Ensuring Secure Schools: A Perspective from Social Work

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Abstract

This study aims to compile existing research in the literature to demonstrate the methods used in collaboration between social services to establish a secure school climate. In today's context, the role of schools in child development ranks among the highest in terms of significance. Children spend a significant portion of their days within school environments. Numerous factors exist within schools that influence the lives of children. Teachers, classmates, school authorities, the surrounding environment, and even the school's physical structure impact children's development, collectively forming the school climate. Acts such as violence, harassment, bullying, neglect, abuse, substance abuse, discrimination, and inequality pose threats to the school climate, making it unsafe. A secure school climate plays a crucial role in enabling students to complete their education effectively. Collaborative efforts involving social services, law enforcement, and school staff are crucial in ensuring a secure school environment. This study delves into the implementation methods of school policing worldwide while exploring the potential contributions of social work support to this practice.

Keywords: Social service, school, police officers, social security.

Güvenli Okulun Sağlanması: Sosyal Hizmet Bakış Açısı

Öz

Bu çalışmada, literatürdeki araştırmalar derlenerek, sosyal hizmet işbirliğiyle güvenli okul ikliminin sağlanabilmesi için hangi yöntemlerin kullanılabileceği ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Günümüzde çocuk gelişimi konusunda okulların oynadığı rol, önem derecesinde en üst sıralarda yer almaktadır. Çocuklar günlerinin çok büyük bir kısmını okullarda geçirmektedir. Okullarda çocukların hayatlarına etki eden pek çok faktör bulunmaktadır. Öğretmenler, sınıf arkadaşları, okul yetkilileri, okulun çevresi ve hatta okulun fiziki yapısı dahi çocukların gelişimine etki etmektedir ve bu faktörler okul iklimini oluşturmaktadır. Şiddet, taciz, zorbalık, ihmal ve istismar, madde kullanımı gibi suçlar, ayrımcılık ve eşitsizlik gibi etkenler okul iklimine zarar vermekte ve okul iklimini güvensiz hale getirmektedir. Okul ikliminin güvenli olması öğrencinin eğitimini verimli bir şekilde tamamlanması açısından kritik rol oynamaktadır. Okul ikliminin güvenli hale getirilmesi için sosyal hizmet, polis ve okul çalışanları işbirliği içinde çalışmalıdır. Bu çalışmada okul polisinin dünyadaki uygulanma şekilleri incelenmiş, sosyal hizmet desteğinin bu uygulamaya neler katabileceği araştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sosyal hizmetler, okul, polis memurları, sosyal güvenlik.

Introduction

Defining school safety, as with all social concepts, is challenging. Various definitions exist regarding school safety. According to Dönmez[1], school safety is when students, teachers, and other staff feel physically, psychologically, and emotionally free. Güven[2] defines school safety as the creation of a conducive environment for learning within the school. A safe school is a condition where positive interactions occur among students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and visitors, where attitudes and reactions are not threatening, and where a climate fostering positive relationships and personal development prevails.

School safety entails students, staff, and other stakeholders, such as parents and visitors, feeling secure in the school environment, both physically and in terms of their psychological and social well-being. The scope and dimensions of school safety extend beyond the confines of the school setting. It encompasses all stages from when a child or any other school personnel leave home to go to school until they return home[3].

In both the world and our country, the significance of school security is evident through numerous incidents and cases. Statistically, the number of crimes committed in schools is on the rise. In the academic year 2019-20, 10 percent of schools reported instances of verbal abuse directed towards teachers, representing a 5 percentage point increase from the levels observed in 2009-10. During the same period, the proportion of schools reporting disrespectful behavior by students towards teachers, excluding verbal abuse, reached 15 percent, indicating a rise compared to the 9 percent reported in 2009-10. Additionally, there was an escalation in incidents of "general disorder in the classroom," with 4 percent of schools reporting such occurrences in 2019-20, as opposed to the 3 percent reported in 2009-10[4]. Therefore, administrators are endeavoring to formulate realistic and universally applicable policies[5].

School security is important for students, parents, teachers, and school administrators from the perspective of social services. A safe school environment supports the emotional, social, and academic development of students. It also builds trust among families and provides better support for students. A secure atmosphere is essential for teachers to conduct effective teaching. School security prevents bullying and violence, enhances social cohesion, and ensures equal opportunities. Social service professionals play a crucial role in meeting students' psychosocial needs. In conclusion, school security encompasses not only physical but also social and emotional well-being. This study

constitutes a literature review. Police-school collaborations aimed at ensuring school security in Turkey and globally have been investigated in the literature. The importance of school security and police collaboration is initially discussed in the study. Subsequently, examples of police-school collaborations are provided, followed by an explanation of how social work can contribute to this collaboration.

Qualities of a Safe School

For effective learning to take place and for students to develop their potential, it is essential for a school to be a safe place for both students and teachers. Without a safe learning environment, teachers encounter difficulties in teaching and students in learning. If students carry security concerns, they cannot concentrate on learning. Therefore, ensuring schools are safe is a significant necessity[6].

Transforming schools in Turkey into safe spaces for education and instruction, free from violence and threats, is crucial. Otherwise, it not only impacts students and teachers negatively but also influences the education process, the immediate and wider community around the school, and the entire society[7].

Determining whether a school is safe is not a straightforward task. Safety is influenced by numerous factors. However, it is possible to derive certain conclusions about safety in schools from statistical indicators related to safety and reports from government and non-governmental organizations and then make evaluations based on these findings.

A secure educational institution is one in which academic pursuits unfold within a setting free from fear, violence, and anxiety. This conducive environment cultivates a climate where every student experiences a sense of care and acceptance. A safety-oriented school is devoid of bullying, explicitly communicates behavioral expectations, and actively promotes a culture of support and compassion[8].

Safe schools are supportive schools. They indicate student needs and high performance. When both teachers and students feel secure, high performance is expected[9]. Teachers' classroom management strategies can influence the school climate. Teachers should exhibit consistency in their approach towards students and encourage open communication[10].

School safety is crucial for effective learning and overall societal well-being. Creating a supportive environment free from fear and violence among students and teachers is essential to encourage the general performance of individuals and the community.

Concept of School Climate

According to the concept of school climate, the most significant factor influencing student behavior is the school climate itself. There exists a direct relationship between a healthy and open climate in the school and its safety. The healthier and more open the school climate, the safer the school becomes. Sergiovanni[11] has identified indicators for determining school climate, including consistency in rule enforcement, taking responsibility, standards, rewards, organizational transparency, support and friendly relations, and leadership. These indicators can be explained as follows:

Consistency in rule enforcement refers to the fair and consistent application of school rules. Taking responsibility signifies holding everyone in the school accountable for their duties, from students to teachers, in all aspects. Standards represent the collaborative effort to achieve common goals. Rewards symbolize a positive learning environment. Organizational transparency aids in the formation of a trust-based environment, while support and friendly relations assist in students' emotional and social development. Leadership serves as an integrative and goal-oriented catalyst.

Problem Areas in School Safety

School safety encompasses all stages from the moment a student, teacher, or staff member leaves their home to go to school until they return home. Therefore, in terms of space, school safety includes three fundamental areas of security: the safety between home and school, within the school premises, and in the classroom[4].

The dimensions of school safety can be approached in terms of security in various domains. These may include safety against violence from peers, safety regarding exposure to physical violence from teachers, safety against natural disasters, security related to health and cleanliness, psychological and emotional security, as well as security concerning ethnic and political viewpoints[4].

In studies related to school and student safety, the issue of violence stands out. Violence, defined as the excessive display of unwanted behaviors that do not align with the school's goals and expectations[12], has been a longstanding, commonplace feature of school life for centuries and its origins are deeply embedded within the social, cultural, historical, and economic context of the era. There is an increasing concern about understanding the roots of violence, aiming to find constructive ways to reduce and ideally prevent violence when it occurs[13].

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In today's world, especially in literary and visual media, there is considerable coverage of drug use, particularly in schools and at an early age. Each institution and organization has its own methods to combat substance abuse. Undoubtedly, educational institutions are at the forefront. Educational institutions must continue their efforts in combating substance abuse and should establish contact with relevant institutions and organizations when necessary.

In America, it is estimated that more than 3% of children are subjected to maltreatment each year. As a result of physical and sexual abuse, a variety of mental health problems may be observed in children, such as 'insecure attachment, post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulties in establishing relationships, attention deficit disorder associated with hyperactivity, depression, and socially inappropriate relationships with peers'. Psychological abuse is thought to occur more frequently than physical abuse[14]. Maltreated children may experience short- or long-term mental health problems depending on the developmental period, type, frequency, and duration of the abuse, as well as the support provided by the family when the abuse occurred[15].

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute[16], four out of five young people engage in sexual intercourse during their adolescence. Getting pregnant at a young age can impose a significant financial burden on society. Targeting young men in preventing early pregnancies is crucial. It has been determined that becoming a young father is associated with displaying aggression or other problematic behaviors[17].

Especially in our country, generational conflicts are observed in such cases. The situation becomes extremely challenging due to the family's acceptance and inadequate government policies. Particularly in communities adhering to traditions and customs, such cases can result in murder. Therefore, preventive measures should be taken, and policies addressing risks must be developed.

Global Frameworks of Police-School Collaboration Models

Three primary models of collaboration between the police and schools are outlined as follows:

School-Based Officers: In this model, police officers are employed either on a part-time or full-time basis within the school setting.

Police as Educators: This model involves police officers serving as educational resources, contributing to the educational environment in schools.

Comprehensive Police-School Collaboration Programs: This model entails a broader approach, where the police are integrated into a larger network that includes local organizations, communities, and social services[18].

School-Based Officers

The School Resource Officers (SRO) model is among the most widely disseminated paradigms within police applications targeting schools. Originating in the United States, this model encompasses strategically and officially deployed police officers specifically assigned to a designated school or all schools within a certain region. Implemented since the 1950s, this model has undergone various adaptations and has been applied globally[19].

Since the 1970s, police engagement with UK educational institutions has evolved due to legislative changes emphasizing a heightened commitment to youth crime prevention and a welfare-oriented approach. Collaborative efforts with young demographics have increased interfacing within education and social services. School Liaison Officers, selected through a discerning process, often hold full-time roles within the educational milieu, highlighting the multifaceted interactions between law enforcement and schools, addressing societal imperatives related to youth welfare and crime prevention[20].

In the Netherlands, initiatives incorporating full-time police officers within school settings are a recent development, inspired by the School Resource Officers program in the United States. A notable instance of such experimentation is the "School Officer" project, inaugurated in 2001, where a full-time police officer was stationed at a middle school in Duiven. This appointed officer is equipped with an office dedicated to disseminating information to the entire school community and addressing emergent issues. The project reflects a strategic integration of law enforcement into educational environments, drawing parallels with international models and catering to the specific context of the Netherlands[18].

In Queensland, Australia, the School Resource Officer Program assigns police officers to support primary and secondary schools in achieving educational goals. These officers, though, do not take on teaching responsibilities. The program strategically integrates law enforcement into the educational system, fostering collaboration and aligning with the diverse objectives of schools in Queensland[21]. Countries can adapt and incorporate police-school collaboration according to their needs and the issues they deem necessary. Some countries and regions have developed systems where police officers are present in schools not as law enforcement officers but as educators.

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Police as Educators

The second paradigm of collaboration between schools and law enforcement focuses on using police forces as educational assets, dating back to the early 20th century. Originally addressing topics like bicycle safety and traffic regulations, this model has evolved to emphasize crime prevention, especially in substance abuse[5]. Collaborative efforts involve law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and specialized police units delivering comprehensive educational interventions on crime-related issues to students, faculty, and parents within the school community.

Police services in Winnipeg and Calgary, Canada, have created customized presentations for schools and parents, addressing topics such as bullying, alcohol-related driving, personal safety, and internet crimes. The Metropolitan Police Service in London also provides tailored services for primary and secondary schools. This reflects a global trend where law enforcement agencies collaborate with educational institutions, contributing to the dialogue on school safety and crime prevention through focused educational outreach[18].

"The School Adoption Plan" is a European educational initiative where police officers, acting as "Adoption Agents," educate primary school students on crime prevention. Originating in the Rotterdam-Rijnmond region in 1995, the program expanded to other Dutch regions, Poland, Slovakia, Belgium, and Estonia by 1998-1999. Several other European countries have expressed interest in adopting it[18].

In Hamburg, Germany, a collaborative school-police education program established in 2002 resulted from an agreement between educational authorities and the police in 1982. The program aims to enhance young people's resilience to peer pressure, provide information about values, and address underlying causes of youth crimes for prevention. This initiative extends to all schools, emphasizing the effort to instill valuable insights and resistance skills among the youth[22]. In Police as Educators systems, police officers serving as educators typically strive to prevent students from getting involved in crimes.

Comprehensive Police-School Collaboration Programs

The third model within the police-school collaboration framework encompasses extensive collaborations involving schools, the police, and other service sectors. These multifaceted partnerships serve diverse purposes, including information exchange, assistance in program implementation, regular school visits, as well as consultancy and

support. Specific individual projects discussed in earlier models also align with these collaborative criteria.

The Community Outreach through Police in Schools Program, developed in 1998 by Yale University's Child Development-Community Policing program, is a short-term, prevention-oriented, school-based intervention. It involves community police officers and child clinicians providing weekly sessions for at-risk middle school students exposed to violence. The program includes an eight-session curriculum over 10 weeks, conducted during the school day, with specially selected and trained police officers attending weekly meetings with a supervising clinician.

In 1995, Giessen, Germany schools faced issues like violence, drugs, and racial incidents, leading to the Wetzlar Model Police-School Project. The project involved a partnership between police, school stakeholders, and youth welfare groups. The police established a hotline, responded promptly to school requests, and provided training on incident protocols. Various initiatives, including mediation, sports nights, and support for students with behavioral problems, were introduced[18]. In this model, it is acknowledged that the collaboration between the police and schools alone is not sufficient. Families and the school community are also included in this collaboration. This way, efforts are made to eliminate the source of crime.

School Safety in Turkey

The Ministry of Interior in Turkey has issued a circular for the 2023-2024 academic year, addressing public order and traffic precautions. The circular aims to ensure safety and tranquility in school zones. Governors and district governors will lead meetings with the participation of key stakeholders, including Provincial and District Chiefs of Police, Gendarmerie Commanders, the Director of National Education, school administrators, parent-teacher association presidents, local authorities, representatives from anti-drug organizations like Yeşilay, experts in drug abuse prevention, and other relevant parties. These meetings are intended to establish and implement specific measures for the designated objectives.

The decisions made encompass increasing educational sessions and inspections for school bus drivers, continuing enforcement of pedestrian priority areas, conducting awareness campaigns regarding narcotics and stimulants, and intensifying coordinated inspections as part of these precautionary measures[23].

The "Education and Security Project," a collaborative effort by the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of the Interior, will continue during the 2023-2024 academic year. Under this protocol, traffic around school premises during entry and exit hours will be systematically controlled in coordination with law enforcement agencies. Visitor records will be maintained according to schedules, and necessary checks will be conducted within designated timeframes. Inspection of play, sports equipment, tools, and work equipment in schoolyards will be carried out to ensure safety, and appropriate measures will be taken.

Checks during the boarding and disembarking of school transportation vehicles will be overseen by duty teachers/school administrators, implementing essential security measures. Collaborative efforts with municipal authorities will be made to remove mobile vendors from the school vicinity and conduct necessary inspections[23]. Ensuring student safety during school transportation entry and exit is crucial, as the presence of mobile vendors near schools can contribute to increased access to drugs and cigarettes for children, potentially leading to gang activities. Therefore, child protection in the school's immediate vicinity and intensified inspections in the surrounding areas are imperative[24].

In schools, numerous measures can be taken under the guise of security; however, it is imperative to eliminate the underlying causes that lead to security issues. Simultaneously, while striving to create a secure environment, it is essential to ensure that students' comfort zones remain intact and that schools do not transform into quasi-prison environments.

School Safety and Social Work

School social workers are typically trained in violence prevention[25] and are professional individuals capable of conducting research to inform the community[26]. Therefore, school social workers have a comprehensive understanding and a unique perspective on the school safety strategies applied or likely to be applied in the schools where they work. School social workers strive to prevent harmful situations affecting students and the school environment by developing, implementing, and understanding school safety strategies[27].

School social workers directly witness the impact of school safety strategies through their interactions with both schools and students. This situation informs social work professionals about school safety, contributing to the development of school safety. The

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activities undertaken by school social workers both within and outside the school, along with their broad perspectives, are aspects that need to be considered in the development of school safety. The exploration of school social workers' perspectives on school safety and security remains an under-researched area[28].

Despite attempts to establish collaboration between the police and schools to ensure school security in our country, the lack of a social work professional facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration between the two institutions, coupled with the absence of supportive policies, results in merely symbolic and short-term practices. While short-term social service efforts have been implemented in specific cities in Turkey, solutions and sustainable social service practices to improve school safety and the school climate have not been widely disseminated.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The importance of school safety is twofold: it ensures a healthy learning environment for students and shapes the school climate for their benefit. Schools face various crimes that threaten the school environment, such as violence, substance abuse, neglect, abuse, peer bullying and early sexual relations among children. This situation can disrupt education and even lead to physical or mental harm to students.

To maintain school safety, different countries have developed diverse solutions in their school policing practices. While some countries station police officers directly within schools, in others, officers from nearby police stations are assigned to schools. There are also approaches that significantly differ in terms of integrating school police. In these approaches, school police, acting as educators, educate children on how to ensure their safety, clearly define what constitutes crime and a criminal, and foster increased interaction between police and children.

Starting from this point, it is considered necessary to commence education regarding the development of police-citizen relationships within the scope of school police practices from an early age. Ensuring the security needs of students from these ages onward, developing police-student relationships, providing a safe environment in schools, protecting children, and making preventive measures systematic hold significant importance. The objectives of the school police aimed at the relevant age group include introducing the police and police organizations, preventing bias against the police, enhancing police-student and parent dialogues, ensuring the young population maintains a positive view of the police, increasing knowledge flow regarding crime and

criminals, and aiming for children attending school to receive education in a secure environment away from potential dangers.

Despite all these, the school police, as an implementer of state power alone, cannot entirely ensure a safe school environment. The school police may fall short in addressing the underlying causes within the school environment that might lead students to crime. Considering the close interaction between police and schools, it should be acknowledged that school police program can lead to excessive authority and a more controlling structure within the school, thus the negative aspects of this implementation should not be overlooked.

The improvement of the school climate and the provision of school security constitute a critically important issue in which social work plays a pivotal role. In this context, the collaboration between school authorities, social work professionals, and the police holds significant importance. The enhancement of the school climate involves the creation of an environment that supports students' emotional, social, and academic development. Social work contributes to this process by providing individual and group-level support, preventing negative behaviors, and facilitating the establishment of healthy relationships among students. Additionally, by focusing on the development of students' coping skills, social work can positively influence the school climate.

Social work professionals can play an effective role in addressing issues such as violence, harassment, or bullying among students. By providing psychosocial support to students, these professionals can work towards understanding and resolving the root causes of problems. Moreover, social work experts experienced in dealing with crime and criminals can collaborate with school police to formulate an effective security strategy.

In conclusion, the improvement of the school climate and the provision of security are achievable through strong collaboration between school authorities, police, and social work professionals. This collaboration contributes to supporting students in a healthy learning environment, fostering the development of safer and more positive individuals in the community.

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