The Counselling Practice of School Social Workers in Swedish Elementary Schools - A Focus Group Study

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Abstract : This article describes the counselling practice of school social workers (SSWs) with individual children. SSWs work in the school system's pupil health team, whose primary task is health promotion and prevention. The work of SSWs is about helping children and adolescents who, for various reasons, suffer from mental ill-health, school absenteeism, or stress that make them unable to achieve their intended goals. SSWs preferably meet these children in individual counselling sessions. The aim of this article is to describe and analyse SSWs' experience of counselling with children and to examine the characteristics of counselling practice. The data collection was conducted through four semi-structured focus group interviews with a total of 22 SSWs in four different regions in Sweden. SSWs provide counselling to children in order to bring about improved feelings or behavioural changes. It can be noted that SSWs put emphasis on both the counselling process and the alliance with the child. The interviews showed a common practice among SSWs regarding the structure of the counselling sessions, with certain steps and approaches being employed. However, the specific interventions differed and were characterised by an eclectic standpoint in which SSWs utilise a broad repertoire of therapeutic schools and techniques. Furthermore, a relational perspective emerged as a most prominent focus for the SSWs by re-emerging throughout the material. We believe that SSWs could benefit from theoretical perspectives on 'contextual model' and 'attachment theory' as 'models of the mind'. Being emotionally close to the child and being able to follow their development requires a lot from SSWs, as both professional caregivers and as "safe havens".