

# EVALUATION OF PREVENTION ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AT A NUMBER OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN HANOI CITY

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**Abstract:** This article addresses the current situation of social work activities aimed at prevention and early detection of mental health problems implemented in a number of secondary schools in Hanoi city. The research findings, based on a survey of 140 teachers and 400 students from 3 secondary schools in Hanoi, indicate that activities for early detection and prevention of student mental health problems are not conducted regularly. They tend to be formalistic, isolated, unsystematic and lack diverse methods and implementation tools. This current situation is influenced by numerous factors, such as the limited knowledge and skills of implementers, a lack of resources and support services and inadequate policies for implementers... From these findings, the article proposes a number of measures to enhance the effectiveness of social work activities in prevention and early detection of student mental health problems.

**Keywords:** Student mental health, school social work, prevention, early detection.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A report by the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that the prevalence of mental health problems among students aged 10-16 is 19.46%<sup>1</sup>. UNICEF also reported that the prevalence rate of mental health problems among children and adolescents in Vietnam is approximately 29%, varying by age, gender and living area (UNICEF, 2018). These reports indicate that a very large number of students are facing mental health problems, especially since the emergence of COVID-19. The media features numerous articles and information related to student mental health problems, reflecting significant societal concern for student mental health problems.

Mental health is considered an inseparable part of the definition of health (WHO, 2001), wherein mental health is not merely the absence of mental disorders but also encompasses a state of well-being, confidence in one's own abilities, autonomy, competence and the ability to realize one's potential. In its research, UNICEF has also cited and synthesized various studies to identify the most common mental health problems faced by children and students in Vietnam, such as behavioral disorders (24%), emotional disorders (16%), anxiety (23%) and risk of depression (26%) (UNICEF, 2018). Such mental health problems significantly impact students' daily life, quality of life and learning.

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<sup>1</sup> [Mental health of school students in Hanoi \(maihuong.gov.vn\)](http://maihuong.gov.vn)

However, it is not only clearly manifested mental health problems that are of concern, but also those at the level of psychological difficulties that occur commonly and frequently, such as anxiety, sadness, melancholy, fatigue, discouragement, stress and other negative mental health states stemming from difficulties in relationships with friends, family and teachers. These issues also greatly affect students and can lead to more serious problems such as suicide, substance abuse, school violence, dropping out, truancy and gaming addiction, creating difficulties for schools, causing anxiety and stress for parents and directly impacting the students' future ...

Furthermore, in the current context, students' learning formats can fluctuate and change, with periods of online learning and periods of in-person learning. Coupled with the impacts of the pandemic, this will cause students many difficulties in their studies, daily activities and recreation, thereby leading to mental health consequences. If student mental health problems are not addressed in a timely manner, they will have long-term effects on their psychological development and future. Therefore, they require prompt detection and support.

Support activities for student mental health problems are often isolated, uncoordinated and share a clear commonality of focusing on intervention services rather than emphasizing the development of models and services for early detection and prevention of mental health problems.

With the social work profession's characteristic interdisciplinary approach, it aims to address student mental health problems sustainably, starting with early detection and prevention activities. Early detection is one of the most important tasks of a school social worker, helping intervene and assist students before their problems become too severe. Prevention is also a duty that school social workers must perform through activities such as communication campaigns and life skills education, aiming to enhance awareness, understanding and the ability to cope with difficulties, challenges and changes in their lives, studies and daily activities. Thus, in the most proactive mental health support model, prevention and early detection are key.

The Ministry of Education and Training promulgated Circular No. 33/2018/TT-BGDĐT on providing guidelines for the practice of school social work and more recently, Decision No. 4969/QĐ-BGDĐT on the issuance of the Development Plan for Social Work in the Education Sector for the 2021 - 2025 period. The purpose is to strengthen social work services within educational institutions, thereby providing support services for students, teachers and parents. The introduction of this circular is a positive signal in approaching students' problems from the perspective of social work. The Circular especially emphasizes the implementation of activities to detect and prevent problems arising in schools, including student mental health problems. However, the Circular only stipulates the need for such prevention and early detection activities without offering a concrete process or model to guide schools in their detailed and systematic implementation. On the other hand, school social work in our country is currently carried out by teachers and staff in concurrent roles, rather than by formally trained social workers. Therefore, evaluating the current situation of prevention activities for student mental health problem will help build a general school social work model and specifically, a social work model for the prevention and detection of mental health problems.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted with 140 teachers and 400 students at three secondary schools in Hanoi. The study employed a combination of the following methods: documentary research, questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews, data processing using SPSS statistical software and Chi-square test method.

## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Current situation of student mental health prevention

Prevention activities for student mental health problems at secondary schools include some activities such as communication campaigns, building a suitable and healthy school environment, life skills and values education and early detection of student mental health problems. These activities were evaluated on two aspects: the frequency of implementation and the outcome of implementation. The frequency of implementation was rated on four levels: regularly, occasionally, rarely and never; the implementation outcome was rated on four levels: good, fairly good, average and unsatisfactory.

**Table 1. Current situation of prevention activities for mental health problems at some secondary schools in Hanoi city**

Prevention activities for student mental health problems	Frequency of implementation (Mean value)	Outcome of implementation (Mean value)
Communication on mental health	2.23	2.25
Building a healthy and friendly environment	2.31	2.07
Life skills and values education	2.46	1.79
Organizing early detection activities	1.99	2.04

(Source: Research findings of the project)

The results show that among the prevention activities for student mental health problems carried out by schools, life skills and values education had the highest frequency of implementation with a mean value of 2.46, yet its outcome of implementation was rated the lowest (1.79). The second highest frequency was for activities related to building a healthy and friendly environment, with a mean value of 2.31, but its outcome was also not highly rated. This was followed by communication activities to raise awareness of mental health issues for students and teachers. Although its frequency of implementation was low, its outcome was the highest (2.25). Early detection activities had the lowest frequency of implementation and their outcomes were also not rated as good.

### 3.2. Factors affecting social work activities in early detection and prevention of student mental health problems

To analyze the interaction between factors related to school social workers (including knowledge, skills, attitudes) and factors related to student mental health support policies, support policies for school social workers and the system of resources and services, we examined the correlation between these factors and the implementation of prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers. We also made some predictions about changes in prevention activities for student mental health problems as the influencing factors change. Studying the influence of these factors is the basis for proposing measures to enhance the implementation of student mental health prevention activities.

To investigate the correlation between the prevention activities for student mental health problems implemented by school social workers and the influencing factors, we calculated scores for each item of every scale and, based on that, computed the mean score for the entire scale. In this context, a higher mean score, approaching 5, indicates that the prevention activities, knowledge, skills, attitudes, support policies and services/resources for student mental health were better and vice versa.

*Correlation between prevention activities for student mental health problems and the knowledge, skills and attitudes of school social workers*

In general, the survey results shown in Table 2 reflect a statistically significant positive pairwise correlation between the prevention activities for student mental health problems implemented by school social workers and their enthusiasm and interest in the job; their professionally trained knowledge; and their proactivity.

**Table 2. Correlation between prevention activities for student mental health problems and knowledge, skills and attitudes**

Pearson correlation coefficient	Professional knowledge	Professional skills	Professional attitude
Prevention activities for student mental health problems	0.625	0.526	0.437

*Note: The table displays statistically significant correlation coefficients with  $r^{**}$  at  $p < 0.01$ , where  $r$  is the Pearson correlation coefficient.*

(Source: Research findings of the project)

Among these correlations, we found the strongest correlation between the prevention activities for student mental health problems implemented by school social workers and their professional knowledge ( $r = 0.625$  and  $p < 0.01$ ). Indeed, professional knowledge is the fundamental foundation for implementing these prevention activities. Supporting student

mental health problems without understanding the types of disorders, their manifestations and causes; the psychology of student mental health problems; or performing prevention activities without knowledge of the relevant laws and policies for student mental health problems will certainly lead to ineffective task performance.

The statistical results also show a fairly strong, statistically significant positive correlation between prevention activities for student mental health problems and professionally trained skills, with  $r = 0.526$  and  $p < 0.01$ . Like professional knowledge, proficient professional skills are a very important requirement.

A correlation exists between the prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers and their professional attitude ( $r = 0.437$  and  $p < 0.01$ ). While this correlation is not very strong, it is statistically significant. The professional attitude of a school social worker is defined by respecting and accepting student mental health problems; being consistently enthusiastic and passionate about their work; being proactive and taking initiative in their job, as demonstrated by their determination to persevere after failure, their belief in their own efforts over luck, their readiness to respond to unplanned changes and their proactive, creative and hardworking nature, unafraid of difficulties. When these attitudes are present, the implementation of prevention activities will become more effective and is likely to achieve the desired results.

In summary, the correlation between the implementation of prevention activities for student mental health and the factors related to the school social workers themselves is positive and quite strong. Within this relationship, the strongest and most impactful connection is the correlation between prevention activities and the professional knowledge and skills of school social workers.

#### *Correlation between prevention activities for student mental health problems and policies*

This was based on the hypothesis that policies for student mental health problems and school social workers have a definite impact on the implementation of prevention activities by school social workers.

**Table 3. Correlation between prevention activities for student mental health problems and policies**

Pearson correlation coefficient	Policies for student mental health problems	Policies for school social workers
Prevention activities for student mental health problems	0.317	0.652

*Note: The table displays statistically significant correlation coefficients with  $r^{***}$  at  $p < 0.01$ , where  $r$  is the Pearson correlation coefficient.*

(Source: Research findings of the project)

The statistical results reflect a positive and statistically significant correlation between the implementation of prevention activities for student mental health problems and the policy factors for both student mental health problems and for school social workers.

The policy for school social workers has a stronger correlation with prevention activities for student mental health problems ( $r = 0.652$  and  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that when school social workers receive special allowances, are given priority and have opportunities for professional development, the prevention activities for student mental health are also implemented more effectively.

The implementation of prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers also has a positive but weaker correlation with the policy for student mental health problems, with  $r = 0.317$ . Thus, it is evident that this factor also has a considerable impact on the effectiveness of prevention activities for student mental health problems.

#### *Predicting the implementation of prevention activities for student mental health problems based on influencing factors*

Predicting the implementation of prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers is of great importance in proposing measures to enhance the effectiveness of these activities. We will examine the predictive ability of each independent factor to identify the prominent role of those factors considered important among the group of factors affecting the implementation of prevention activities for student mental health problems.

**Table 4. Predicting the change in prevention activities for student mental health problems under the impact of each independent factor**

Independent variables	Dependent variable – Prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers ( $r^2$ )
Professional knowledge	0.428 <sup>***</sup>
Professional skills	0.361 <sup>***</sup>
Professional attitude	0.143 <sup>***</sup>
Policies for students	0.181 <sup>***</sup>
Policies for school social workers	0.085 <sup>***</sup>
Adequacy of local resources and services	0.417 <sup>***</sup>

Note: The table only displays statistically significant values with  $r^2$  – First-order regression coefficient; <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < 0.01$ , <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p < 0.001$ .

(Source: Research findings of the project)

The displayed results indicate that all factors impact the implementation of prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers. The factor with the strongest influence is the professional knowledge of the school social worker ( $r^2 = 0.428$  and  $0.417$  with  $p < 0.001$ ). This means that for school social workers to effectively implement prevention activities for student mental health problems, their performance heavily depends on their understanding of student mental health problems, types and characteristics of these problems, processes and principles of prevention activities for student mental health problems as well as their understanding of family and social systems.

The second most impactful factor on prevention activities for student mental health problems is the adequacy of local resources and services ( $r^2 = 0.417$  and  $0.417$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This implies that improving the system of services and resources will significantly increase the effectiveness of prevention activities for student mental health problems.

The third most impactful factor is professionally trained skills ( $r^2 = 0.361$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Clearly, training and equipping workers with skills for implementing prevention activities for student mental health problems, such as communication, counseling, advocacy, networking, resource mobilization and service coordination as well as providing them with ample participation in professional activities to accumulate and master these skills, have a considerable influence on the implementation level of implementing prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers.

The implementation process of prevention activities for student mental health problems by school social workers is also influenced by the policy for student mental health problems ( $r^2 = 0.181$  with  $p < 0.001$ ). The factor with the lowest impact on prevention activities for student mental health problems is the policy for the implementers of these activities ( $r^2 = 0.085$  with  $p < 0.001$ ). The factor of professional development training has a higher impact (its predictive ability is 17.1% with  $p < 0.001$ ).

### 3.3. Proposal of some measures to implement prevention activities for student mental health problems by social workers

Develop an academic program with a reasonable study schedule, integrated with mental health care, to prevent students from experiencing psychological effects and consequences such as pressure and stress at school and during classes.

Regularly organize awareness campaigns to improve mental health for students.

Integrate mental health topics into the Life Skills education curriculum for students.

Build a school psychological counseling room/center and a school social work office on-site to support the prevention and intervention of student mental health problems.

Strengthen the organization of workshops and forums featuring speakers and experts on mental health.

Organize training sessions and classes for teachers, school administrators and parents on the mental health problems of secondary school students.

Schools should pay greater attention to student mental health in addition to providing academic education.

Schools must take responsibility for minimizing the causes that affect student mental health. Intervention and support can take many forms but must all be directed toward the goal of ensuring a safe, healthy and friendly environment for students - the future of the nation - helping them develop soundly in physical, mental and personal character.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Mental health care, along with the prevention, early detection and early intervention of student mental health problems, is a crucial task that needs to be widely implemented in schools. As the function of a school is to educate, its teachers and staff must understand the psychophysiology of their students to create an environment that fosters their holistic development, both physically and mentally. The family is also the foundational basis for a child's formation of personality and consciousness; therefore, caring for the mental health of students - especially secondary school students - requires coordination between the family and the school.

In order to effectively implement early detection and early intervention for student mental health problems, it is necessary to rely not only on families and schools but also on school social workers to assist in resolving the mental health issues that students face. With the proficient skills, professional expertise and practical experience of school social workers, student mental health problems can be addressed, bringing stability and harmony to their lives.

Prevention and early detection activities for student mental health problems should be implemented regularly and continuously through various forms. This project focuses on and proposes two key activities: communication campaigns to raise awareness of student mental health for parents, teachers and students themselves. Furthermore, communication sessions should also be organized specifically for students on how to prevent and self-detect the early signs of mental health problems.

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