

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A MODEL OF SOCIAL WORK AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING IN GENERAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: Currently, secondary school students are encountering a variety of psychological and social difficulties, which heightens the urgency for a school-based psychological support and social work system. International studies highlight the integrated models that merge social work with psychological counseling within educational institutions. Nevertheless, in Vietnam, existing models seldom integrate both components, leading to a lack of a holistic support system for students. This paper examines the theoretical and practical foundations necessary for establishing a school-based social work and psychological counseling model. It subsequently proposes a model tailored to the Vietnamese educational environment and explores strategies for effective implementation. To ensure the efficient operation of this model, it is crucial to strengthen the legal framework, enhance the quality of the workforce, improve collaboration between schools and communities, secure financial and infrastructural support, and conduct regular evaluations and refinements of the model. The results contribute to the establishment of a comprehensive support system that promotes the sustainable intellectual and emotional development of students.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary society, characterized by ongoing transformation and various challenges, students in general education institutions increasingly face psychological and social issues, including academic pressure, school violence, family conflicts, and other mental health concerns. Research conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) indicates that around 10-20% of children and adolescents worldwide suffer from mental health problems;

however, most do not receive timely and effective assistance. This situation underscores the critical necessity to implement school-based psychological support and social work (SW) systems to aid students in overcoming challenges and fostering holistic development-intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

In Vietnam, despite some initiatives aimed at incorporating social work and psychological counseling activities into the general educational system, the models of implementation continue to

be disjointed, inconsistent, and have not yet achieved their maximum effectiveness. Numerous educational institutions still do not have adequately trained professionals or efficient coordination systems among schools, families, and communities to support students. Research conducted by Adelman & Taylor (2009) indicates that a holistic school-based support model not only tackles individual student challenges but also improves the learning atmosphere, fosters social unity, and diminishes negative behaviors within educational settings.

How can a successful school-based Social Work - Psychological Counseling (SW-PC) model be created and executed in a manner that is consistent with the general education framework in Vietnam and addresses the varied psychological support requirements of students in today's world? This article centers on three primary aspects: (1) Examining the theoretical and practical underpinnings for developing a school-based SW-PC model; (2) Suggesting a SW-PC model that is appropriate for contemporary general education institutions in Vietnam; (3) Exploring strategies to effectively implement this model in practice

2. Literature review and legal framework for establishing a social work and psychological counseling model in general education institution

2.1. Literature review

In the past few decades, school-based Social Work and Psychological Counseling (SW-PC) has become a significant field of research worldwide, particularly due to the increasing occurrence of mental health problems and social difficulties encountered by students. Numerous studies, both international and domestic, have suggested different models and strategies designed to improve the efficacy of these services in educational environments.

Dryfoos (1994) introduced the "full-service schools" model, which underscores the significance of cooperation among educational institutions, families, and communities to meet the multifaceted needs of students. In a similar vein, Adelman & Taylor (2009) emphasized the importance of comprehensive psychological support services within schools, contending that an integrated approach combining Social Work and Psychological Counseling (SW-PC) greatly enhances students' academic success and mental well-being.

The research conducted by Roeser et al. (2000) demonstrated a significant link between mental health and academic achievement, confirming that psychological counseling services not only tackle mental health challenges but also foster comprehensive academic growth. Dimmitt et al. (2007) underscored the success of evidence-based school counseling initiatives in diminishing adverse behaviors and improving school involvement. Furthermore, studies by Franklin et al. (2012) and Teasley (2018) pointed out the crucial role of school social work in assisting students in developing social competencies and managing stress.

In Vietnam, there has been a growing interest in research concerning school-based Social Work and Psychological Counseling. Nevertheless, the majority of studies have concentrated on each model in isolation, failing to create a robust integration between the two disciplines. This has resulted in a deficiency in the establishment of a holistic support system for students.

The research conducted by Phương (2009) and Mui (2009) concentrated on the necessity for psychological counseling among students and the creation of counseling rooms within high schools. Both studies highlight the importance of a structured counseling system; however, they remain confined to the realm of school psychology and do not incorporate elements of social work. In contrast, while school social work has been examined, it has not been effectively integrated with psychological counseling. Kham (2016) offered a comprehensive overview of international social work models and their relevance to Vietnam, emphasizing the need for models that resonate with the nation's cultural and social context. Additionally, Bac (2012) explored the obstacles faced in the implementation of psychological counseling and suggested measures such as improving professional training and investing in infrastructure to better support students.

The research conducted by Khoa and Tuong (2020) outlined the psychological support framework established at Tue Duc High School, highlighting the partnership between the institution and families. Although this framework incorporates a degree of coordination among various stakeholders, it remains deficient in the systematic integration of social work with psychological counseling.

Research on psychological counseling in schools within Vietnam predominantly examines the requirements and current status of service delivery in general education institutions. For example, a study conducted by Bac et al. (2022) evaluated the psychological counseling services available at high schools in Phu Vang District, Thua Thien Hue, revealing that although various counseling formats are utilized, their effectiveness is constrained by the inadequate professional skills of the counseling personnel. In a similar vein, the investigation by Thang and Van (2023) regarding the management of counseling activities for middle school students in Pleiku City, Gia Lai, highlighted the essential function of these services in aiding students. Nonetheless, it also noted that a lack of sufficient focus from school administration has impeded the success of the counseling initiatives (Thang & Van, 2023).

Consequently, although global research highlights the significance of a cohesive model that merges Social Work and Psychological Counseling, studies conducted in Vietnam have predominantly concentrated on each discipline separately, lacking a holistic strategy within the educational environment. This has led to the lack of a thorough support framework that concurrently promotes the psychological and social growth of students.

2.2. Legal structure for establishing a social work and psychological counseling framework within general education institutions

The SW-PC model within general education institutions is founded on several essential legal and policy frameworks:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Vietnam became the first nation in Asia and the second globally to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. This Convention stipulates that all individuals under the age of 18 are entitled to fundamental rights that facilitate their optimal development. The Vietnamese government has utilized the Convention as a guiding framework for amending its laws, regulations, and national policies to promote and protect children's rights (United Nations, 1990).

The Law on Children (2016): This legislation acts as a vital legal framework for developing policies and programs focused on the holistic protection, care, and education of children. For the first time, it

clarifies essential concepts related to child protection, including various forms of abuse and exploitation, and delineates a three-tiered system of protective services: prevention, support, and intervention. The law sets forth procedures for aiding children who are victims or at risk of abuse, exploitation, abandonment, or other exceptional circumstances. Additionally, it addresses the safeguarding of children in cyberspace and those without sufficient family care. Importantly, the law requires the government to formulate guidelines for establishing a safe and supportive educational environment and for the prevention of school violence (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2016).

The Education Law (2019): This legislation delineates the rights and responsibilities of citizens in relation to education and categorically forbids any actions that infringe upon the dignity, honor, or physical integrity of educators, staffs, and students within educational establishments. It also prohibits behaviors that disturb public order or entail the use of addictive substances. Additionally, the law asserts that students are entitled to respect and to pursue their studies in a secure and healthy educational setting (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019).

Decree No. 56/2017/NĐ-CP outlines the procedures for providing support and intervention in cases involving children who have experienced abuse, are at risk of violence or exploitation, or are in other exceptional situations. It also clarifies the responsibilities of child protection officers at the commune level, tasking them with the implementation of support and intervention processes under the guidance of the commune-level People's Committee (Government, 2017a). *Decree No. 80/2017/NĐ-CP* offers guidance to educational institutions on executing preventive measures against school violence, assisting at-risk students, and intervening when incidents of school violence arise (Government, 2017b). *Circular No. 31/2017/TT-BGDĐT* provides direction for the implementation of psychological counseling in general education schools. It highlights the importance of prevention, support, and intervention for students encountering psychological challenges in their learning and personal lives, as well as the development of life skills. The circular encompasses topics such as age-appropriate psychological counseling, adolescent

reproductive health, violence and abuse prevention skills, conflict resolution, career guidance, and more (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017).

Circular No. 33/2018/TT-BGDĐT guidelines the school - based social work: The Circular highlights initiatives designed to improve knowledge and skills, enabling learners to manage challenges, stress, and temporary psychological crises independently, while also fostering their personal growth and academic abilities. Its objective is to safeguard learners from dangers such as abuse, violence, and social issues, as well as to avert school dropout and legal infractions. Simultaneously, it aims to enhance the awareness and skills of parents or guardians in understanding, supporting, and accompanying learners. Additionally, it provides assistance to school administrators, teachers, and staff in educational institutions to enhance their knowledge and skills related to social work within schools, specifically by improving their ability to engage with community resources to collaborate with schools in advancing social work initiatives in the educational environment (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018).

Circular No. 20/2023/TT-BGDĐT (issued on October 30, 2023) offers directives regarding job roles and staffing standards in general education institutions and specialized public schools. It mandates that each school must designate one student counselor. In the absence of official staffing, this position may be filled via a labor contract or assigned to a teacher as an additional responsibility (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023). *Circular No. 01/2017/TT-BLĐTBXH* from the Ministry of

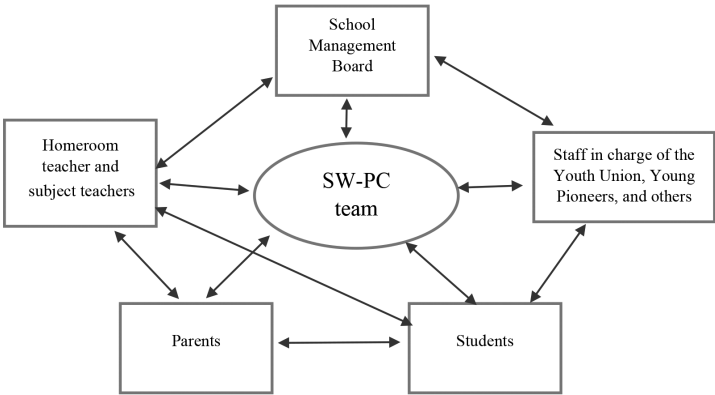
Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (dated February 2, 2017) delineates particular ethical standards and professional principles for social workers (Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, 2017). *Circular No. 11/2024/TT-BGDĐT* details the classification codes, professional title standards, and salary grades for student counselors employed in public general education institutions and specialized schools (Ministry of Education and Training, 2024). *Decision No. 1311/QĐ-BGDĐT* (dated May 13, 2025) from the Ministry of Education and Training launches a professional development program that aligns with the standards for student counselor roles. This decision seeks to standardize and enhance counselor training, ensuring adherence to legal requirements, quality of training, responsibilities of instructors, and effectiveness of implementation. This marks a significant institutional advancement toward improving the professional capacity and efficacy of student counseling within the general public education system (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025).

2.3. Theoretical and practical foundations for the development of a social work and psychological counseling model within general education institutions

The Ministry of Education and Training has put forward a model for Social Work - Psychological Counseling that encompasses various stakeholders, such as School Management Board, staff, teachers, students, and parents (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023b).

This model is depicted in the figure below:

Figure 1. Diagram of the organizational structure for the social work and psychological counseling model within general education institutions



Source: Ministry of Education and Training, 2023b

The figure 1 depicts that the SW-PC model encompasses a thorough array of stakeholders: school leadership, staff, teachers, students, and parents. Each group possesses unique roles and responsibilities: School Management Board: Charged with directing, approving, guiding, and supporting the execution of SW-PC activities. School staff and teachers: These individuals serve as both the targets and implementers of the model. They receive assistance from the SW-PC team to tackle student-related issues and may also be assigned specific duties aligned with their job roles. Parents and Students: While they primarily benefit from the model's interventions, they also engage in addressing related issues under the supervision of the SW-PC team. The SW-PC Team: Functions as the central unit responsible for executing the model. The team must comprise at least one full-time specialist holding a bachelor's degree in a discipline related to social work or psychological counseling, equipping them to manage specialized tasks. The team is anticipated to collaborate with both internal and external stakeholders to effectively fulfill its obligations.

3. Research methodology

This article utilizes a theoretical research methodology to synthesize, analyze, and organize literature and studies pertaining to SW-PC in educational institutions. Through the examination of scientific publications, educational policies, legal documents, and both national and international

practical research, the paper elucidates the theoretical and practical foundations necessary for creating an integrated SW-PC model within the general education framework. The theoretical analysis aids in identifying current research gaps and offers recommendations for the successful development and execution of this model within the educational context of Vietnam.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Formulating a model for social work and psychological counseling within general education institutions

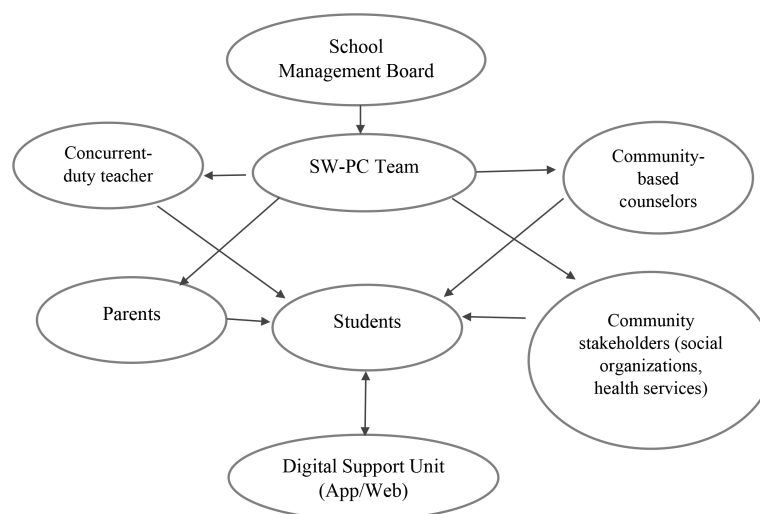
4.1.1. Roles of social work and psychological counseling in general education institutions

School-based Social Work and Psychological Counseling is responsible for preventing problems and adverse behaviors that could impact students; offering assistance and intervention when students encounter psychological, social, or academic difficulties; and directing students to external professional support services when their requirements surpass the capabilities of the school's SW-PC personnel (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023a).

4.1.2. Organizational structure and responsibilities of members in the expended social work and psychological counseling model within general education institutions

According to the SW-PC model put forth by the Ministry of Education and Training, the author has formulated an expanded model for Social Work and Psychological Counseling that is suitable for general education institutions as detailed below:

Figure 2. Diagram of the organizational structure for the expanded social work and psychological counseling model in general education institutions



Source: The author fomulates

The organizational framework of the enhanced SW-PC model illustrates an interdisciplinary, interconnected, and integrated support system focused on students. It activates multi-tiered support mechanisms both within the school and in the surrounding community. At the heart of this model is the SW-PC Team, which acts as the primary unit tasked with organizing and executing support initiatives while also liaising with other stakeholders. This team comprises not only full-time specialists but is also augmented by concurrent-duty teachers who have undergone fundamental training in school social work and psychological counseling. Their participation broadens the implementation scope and improves student outreach and accessibility.

A significant advancement of the model is the formal integration of community counselors - external specialists including psychologists, healthcare professionals, and social work authorities who can work alongside the school via contractual agreements or project-based collaborations. The involvement of this group enhances the professional expertise of the model, especially in addressing complex or delicate cases that surpass the specialized skills of in-school personnel.

The model further underscores the importance of a community-oriented approach to education, emphasizing the active participation of parents and external stakeholders, including local authorities, social organizations, healthcare providers, and social protection agencies. This approach guarantees that psychosocial interventions are not limited to the classroom but are expanded and incorporated into the wider living environment of the students.

Significantly, the model incorporates digital transformation by creating a Digital Support Unit

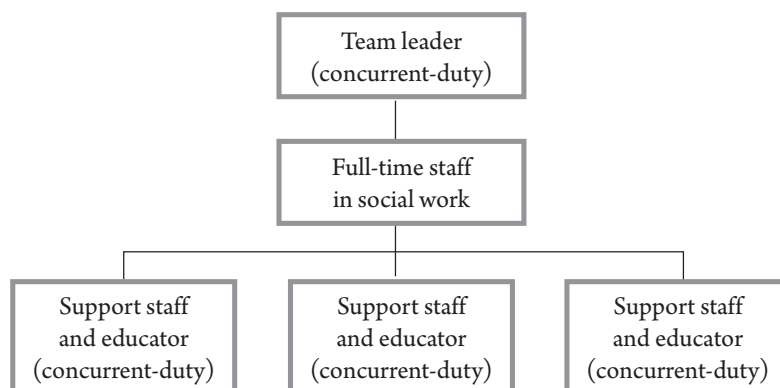
tasked with the digitization of counseling and support services, managing feedback systems, implementing early warning mechanisms, and constructing a digital repository of life skills resources. This strategy is in line with contemporary trends in educational technology and allows students to receive support in a confidential, adaptable, and ongoing way even in the absence of face-to-face meetings with counselors.

The complete model functions under the cohesive guidance of the school management board, which guarantees legal validity, strategic orientation, and alignment with the school's comprehensive educational framework. This aspect is crucial for the establishment of the legitimacy and sustainability of Social Work – Psychological Counseling initiatives within the broader educational context.

In summary, the expanded SW-PC model not only inherits the strengths of the current framework but also incorporates practical enhancements: expanding human resources, strengthening professional expertise, integrating technology, and fostering community engagement. Together, these elements create a comprehensive, continuous, and sustainable support ecosystem for students within the context of modern education.

In this framework, the SW-PC Team holds a crucial position. It consists of the following personnel: one Team Leader (part-time), one full-time expert in social work and psychological counseling, along with several concurrent-duty support staff and educators. The quantity of part-time support staff may fluctuate based on the particular circumstances of each educational institution (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023b). The organizational structure of the SW-PC Team is depicted in the diagram below:

Figure 3. Structure of the SW-PC Team in general education institutions



Source: Ministry of Education and Training, 2023b

The SW-PC Team is tasked with screening and identifying at-risk students to recommend interventions to the school management board; executing preventive programs for students, teachers, and parents in diverse formats; offering both individual and group counseling; referring high-risk students to specialized external services; and documenting their activities for the school, as well as for the district or provincial Departments of Education and Training.

The SW-PC Team Leader is designated by the school management board and is tasked with supervising operations, formulating periodic activity plans, coordinating professional endeavors, preparing outcome reports, and engaging with specialized service providers in social work and psychological counseling. This person must hold professional qualifications and certification in social work or psychological counseling, have a comprehensive understanding of child protection laws, and exhibit pedagogical skills, management abilities, communication expertise, and the capacity to coordinate across various sectors.

The full-time SW-PC specialist may be appointed on a permanent basis or engaged through a contract. Their duties encompass planning and implementing student screening, intervention, and counseling; coordinating with the semi-specialist support team; creating intervention case files; referring complex cases to external services; collaborating with experts; and preparing reports. They are required to possess a relevant degree or certification in social work or school psychology, exhibit strong skills in working with children, have a comprehensive understanding of developmental stages, uphold strict confidentiality, and demonstrate professionalism, patience, and empathy.

The SW-PC team comprises support staff and educators, including homeroom teachers, Chief young pioneer leader, school health personnel, the Youth Union secretary, and a parent representative. They perform tasks delegated by the team leader, aid in student screening, facilitate the execution of activities, tackle arising issues, and collaborate with the full-time specialist to guarantee the efficient provision of services.

The parent representative is involved in the creation of activity plans, assists in the execution

of services, oversees their implementation, fosters collaboration among fellow parents, and aids in the mobilization of resources to promote SW-PC initiatives within the educational institution.

4.2. Operation process of the social work and psychological counseling model in general education institutions

In this research, the author utilizes the operational framework of the school-based SW-PC model as specified by the Ministry of Education and Training (2023b). Each activity adheres to a specific protocol, as described below:

4.2.1. Screening and risk identification activities for students

- *Purpose:* To collect information regarding the needs of students, their family circumstances, and any difficulties encountered by students, parents, and educators; to pinpoint school-wide concerns that necessitate preventive measures; to identify individual cases that require support or intervention; and to direct students to suitable external services when needed.

- *Methods:* Utilizing questionnaires crafted by the SW-PC team; conducting informal interviews; gathering reports from homeroom teachers and parents; receiving messages through the team's mailbox or voluntary disclosures from students; and collecting information from volunteers, etc.

- Implementation Process:

+ Step 1. Create a system for receiving information:

The SW-PC team serves as the primary unit for gathering information from diverse sources, including the team's mailbox, hotline messages, the school's official fan page, and reports from homeroom or subject teachers, parents, or peers.

+ *Step 2. Create screening instruments to identify students at risk or in need of intervention:* The SW-PC team designates the specialist counselor to develop tools and scales for screening student-related issues. These instruments may utilize standardized measurement scales for assessing student mental health and behavior or be formulated based on reports from students, teachers, and parents to determine which issues should be prioritized for resolution.

+ *Step 3. Conduct screening and assessment of student issues:* The SW-PC team performs direct screenings of student issues utilizing assessment forms and

evaluation scales. Additionally, the team collects reports from teachers and parents concerning the challenges that students are encountering. Surveys and assessment tools are distributed to teachers and parents to assist in identifying students who require support or to uncover broader issues present in the classroom or school environment.

+ *Step 4. Process the information, filter cases, compile a list of student issues, and formulate an intervention plan:* After gathering information from various sources, the SW-PC team must ascertain: What issues are students experiencing within the school? What factors are contributing to these issues? What do students require in order to resolve them? What actions ought the SW-PC team undertake to tackle the problem?

4.2.2. Preventive activities for student issues in schools

- *Purpose:* The objective is to provide students, teachers, and parents with the necessary knowledge and skills to assist students in preventing and managing school-related challenges. Additionally, it seeks to improve teachers' and parents' comprehension of psychological difficulties and fundamental support techniques tailored to each age group, allowing them to identify student struggles and offer preliminary assistance.

- *Target groups for preventive activities:* Students, teachers, and parents.

- *Process for implementing preventive activities:* Conduct assessments to identify the needs of students, teachers, and parents; select and develop suitable prevention programs; the SW-PC team presents the program to the school management board for approval; finalize the plan and initiate implementation; the SW-PC team executes the preventive activities; assess the effectiveness of the program.

- *Contents of preventive programs:*

+ *For students:* Emphasizes self-awareness, peer relationships, interactions with teachers and parents, and addressing school-related challenges such as school violence, sexual abuse, substance use and addiction, and safe social media practices. The SW-PC team also enhances students' comprehension of core values and life skills through focused educational programs.

+ *For teachers:* Addresses essential topics such as fostering a safe and positive school environment;

understanding the psychological and physical development of children across various age groups; implementing positive discipline strategies; recognizing and addressing behavioral and psychological challenges among students; skills for counseling and supporting students; and awareness of contemporary school issues including school violence, cyberbullying, internet-related dangers, mental health, gender and reproductive health, and adolescent relationships, etc.

+ *For parents:* Offers insights into the psychological and social needs of children at various developmental stages; parenting strategies and positive discipline techniques that promote child engagement; and skills to assist children in preventing and coping with school violence, sexual abuse, online threats, reproductive health concerns, gender, and adolescent love and relationships.

4.2.3. Intervention and support activities for addressing student issues in schools

- *Purpose:* To empower students, parents, teachers, and the community to enhance their capabilities and independently resolve their own issues.

- *Forms of intervention:* Individual and group-based support.

- *Intervention Process:*

+ *For individual interventions:* Receive the student, teacher, or parent and schedule support sessions; establish rapport and collect relevant information; assess and identify the issue; develop and implement a support plan; evaluate progress, close the case, and file documentation.

+ *For group interventions:* Gather individuals with similar support needs; initiate preliminary contact and interaction with students to explore the issues; design a session plan for group support; conduct the formal group counseling/support session; assess outcomes and close the group case.

4.2.4. Referral and networking activities

- *Purpose:* To enable the sharing of ideas, resources, services, and expertise among individuals and institutions in diverse settings, with the aim of collaboratively tackling the challenges encountered by students, school staff, and teachers as part of a holistic support framework.

- *Referral and networking process:* Implemented through the following steps: Comprehend the requirements of students, educators, parents, and

the community in terms of the resources that are insufficient and the support that is necessary; Evaluate and identify the suitable resources that can fulfill these needs or aid in the problem-solving process. Enable students, teachers, and parents to connect with these external support resources.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This paper has put forth a SW-PC model, which is grounded in both theoretical and practical foundations. It presents a well-defined organizational structure, clear responsibilities, and an efficient operational process. The model prioritizes not only interventions and direct support for students but also highlights the importance of preventive measures and awareness-raising initiatives aimed at teachers, parents, and the wider community.

Moreover, it is vital to have a team that is well-qualified, professionally trained, and sufficiently resourced for the model to operate effectively. Regular training and professional development initiatives are necessary to improve the capabilities of school-based SW-PC personnel. Additionally, securing financial resources from the state budget, domestic and international organizations, and community contributions is essential for the sustainable upkeep and advancement of the model. Sufficient facilities, particularly safe and private counseling areas will create conducive conditions for students to freely express their concerns and obtain timely assistance.

To guarantee the model's effectiveness, it is crucial to establish a system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to modify activities based on the actual needs of students. Moreover, effective implementation necessitates the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders, including educational authorities, schools, parents, social organizations, and community.

5.2. Recommendations for effectively operating the social work and psychological counseling model in general education institutions

To improve the effective functioning of the SW-PC

model within general education environments, the following recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, reinforce the legal and policy framework: Establish clear regulations governing the organization and functioning of the SW-PC model in educational institutions, including comprehensive guidance on the roles and responsibilities of its members. Incorporate the model into the educational curriculum to enhance awareness of mental health issues among students, teachers, and parents.

Secondly, ensure the availability of qualified human resources: Recruit and train full-time personnel with the necessary certifications. Offer professional development opportunities for concurrent-duty teachers in the SW-PC team. Create a network of collaborators and volunteers to aid in the screening, prevention, and intervention efforts for students at high risk.

Thirdly, improve coordination among schools, families, and communities: Establish effective communication channels between the SW-PC team, homeroom teachers, parents, and social organizations. Collaborate with specialists, healthcare providers, and psychological support centers for case referrals. Organize workshops and training sessions for parents on topics related to school psychology.

Fourthly, secure funding and infrastructure: Allocate budgetary resources from school finances and external sources to ensure the sustainability of operations. Create private, student-friendly counseling spaces. Seek funding from NGOs and businesses to support training initiatives and provide assistance to underprivileged students.

Fifthly, implement regular evaluations and improvements: Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the model, gathering feedback from students, teachers, and parents to enhance counseling services. Utilize data analysis to propose strategies aimed at improving the quality and impact of the model.

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