

## THEORETICAL ASPECTS REGARDING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** *Social assistance within the educational structure is considered to be beneficial to contemporary society, bringing benefits to the development of young people. "They expect from school the guarantee of the success of a fulfilled social life, that is, the concomitant material satisfaction, stable social relationships, but also the active contribution to building society" (Neamțu, 2003)*

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The role of the social worker in school to support equal opportunities:

- support for vulnerable students, the social worker helps children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, families with problems or who face emotional difficulties;
- prevention of school dropout, through early identification of risks and appropriate intervention, cases of school dropout can be reduced;
- mediation between school, family and community, the social worker facilitates communication and collaboration between parents, teachers and other institutions;
- counseling and emotional support, students can receive help for issues such as bullying, anxiety, family disagreements or trauma;
- promoting inclusion and equity, social assistance contributes to the integration of students with disabilities, those of other ethnicities or who face discrimination.

Thus, the need for school social workers is supported by a reality in which there are more and more social, psychological, and medical problems that students may face.

"Social assistance in schools represents one of the most important areas of intervention at the community level because it is in school that the personality of adolescents is truly formed, and they need, in addition to educational practices and professional training, emotional support" (Romanian Sociological Journal, Sorin Mitulescu, Changes in Romanian Education in the Post-communist Transition Period. Effects on the Young Generation).

Social assistance in school is an important element of the educational structure that aims to support students in overcoming social, emotional and family difficulties that may affect their educational journey.

The work of the school social worker is carried out in a complex setting, marked by numerous challenges: poverty, domestic violence, parental neglect, school dropout, discrimination or social exclusion. In this context, the objectives of school social work are essential for creating an equitable, safe and development-friendly educational environment.

The school social worker has a multidimensional role, acting as a mediator between the student, the family and the community institutions. One of his main duties is to identify and assess the social needs of students, especially those who come from vulnerable backgrounds – single-parent, poor, disorganized families or with parents abroad (Runcan; Buzducea, 2017).

The social worker also collaborates with teachers and school psychologists to develop individualized intervention plans and support the integration of children with special educational needs (Gavrila-Ardelean & Gavrila-Ardelean, 2017). Supporting communication between the family and the school is another major responsibility, given that the parent-school relationship directly influences the student's educational path (Cojocaru, 2005).

Social intervention in school covers a variety of areas, the most important of which are:

Preventing and combating school dropout – by monitoring student attendance and counseling families at social risk;

Managing cases of violence and abuse – the social worker is often the first specialist to notice signs of physical, emotional abuse or neglect and can trigger legal protection procedures;

Supporting students with behavioral problems or emotional difficulties – in collaboration with the psychologist, individual or group counseling is offered;

Facilitating access to social and medical services – especially for children from disadvantaged families or rural areas (Buzducea, 2010).

The social worker's work in the school environment is deeply interdisciplinary. The success of interventions depends on cooperation

with teachers, psychologists, school doctors, local authorities and NGOs. Thus, a support network is created around the student, which favors his personal and educational development (Zamfir; Zamfir, 1995).

In Romania, although the role of the school social worker is legally recognized, in practice there are numerous difficulties. The low number of social worker positions in schools, the lack of financial resources and sometimes the reluctance of the educational community to involve them limit the impact of interventions (Dumitru; Păunescu, 2016). In addition, excessive bureaucracy and the lack of continuous training contribute to the decrease in the efficiency of this service.

The social worker plays an essential role in promoting an inclusive and equitable school, actively contributing to the prevention and management of social problems affecting students. Strengthening this service, by employing specialists in each school unit and by forming a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration, is a necessary condition for a modern educational system, centered on the real needs of the child.

One of the fundamental objectives of social assistance in schools is the prevention and reduction of school dropout, an alarming phenomenon in Romania. The role of the social worker is to identify students at educational risk (frequent absenteeism, low school performance, family problems) in advance and to develop support strategies together with teachers and families. Through counseling, home visits and collaboration with local authorities, attempts are made to maintain students in the educational system (Runcan; Buzducea, 2017).

Social work aims to ensure that all students benefit from equal opportunities in education, regardless of their social status, ethnicity, gender or disability. This objective translates into direct support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds – either by facilitating access to educational resources or by mediating relationships with peers and teachers. The social worker thus becomes an active factor in promoting inclusive education, a principle also supported by European and international policies (UNICEF Romania, 2017)

Another important objective is to facilitate students' personal development. Social workers support students in overcoming emotional or relational obstacles, through individual or group counseling activities, personal development workshops and conflict management. These interventions contribute to strengthening self-esteem, social skills and prosocial behavior (Cojocaru, 2005).

A functional relationship between school and family is vital for the educational success of the student. The social worker has the role of facilitating the dialogue between parents and teachers, especially in the case of socially disadvantaged families or parents who have gone

abroad. In this context, the objective is to create an active and sustainable partnership between the family and the school institution, for the benefit of the child (Dumitru; Păunescu, 2016).

School is often the place where the first signs of high-risk situations can be identified: physical or emotional abuse, neglect, domestic violence or child trafficking. The social worker is trained to observe these signals, investigate the situation and initiate the necessary legal procedures for the protection of the child. Preventing and combating these forms of abuse is a priority objective in the daily work of the social worker (Buzducea, 2010).

The social worker's intervention in the school environment is guided by a set of fundamental principles that guarantee ethics, efficiency and orientation towards the real needs of the beneficiaries. These principles reflect the universal values of the social worker profession, adapted to the school and educational specifics.

**1. Respect for human dignity and children's rights** – The first and most important principle in school social work is the respect for each child's dignity and the promotion of their rights, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Students must be treated with respect, empathy, and without prejudice, regardless of their ethnic, religious, economic, or social background (UNICEF Romania, 2017). The social worker has the obligation to ensure that the child's voice is heard and taken into consideration in any decision affecting them.

**2. Confidentiality and privacy protection** – Another fundamental principle is the confidentiality of information. The school social worker has access to sensitive data about students and their families, and maintaining confidentiality is essential for building a relationship of trust. Although certain situations require reporting to the appropriate authorities (e.g., abuse or neglect), disclosure of information must always be done with discretion and in compliance with the legal framework (Cojocaru, 2005).

**3. Student-centered intervention** – Social work in schools is based on personalized intervention, adapted to the specific needs of each child. This principle involves an individual assessment of the student's social, family, and educational situation and the development of tailored support strategies. Each child is unique, and interventions must reflect this reality (Buzducea, 2010).

**4. Equity and equal access to resources** – The social worker is responsible for promoting equity in education by facilitating equal

access to opportunities and resources for all students. This is especially crucial for children from vulnerable communities, ethnic minorities, low-income families, or children with disabilities. The principle of equity involves active efforts to reduce inequalities and discrimination (Runcan & Buzducea, 2017).

**5. Self-determination of the beneficiary** – A core principle of social work practice is the respect for the autonomy of the student and their family. Even though minors do not have full legal decision-making capacity, it is important that their opinions are valued. The social worker encourages student participation in the decision-making process, without imposing solutions, but rather guiding them toward making informed choices (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1995).

**6. Interdisciplinary collaboration** – In schools, effective intervention does not occur in isolation. The social worker must constantly collaborate with homeroom teachers, educators, school psychologists, parents, doctors, and local authorities. Interdisciplinary cooperation is a key principle in addressing complex cases and in building a support network around the child (Dumitru & Păunescu, 2016).

**7. Prevention and proactivity** – Another important principle is the focus on prevention, not just crisis management. The social worker must identify early warning signs (such as absenteeism, aggression, or behavioral changes) and intervene proactively to prevent the situation from worsening. Prevention is more effective and less costly than intervention during a crisis (Runcan & Buzducea, 2017).

The fundamental principles of school social work provide an ethical and professional framework for the intervention of the social worker. They ensure the protection of children's rights, educational equity, confidentiality, and effective teamwork. Respecting these principles is essential for building a safe, inclusive educational environment focused on the holistic development of the student.

School social work plays a vital role in protecting the right to education, promoting social equity, and supporting students facing difficulties. Its goals range from preventing school dropout to fostering inclusion, all aiming toward a more humane, equitable, and effective educational system. Strengthening this profession within the educational environment is essential for the development of a society committed to social justice and inclusion.

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