

URAL NADIR & MEHMET CAN AKTAN**SOCIAL JUSTICE, EDUCATION AND SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN TURKEY****Abstract**

This study focuses on welfare state, social justice and school social work interaction. In this paper, these three concepts' reflections in Turkey were mentioned. Researchers aimed to discuss how school social work (which is brought to the agenda recently) is important in the provision of social justice in Turkish public service delivery.

Introduction

Social work in Turkey has been left half a century behind and when we look at its practise fields, it is possible to see that those fields are developing differently from each other. For example, such fields like poverty, disability or clinical social work, have some settled practises but it is hard to say the same thing for school social work in our country. Nevertheless as a new social work field, school social work had developed first especially in the United States of America and the United Kingdom and also developed in some European and Eastern countries. It is known that school social workers are being employed at schools in these countries.

A Brief Overview of School Social Work

To understand the content and function of the school social work, it is necessary to define what school social work is. 'School Social Work is an important field of social work that located in schools to provide services, such as evaluating students' problems and needs; solving their problems about adolescence, success, family, friends and life conditions; helping students to maintain their educational activities successfully' (Duman, 2000, p. 35). As understood from the definition, school social work helps students with their development process, family profile and life conditions. Students' needs, problems they face in school settings and their solutions are the main issues for school social work. The main objective of school social work is to support solving pupils' psychosocial problems and increase their academic achievements by this support and by making educational environments more functional, to raise the quality of education.

It is considered that first practises in school social work started in the USA and England. The role of *school attendance officer* was born in England and over a century later, this role has evolved into *education welfare officer* or *education social worker*. In the USA, private agencies in three East Coast cities placed *visiting teachers* at schools to provide contact between home-school and promote school attendance. The role of the 'visiting teacher' developed a true social work approach (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002, p. 9). The title of 'school social worker' was adopted in the 1930s (Costin, 1969; Huxtable & Blyth, 2002, p. 9). Therefore, from the beginning of school social work, its goal is developing mutual understanding and collaboration between home and school (Özbesler & Duyan, 2009, p. 20).

It is known that the placement of school social workers within the school staff was in the 1900s. In Turkey, school social work practises have not yet started but it is possible to mention some efforts. Especially, some social problems which are increasing at school such as addiction, violence etc. in our country are requiring teamwork in school settings. Evidence, for this development is provided by the Children's Rights Strategy Document and National Action Plan of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (2013-2017), where provision is made for initiating school social work until 2016 in Turkey.

Within the ecological system which regulates school social work; students located in school ecosystem interact dynamically with their families, teachers, environment and each other and also the community. Therefore, we need to handle students' problems and needs within the social environment in which they communicate and interact (Özkan & Kılıç, 2014, pp. 75-78).

The Relationship between Social Justice and School Social Work

Before discussing the relationship between school social work and social justice, it is important to mention about some concepts.

First of them is the term of 'state'. It is a concept with four hundred years of history and defined as *a form of government that determines state's intervention to social and economic life for public welfare and its methods*. A Welfare State can be defined with many goals, including social development, social justice, social peace, social stability, social integration, social democracy (Danış, 2007, p. 54). In this study, we aim to emphasize social justice – school social work interaction.

Social justice is one of the most important goals for states. It is defined as *possibility from country's resources and opportunities equally*. According to International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2014) definition:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

As understand from the passage, the connection between social work and social justice is clear.

Correlatively, when we look at 'IFSW Code of Ethics' (2012), we see also a place given in that to social justice. According to the IFSW Code of Ethics, Article 4.2:

Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work. This means:

- **Challenging negative discrimination:** Social workers have a responsibility to challenge negative discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour, racial or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs.

- Recognising diversity: Social workers should recognise and respect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the societies in which they practise, taking account of individual, family, group and community differences.
- Distributing resources equitably: Social workers should ensure that resources at their disposal are distributed fairly, according to need.
- Challenging unjust policies and practices: Social workers have a duty to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where resources are inadequate or where distribution of resources, policies and practices are oppressive, unfair or harmful.
- Working in solidarity: Social workers have an obligation to challenge social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatisation or subjugation, and to work towards an inclusive society.

Similarly, according to Council of Social Work Education (CSWE, 2012)'s description: 'the purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person and environment construct, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, social work's purpose is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons'. This also explains us social justice – social work intersection.

Certainly, not only social work, but also education has a privileged position for providing social justice. Actually, there is a two-sided relation between education and social justice. Firstly, a 'social justice – education discussion' about problems on reaching the right to education access which is one of the most significant resources of a country. Secondly, a 'social justice – education discussion' as a significant instrument about providing social justice.

Social justice in education can be approached from two dimensions. First one may be considered at macro level as individuals the right to equal participation whatever their ethnic, economic status and sexual orientation. Second one may be considered at both macro and micro level as pupil's deficiency in the right to education that comes from different sectors of society.

One of the most important functions of social work is providing each person opportunity to realize their own potential. When we look from education's point of view, for children outside the education system, deprived of education equality and those forced to leave the school, social work services in school settings are significantly important. When we think in the context of social justice, such services should be seen as essential instruments for welfare states' goal of social justice.

The right to education is also legislated by Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. Referring to Article 42: 'education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state schools. The State shall provide scholarships and other means of assistance to enable students of merit lacking financial means to continue their education. The State shall take necessary measures to rehabilitate those in need of special education so as to render such people useful to society' (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982). Considering Turkey's enrolment rates, it is seen that Turkey was in the last place among OECD countries by 2011. By the age of 5-14, Turkey's enrolment rate is 91.3% compared to OECD's 98.6%

enrolment rate (OECD, 2011). Also, enrolment rate at the age of 14-19 is important. This age group is seen as the entrance into the labour market and strongly focused on across the world. Similarly, by the age of 14-19, only out passing China and Mexico, Turkey is antepenultimate with 62% enrolment rate compared to OECD average of 82% (Şimşek, 2013). With the education share inside Gross National Product (GNP), Turkey is in the lowest places among OECD countries.

A field research's results by Gökşen, Cemalcılar & Gürlesel (2006) about drop outs at primary school includes: Drop out mainly occurs in fifth and sixth classes. Especially for girls, parental pressure is an important factor. When it comes to family parameters, mother's education level and economic status are significant on family breakdown.

Looking from a wider perspective, Kopels (2007, pp. 288-289) expresses that many children coming from disadvantaged groups are less likely to benefit from right to education equally. Kopels emphasizes the necessity of 'school social work' and the following points:

- To become conscious about students with diversities, especially for teachers, is important. Beside this, expressions involving discrimination should not be used in school settings.
- Counselling and case management for both students and families will be useful and these should be integrated into school system.
- Activities which gather student and whole school personnel will help people understand each other; so, such activities should be organized.
- In addition, performing works or studies related with access and continuance to education are also important for quality of education and student achievement.

Franklin & Harris (2007, pp. 331-340) describe social workers' roles in school settings in detail. They emphasize planning the most appropriate interventions for different kinds of groups. Franklin & Harris determine school social workers professional roles. These include: 1) Consultant, 2) Clinical Interventionist, 3) Enabler and Facilitator, 4) Collaborator, 5) Educator, 6) Mediator, 7) Advocate, 8) Diversity Specialist, 9) Manager, 10) Case Manager and Broker, 11) Community Intervention, 12) Policy Initiator and Developer.

Results and Evaluation

One of the most significant roles of governments is providing equal right to education for every child as an important indicator of social justice. According to OECD, Turkey has a low level of school attendance statistics. For a solution of this problem, to minimize school dropout risks and also to make schools more effective for students, school social work is essential to welfare, in the final analysis. In that way: it is most important to bring school social work into action in Turkey. Whereby, with the help of social work interventions and efficient use of school social workers' roles, to deal with many problems – including those mentioned in this study – Turkish society will move forward.

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