



Asia Network of School Social Work



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Japanese School Social Workers in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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1. Recent Status Report of School Social Workers in Fukuoka Prefecture

In January 2020, the first COVID-19 case in Japan was confirmed. The virus soon spread nationwide severely impacting schools and the education system. From March 2, elementary, junior and senior high schools, and schools for special needs education were temporarily closed until the spring holidays based on the "Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control." Some education



boards permitted school social workers to continue working in schools, but others prohibited any activities at their usual workplace and gave an order to stay home at standby. On April 7, the Japanese government declared a State of Emergency to seven Prefectures including Fukuoka. On April 16, the declaration was expanded nationwide, and 13 Prefectures including Fukuoka were designated as "special alert prefectures." As a result, school closures were extended even after the start of the new school year in April. All events, such as the entrance ceremony and the first-day assembly, were canceled. School social workers who were permitted to work during the school

closure continued to provide support, together with the teachers, by conducting home visits of children who needed assistance, confirming their safety, and handing out learning materials. Some schools prohibited home visits, and in such cases, many school social workers made efforts to communicate by phone and exchanged information with various specialized organizations to confirm the safety of children. In any case, it was the first time for all schools to respond to a situation like COVID-19 pandemic, and the best we could do at the time was to consider various countermeasures to prevent the spread of the infection. However, this led many schools and boards of education of some regions to order a stay at home at standby to school social workers. Wages were not paid to non-regular school social workers during the standby period, and some found themselves in financial difficulties. As the virus continued to spread in Japan, the State of Emergency was extended to May 31, and school closure was extended accordingly.



The emergency declaration was finally lifted on May 25. Schools began to gradually re-open in June at the discretion of each prefecture. In each region, educational activities at schools resumed with the utmost care to prevent infection, such as staggered attendance and reduced class hours, which are still in effect today. While schools were closed for approximately two months, new social problems have also surfaced. There are increase in child abuse consultations at child consultation centers, slanderous remarks are being made against children and families infected with COVID-19, and cautious parents are refusing to send their children to school in fear of the virus.

Many school social workers in Fukuoka Prefecture had never experienced working in times of disaster. Consequently, school social workers were unable to fully conduct necessary social work and offer skills required for this pandemic crisis to schools and boards of education. We were also unable to provide adequate services to children in need of support. Also, the work we conducted had varied because our employment status and the working position in Fukuoka Prefecture was different in each region. Therefore, it is an urgent task for school social workers as a whole, to elevate competence and be prepared to work in the most critical situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. Under certain circumstances, schools may close again in Japan, so we need to clarify the issues that school social workers must immediately work on.

2. Annual Activity Report 2020 – Fukuoka Association of School Social Workers

Fukuoka Association of School Social Workers (FASSW), established in 2012, has been proactively offering programs such as training sessions to maintain practice of excellence. We have also been

promoting public awareness on the importance of school social work. Over the course of eight years, our members have increased to over 200, and each year high expectations for school social workers grew in the Japanese society. In order to respond to these changes, the association needed to become a more sustainable organization. Thus, in April 2020, FASSW has re-established as a general incorporated association. This will enable us to provide more educational programs, starting with advanced training sessions for school social workers, to other various projects that will lead to ensuring education for all children. This will also give us a wider public recognition as a professional organization.



This year, our annual workshops were initially postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we resumed the training sessions online in June. Because it is much different from our usual face-to-face seminars, we are still seeking for the most effective way, unique to online. Despite the difficulties, all members at FASSW are making the best out of the situation to maintain practice of excellence and to enhance our professional skills.

In addition, FASSW conducted a survey to our regular members in order to understand how the work and roles of school social workers changed due to COVID-19. The result showed that the working conditions of school social workers vary greatly among local governments in Fukuoka Prefecture.

On November 28, FASSW will hold a convention to commemorate the re-establishment of the association. The theme will be "The Role of School Social Workers During the Coronavirus Pandemic – Social Work in Schools." We would like to make this convention an opportunity for us to re-assess and to reconsider the social work required in schools to ensure children's education, especially during this COVID-19 crisis. The convention will be held online, and we look forward to having many enthusiastic school social workers participate from all over Japan.



Korean School Social Workers in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Schools and children around the world are hard hit by the waves of covid-19. Students spend most of their time on digital devices at home. Compared to parents of high socioeconomic status, those of low SES find it more difficult to guide and to care for their children during virtual learning. With their hands tied, teachers worry that the existing gap in educational attainment between high and low SES students might grow even bigger. They are also concerned that the proper social development is jeopardized due to dramatic drop of opportunities for students to socialize. As this near-lockdown prolongs, the need for checking in with students with regard to their wellbeing at home and their learning and the need for supporting families and schools in this strenuous times became more and more obvious. Among the frontline workers helping these children, families and schools are school social workers who play various roles and tasks.

As school social workers in South Korea gradually comprehend and adjust to this unprecedented situation, we attempt to assess the scope of changes in the roles and tasks of school social workers during the pandemic and to understand the challenges they have been facing. To do so, we(Education and Society) first analyzed 36 covid-19 relevant cases managed by school social workers, then conducted an online-survey (N=472) followed by in-depth, individual interviews of seven current workers. The quantitative and qualitative data we collected throughout the process was rich and informative which can be summarized as follows.

Upon the outbreak, school social workers functioned as brokers who connect resources to where they are needed, assessment experts who check upon students and their families in quarantine, case managers who help families address their imminent needs, collaborators who work with teachers and other school staff in assisting students to participate in online learning and to abide by social distancing guidelines, and communicators who liaise between school, students, guardians, and community members. We found that while the roles of a school social worker remain constant regardless of the pandemic, the tasks have been modified to a large extent mainly because 1) most activities involving face-to-face contact have been halted, 2) the

methods of service delivery have changed (e.g., more phone calls, SNS), and 3) they have been involved in implementing the safety and precaution measures when students are on campus and in disseminating survival kits or covid-19 care packages for families. It is this versatility and flexibility of these school social workers that characterizes the profession's role. With an eco-systemic point of view in mind, school social workers adapt to the situation like a chameleon and evolve as needed.



There were challenges as well including lack of creative ideas about how to safely contact students, lack of knowledge and skills to implement online social work services, sense of helplessness and being isolated, confusion and anxiety, and frequent changes of plan for school social work programs for the school year. As the top three current needs, the participants ranked 1) learning new technologies in order to serve their clients without risking anyone's health and safety, 2) assessing how students are doing when they are not on school campus, and 3) clear guidelines and protocols from government authorities for school social workers to refer to when they provide services during a pandemic. Some workers could only wait especially in the early months of the pandemic not being able to fully grasp the magnitude of the situation. However, it seems that this waiting period was not wasted. Instead, the wait enabled them to ponder, to plan, and to reorient themselves. It appears that covid-19 pandemic affects us in waves and as wise school social workers, rather than being overwhelmed by the size of the wave, they wait and surf turning a crisis into an opportunity that makes the workers truly get to know their students and their families who ride the waves together.



Strengthen Social Safety Net and the Development of School Social Work in Taiwan

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School social work in Taiwan was first established in 1977, when the Taiwan Fund for Children and Families attempted to promote school social work with external support in reference to the school social work model in Hong Kong. Promoting school social work was difficult because social workers were not permanently deployed in schools and funding was not regularly provided by governments. Consequently, social services in schools were halted in 1985; instead, a service program for early school leavers was promoted in a collaboration between communities and schools. This program lasted until 1996, when the Ministry of Education implemented the Junior High School Pilot Program for Professional Counselors.

In December 1995, a group of male students in Taipei Municipal Chengyuan Junior High School collectively sexually harassed their female classmates. The incident shocked the Taiwanese society, which demanded that the school reinforce its counseling professional knowledge and workforce. Subsequently, the Legislative Yuan revised the fourth subparagraph of Article 10 of the Primary and Junior High School Act, specifying that counseling centers must employ full-time guidance counselors with professional knowledge and skills as well as a certain number of volunteer counselors. In 1996, the Junior High School Pilot Program for Professional Counselors was initiated. Full-time professional counselors entered selected junior high schools to work as school social workers or social counselors. Although the Ministry of Education stopped funding the 2-year pilot program after its conclusion, some county and city governments continued to promote school social work programs with their own budgets.

In November 2010, a campus bullying incident erupted in Bade Junior High School in Taoyuan County—to the anger of society, which heavily criticized the school authority as incompetent. In response, the Legislative Yuan once again revised Article 10 of the Primary and Junior High School Act to expand the staffing of full-time counselors and require that elementary and junior high schools with 55 or more classes hire a minimum of one full-time professional counselor. Municipal, county, and city governments were required to hire and deploy full-time counselors according to school needs. Municipalities, counties, and cities with 20 or fewer elementary and junior high schools were required to hire one counselor each. Those with a total of 21–40 such schools were required to hire two counselors, and so on. Thus, more than 550 full-time counselors were hired by elementary and junior high schools across Taiwan, with more than 40% of the schools employing school social workers.

To enable small schools in remote regions to hire professional counselors or school social workers, the Act for Education Development of Schools in Remote Areas was passed in December 2017. According to its 11th article, local authorities were required to deploy professional counselors or school social workers in schools in remote regions on the basis of the zoning of junior high school districts.

The professional counseling workforce employed by county and city governments in Taiwan is thus divided into the following three modes: (1) District school deployment mode: school social workers or social counselors are deployed in schools with 55 or more classes or in schools at regional centers supporting nearby medium- and small-sized schools. (2) Counseling center mode: school social workers or social counselors are deployed in counseling centers. (3) Joint counseling center and school deployment mode: school social workers or social counselors are deployed in schools with 55 or more classes, and the school social workers and social counselors that originally every 20 schools were allocated one are stationed in the county or city counseling center to support small- and medium-sized schools.

Regardless of the mode of their deployment, school social workers are tasked with the following responsibilities: (1) assist schoolchildren to adapt to school life, (2) assist schoolchildren in overcoming obstacles in completing their education, (3) satisfy the educational needs of schoolchildren with special conditions (e.g., disabilities, learning underachievement, indigenous people, new immigrants), (4) prevent campus violence and substance abuse, (5) respond to family-related problems that prevent schoolchildren from adapting to school life (e.g., spousal violence, child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, witnessing domestic violence, poverty, family disorganization, crime, and serious disease or injury), (6) employ community resources to assist schools in addressing student needs and problems, and (7) assist schools in establishing an environment beneficial to learning.

Starting in August 2017, school counseling teams have been included as cross-departmental partners in the Strengthen Social Safety Net Programs. School social work plays a crucial role in bridging social welfare and the mental health care systems. Students who need assistance are included in a family-centered and community-based service network. They are not only counseled as students but also protected as children or adolescents.

On June 19, 2019, the Juvenile Justice Act was revised, and school social work was substantially affected. Before the amendment, seven types of juvenile offences listed in Article 3 were considered violations of the criminal code: (1) constantly contacting individuals with criminal habits, (2) frequently accessing objectionable places, (3) running away from school or home, (4) joining an

illegal organization, (5) habitually carrying weapons without a justifiable cause, (6) using narcotics or hallucinogens, and (7) preparing or attempting to commit a crime not punishable by the statutory law. Only three were retained after the revision: (1) habitually carrying weapons without a justifiable cause, (2) using narcotics or hallucinogens even where such an act is not punishable under statute, and (3) preparing or attempting to commit a crime that is not punishable by the statutory law. Moreover, according to the legislative directions, the term “offensive misconduct” was replaced with “risk exposure behaviors.” Article 18, which specifies that municipal, county, and city governments must establish youth counseling committees, is to become effective July 1, 2023. Article 85-1 was removed; it specified that individuals aged a minimum of 7 years but less than 12 years who had engaged in criminal behaviors should be corrected according to the provisions of the juvenile court applicable to juvenile protection incidents.

Accordingly, school social workers bear increased responsibilities in preventing risk exposure behaviors in schoolchildren aged under 12 years and counseling schoolchildren who have engaged in such behaviors and who are the targets of protection by the Protection of Children and Youth Welfare and Rights Act. Therefore, school social workers must cooperate with social workers in departments of social welfare in protecting and counseling children who come from vulnerable families, have been neglected and abused, have witnessed domestic violence, or have been sexually exploited.

From 2021 to 2023, the number of social workers working in youth counseling committees is expected to increase. However, their targets for services are limited to schoolchildren who have engaged in criminal behaviors or the aforementioned three risk exposure behaviors specified by the Juvenile Justice Act. The responsibility of preventing other types of juvenile misconduct and counseling students who have committed misconduct are undertaken by school social workers and school counseling teams. To prevent misconduct and to counsel children who have committed misconduct, school social workers are required to not only cooperate with youth counseling committees but also cooperate with social workers in departments of social welfare.

School social workers in Taiwan are not only required to provide student-centered, school-based counseling services in campuses; they are also required to connect with other systems of the Social Safety Net to provide comprehensive family-centered and community-based services.



Singapore School Social Workers in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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This year, school social workers continue to reach out to children and youths from primary and secondary school through preventive, remedial and developmental work. Given the Covid-19 situation, there is limited access to students through face-to-face intervention. Hence school social workers took the opportunity to survey the ground needs and during this period, worked in partnership with few schools to support students and their families, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds.

To maintain visibility and presence, school social workers have developed innovative ways to engage students through online platforms such as insta-story, Telegram etc.

Some school Social workers were involved in the Gear-up programme, which is an after- school engagement programme for schools to work with community partners to provide support and strengthen students' social-emotional competencies and social skills.



Singapore Association of Social Workers

