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Social Work in The Greek Schools: A Review of Policy Texts

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Abstract

Social work is an applied science that finds application in a multitude of fields, health, education, social protection, protection of the elderly, addiction, human rights, etc. Specifically, in the field of education both in America and in European countries, the social worker has an active presence in schools in various forms. This article will analyze the evolution of the role of the social worker in education in Greece through the study of the legislative framework from 1975 to 2018.

Keywords: Social Work in Education, Greece, General Education

Introduction

According to the International Federation of Social Workers (n.d.) "Social work are 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. The above definition may be amplified at national or regional levels." Social work is a multi-sector profession. Some examples of fields that a social worker can be employed are disability, community development, addiction, child protection, elder protection, human rights, disaster management e.t.c.

In this article will focus in social work in the field of education and particularly in the situation of social workers in the education field in Greece. Social workers in Greece are almost exclusively employed in Special Education. The role of the social work profession in General education is ignored. We will approach the issue of social workers in education in Greece by analyzing the relevant legislation from 1975 to 2018. The research was qualitative, and content analysis was used in order to analyze and cross – compare all the policy texts in relation to education and social work (Iosifidis, 2008). The whole set of legislation related to General and Special education was collected and analyzed in order to identify references to the social worker's profession and responsibilities. Correspondingly, the reference of the field of education to social work legislation was researched. We will focus on the most important references that connect the social worker profession to General education.

School Social Work

A school social worker is a professional who offers psycho-social services at the micro, medium, and macro level. The services a social worker provides to the education environment it's not only directed to children and to teenagers but also to their families, the teaching staff, and the whole school community. According to Barker (2003) "School, social workers are often called on to help students, families, and teachers address problems such as truancy, social withdrawal, overaggressive behaviors, rebelliousness, and the effects of special physical, emotional, or economic problems."

Besides the focus on problems that individuals face, social workers deal with education policy issues, crisis intervention, child neglect, and abuse (Massat et al, 2008). According to Katsama (2014: 25) " School social work focused on and had a catalytic effect on inclusion in the education of children from specific population groups facing difficulties, such as children of immigrants, families facing social and economic problems, children with abusive behavior or disabilities. Social work highlighted students' needs and rights and advocated for their opportunity to make the most of the educational process."

Since the late 20th and early 21st century, school social work has followed an inter-method holistic model. According to Jarolmen (2014), approaches to school social work have historically been related to the systemic model and later to the ecological model. Based on these models the social worker does not deal only with the individual but deals with the whole set of systems that surround him and interact with him, such as family, extended family, neighborhood, school and community. According to Openshaw (2008), the common tasks of social workers in schools are a. consultation as a member of a interdisciplinary team, b. assessment, c. direct intervention and assistance with program development.

The most recent approach to school social work is that of Strength-Based Model. This approach is practical and aims to bring about changes in the individual and their environment. The change is not made by focusing on the negative elements of the individual and their environment but the positive ones. The benefits and potentials of each system are explored so that individuals can fulfill their dreams and aspirations (ibid, 2014). The ultimate goal is to empower the individual and their community. Empowerment is related to educational theorist Paulo Freire concept of Critical Consciousness. Paulo Freire defines critical consciousness as the ability to "intervene in reality in order to change it." (Freire, 2005). According to Powel (1998), the role and purpose of social work in postmodern society are to empower individuals, groups, communities, and societies to take action in order to re-energize civil society to ensure the human rights and equal treatment they deserve.

Social Work in the Greek schools: 1974 – 2008

Social work in education in Greece is almost exclusively linked to Special education. Special schools have been employed with social workers since 1987. But if we look at the relevant laws, we will see that the practice of social work in education (General and Special) is regulated by Laws and Presidential Decrees of 1974, 1978 and 1985. One would say that social work in education is a tradition. However, the role it can play has been overlooked, and even today in 2019, there are no social workers employed permanently in General education. The relationship of social work with education has been maintained through pilot programs mainly organized by Schools and Departments of Social Work in the country (Kallinikaki, 1998, Katsama, 2014).

After 1975, social workers appeared in education under Law 1566/1985. The law covers all education and concerns the "Structure and functioning of primary and secondary education." Social workers appear as professionals in Special education schools. There is no reference to the provisions relating to General education and the employment of social workers there. Shortly after in 1989 in Presidential Decree No. 50/1989 titled "Determination of professional rights of the graduates of the Department of Social Work of the School of Health Professions of the Technological Educational Institutions" it is explicitly stated that social workers can be employed to provide social services at all levels of education. Nevertheless, there was no provision of connecting the social work profession to the educational system (except for Special education) from any Government.

Even when researching Special education, we can see that there was no important change or evolution to that institution up until 2000. According to Spinthourakis et al (2008: 11), "Enacting the appropriate legislation has been a landmark in developing contemporary Special Education in the country. For example, Law 1143/1981, Law 1566/1985, and in particular Law 2817/2000, which supplements, updates and upgrades the existing institutional framework in Special Needs Education. According to Law 2817/2000, the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs is responsible for Special Needs Education. The Ministry co-operates in the procedures of establishing the centers and workshops for special vocational training, which fall within the

aeigis of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, as long as school-aged persons with SEN attend these centers."

In 2000 in addition to other issues under the Law 2817/2000 KDAY were established. KDAY (Diagnostics, Assessment, and Support Centers) are responsible for the provision of diagnostic, evaluation, and support services for students and especially those with special educational needs, as well as support, information, and awareness raising for teachers, parents, and society. At KDAY Social workers are employed as part of an interdisciplinary team which consists of a teacher of special education, a psychologist and a psychiatrist when needed. The social worker according to Decision Γ6/4494 in Government Gazette 1503/8/11/2001 defining the duties and obligations of KDAY's staff mostly is involved with the family, gathering information about the social and family history and is also involved in organizing projects in order to sensitize the community towards disability. There is no actual involvement of the social worker with the general education in the policy texts, but the children who come to KDAY come from every level of education and from every type of education. It is with this logic that KDAY social workers come into contact with the General education student population.

The next legislation related to Special education is Law 3699/2008. This law favors a more medically oriented focus on issues related to special educational needs and specifically excludes children with linguistic and cultural differences. The diagnostic centers known as KDAY are renamed to KEDDY. Apart from changing the name, there are no significant changes in the operation of these centers. The responsibilities of a social worker remain the same. According to Spinthourakis et al. (2008), KEDDY is responsible for a. providing diagnosis on the nature and degree of difficulties of students, b. recommending their registration, classification, and their attendance in the appropriate school of general or special needs education, c. providing advisory services, students, parents, and teachers, d. providing early intervention, etc.

Social Work in Greek schools: 2014 - ...

The first placement of a social worker in General education is carried out by Decision 17812/Γ6 in Government Gazette 315/B' /12.02.2014. This law establishes a new committee called Diagnostic Educational Assessment and Support Committee (EDEAY). EDEAY is an interdisciplinary committee which, although administratively comes under a Special school, is placed in General schools. Again, the relationship with Special education is immediate as the General schools in which this committee is placed are those that have an integration class¹ for children with disabilities. The main aim of these committees is, therefore, to support children with disabilities who are attending or are going to study in the integration classes. EDEAY's logic was related to the concept of inclusive education. The goal is to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools. This committee is constituted of the Principal of the General school, the Special educator of the integration class of the General school, a psychologist and a social worker.

The responsibilities of the social worker are broadened under Decision 17812/Γ6. The social worker deals with the prevention, empowerment of the family and its members and focuses on "social, economic, cultural, environmental and family factors that impede the children's access to school, affect its normal schooling, home study, and school performance "(Decision 17812/Γ6 in Government Gazette 315B/ 2014)

EDEAY is an innovative program for Greek General schools. Teachers of General education did not know what a social worker can do in an educational setting or in any setting. Of course, again, the social worker was introduced to the school through Special education. This meant that the social worker and the psychologist - working as a team- could not deal with children who they as professionals considered in need of help or that

¹ "In the case of SEN students attending mainstream schools, they can study in:

1. Ordinary classes with parallel support from a special needs education teacher [...] 2. Specially organized and appropriately staffed integration classes operating within mainstream and technical vocational education institutes." (Spinthourakis et al, 2008:11).

their parents could seek help directly from them. According to the law, the social worker can deal with: 1. the students of the integration class and 2. the students that the school teachers association proposes. That is to say, it does not function as a social worker in a General school but as an external partner again with a disability focus.

According to Lembesi (2017), though EDEAY is necessary for the education system in Greece, several questions arise from its operation. Firstly, there is a gap in the law concerning the students EDEAY can undertake. If an incident or a student that needs help is not referred to EDEAY by the school teachers association, but the social worker or the psychologist of EDEAY perceive that a child needs help what can they do? That gap in the law highlights many ethical issues relating to the social work profession. The problem that arises is that the teachers are not always informed about the role of EDEAY and the role of psychologists and social workers in the school context in order to seek help when and where it is needed. On the other hand, there is not a culture in General education working in a multidisciplinary team. If the previous issues resolved, EDEAY could be seen not only as a structure that belongs to Special education but as a structure capable of preventing school dropouts and removing social exclusion factors for the students and their families (with or without special educational needs).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education issues a decision on "Duties and Responsibilities of Social Workers in Primary and Secondary Schools of General and Vocational Education." (Decision 142628/ΓΔ4 in Government Gazette 3032/B/4-9-2017). It is the first time that a social worker's job in General education is defined by law. The description of responsibilities follows international data on the practice of School Social Work. The social worker is described as a member of the school unit with a distinct workplace.

The law is extremely detailed. Its central rationale is that the social worker "is responsible for the practice of Social Work and the provision of support services in the school environment. It promotes the psychosocial and cognitive development of pupils based on the principles of equal rights and opportunities in the educational process. The interventions of a social worker have the purpose of empowering students and their families" (Decision 142628/ΓΔ4 in Government Gazette 3032/B/4-9-2017: 35038-35039).

According to the law the social worker focuses on (a) factors that impede students' access to school, affecting school attendance, and school performance, (b) family factors and social life factors that lead to exclusion from participation in activities that are consistent with the rights of the child, (c) the formation of an out-of-school environment for the pupil community on the basis of the principles of inclusion, social justice and social solidarity, (d) intervenes in crisis situations and sensitizes students to various social issues (school bullying, respect for diversity, social interaction, etc.), (e) designs and implements prevention programs, (f) looks for alternative education opportunities for school leavers, and works with all responsible bodies to reduce school leakage (ibid.).

It is obvious that the social worker as described above is not just related to Special education issues but is a School social worker concerned with the wellbeing of all the students, their families, and the community. This law, although unprecedented in Greek terms, was not followed by relevant jobs in General education. The exception is a program of the Ministry of Education in the years 2017-2019 where social workers were hired (as substitutes) in schools where Roma students attend (Decision 144073/Δ1 in Government Gazette 3084/06.09.2017 Decision 138620/ Δ1 in Government Gazette 3672/B/ 28.08. 2018).

Recently in 2018, a law was issued concerning the Reorganization of support structures for primary and secondary education (Law 4547/2018). According to that law at the level of the prefecture, KESY (Educational and Counseling Support Centers) will operate. KESY is the evolution of KEDY and aims to support schools in issues concerning learning disabilities, student's behavior issues, social inclusion, school leakage, psychosocial needs, the inclusion of students with disabilities, bullying, as well as professional counseling. This law clearly departs from the logic that the support structures are concerned only with Special education and introduces the logic of inclusion. In addition to diagnosing Special education needs, KESY support the school unit in all

student-related problems. The description of the social workers responsibilities in KESY is in accordance to the 2017 law.

EDEAY also changed and from Diagnostic Educational Assessment, and Support Committees are renamed to Interdisciplinary Educational Assessment and Support Committees. Changing the word diagnostics to interdisciplinary shows a new perspective on the work of the social worker and the psychologist at school, moving away from the medical oriented focus of previous laws. EDEAY under the new law can provide services to the whole school community that it is placed. The problem that persists is that EDEAY is only placed in schools with inclusion classes. The implementation of the new Law 4547 concerning issues of Social Work in the Greek schools awaits to be seen in the years to come, especially after the government swift in Greece in 2019.

Conclusion

This article sought to describe the presence of the social worker in the Greek education system through the study of the relevant legislation from 1975 to 2018 focusing on central changes related to Special education and General education in the country. The central conclusion is that social work as a profession in Greece relates almost exclusively to Special education rather than the relevant 1985 legislation governing the practice of the profession in all levels and types of education. Laws leave more hope for including the Social Work profession to the General education system than reality does. The recent 2014 legislation to date, has not been followed by corresponding permanent jobs in schools. We also need to emphasize the lack of social workers, even at the legislative level, from higher education.

We believe that the target of social workers ought to be to communicate their role and what they can contribute to the educational community. As Openshaw (2008) stresses, "It is sometimes difficult for school social workers to gain visibility and to convince district personnel of the validity of their role and skills. To avoid this problem, the social worker should gain visibility and network with school personnel and parents whenever possible.

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