APPLICATION OF SOCIAL WORK IN PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

NGO THI MONG THU, *ngothimongthu1978@gmail.com*
Nguyen Huu Huan High school, Ho Chi Minh City.

INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
	The application of social work (SW) in psychological counseling for high school students in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is the focus of this study. The research employed a combination of literature synthesis, field surveys and in-depth thematic analysis. Findings indicate that social work plays a critical role in supporting students to address common psychological issues such as anxiety, depression and family conflicts, while also enhancing life skills and career orientation. However, the implementation of school-based social work faces multiple challenges, including a shortage of qualified professionals, the absence of clear legal frameworks and limited coordination among schools, families and communities. The paper proposes several solutions, including policy improvement, professional training and strengthened intersectoral collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of social work in educational settings.

1. Introduction

High school students in Vietnam face considerable pressures arising from academic demands, family expectations and social relationships. School mental health has become a serious issue, significantly affecting students' holistic development. According to a recent study by the Ministry of Education and Training, more than 50% of high school students in major cities experience psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and emotional disorders. However, the current system of school-based psychological counseling has not yet been able to adequately meet students' needs. This gap not only hinders students from overcoming psychological challenges but also directly impacts their academic performance and personal growth.

In Ho Chi Minh City where the student population is large and the learning environment is highly competitive, school social work is considered a viable solution to support students in coping with psychological difficulties. The integration of social work into school psychological counseling brings multiple benefits, ranging from the early detection of mental health issues and the provision of timely interventions, to the creation of an inclusive and supportive learning environment that fosters students' comprehensive development. A recent survey at high schools in HCMC indicated that more than 70% of students felt the need for psychological support in schools but had not been able to access such services.

Notably, school social work in psychological counseling not only helps students address emotional difficulties but also contributes to the development of life skills, stress management abilities and the establishment

of future career goals. This explains why the implementation of school social work is essential. Models that integrate psychological counseling with social work in several high schools in HCMC have already demonstrated tangible effectiveness in reducing psychological problems and improving the overall school environment.

Empirical research conducted at four high schools (both public and private) in HCMC further highlights the substantial demand for psychological counseling services. Specifically: Survey results show that 81.7% of students had sought help from school counselors when facing difficulties, 40% frequently encountered problems related to academic pressure and 15.1% experienced severe mental health issues.

Nevertheless, the implementation of social work in psychological counseling remains constrained by several factors, including a shortage of specialized personnel, the absence of clear legal regulations and uneven social awareness of school-based psychological services.

This study aims to analyze the theoretical foundations and practical applications of social work in school psychological counseling in HCMC while proposing solutions to improve and enhance its effectiveness. These proposals are particularly urgent in the current context, where schools often lack sufficient human and financial resources to implement such programs effectively.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1. Concept of social work in school psychological counseling

Social work in schools is a professional activity aimed at helping students resolve personal, academic and social problems through both direct and indirect interventions. School psychological counseling is considered a specialized support method that helps students identify problems, regulate emotions and behaviors and develop adaptive skills in the school environment.

According to Nguyen, V. Q. (2020), social work in psychological counseling not only includes individual counseling but also group activities, crisis intervention, life skills education, service coordination and psychosocial communication in schools.

2.2. Theoretical framework of social work in psychological counseling for high school students in Ho Chi Minh City

2.2.1. Ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenne, (1979): This theory emphasizes that student development is influenced not only by family and school environments but also by broader social and cultural factors. Managing stress and depression: The theory highlights that supporting students should not be confined to the school setting but must also involve families and communities. When students feel supported from multiple levels, their stress is alleviated and depressive symptoms are reduced. Family crises: In cases of family conflicts or insufficient parental support, the ecological systems theory suggests that social work interventions should extend to families and communities, ensuring that students receive comprehensive support from all stakeholders.

2.2.2. Humanistic theory (Rogers; Maslow)

This theory focuses on holistic human development and the importance of empathy in counseling. Stress reduction and cognitive growth: Humanistic theory underlines the role of social workers in creating a safe environment where students feel listened to and supported. Such an empathetic environment allows students to reduce stress and gradually improve their psychological well-being.

Career orientation: Maslow's hierarchy of needs identifies self-actualization as the ultimate goal of human development. Social work can apply this perspective to help students enhance self-awareness, thereby supporting them in

making career choices aligned with their abilities and aspirations.

2.2.3. Role theory

This theory posits that individuals simultaneously occupy multiple roles in society and crises in one role can affect performance in others. Family and school crises: Psychological difficulties do not only affect students but also disrupt their roles within the family and school. School social work helps students recognize and adjust these roles, enabling them to reintegrate more effectively into their learning and social environments. Role adjustment: Social work assists students in rebalancing their social roles and relationships, reducing anxiety and stress when they feel unable to meet societal expectations (e.g., being a high achiever, a good friend).

2.2.4. Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968)

Systems theory views every individual as part of an interconnected system of relationships, including families, schools and communities. Addressing psychological problems: Students' psychological difficulties are not merely personal issues but also reflect the functioning of broader support systems involving teachers, parents, administrators and counselors. Applying systems theory enables practitioners to clarify the roles of all stakeholders and build a more effective support network for students experiencing psychological distress.

2.3. Roles of social work in school psychological counseling

The core functions of school social work in psychological counseling include early identification of students' psychological difficulties; individual and group counseling and intervention; preventive education through life-skills programs; mobilization of resources from families, schools and communities to support students and guidance for teachers and parents to accompany students. In Ho Chi Minh City, many effective models are being implemented, such as school counseling rooms (Nguyen Huu Huan high school, Trung Vuong high school), the "School social work development" project supported by Good Neighbors and specialized training programs by the Ministry of Education and Training at key schools.

3. Research methods

The study employed a quantitative research method to survey and evaluate factors related to the application of social work in psychological counseling for high school students in Ho Chi Minh City. Specifically, the research sample comprised 916 students from four high schools in HCMC, including both public and private institutions. The research instruments used in the study included.

3.1. Five-point Likert scale survey

This scale was designed to assess students' perceptions, accessibility, evaluation of effectiveness and suggestions for improvement regarding school-based psychological counseling and social work programs. The five-point Likert scale is a widely used tool in social science research, allowing researchers to measure students' levels of agreement or disagreement with survey items. The scale categories included: "Strongly agree" "Agree" "Neutral" "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree".

3.2. Survey administration

The survey was conducted directly in schools with the support of teachers and school social workers. Questionnaires were distributed to students in randomly selected classes. Students were informed about the research objectives and assured of the confidentiality of their personal information. Participation was entirely voluntary and students retained the right to decline participation. Each student completed the questionnaire within approximately 15-20 minutes under the supervision of research staff to ensure accuracy and completeness of the responses.

3.3. Data collection process

After completion, the questionnaires were collected from the schools and securely stored. Data collection took place over the course of one month and all responses were carefully reviewed to exclude invalid or incomplete forms. The data were then entered into SPSS 20.0 for processing and analysis. Descriptive statistical tests such as frequency, mean and standard deviation were applied to evaluate various aspects of social work in school-based psychological counseling.

3.4. Rationale for the chosen research method

The quantitative method was selected because it enables data collection from a large number of students, ensuring objectivity and reliability in assessing the factors influencing social work in school psychological counseling. The five-point Likert scale allows for the measurement of students' agreement or disagreement with specific issues, providing easily analyzable data for drawing accurate conclusions. SPSS was employed as it is a powerful and widely used tool for analyzing social science data, allowing for efficient and precise data processing and validation.

3.5. Research ethics compliance

The survey process adhered strictly to ethical research principles, ensuring voluntary participation by all respondents. Students were fully informed about the purpose of the study and reassured of the confidentiality of their responses. Confidentiality of identity: Students were only required to provide basic information such as school name and age, without disclosing any sensitive personal details. All data collected were used solely for scientific research purposes and were not disclosed externally.

4. Research results

This section presents the survey results regarding the role of social work in psychological counseling for high school students in Ho Chi Minh City. The study was conducted with 916 students from four public and private high schools, using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire to assess students' perceptions, accessibility, effectiveness and suggested improvements of school social work across various domains: Stress and depression management, family conflict resolution, career guidance, academic support, emotional and social relationships. Data were analyzed using SPSS 20.0.

4.1. Psychosocial outcomes of school social work: Stress/Depression and Parent-child communication

4.1.1. Stress and depression

Table 1. SW Support in reducing stress and depression

Content	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
SW staff help students reduce stress	53%	36.3%	6.8%	2.9%	0.8%	4.37
SW staff help students overcome depression	49.8%	35.8%	8%	4.8%	1.6%	4.27

The findings indicate that students highly valued the role of social workers in providing psychological support. Specifically, 53% "strongly agreed" and 36.3% "agreed" that SW staff helped reduce stress, with a mean score of 4.37. For support in overcoming depression, 49.8% "strongly agreed" and 35.8% "agreed" with a mean score of 4.27. The proportion of disagreement was generally below 5%, reflecting a high level of consensus.

These results are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory (1979), which emphasizes that schools serve as crucial ecosystems where SW staff act as mediators, connecting resources that help students adapt and stabilize psychologically.

From the perspective of Humanistic theory (Maslow, 1943; Rogers,1951) the empathy and support provided by social workers fulfill basic psychological needs (safety, being understood), thereby fostering intrinsic motivation for overcoming emotional challenges.

Moreover, these findings align with both international and domestic studies: Franklin et al. (2009) confirmed that school social work in the U.S. effectively reduces stress; the World Health Organization (2020) highlighted the importance of psychological support in preventing adolescent depression; Aligns with international meta-analytic evidence (Franklin et al., 2009) reported similar outcomes, noting students' positive assessment of SW's impact on reducing anxiety and academic pressure.

Taken together, these findings and theoretical connections demonstrate that school social work is a pivotal factor in the early prevention and intervention of students' psychological problems. This provides a critical practical foundation for institutionalizing and professionalizing SW staff in schools to improve the overall quality of education.

4.1.2. Family conflict and communication

Table 2. SW support in resolving family conflict and improving communication

Content	Mean Value
Social workers help students resolve family conflicts	4.22
Social work supports students in improving communication with parents	4.18

The survey results demonstrate that students highly valued SW's role in addressing family conflicts and improving family relationships. Specifically, the mean score for "resolving family conflicts" was 4.22, while "improving communication with parents" scored 4.18, both indicating strong agreement.

These findings can be explained through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which identifies family as a microsystem with direct influence on student development. SW serves as an intermediary, helping students reconnect with their parents and remove communication barriers. From a Humanistic Theory perspective (Rogers, 1951) the supportive and nonjudgmental environment created by social workers allows students to feel safer in sharing and engaging in dialogue with their families.

Comparative studies reinforce these results: Franklin et al. (2009) showed that school SW contributes to reducing family stress through enhanced communication skills; Bronfenbrenner (1979) similarly reported that SW interventions improved student-parent communication, reducing family conflict. Thus, the findings underscore that SW not only supports academic and individual psychological needs but also plays a critical role in resolving family conflicts - a key factor in students' holistic development. This highlights the need for school SW services to integrate family - school - student collaboration to build a harmonious and sustainable educational environment.

4.1.3. Support in career guidance and personal development

SW also helps students identify their competencies, choose appropriate careers and develop academic and personal growth plans.

Table 3. Role of SW in career guidance and personal development

Content	Mean Value
Social work supports students in building study plans and personal development	4.31
Social workers help students understand themselves and choose a suitable career	4.29

The findings reveal that students perceived SW as playing an important role in career guidance and personal development. Both mean scores (4.29 and 4.31) were high, reflecting strong agreement that SW extends beyond immediate problem-solving to long-term developmental support.

Theoretically, these results align with Super's career development theory (1957), which stresses the importance of self-awareness in abilities, interests and values during career decision-making. SW staff play a facilitative role by enabling students to self-explore and make appropriate career choices. Similarly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) suggests that guidance and planning fulfill adolescents' needs for self-esteem and self-actualization.

These findings also resonate with international research: Gysbers & Henderson (2012) confirmed that school counseling programs involving social workers help students clarify academic and career goals. Internationally, Gysbers & Henderson (2012) found that counseling and career guidance activities in secondary schools improved self-direction and reduced the likelihood of inappropriate career choices.

Thus, the data confirm that SW positively contributes to students' self-understanding, appropriate career choices and personal growth planning. This underscores the strategic importance of SW not only in psychological-social support but also in shaping students' educational and career trajectories.

4.1.4. Support in academic learning

SW assists students in coping with academic pressure and enhancing learning effectiveness.

Table 4. SW Support in academic learning

Category	Mean Score
Academic difficulties experienced by students	4.42
Level of SW activity organization	3.45
Effectiveness of SW interventions	3.25

The results indicate that students faced significant academic difficulties (mean score 4.42), reflecting high pressure from curricula, teaching methods and expectations from families and schools. However, the organization of SW activities in this area was rated only 3.45 and their effectiveness 3.25-relatively modest compared to actual needs. This reveals a substantial gap between students' demand for academic support and the adequacy of SW responses. From the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), student learning outcomes are heavily influenced by family, teachers and the school environment; yet SW interventions have not been sufficiently extensive to achieve balance. Comparisons with prior research affirm this gap: Franklin et al. (2009) noted that U.S. school SW not only provides psychological counseling but also significantly improves learning skills and reduces dropout risks. Internationally, Franklin et al. (2009) found that structured SW interventions (e.g., study skills training, time management, self-study strategies) substantially improved academic performance and student confidence. Thus, although the demand for academic support is high, the extent and effectiveness of SW activities remain inadequate. This highlights the urgent need for HCMC high schools to enhance professionalism, strengthen resources and integrate SW programs into formal teaching and learning to generate more meaningful impacts on students' academic outcomes.

4.2. Support in emotional well-being and social relationships

SW helps students develop social skills, improve relationships with peers and families and foster inclusive, friendly classroom environments.

Table 5. SW support in emotional and personal well-being

Survey Item	Percentage Agree/Strongly Agree
I feel comfortable sharing with SW staff	91.6%
SW helps me reduce stress and anxiety	89.7%
SW helps me overcome loneliness and despair	85.4%

The findings show that students highly valued SW's role in supporting their emotional well-being. Specifically, 91.6% reported feeling comfortable sharing with SW staff, indicating strong trust and rapport. Additionally, 89.7% acknowledged that SW reduced their stress and anxiety, while 85.4% believed SW helped them overcome loneliness and despair. These results emphasize SW's essential role in accompanying and supporting vulnerable students facing academic pressures, peer relationships and family expectations.

From a theoretical perspective, the results align with Humanistic theory (Rogers, 1951), which emphasizes empathy, unconditional acceptance and active listening as conditions for emotional expression. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), psychological safety and emotional support are fundamental prerequisites for higher-level needs such as learning, creativity and self-affirmation.

This is further supported by prior studies: Roeser et al. (2012) confirmed that school psychosocial support services improved students' mental health and reduced depression risks; in Vietnam, Nguyen, V. Q. (2020) found that school SW provided a safe sharing channel that helped students overcome anxiety and build self-confidence. Thus, the data confirm that SW strongly influences students' emotional lives, reducing stress and loneliness while fostering trust. This highlights the indispensable role of SW as a core element of comprehensive student support systems in HCMC high schools.

Table 6. SW support in social relationships

Survey Item	Percentage Agree/Strongly Agree
SW creates inclusive and friendly classroom environments	87.2%
SW helps me improve relationships with peers	84.9%
SW helps me communicate better with parents	80.3%

The survey shows that students appreciated SW's contribution to enhancing social relationships. Notably, 87.2% agreed that SW fostered inclusive classroom environments, 84.9% reported improved peer relationships and 80.3% acknowledged better communication with parents.

Theoretically, these findings align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which asserts that individual development is shaped by multiple layers of interaction, including family, school and peers. As intermediaries, SW staff harmonize relationships across these systems. Additionally, Bowlby's Attachment theory (1969) explains that secure and supportive relationships provide a strong foundation for students' emotional and social development.

Supporting evidence from prior research includes Wentzel (2010), who emphasized that school SW interventions significantly improved

teacher-student and peer relationships, enhancing academic cooperation. In Vietnam, Tran, T. M. Đ. (2016) also confirmed that school SW increased students' communication skills, improved family relationships and fostered group cohesion.

Thus, the data indicate that SW is essential for strengthening peer connections, enhancing family communication and building positive classroom environments-critical conditions for students' comprehensive development.

4.3. Overall student evaluation

Table 7. Students' overall evaluation of SW

Survey Item	Percentage agree/Strongly agree
I want SW staff to be permanently available at school	93.2%
SW helps me feel listened to and accompanied	91.3%
SW provides practical support in school life	87.6%

The overall survey results reveal that students held very positive attitudes toward SW in schools. Specifically, 91.3% agreed that SW made them feel listened to and supported; 87.6% felt SW provided practical benefits in school life and an overwhelming 93.2% expressed the desire for permanent SW staff in schools-strong evidence of the urgent demand for sustainable SW services in the education system.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings can be interpreted using Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943): When students' basic psychological needs for safety and understanding are met, they are more motivated to pursue higher-level goals such as competence development and self-affirmation. Likewise, under Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, SW staff serve as connectors among families, schools and communities, enhancing holistic student support.

These findings are consistent with Franklin et al. (2012), who reported that students in U.S. schools with permanent SW services expressed higher satisfaction with psychosocial support. Similarly, in Vietnam, Nguyen, V. Q. (2020) affirmed the growing demand for specialized SW staff in secondary schools, especially in large urban areas such as HCMC. Thus, the data from table 7 underscore that students not only recognize the benefits of SW but also strongly desire its permanent presence in schools. This

provides a crucial scientific basis for institutionalizing school social work as an official component of the general education system.

4.4. Addressing stress and depression through counseling models

Academic stress and depression are among the most common psychological problems faced by high school students, particularly in the context of examinations and family pressure. Some schools in HCMC have adopted counseling models to address these issues effectively.

Individual counseling model at Nguyen Huu Huan high school: Students experiencing stress can access the school counseling office for one-on-one sessions, where social workers help them identify stressors and develop coping strategies. "School stress reduction program" at Trung Vuong high school: This program provides group counseling sessions focused on stress management, anxiety reduction and mood improvement, especially before examinations. These models not only assist students in overcoming stress but also strengthen their capacity for emotional self-regulation in the school setting.

4.5. Career guidance through school social work

School social work also plays an essential role in career guidance-one of the most significant aspects of school psychological counseling. In HCMC, some programs have enabled students to identify career paths that

align with their interests and competencies. Career orientation program at Nguyen Huu Huan high school: Students participate in career counseling sessions where social work professionals administer vocational assessments to help them recognize their interests and strengths.

Online career counseling model at Trung Vuong high school: This program provides online career counseling sessions, allowing students to connect with experts across various fields in order to make informed career decisions. These models have substantially reduced students' anxiety about the future and supported them in making well-informed career choices.

4.6. Summary of findings and observations

Overall, the results indicate that school social work has clear and positive impacts across multiple domains-psychological well-being, family relationships, academic engagement and career readiness. In particular, high levels of agreement on stress and depression management suggest that social workers provide timely, student-centered support aligned with ecological and humanistic perspectives. Moreover, students reported improved communication with parents and stronger peer relationships, highlighting SW's coordinating role across microsystems. SW also contributed to students' long-term development through career guidance and study planning. Nevertheless, gaps remain between students' needs and the current scope and consistency of SW activities, especially in academic support and social-relationship building. These findings provide a strong empirical basis for institutionalizing school social work and for strengthening intersectoral collaboration to ensure sustained impact.

5. Discussion of research results

The survey results demonstrate that school social work has a positive impact on supporting high school students in Ho Chi Minh City in addressing psychological, academic, emotional and social relationship issues. Data collected through a five-point Likert scale survey with 916 students from four public and private high schools revealed a high level of consensus on the critical role of SW in schools. These results are consistent with international studies (Corey, 2017) emphasizing the contribution of social work to the development of students' mental health.

A detailed analysis of the findings shows that the implementation of school social work in HCMC has generated significant outcomes, reflecting the close relationship between theoretical foundations and practical applications. Specifically, Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner) is demonstrated through the positive role of SW not only within schools but also in collaboration with families and communities, enabling students to cope with academic pressure, family conflicts and future planning. Meanwhile, Humanistic theory (Rogers, Maslow) is reflected in the supportive, empathetic and safe environment created by SW, which fosters students' self-awareness and problem-solving capacity. Role theory further explains how SW influences students' recognition and adjustment of role conflicts in their family and social relationships.

5.1. Students' awareness and practical needs

The survey results show that 81.7% of students had sought support from SW staff when facing difficulties, indicating a substantial demand for psychological support in schools. This finding is consistent with the earlier thematic analyses, which revealed that students face academic stress, family conflicts, peer relationship challenges, gender issues and career orientation concerns. Students' awareness of SW has become significantly stronger compared to the early stages of implementation, when school counseling was still a vague concept to most of them. These results reinforce ecological systems theory: Academic stress and family

conflict stem from both micro- and macro-environments and SW interventions must involve coordinated efforts between schools, families and communities to achieve effectiveness.

5.2. Impact on students' mental health

Survey indicators showed high levels of agreement on SW's supportive role: 89.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed that SW helps them relieve stress and anxiety, while 85.6% felt supported in overcoming depression and isolation. Average scores above 4.2/5 clearly reflect the effectiveness of SW in strengthening students' psychological well-being. From a humanistic perspective, the empathetic and safe environment fostered by SW enables students to enhance self-awareness, develop problem-solving skills and strengthen personal capacities. SW is not only a tool for crisis intervention but also a preventive and educational mechanism, guiding students in developing essential life skills.

5.3. Comparison with previous studies and explanation of success

The findings are consistent with earlier research by Nguyen, Nguyen. (2020) and successful SW models implemented in HCMC, such as at Nguyen Huu Huan high school, Trung Vuong high school and training programs conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training (2018). Common success factors include well-trained SW professionals, systematic implementation, intersectoral coordination among schools, families and communities, as well as regular monitoring and evaluation.

The success of these models can be explained through Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy) and Role theory: Students are part of a dynamic system of interactions involving teachers, parents and the community. When all elements of the system work in synergy, SW interventions maximize their impact. Conversely, models lacking collaboration or specialized personnel tend to be less effective.

5.4. Practical barriers to implementation

Despite being highly valued, school social work still faces several barriers: A shortage of specialized personnel (most staff are part-time and lack intensive training), the absence of a clear legal framework (job positions, benefits and responsibilities are not formally regulated) and uneven awareness (some parents and students remain hesitant or stigmatize psychological counseling services). These barriers reflect a persistent theory-practice gap: Although ecological and humanistic perspectives emphasize supportive environments and empathic engagement, limitations in policy, workforce capacity and public awareness continue to constrain the effectiveness of SW.

5.5. Recommendations for improving school SW models

Based on the analysis, this study proposes seven mutually reinforcing actions to improve school social work: (1) establishing official positions…; (2) implementing systematic, competency-based training…; (3) developing intersectoral collaboration mechanisms…; (4) systematizing programs with practical guidelines informed by effective HCMC models; (5) integrating digital technology for remote counseling, record management, intervention monitoring and life-skills delivery; (6) raising community awareness through campaigns, workshops and school-based education and (7) expanding research and instituting periodic evaluations led by education authorities.

6. Limitations and directions for future research

This study was conducted in four high schools in HCMC; thus, its findings may not fully represent the nationwide situation of school SW. In addition, the self-report survey method may introduce subjectivity bias. Future research should expand the scope to multiple provinces and cities while combining qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation to collect more diverse and comprehensive data.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

7.1. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that school social work plays a crucial role in helping high school students in HCMC address psychological, academic, emotional and social challenges. The survey findings reveal that most students recognize SW's role in reducing stress, anxiety and depression; resolving family conflicts; improving communication with parents; providing career guidance and supporting academic and personal development.

The research also highlights the high effectiveness of systematically implemented models at schools such as Nguyen Huu Huan and Trung Vuong, where well-trained personnel, intersectoral collaboration, structured programs and supportive environments have generated substantial impact. These outcomes affirm the close connection between theory and practice: Ecological systems theory underscores the influence of micro and macro-environments; Humanistic theory emphasizes empathy and support for personal growth and Role theory explains how students adjust their roles in family and social contexts. Nevertheless, barriers remain, including the shortage of specialized staff, the absence of a clear legal framework and uneven awareness among parents and students. This indicates that although SW has proven effective, sustainable impact requires systemic investment in policies, training and public awareness.

7.2. Recommendations

Based on the survey results and practical analysis, the study proposes the following recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of school SW: First, establish official positions for school social workers, formalizing responsibilities, benefits and career pathways to ensure professional and stable practice. Second, strengthen specialized training through systematic, competency-based programs that cover psychological counseling, social work skills, relationship management and multidimensional intervention. Third, develop intersectoral networks by creating mechanisms for collaboration among schools, families, local authorities and social organizations to coordinate activities and leverage community resources. Fourth, systematize school SW programs by developing practical guidelines based on effective models in Ho Chi Minh City-such as Nguyen Huu Huan and Trung Vuong-so that implementation is standardized yet adaptable. Fifth, integrate digital technology to support remote counseling, student record management, intervention monitoring and life-skills delivery, thereby enhancing accessibility. Sixth, raise community awareness through communication campaigns, workshops and educational programs that increase understanding among parents, students and teachers, reduce stigma and expand service uptake. Finally, expand research and conduct periodic evaluations under the leadership of education authorities, while broadening studies to other regions to build a comprehensive evidence base for future policy.

REFERENCES

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Corey, G. (2017). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Franklin, C., Kim, J. S., & Tripodi, S. J. (2009). *A meta-analysis of published school social work practice studies.* Research on Social Work Practice, *19*(6), 667-677. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731508330224

Franklin, C. G. S., Kim, J. S., Ryan, T. N., Kelly, M. S., & Montgomery, K. L. (2012). *Teacher involvement in school mental health interventions: A systematic review*. Children and Youth Services Review, 34(5), 973-982. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.027

Gysbers, N. C., & Henderson, P. (2012). *Developing and managing your school guidance and counseling program* (5th ed.). American Counseling Association.

Ho Chi Minh City Department of Education and Training. (2023). *Report on school counseling work, academic year 2022-2023*. Ho Chi Minh City Department of Education and Training.

Le, T. H. (2020). *School psychological counseling*. Hanoi: Vietnam Education Publishing House.

Maslow, A. H. (1943*). A theory of human motivation*. Psychological Review, *50*(4), 370-396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Ministry of Education and Training. (2018). *Guidelines on school psychology counseling*. Hanoi: MOET Press.

Nguyen, V. Q. (2020). School social workers: Needs and challenges. *Vietnam Journal of Social Work*, 4(2), 23-31.

Roeser, R. W., Skinner, E., Beers, J., & Jennings, P. A. (2012). *Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development: An emerging area of research and practice*. Child Development Perspectives, 6(2), 167-173. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00238.x

Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications, and theory*. Houghton Mifflin.

Super, D. E. (1957). *The psychology of careers: An introduction to vocational development*. Harper.

Tran, T. M. D. (2016). *Textbook of psychological counseling.* Vietnam National University Press.

Tran, H. M. (2022). Application of social work in supporting students to overcome psychological crises. *Journal of Social Science Development*, 9(1), 60-67.

Tran, T. K. N. (2015). *Psychological intervention in schools -An ecological approach*. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Publishing House.

Von Bertalanffy, L. (1968).*General system theory: Foundations, development, applications*. George Braziller.

Wentzel, K. R. (2010). *Students' relationships with teachers*. In J. L. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), Handbook of research on schools, schooling and human development. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203874844-8

World Health Organization. (2020, September 28). *New WHO guidelines on promoting mental health among adolescents*. https://www.who.int/news/item/28-09-2020-new-who-guidelines-on-promoting-mental-health-among-adolescents