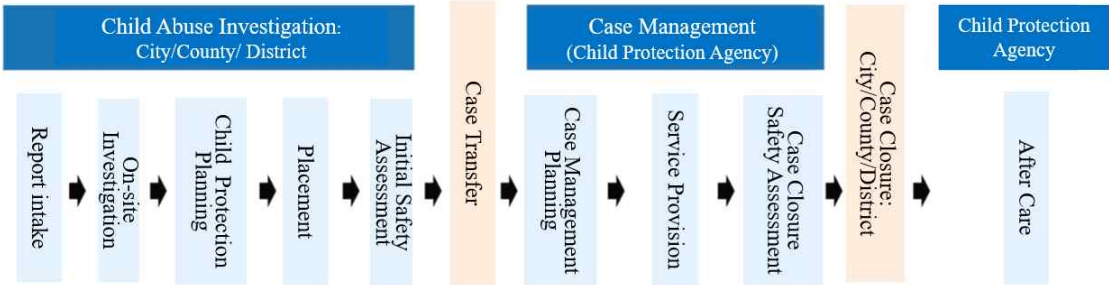


Figure 2. Child Abuse Response System (2020.10.1.Enforcement)

Covid 19 and Child Safety

Korea experienced a severe difficulty throughout the year 2020. Schools were closed and the children's centers were also shut down. The young children had to spend most of the time with the smart-phones in their home. Many workers lost their jobs as the Covid 19 period grew longer, and not a few families have been hit economically. Sometimes cases in which children were killed by parental neglect and abuse have been reported in the media. School social workers have made more phone calls, text messages and home visits to students and families than ever before.

Sora's story

One day Sora, 9 years old, visited the school social worker's office and said. "I'm so scared that I pull a blanket over my head. Mom rarely comes home even at night." Sora was small and thin compared to her peers. She still doesn't read and write well.

The school social worker felt it was dangerous, but she calmly told Sora. "Thank you for telling me that story. You must be scared to be home alone every night. May I come to your house and meet your mother?" She nodded her head.

The house was at the end of the village and the gate was sloppy, making it unsafe from outside intrusion. The school social worker couldn't meet Sora's mom because she didn't answer the phone and reply to the text message. After two weeks, she could meet Sora's mom. She said she had no choice but to work at night. After talking a lot, Sora's mother confessed that she was not confident in raising Sora. Sora has been reported to a child protection agency before, but her life has not changed.

Finally, Sora and Sora's mom said that Sora would be better to live in a children's facility. Sora had to transfer to a new school near the facility. The school social worker didn't lose touch with Sora. Sora said her mom promised to see her once a month, but didn't visit the facility yet. The school social worker met the social worker

at the facility and cooperated to help Sora to adapt to the new environment. After six months, Sora got along well at school and made many friends. She gained weight and grew tall. She is happy there.

Ethical Dilemmas

In dealing with child abuse cases, school social workers often experience ethical dilemmas. Should we work for strengthen the family or should we take the child away from the parent(s)? Recently, child abuse laws have been strengthened, forcing separation measures to be taken in the event of abuse detection. In reality, however, it is often confusing whether separation is best. Should we help the parents to take good care of their children? What if the child doesn't want to be separated from the family, even though the parents don't have the capability? What if the principal doesn't allow the school social worker to intervene in family matters? Though we have principles and ethical guidelines for social work professional practice, the reality is far more complex and difficult.

This kind of work increases stress and emotional consumption. School social workers feel exhausted and sometimes feel frustrated. KASSW recommends a quality supervisors for the school social workers about child abuse. KASSW also offers programs for its members to relax and recharge; A group of social workers read the book <The Children Act> by Ian McEwan or watched movies like 《Capernaum》(2018) and had a discussion. And some take lectures about 'children's right' offered by UNICEF.

References

Child Welfare Act:

<https://www.law.go.kr/LSW/lsLinkProc.do?lsNm=%EC%95%84%EB%8F%99%EB%B3%B5%EC%A7%80%EB%B2%95&chrClsCd=010202&mode=20&ancYnChk=0#>

Kang Dong-wook (2019). A Study on the Current Status of Child Abuse in Korea and Legal and Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. Child Protection Research, 4(2), Korean Society for Child Protection, 133-194

Ministry of Health and Welfare (2020). Key statistics of child abuse in 2019. Department of Child Abuse Response, Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Special Act on Punishment of Child Abuse Crimes (Child Abuse Punishment Act):

<https://www.law.go.kr/%EB%B2%95%EB%A0%B9/%EC%95%84%EB%8F%99%ED%95%99%EB%8C%80%EB%B2%94%EC%A3%84%EC%9D%98%EC%B2%98%EB%B2%8C%EB%93%B1%EC%97%90%EA%B4%80%ED%95%9C%ED%8A%B9%EB%A1%80%EB%B2%95>

Protecting our children - A Collective Approach in Singapore

Ang Kai Fen & Melissa Lim
(School Social Work Chapter, Singapore Association of Social Workers)

Management of Child Abuse in Singapore

Each day, the safety and well-being of some children across the world are threatened by child abuse and neglect. Intervening effectively in the lives of these children and their families is not the sole responsibility of any single agency or professional group, but rather is a shared community concern.

The lead agency in child protection in Singapore is the Child Protection Service (CPS) under the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the duties are spelt out in the Children and Young Persons Act. (www.msf.gov.sg)

In recent years, MSF has introduced more rigorous screening tools and training for professionals such as social workers, educators, counsellors and health professionals. This network of committed professionals helped to keep children safe. With enhanced ability to pick up safety concerns for a child, community intervention becomes the first line of support. These include supporting the children and families with community-based help such as Family Service Centres (FSCs) or Child Protection Specialist Centres (CPSCs), Safe and Strong Families Preservation (SSF-P), Family Violence Specialist Centres (FVSC) or referring serious cases of harm to MSF's Child Protective Service (CPS) for intervention.

In addition, MSF has stepped up public education efforts on child protection and family violence over the years, which helped in uncovering more cases of concerns.

Types of Abuse	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Physical Abuse	188	138	177	148	161	263	444	373	584	660
Sexual Abuse	58	72	70	60	56	82	107	181	248	210
Neglect	144	205	136	135	164	206	322	340	331	218
Total	390	415	383	343	381	551	873	894	1,163	1,088

**Source: Ministry of Family and Social Development. Statistics last updated on 16 April 2020.*

The Importance of Collective Support

There is an African proverb, that “*It takes a village to raise a child*” and indeed, all of us including government, community and public have a part to play in ensuring that our children are protected from harm. In addition to MSF, Family Service Centres (FSCs) and other social service agencies are also common access points for enquiries and help in parenting issues. Counselling, referral and family life programmes are some of the key services offered by such agencies. The help provided by these centres serves as a form of early intervention for families experiencing difficulties in managing their children or coping with parental roles. SHINE Children and Youth Services is thus one of the social service agencies that developed a child-centric wrap-around integrated care programme to provide holistic upstream social work intervention support and care to vulnerable primary school-going children while promoting social work practices in school setting.

Adopting a “many helping hands” approach, the Integrated Care Programme (ICP) by SHINE brings together a network of partners from different organisations. It is with the common aim to provide opportunities and resources for children to overcome challenges, grow, learn and be successful through their primary school education. The enhanced support and care for the children was also extended in close collaboration with their parents and caregivers so that the common agenda can be met.

To ensure accessibility and responsive service for the children and their families, a dedicated school social worker from SHINE Children and Youth Services is attached to each of the ICP primary schools two

days a week. Working alongside the school counsellor, teachers and school management team, the school social worker can assess the needs, provide on-site support in school, and works as a single point of contact for the families. The school social worker also facilitates the case management process and links up with the local Community Development Council (CDC) in aggregating the different resources to support the children and their families.

The ICP was designed with the following objectives in mind:

1. To address the multiple challenges faced by children and their families so as to bring forth a more stable home environment that can support the development of the children.
2. To put in place support and resources to increase the likelihood of referred children completing their Primary school education.

The underlying guiding principle of ICP is that education can act as a social lever in supporting our future generations to achieve social mobility. Hence, to level up their accessibility to social mobility, we believe that it starts from enabling our future generations to complete their primary education.

The Story of Sami

Sami was 9 years old when he was first referred to ICP. His mother, Mdm Selina*, a single parent, was having difficulties ensuring the well-being of Sami and his younger brother Samad*. Despite being neglected by Mdm Selina, Sami often shared with the school counsellor that he yearned for the attention of his mother. Mdm Selina often switched partners and unfortunately, they were mostly violent towards her. She was also admitted to hospital frequently due to her renal disease. As a result, Sami and Samad was often left in the care of different adults. There was also a lack of established structure and parenting towards the children. Many times, Sami was found loitering in the community while Samad was left alone at home watching videos unsupervised.*

During one of her nights out with her partner, Mdm Selina kept Sami alone and locked up at home which led to his absence from school. When he eventually attended school, the school counsellor checked in on him and found out that he was locked at home for more than 12 hours. The school counsellor immediately informed MSF's Child Protective Services after assessing that it was a case of neglect. As the bridge between community partners and the school, the ICP school social worker activated the "village" – that included the Family Violence Specialist Centre, the family service center, the social service office, Sami's primary school and the school's afterschool care services, Samad's preschool, locale-based community council and the medical social worker, to put together interventive support for this family. As the pre-school principal was included in the discussions of a safety plan when Sami was first put under child protection, the principal promptly reported to the child protection officer when she first observed bruises on Samad. With all the different stakeholders working actively together and keeping one other updated, the safety of the children was therefore ensured.

To date, Sami had shown tremendous improvement in his abilities to take instructions in school and displayed self-control. This was due to the structure he is currently experiencing in the children's home as well as the constant communication between, and common practices across the various helping professionals. The ICP school social worker continues to work closely with the school counsellor and social workers from community agencies to safeguard the boys' interests.

**names of the individuals have been anonymised*

Building Bridges

Indeed, it takes a village made up of different community partners such as schools and social service agencies to come together to enable the well-being of our children and a safe home for them to grow up in. As school social workers use their relationship skills and systemic knowledge to act as bridges between teachers, school leaders, community agencies and the statutory bodies, there is a belief that we can do more.

Reference from the following webpages:

<https://www.msf.gov.sg/research-and-data/Research-and-Statistics/Pages/Child-Abuse-Investigations.aspx>

<https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Nurturing-and-Protecting-the-Young/Child-Protection-Welfare/Pages/Protecting-Children.aspx>

<https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Nurturing-and-Protecting-the-Young/Child-Protection-Welfare/Pages/Sector-Specific-Screening-Guide-SSSG-and-the-Child-Abuse-Reporting-Guide-CARG.aspx>

**** To find out more on SHINE Children and Youth Services, please visit www.shine.org.sg**

The Role of School Social Work in the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Taiwan

Wu, Jia-yun
(School Social Worker, Taiwan
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: "I don't understand why my mother didn't go back to the shelter that night and wanted to take us home to see Dad?"



: "Maybe if I kill myself and everything will be fine..."



: "The government is ripping my family apart! If I can't stand it anymore, I will first kill my wife and children and then kill myself... The society is very unfair to me..."

It is especially important to have a safe and stable family and living environment for the growth and development of children. However, when domestic violence occurs in the family, the main caregivers suffer from mental illness, or their parental role is poorly fulfilled, it is a crucial task of school social workers in Taiwan to ensure the quality of care and children's right to education. In the "Plan to Strengthen the Social Safety Net" released by the Executive Yuan in 2018, the "family-centered and community-based" service concept is expected to be fully implemented through a service context with "household" as the core. The priority of responding to family needs and community-based characteristics is utilized to prevent social risk factors caused by family dysfunction. When the family has a serious imbalance of functioning due to marital violence, the children's development and education rights are endangered, and at the same time they face personal safety issues. How do school social workers respond and intervene to reduce the adverse impact of family imbalances on children's education? The following are some examples of our practice.

1. A social work perspective that starts where the students are, goes out of campus, and understands the family

1. The student's fear comes from the family: "Dad put a meat grinder in front of me and my mother..."

During one of the confrontations, the girl watched her panic-stricken mother being beaten by her father, which resulted in a ruptured left eardrum. One day at the dinner table, her father slammed her mother on the back of head because he suspected that she had an affair. In an attempt to protect, the child stretched out her arm to shield her mother's head, and she was also hit by her father during the fight. On another night of quarrel, her father, who had been convicted of possessing lethal weapons, brought a meat grinder and threatened to shoot the mother and children and then grind them.... For that girl, to have a peaceful day seems to be an impossible wish.

2. Behavior at school originates from the underlying family imbalance

- (i) The girl suppressed herself and cooperated calmly in the violent environment; the younger brother learned to vent his emotions through violence and self-harm

What the teachers saw at school was that the two siblings from the same family had extremely

different emotional and behavioral reactions. Constantly witnessing parental conflicts in a violent environment, the girl was always calm. After witnessing her father's abuse of her mother, she went to school and always described the incident to the teacher in a third-person point of view. Taking a bystander role was her survival strategy to maintain a peaceful life.

The girl's younger brother suffered from ADHD and used self-harm behavior to relieve stress in conflict situations. A child protection social worker once explained to the two siblings that if a crisis in the family recurs, in order to ensure personal safety, they will be arranged to temporarily live in a safe place. The younger brother, whose emotion was easily elicited by verbal and environmental pressures, replied to the social worker by saying "If so, I will jump off the building."

Regarding the intimacy issue, the two parents were engaged in power control and destroying each other, which had consumed their parenting energy and made them unable to pay attention to the emotional and companionship needs of their children who had witnessed severe violence.

(2) School social workers operate across the education and social work system, who assist the school to integrate resources from multiple systems and connect with external parties

In the face of child protection incidents, the school's involvement includes the individual student's micro-system, community system, and the social and cultural macrostructures. In terms of resource network connection, the school must contact the women's protection workers, child protection workers, and offender service agencies in the social work system. The school may also need to connect with mental health care, police units, and resources of family relatives and friends.

The school social workers who stand across the two professions of education and social work are highly knowledgeable of social resources, and they are familiar with school culture, institutions, and administrative system operations, which helps to keep the collaboration and division of services between the school and network members going smooth.

II. School social work that promotes a close coordination among school, family, and community in times of crisis

It is impossible to rely on a single force and single working method to pull up a marginalized child. To understand the storm that a child encounters in the school years, it is necessary to examine the intertwinement between them and life, family, and social system. By doing that, we can untangle the problem, explore its causes from different angles, and then find possible ways to work with the child.

Assessment and intervention of professional school social work

School social workers often work with not only the students themselves. Peers, parents, siblings, and others may also be involved in the work process. Intervention methods include cognitive change, problem solving, parental education, family economic improvement, etc. School personnel involved may include homeroom teachers, counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and even special education teachers.

To increase the family's opportunities to obtain resources from its environment and to accompany the children and the family to face their problem, school social workers often need to work with not only the school guidance team but also cross-professional external network units such as the police, social services, or mental health care agencies when entering the school and the family.

(1) Safeguard the rights of the individual client: to reduce the adverse impact of family imbalance on children's education rights

School social workers take students as the core and assess their ecosystems. When child abuse occurs in the family, the first priority of the individual-level intervention is to protect the student's right to education and basic development. While working to maintain their life safety, another important work goal is to improve students' physical and mental adaptability to the environment.

a. Actively advocate children's rights and highlight the subjectivity and needs of children who witnessed domestic violence.

- b. Assist children to recognize their own feelings in the face of family changes and relieve the emotional pressure caused by witnessing the course of violence.
- c. Guide children of unstable families with violence to prepare for separation and psychological adjustment.

(2) Stabilize the family care system: to work with the family with understanding

The individual and the environment shape each other, and people's psychological activities are intertwined with the social environment to which they belong. When facing the client, school social workers adopt the ecological systems perspective and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the individual. Then they intervene by changing the environment, strengthening family functions, etc.. Because social workers believe that only by harmonizing the environment, strengthening the family functions, responding to the needs of parents, and taking care of the smallest unit in society, the family, can the family have enough energy to take care of our students.

- a. Guide the client's mother to become aware of her own issues and pay attention to the rights and interests of herself and her children again.
- b. Accompany the client's father to face family imbalance and connect him with resources.
- c. Rebuild the parent-child relationship under a safe and appropriate circumstance.

(3) Facilitate a close collaboration among systems: school guidance cannot rely on a single force

The students received by school social workers and the guidance system are mostly problem-based cases. Their issues are complex and involve multiple aspects, and the causes of their problems are also varied. What we expect is that students can be taken care of completely and continuously through the intervention of the school guidance team. When faced with difficult cases, education, counseling, or social work profession alone may not be able to adequately address the diverse issues of students, their physical/psychological development, and their multiple needs in the environment.

- a. Facilitate intensive communication and collaboration between network members to timely assess the suitability of children staying in their families for care.
- b. Mobilize environmental resources to provide family services effectively and strengthen family care functions.

III. Conclusion

In highly unstable families with marital violence, the needs of children who witnessed domestic violence are often marginalized and not taken seriously. The purpose of establishing the school guidance team is to make the problem-solving actions more humane and effective, which is consistent with the goals of education. Among them, the school social workers utilize a cross-situational and cross-system working method, which adopts a generalist approach to mobilize multiple resources. It is hoped that the impact of family crisis on students' right to education can be reduced through timely intervention.