THESIS

A Study of How Teachers Perceive School Social Workers in Russia

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ABSTRACT

Many children suffer in school because of various social, emotional, economic and other challenges (School Social Work Association of America [SSWAA], 2017, para. 1). Therefore, school social work has been put at the forefront of the political agenda in the Western world (Constable, 2008, p. 11). However, the development of closer collaboration between school-related personnel is still in the making (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 1[1].). In Russia, this process has progressed even slower because of the Iron Curtain and the soviet system (Galaguzova, 2014, p. 205).

The purpose of this research was to study the Russian teachers' perception of school social workers. The institution of school social work in Russia has started developing only in the 1990s and currently there exist confusions and overlaps concerning the role of school social workers within school system (Galaguzova, 2014, p. 205).

The study was conducted in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The sample was selected from six public schools and overall fifty teachers participated in this survey research. The questionnaire used in this study consists of twenty-three questions. The questions were particularly focused on tasks and functions performed by school social workers in Russian schools, collaboration between two professions, benefits and challenges of this collaborations and the ways to improve it as the teachers' viewed it.

The analysis revealed that school social work in Russia has not achieved the complete recognition yet. The teachers had general idea of school social workers' role within school system, but did not understand how they could benefit from it. Consequently, the collaboration between the teachers and school social workers remained poor, thus resulting in child welfare being potentially at risk.

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[1] The pages do not correspond with those mentioned in the Reference list, because the article was downloaded in .doc format from the following source: https://www.academia.edu

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In our complex world, such institutions as schools have many problems to face. The increasing level of poverty, home violence, bullying, problems with students' health, etc. put schools at a state of crisis (Chen, 2017). School system has to seek for solutions, which will benefit children, through the collaboration with families and legislators (Chen, 2017). Students, who significantly range in diversity, are at an important developmental stage and they need support to overcome these various challenges when attending school. It makes school social work critical in school settings.

But what is school social work then? According to The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2017), school social workers present the following kind of activity:

> School social workers are an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success. They work directly with school administrations as well as students and families, providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, mental health intervention, crisis management, and support services. As part of an interdisciplinary team to help students succeed, social workers also facilitate community involvement in the schools while advocating for student success (para. 1).

Social services in schools vary dramatically across countries, especially because of different developmental paths of social work in general. Non-Western countries hold a specific place in this discourse, because in many of them the development of social work was less progressive than in other countries (Jönsson, 2014, p. 12). One of the vivid examples of such development is Russia.

The institution of school social work, or social pedagogy, in Russia was introduced only at the close of the 20th century – in 1990, in the context of the dissolution of the USSR, when many social, economic, moral and other problems arose. This context made the development of social pedagogy difficult and contradictory. However, the tendency to humanization and democratization of social life in Russia helped to overcome many complications and introduce changes.

Unfortunately, in spite of the introduced changes, social pedagogy in Russia still does not have a single structure and clear arrangement. Functions and responsibilities of school social workers are not defined as general standards (Galaguzova, 2010, p. 8), and consequently their role remains vague and ambiguous. That is why school social workers are not greatly valued within school system and school personnel do not fully understand how they can collaborate

with school social workers and benefit from this collaboration. Especially it concerns teachers, who are responsible for the well-being of schools and their students on the same basis with school social workers.

Therefore, the objective of my thesis is to get deeper and broader understanding of the school social work services through the teachers' perspective. The goal of the research is to evaluate the role of school social workers in school system and the way their work is perceived by teachers. It is important to consider the teachers' perspective, because their understanding of school social workers' role and expertise, can contribute to the promotion of students' wellbeing.

The research question in my study is therefore as follows: *How do the Russian teachers perceive the role of school social workers?*

This general research question possesses several sub-questions:

— What do teachers think are the main services, which school social workers provide in Russian schools?

— How do Russian teachers understand the value of these services for schools and their own practice?

— Through the teachers' perspective, what are the main challenges school social workers and teachers have to face during their collaboration in the context of Russian schools?

— What areas, in teachers' opinion, can be improved in order to overcome the challenges and utilize school social workers as a significant member of educational process in Russian schools?

The interaction between teachers and school social workers is crucial within school system. According to the ecosystems theory, teachers and school social workers present two microsystems, which influence a child (Healy, 2005, p. 140). Their collaboration presents mesosystem, which is even more influential and its functioning should be based on strong connection and agreement between these two professions (Healy, 2005, p. 140). However, until the role of school social workers is clearly stated and understood, there will be no effective cooperation (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 15). It is necessary that teachers realize the roles and responsibilities of school social workers and are in accord about their duties.

Unfortunately, there has been little research on the collaboration within school settings and how school-related personnel value each other. The previous researches discussed in my thesis reflect mostly on the administrators' (Allen-Meares, 1994; Tower, 2000a), teachers' (Picton & Keegel, 1978) and special education staff's perceptions of school social workers (Tower, 2000a). In Russia, there is no previous research, to date, on the teachers' and other school personnel's perceptions of the role of school social workers. Thus, the need for the further research of school social work in the Russian context is evident.

In the current study, I rely on the quantitative research design, specifically on a written survey in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 23 questions, which include both quantitative and qualitative. The questions have been sent to six public schools in different parts of Saint Petersburg, Russia. The total of fifty teachers participated in the survey.

The structure of this paper consists of five chapters:

— Chapter 1 serves as general introduction to the research project.

— Chapter 2 reviews related literature, which gives a historical overview of the development of social work and school social work in general and in the Russian contexts. This chapter also discusses the ecosystems theory relevant for the current study, the importance of collaboration between teachers and school social workers and the role of school social workers within school system.

— Chapter 3 discusses methodological background of the study. It includes the description of research design, my choice of the method and the data.

— Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussion on the teachers' perception of school social workers.

— Chapter 5 includes conclusions and implications for future research.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

This chapter starts with a short discussion on various theories concerning the ways to help children within school system. I particularly focus on the ecosystem theory, which seems relevant for the current research. Then, I continue with the historical background of social work in general and in Russia, as a special case. After that, I consider the historical background of school social work in the general and in the Russian contexts. Further, I discuss the previous researches reported on the field, i.e. school social workers' role and tasks and the way they are perceived by school personnel.

The Best Way to Help Children?

Child welfare systems in different countries have to face many challenges and consider various needs of children and their families. It is always disputable, which approach is the best to do so. There are numerous theoretical frameworks for social work practices. For instance, Washington (2008) claimed that the attachment theory was very useful and widely accepted (p. 9). This theory implies, according to Howe, that the first relationship between a child and a caregiver in infancy becomes a prototype for the child's further relationships with the others (as cited in Washington, 2008, p. 8). The knowledge of the attachment patterns allows childcare workers to find common ground with the child and communicate with him/her more effectively. Some scholars, such as Pozzuto, Angell and Dezendorf, supported the critical theories to be the most effective in child welfare (as cited in Washington, 2008, p. 13). These theories can contribute to the decrease of injustice in relation to the child and strengthening of his/her individual rights (Washington, 2008, p. 13). However, "some researcher suggest that challenges within the child welfare systems are the best addressed using a systems or 'ecological' perspective" (Leon, Lawrence, Molina & Toole, 2008, p. 144). Currently ecological perspective is widely used in many countries; unfortunately, it is not the dominant one in Russia. This approach has been developing by few particular scholars such as Lifintsev and Antsuta (2013).

Ecological perspective, or ecological systems theory is based on the conception of person-environment relations, which implies that a person is affected by everything he/she is surrounded. The theory was propounded by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The phycologist made a focus on children development within the context of the systems relations. According to ecological systems theory, the systems, which has the most potent and direct influence on children, are micro- and mesosystems (Healy, 2005, p. 140).

In the current study, mesosystems deserve special mention. Mesosystems present "the relationships between two or more settings (i.e. microsystems) in which the child is an active participant, such as school and home" (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 2009, p. 44). Ideally, the relationship within mesosystems is based on strong connection and agreement. Thus, the child has an opportunity to develop completely. However, the absence of connection and conflicts of values between microsystems place the child at risk (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 2009, p. 44) and keep him/her from developing.

One of the vivid examples of mesosystems is the relationship between school and home. These two settings are usually strongly connected. They support the child and collaborate to provide him/her with healthy and balanced development. The ecological perspective allows to monitor this relationship and answer the important questions, which can contribute to its improvement, according to Germain and Gitterman: 1) What is going on with other parts of the systems that affect the child's life? 2) How does each system contribute to or help change the problem? 3) What can be changed? (rather than "Who can be changed?") (as cited in Leon et al., 2008, p. 146).

In the particular research, the relationship between teachers and school social workers were considered through the ecological perspective. Since social workers are often regarded as "outsiders" in school environment (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 12), it is possible to present their relationship with teachers as mesosystem. These two microsystems should work together within school system to provide a healthy balance for the child's wellbeing; they should complement each other and not contradict. Moreover, if they do not team up, it can weaken the relationship between the other microsystems, e.g. school and family, and make the things worse for the child, who needs help. Thus, it becomes important to answer the questions mentioned above and investigate the interaction between two microsystems (school social workers and teachers) to improve it and contribute to students' success. To study teachers' perception of school social workers is one of the number of steps to do so. Through the ecological perspective, I investigated the way the teachers perceived school social workers and valued their services in Russian schools. In addition, it was useful to explore whether school social workers were integrated within school community or not and what challenges prevented them from collaboration with teachers. To do so, I analysed various aspects of school social work, such as the role of school social workers, their functions and tasks, benefits of school social workers, possible challenges and improvements of their practices, etc. All these contributed a lot to the

understanding whether the mesosystem presented by teachers and school social workers functioned effectively or not.

School Social Workers vs Teachers

School social workers are the members of school-related personnel, and their effectiveness often depends on the collaboration with other people working within school settings (Higy, Haberkorn, Pope & Gilmore, 2012, p. 9). One of the most significant interactions is between school social workers and teachers, since the latter has to do with students on the daily basis. For the first time, the necessity for such collaboration was stated in the second half of the 20th century. In 1965, Popper claimed that if this inter-professional collaboration did not succeed these two professions would "be forced to learn more about one another's process but in a diffused and ad hoc fashion" (as cited in Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 1).

Currently, the context of globalized world implies the growing need for this collaboration. Schools have to face new problems such as increasing numbers of immigrants and students from single parent and poor families (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 1). Thus, social workers are supposed to be great support for teachers during the educational process.

To understand the main point of the collaboration between school social workers and teachers, I believe that it is indispensable to look into the definition of the former:

School social workers are an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success. They work directly with school administrations as well as students and families, providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, mental health intervention, crisis management, and support services. As part of an interdisciplinary team to help students succeed, social workers also facilitate community involvement in the schools while advocating for student success (NASW, 2017, para. 1).

However, it is even more significant to distinguish similarities and differences in two professions. The first similarity, singled out by Bronstein and Abramson (2003, p. 2), concerns the debated professional status. Some sociologists, for instance, Etzioni (1969) and Lortie (1969) qualified both social work and teaching as "semi-professions", which possessed identical characteristics: shorter training period, lower status, less right to privileged communication, less of a specialized body of knowledge, and less autonomy from supervision or societal control, lower salary than the full professions (as cited in Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 2). The next similarity is predominance of women in both professions, who have to balance diverse roles in schools (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 2). Further are bureaucratic

settings, in which school social workers and teachers have to act. Gartner claimed that they had little autonomy and could not control many aspects of their practice (as cited in Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 3). In addition, both school social work and teaching are service-oriented professions with the mission of helping children (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 4).

The differences, described by Bronstein and Abramson (2003), are the following: early socialization and professional self-selection; academic preparation in the university; and orientation to demands of the school setting through internship and early work experience (p. 5). The scholars claimed that early socialization, i.e. public school education of social workers and teachers, and professional self-selection "predispose[ed] certain type of individuals to enter these positions" (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 6). It implies that the professionals often refer to values and attitudes, which they have gained during socialization, in their practices. These diverse values and attitudes can become a reason of misunderstandings between school social workers and teachers. The academic preparation also differentiates two professions. Teachers' education is focused on the development of expertise in subjects and knowledge delivery. For this reason, it usually happens that teachers try to fit all students into the same educational standards, while school social workers are taught to consider students' backgrounds when working with them (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 8). The last difference, concerning internship and early work experience, is connected with professional socialization. The very first organization social workers or teachers work in greatly influences their future practices. Bronstein and Abramson (2003) stated that "once teachers enter[ed] the school setting as professionals and the influence of their more progressive academic training fad[ed]; it [became] more difficult to develop and implement new ideas" (p. 11). Social workers, who are usually regarded as "outsiders" in schools, also have to face many problems when they start working. The most important problems are disagreement between professional mission and values, role confusion (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 12).

The similarities discussed above help to establish communication between school social workers and teachers. However, differences become barriers for close collaboration between them. To overcome these barriers, it is indispensable for professionals to realize their roles and educate each other about them. This can be done with the help of educational programmes in universities (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 15).

In the school settings, collaboration should start with school social workers asking teachers how they understand schooling and students' individualities, how they "perceive that

the social worker can be helpful" (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 15). Such asking helps to avoid misconceptions and preconceived opinions about school social services. It also makes the practices of social workers more effective and consistent. Teachers should understand that school social workers are their great support in achieving success, not the threat to the educational process. Nevertheless, by reference to the mentioned differences, I expected to find misunderstandings and divergence of attitudes between two professions.

In modern education, it often happens that teachers do not understand the roles of school social workers and, as a result, do not value them. Avant (2014) conducted a study on the role of school social workers in implementation of response to intervention. In the course of the survey, school social workers indicated that they were often regarded as pseudo-administrative staff or universal coaches (Avant, 2014, p. 17). Teachers, who were not involved in special education, did not perceive them as important members of school-related personnel and did not value diverse interactions with them, such as behaviour interventions (Avant, 2014, p. 17). School social workers stated that teachers just "preferred a quick fix solution to student behaviour problems" (Avant, 2014, p. 18). Thus, social workers struggled to perform the full range of their functions.

The lack of understanding leads to teachers' unwillingness to participate in the activities, which make the educational process sustainable. Dash and Mohan (2015) conducted a research in India on the problem of teachers' involvement in collaboration with school social workers. The lack of initiative from teachers was noted by school social workers, since they were regarded as teachers' "replacement" (Dash & Mohan, 2015, p. 555). Teachers preferred to consider school social workers as administrative personnel and use the authority to refuse their services. It was difficult for them to believe in school social workers' values and methods.

Relating these studies to my research sub-questions, I was particularly interested to investigate how teachers perceived school social workers and how their perceptions affected collaboration between two professions.

Social work and school social work in particular, have undergone diverse changes over the time. Nevertheless, in the context of changing world the collaboration between teachers and school social workers remains critical. The delivery of education and effective services to students is indispensable nowadays. As stated by Dente (2011):

"Each professional provides a unique contribution to the student experience, and each of these contributions is enhanced through the synergy that rises from the supportive collaboration of educators and social workers. Thus, teachers and school social workers should work together and unite in their efforts to provide excellence in education for students" (p. 6).

Before I discuss the previous researches on school personnel's perception of school social workers, I think it is important and interesting to look into the historical background of social work and school social work, particularly in Russia. It allows to consider school social work in Russia, which is of my interest, both in general, and in a more narrow sense.

The Development of Social Work

The Origin

The history of social work is rich and significant despite the fact that the beginning of the profession is difficult to be determined. It is well-known that many initiatives have been taken to improve human life through the religious perspective (Healy, 2012, p. 55). However, these activities, based on the idea of helping, were not provided as professional services. The earliest preconditions for the emergence of social work were connected with the Industrial Revolution (18th–19th centuries). Social work became a response to the problems related to urbanization, such as poverty, illiteracy, child labour, harsh working conditions, etc. Therefore, the subject matters of social work of this period were defined as "the need for the poor to develop appropriate values and attitudes to cope" and, at the same time, "the need to improve socio-economic conditions of poor communities" (Sewpaul & Hölscher, 2004, p. 37). These two concerns corresponded with two models of practice, which appeared in the latter half of the 19th century – the Charity Organization Society (COS) and Settlement Movement (e.g. Toynbee Hall in 1884 in London). They became a significant foundation for the further social work development.

In the very beginning of the 20th century, social work schools and professional organizations began developing in the European countries and the USA, according to de Jongh (as cited in Healy, 2012, p. 55). It was necessary because of "the need to overcome fragmentation of social work, to develop coherent methodology, definable techniques and predictable outcomes" (Sewpaul & Hölscher, 2004, p. 37). Moreover, a question about the profession status of social work was posed. In 1915, Flexner doubted social work to be a profession:

"Is social work a profession in the <…> strict sense of the term? <…> I have made the point that all the established and recognized professions have definite and specific ends <…>. This is not true of social work. It appears not so much a defined field as an aspect of work in many fields" (as cited in Leighninger, 2000:37–39, 43–46).

In response, the interest in professionalism increased among social workers, who struggled to be seen in a professional light, and the 1920s brought absolutely a new direction of social work (Nsonwu, Casey, Cook & Armendariz, 2013, p. 3). New practices and settings, in which social work was carried out, were introduced. Social workers became interested in Freudian and other psychologically focused ideas. There was a movement towards the individualistic method, i.e. social casework method.

The global economic depression of the 1930s became critical for social workers. They encountered increasing numbers of the unemployed (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012, p. 23). During this period, their clientele was not only the traditional poor, but also growing numbers of working- and middle-class population (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012, p. 23). The focus was back on the economic and social conditions of living. However, the Second World War (1939–1945) gave the opportunity for social workers to prove their worth, since they became vital for the populations. It was their duty to contribute to the post-war welfare state development.

The Post-World War II Period

The 1950–1960s brought new perspectives and developments in social work. The establishment of such organizations, as NASW in the USA in 1955 (Brown, 2001, p. 212) and Norsk Sosionomforbund in Norway in 1959 (Hutchinson, Lund & Oltedal, 2001, p. 116), had a purpose to unify and advance the profession. The social work's identity was strengthened. Social workers, who returned to personal aspects in their practice, were regarded as welfare state professionals, whose main functions included casework, community work, empowerment, social advocacy, and political action (Sewpaul & Hölscher, 2004, p. 38).

The 1970s introduced new subject matters of social work – interests of clientele, social workers, society at large (Sewpaul & Hölscher, 2004, p. 37). Diverse programmes became law, such as housing and community development, delinquency programmes. However, from the early 1980s "when conservative and business forces started to pressure governments to cut back social programmes and services" (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011, p. 268), social work had to rely

on the private sector to provide services and the growth of the post-war welfare states was suspended (e.g. in the USA, Canada).

These cuts resulted in a situation of the 1990s, when it was difficult for governments to fund new programmes and "social work as a profession was identified mainly with counselling help to individuals or as adjunct staff for organizations, rather than becoming the 'profession' associated with any one service system" (Morris, 2000, p. 45). Still "deprofessionalisation pressure is evident in such a profession as social work, which <...> cannot protect its 'turf'", according to J. Healy (as cited in Lyngstad, 2001, p. 9).

Present State

Currently, the interest in social work, especially in its international aspects, is expanding dramatically in terms of globalization (Healy, 2012, p. 3). Since globalization has led to new social problems, which influence people's well-being on different levels, the further understanding and development of the profession is needed to provide relevant and effective social work services all over the world. To date, the generally accepted understanding, according to Daniş and Kirbaç (2013), is to train multi-perspective social workers who can satisfy the requirements of globalized world "[using] all the methods of social work when needed" and "[being] able to work with different levels of formal systems such as individuals, families, group, community, society" (p. 710). Moreover, it is necessary for social workers to be able to establish effective working relations with other agencies and professions, since "roles and relationships are in flux" nowadays (Barr, Goosey & Webb, 2008, p. 284). Inter-professional collaboration is becoming more pressing demand, which can "provide a safe and neutral environment where all the parties can review the impact of change and explore afresh ways to work together" (Barr et al., 2008, p. 284). The notable example of the need for such collaboration is within schools. The recognition that social work in schools and its integration within education are on the responsibility of all school personnel, not only social workers, is increasing (Barr et al., 2008, p. 281). Thus, the profession and the areas[2] of social work practices continue to expand and develop.

From this discussion, it is evident that social work has undergone significant changes. However, in Russia this process has been slowed down because of the Iron Curtain and the

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[2] The fields of work and interaction also keep expanding and a variety of settings are presented nowadays, i.e. mental health centers, hospitals, diverse human service agencies, settlement houses, child welfare organizations and schools, etc.

peculiarities of the soviet system. I would like to discuss the development of social work in the Russian context in the further section.

Historical Perspective of Social Work in Russia

The development of social work described above was similar for many countries. However, in various non-Western countries, i.e. India, African and South American countries, etc., social work followed the different development path. It was less progressive and later came under the influence of Western models of social work in the context of globalization (Jönsson, 2014, p. 12). This scenario was similar for Russia. For that reason, to explore the development of social work in the Russian context is important and attracting my considerable interest.

As in many other countries, till the 18th century the Church was responsible for the provision of social services, such as free meals and asylums, to the population in Russia. Charity was an official duty of the Church. In the 18th century, the government began taking part in the social support provision for citizens. However, its influence was not very strong. Then, the 19th century introduced the individual approach to the population in need (Kastarnaya, 2010, p. 154) and the system of charitable organizations was established.

The 20th century defined the development path of Russian social work. While the profession in the most part of the countries was following the same type of development discussed above, the revolution of 1917 introduced the complete rethink of social services in Russia. The Soviet government took the full responsibility for the social support to the people in need. Social work in Russia turned into the paternalistic model and was arranged by departmental principle (Kastarnaya, 2010, p. 154). The functions of social work "were carried out by a number of agencies in the domains of four ministries – Education, Health Care, Social Promotion and Internal Affairs. Certain similar functions were undertaken by Communist Party organizations, Komsomol (Youth Communist Organization) and trade-unions" (Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2001, p. 159).

In 1991, because of the dissolution of the USSR, a new range of social problems emerged in the country. They were mostly connected with the low quality of life. Therefore, social work services underwent important changes (Kastarnaya, 2010, p. 154). The social protection system became a prior concept and, in this context, the social work services started rapid growth.

Currently social work in Russia is based on several federal laws, which define the principles of the services[3]. The main activity areas are connected with social support, social health, psycho-pedagogical and social-legal practices, as well as welfare assistance (Kastarnaya, 2010, p. 154). The most common places of work are the following: asylums, homes for the aged, schools, prisons, social service centers, social welfare offices.

Unfortunately, Russian social work has to overcome the challenges connected with the late introduction of the profession – strengthening of the partnership between education and practice, clarification of the functions, methods and status of social work as a profession (Iarskaia-Smirnova, Romanov & Lovtsova, 2004, Conclusion section, para. 2). These challenges cause the problem of deprofessionalisation, which touches on modern social work in Russia. It is indispensable for social work in Russia to "clearly define a circle of issues, which relate to professional's competence, making thus limited the professional's world-view and claiming unique and legally supported competence" (Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2001, p. 168).

To sum up, it is evident that social work in Russia differs to a certain extent from the other countries because of its unbalanced development. Significant number of measures should be taken for social work to form properly and make the competence clear. My research question reflected on how teachers understood the school social workers' competence and if it played an important role within school system.

School Social Work

School is a place where children gain knowledge and socialize, know themselves and other people. It is important that school environment is healthy and friendly, thus children can succeed and develop (Constable, 2008:6). For that reason, I believe social work is especially relevant in school settings, since it contributes a lot to the maintenance of school well-being. In this regard, the current research was focused on school social work.

The profession of school social work emerged at the beginning of 20th century in the context of social work expansion in many countries. The precondition for its development was the introduction of compulsory education for all children in many countries – "education, no longer for the elite, was for everyone a necessary part of preparation for modern life"

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[3] The main principles for social work are the following: 1) focus on concrete situation of an individual client; 2) accessibility; 3) voluntary agreement, 4) humanity; 5) priority in social services should be given to children and youngsters under 18 who are in a difficult life situation; 6) confidentiality; 7) preventive orientation (Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2001, p. 162).

(Constable, 2008, p. 11). The main duty of school social workers in the early 1900s (visiting teachers in the USA or school attendance officers in the UK) was to help teachers to understand that adverse social environment (e.g. poverty, child labour) influenced school attendance (Dupper, 2003, p. 13). In 1916, Culbert specified the role of visiting teachers during the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (Constable, 2008, p. 14). Their role focused on, according to Culbert:

"…interpreting to the school the child's out-of-school life; supplementing the teacher's knowledge of the child <…> assisting the school to know the life of the neighbourhood, in order that it may train the children to the life to which they look forward. Secondly the visiting teacher interprets to parents the demands of the school and explains the particular demands and needs of the child" (as cited in Constable, 2008, p. 14).

In the 1920s, the emphasis was shifted to the casework practices under the influence of psychodynamic theories in social work. Irwin and Marks emphasized that social workers focused more internally on schools and maladjusted children and aimed their efforts to "fit the school to the child", not vice versa (as cited in Shaffer, 2006, p. 244). However, the global economic crisis of the 1930s led to the return to the focus on social conditions and physical needs of students, which influenced their education opportunities.

During the 1940–1950s, the clinical model became leading again (Dupper, 2003, p. 13). School social work continued developing and addressing the individual problems of students, which caused absenteeism and misbehaviour. Social workers became a link between schools and families.

In the 1960–1970s, the main emphasis of school social work was on coordination of family, school and community, and multidisciplinary teamwork. In addition, the legislation of school social work began. The main issue was "balancing the interests of the school against the rights of students in matters related to student discipline" (Dupper, 2003, p. 15). This legislative activity and the need to change school conditions and policies raised the question of school social workers' role and tasks.

The 1980–1990s were also very challenging period for school social work, because of the growth in numbers of students with learning and behavioural problems (Dupper, 2003, p. 17). New legislations and new duties of school social workers were introduced, thus their roles became more clearly defined. They focused not only on students, but also on the engagement of families in attending the need of their children.

In the 21st century, the role and duties of school social work keep changing, since society and students' needs are changing. Currently, there are greater expectations from school social workers to provide children with favourable environment and opportunities for their personal development. Allen-Meares claimed that in some countries, such as the USA, trained school social workers had a well-established role in "providing a wide range of preventative and treatment programmes for children and young people in schools" (as cited in Lyons, 2002, p. 208). However, other countries (e.g. the UK) face diverse challenges as disagreements about the role and necessary qualifications of school social workers (Lyons, 2002, p. 213). These disagreements can cause difficulties in social services provision and even the problem of deprofessionalisation. Based on Lyons (2002) article, I expected that the main duty of school social workers in Russian schools would be the maintenance of healthy environment for students' development. Moreover, the concerns about the role and qualifications were of great importance for me.

School Social Work in the Russian Context

It was discussed above, that school is a very significant place for social work practice. The preconditions for the introduction of school social work, or social pedagogy, as it is usually named in Russia, emerged in the 1920–1930s. Many significant works of such Russian teachers as Makarenko (1922) and Shatskij (1962), psychologists as Vygotskij (1926) and Zalkind (1929), were focused on the social education of children. Unfortunately, the socialist ideology, implying the absence of any social problems, threw back the development of this branch of knowledge and practice. The institution of social pedagogy was officially established only in 1990 during the social and economic crisis in the country (Galaguzova, 2014, p. 205). The development of theoretical approaches and practices has started. Job description, functional duties and work places of school social workers (social pedagogues) were defined. Special attention was given to the training of social pedagogues in the institutes of higher education.

Currently, school social work in Russia is in development stage. One of the most important challenges for this development is that there are no normative documents defining official and functional duties of school social workers. It results in role confusion, for instance, when both school social workers and school phycologists provide consultations for students and teachers. It is even worse, when a person (e.g., one of schoolteachers) without educational background in social work occupies the position of social worker in school. Then, the real activities of school social workers sometimes do not coincide with the training of specialists

(Galaguzova, 2014, p. 207). Therefore, I looked for the expectations of school social workers to be unsatisfied and their roles to be perceived vaguely by teachers.

Studies on School Social Workers and Their Duties

I would like to discuss the previous studies on school social work through Russian and other countries' perspectives. There have been more researches on the topic in such countries as the USA and Australia comparing to Russia, where only few studies have addressed it. For that reason, it was especially significant to explore the Russian context and how school social work functioned within it.

The activities concerning social services in schools are various and touch upon diverse aspects. One of the most important studies on tasks performed by school social workers was conducted by Costin (1968). The purpose of the study was to analyse what specific tasks were of the importance to school social workers. The researcher derived the sample mainly from the NASW members (as cited in Constable, 2008, p. 19). She concluded that the primary tasks of school social workers were oriented to clinical casework of 1940–1950s, and claimed that they did not take schools as the source of possible problems and paid no attention to "the changing mission of schools and the potential of practice to assist that mission" (as cited in Constable, 2008, p. 19). Costin regarded such a perception of the role of school social workers as very narrow and there was still considerable ambiguity with regard to it. For this reason, her next intention was to explain what it should be like. In 1973, Costin worked out the school-community-pupil relations model and singled out seven groups of school social workers functions: 1) direct counselling with individuals, groups, and families, 2) advocacy, 3) consultation, 4) community linkage, 5) interdisciplinary team coordination, 6) needs assessment, and 7) program and policy development (as cited in Constable, 2008, p. 20). The model seems to be useful, since it provides more comprehensive knowledge of school social workers' functions. Thus, following Costin (1973), I expected to find these groups among the functions performed by school social workers.

The same issues can be found in the study by Abramovskih (2009), who carried out the analysis of school social workers' functions within Russian school settings and developed eight groups of them. She claimed that it was necessary for school social workers to have a clear idea of their functions and aspects of work in order to conduct the activities effectively. These eight groups are the following: 1) diagnostic (the study of individuals and the reasons of their problems); 2) prognostic (search for solutions); 3) mediation (to act for the students); 4)

organizational (provision of meaningful activities); 5) communicative organizational (promotion of collaboration between students, families, schools, communities); 6) protective (legal protection of school social workers and their clientele); 7) preventive (prevention and social therapeutic measures development); 8) corrective and rehabilitative (correction of educational influences on the individuals) (Abramovskih, 2009, p. 129)[4].

Picton and Keegel (1978) conducted a research to study teachers' perception of school social workers in Australia. It should be mentioned that it was necessary for a school social worker to have a teaching background. The researchers had a purpose to apply the concepts of genericism and systems theory to the social work practice within school settings. One of the main conclusions made by them claims that teachers perceived a social worker primarily as a counsellor, working with difficult students, and it was a reason of their limited involvement (Picton & Keegel, 1978, p. 13). The social worker, in his turn, decided to "give priority to working within the school environment, with students and staff, and less emphasis on direct counselling with families experiencing social problems" (Picton & Keegel, 1978, p. 14). Thus, diverse conflicts between the social worker and teachers happened to be and "the social change goal, that [was], facilitating changes in the school structure in response to the social worker's perceptions of students' needs [was] difficult to achieve" (Picton & Keegel, 1978, p. 13). I expected this study to find resonance in my research, because I specifically focused on the difficulties in interactions among school personnel (i.e. school social workers and teachers).

Allen-Meares conducted a national study on school social work in 1994. She found that school social workers preferred the tasks, which were more consistent with the needs of students and the contemporary challenges facing the school, but the administration prevented them from focusing on these tasks (Allen-Meares, 1994, p. 560). The tasks mandated by the school included, for instance, home visits, referring children and families to community agencies, i.e. traditional tasks (Allen-Meares, 1994, p. 564). Social workers preferred such tasks as to assess target groups of children, help change school-community-pupil relations, meet with parents in groups, conduct classroom activities, etc. (Allen-Meares, 1994, p. 564). Therefore, the researcher concluded that school social work was greatly influenced by administrators, who did not have a proper educational background in social work. It was difficult to decide what working area should be dominant. The need for collaboration between schools of education and

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[4] These two groups of functions (Abramovskih, 2009; Costin, 1973) were partially employed by me when preparing the questionnaire and defining the working areas of school social workers. Nevertheless, there is still uncertainty about real functions, because these groups are too broad.

social work, in order to provide school-related personnel with knowledge about each other, became evident.

Tower (2000b) conducted a study on the special education staff and administrators' attitudes towards school social workers. She made a supposition that the distribution of school social work services was limited because of these attitudes. The results varied wildly. For instance, it was difficult for the participants to identify the tasks of social workers, and on the other side, they considered the tasks connected with helping students with disabilities to be very significant. Later, the researcher expressed the idea about the media's influence in such lack of understanding of social workers' role within school settings:

Social work is a noble undertaken, but defamatory images of the profession are commonplace, especially in the popular media. Brawley (1995) has suggested that lack of positive media attention is the reason that social work is "not uniformly known and endorsed by the public" (Tower, 2000a, para.1).

Based on the researches by Allen-Meares (1994) and Tower (2000b), I assumed that my respondents did not possess enough knowledge of school social work and their perceptions would be quite limited. In addition, my questionnaire reflected on teachers' idea of the tasks performed by school social workers.

In 2012, Lee explored the current state of school social work in Australia. The researcher's findings demonstrated the differences in understanding the profession of school social work. Firstly, the official titles of school social workers varied in some parts of the country. According to Lee (2012), the other titles of school social workers were counsellor, student support officer, or primary welfare officer, team leader, manager (p. 557). Secondly, social workers had to spend most part of their time on such tasks as counselling, paperwork and administration, case management and consultation (Lee, 2012, p. 562). However, they wanted to spend more time on the tasks they considered to be more important, such as improving school culture, group work, student engagement activities, etc. (Lee, 2012, p. 562). They also mentioned that the focus of work should be enhancing social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of students (Lee, 2012, p. 563). In my view, these findings underline the ambiguous position of school social workers and revert me to the necessity of further research on it.

The similar to the above issues can be found in the study by Sheptenko (2014), who conducted a research in the village school of Altay, Russia. She noted that the village community was secretive; it was difficult for the population to enter into the "bigger" social

life (Sheptenko, 2014, p. 99). For this reason, there was an acute need in social work in school to help the younger generation to overcome such a problem. The purpose of the survey was to define the main goals and tasks of school social workers in the village environment. The students, who studied social pedagogy, were the respondents of the questionnaire. According to their answers, the village school did not differ a lot from city schools. The only issue was its poor material condition. The results also showed that social work in the school had a focus on children and families. The main goals of school social workers were defined in the following way: 1) the creation of favourable conditions for children development; 2) assistance in self-development and adaptation; 3) protection of children (Sheptenko, 2014, p. 100). Then, the tasks were introduced: a) to help children develop social skills; b) to assist in adaptation to school environment; c) to provide collaboration between children, families and teachers (Sheptenko, 2014, p. 101). Based on the researches by Lee (2012) and Sheptenko (2014), I expected that such duties of school social workers as the improvement of school environment, wellbeing of students and assistance to them, would be regarded as the most important by teachers.

Another view can be found in the research conducted by Volodarskaya (2014). She studied the role of school social workers in the interaction between schools and families. She made a focus on the importance of personal contacts between school social workers and families, aiming to assist in children socialisation (Volodarskaya, 2014, p. 50). This focus defined the specific tasks for school social workers to become a link between schools and families: 1) to provide parents with an insight into theoretical and practical aspects of their work with students; 2) to get parents involved in the educational process; 3) to arouse parents' interest in self-development; 4) to provide teachers with knowledge about family education (Volodarskaya, 2014, p. 50). Thus, the researcher stressed out the role of school social workers in the connection between schools and families and questioned if the collaboration for this connection was sufficient. I assumed that my respondents would also regard school social workers as an important link between schools and families.

Petrikova and Barkunova (2015) conducted a study on the activities of schools social workers in two particular schools in Shuya, Russia. In the report, the researchers employed the definition of school social work by Berezina and Ermolenko (1994), which stated that school social work is oriented to the establishment of healthy relations in families, schools and society (as cited in Petrikova & Barkunova, 2015, p. 149). This study reflected upon the social workers' perception of their practices. The researchers found that the main tasks of social workers were

interaction with families of maladjusted children, prevention of child neglect, provision of benefit schemes, solutions to the family conflicts (Petrikova & Barkunova, 2015, p. 149). The other results to highlight were: 1) the most effective way of work, according to the answers, was outreach activities; 2) the most difficult task for school social workers turned out to be home visits; 3) the very important focus area was work with maladjusted children. The researcher concluded that school social workers were able to define their role and tasks themselves. However, it remained questionable if the other personnel could do the same and if their knowledge about school social work was developed enough. Based on this research, I expected that teachers did not fully understand the functions and tasks of school social workers because of lack of knowledge in the field.

Koroleva (2010) conducted a study on the challenges school social workers have to face during their practices. She figured out three groups of challenges, such as: 1) socio-economic; 2) educational and professional; 3) occupational personality (Koroleva, 2010, p. 147). The first group mainly implies the unbalance between the need for socio-pedagogical services in different social groups and their provision only in schools. Then, it concerns financial difficulties school social workers have to face because of low wages. It usually happens that educated school social workers find other work places and their positions are occupied by unqualified personnel. Educational and professional challenges are connected with training and the situations when it does not correspond to reality. School social workers are not always prepared for schools' needs such as, for instance, documentation maintenance. Occupational personality is also a contradictory issue. School social workers have to satisfy strict requirements based on the codes of ethics and qualification profiles. However, it can lead to deindividuation, which is not acceptable since school social workers are often personal examples for individuals. To define these challenges is an important step to improve efficiency of social services in schools. However, this improvement demands significant changes in the training system of school social workers (Koroleva, 2010, p. 151). Based on this research, I assumed that one of the main challenges for sufficient school social work would concern the unqualified staff.

These studies demonstrate that even with the development of school social work, there are still some misconceptions concerning the role and tasks of social workers within school system. Especially it concerns Russia, where only few researches were reported on school social work. These few studies, focused on the clarification of school social workers' role and tasks, were relevant for the current research, since they created a broader picture of school social

workers' job responsibilities, defined the focus of social services and difficulties connected with them. However, the lack of teachers' perspective as well as the differences in perceptions of school social workers' duties became the challenges for me. Therefore, it was necessary to develop research sub-questions about social services within schools and teachers' evaluation of them. The sub-questions of the current research reflected on social services provided in Russian schools, how teachers valued them, what challenges prevented teachers from collaboration with school social workers and what could be improved to overcome these challenges. Questions, which are more specific, are discussed in the methodology chapter.

It is very important to get a deeper understanding of different perspectives and perceptions in order to recognize a clear role and responsibilities of school social workers, as well as barriers and challenges, to provide students with relevant and effective social work services. Moreover, the clarification of the role and tasks can contribute to the expansion in the number of school social workers, their ability to manage their time and activities effectively, and collaboration with school-related personnel. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to extend the knowledge of school social work in Russia, particularly to attempt to investigate the perceptions of school social workers' tasks and role by teachers and explain the need for social worker in Russian schools. My general expectations, based on the previous researches, centered around teachers' vague concept of school social work and lack of knowledge about school social services. Then, I expected that the focus of school social workers' practice was the provision of healthy school environment and connection between school and families. I also assumed that the main challenge for effective school social work would be unqualified staff employed on the particular positions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 start with the description of the methodological background of my research, i.e. research design and instrument. Then, I proceed to sampling, data collection and analysis. Further, I continue with discussions on strengths and limitations of my study, its validity and reliability, and ethical concerns.

Research Design

The purpose of the research was to determine the teachers' perceptions of school social workers' role in Russian schools. For that reason, quantitative research design was employed in the particular study. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), quantitative research seeks "explanations and predictions that will generalize to other persons and places. The intent is to establish, confirm, or validate relationships and to develop generalizations that contribute to theory" (p. 95). Quantitative research is generally carried out to produce "reliable data that tells us how many people do or think something" (Design, Monitoring and Evaluation for Peacebuilding [DME for Peace], p. 4), and that is why it was relevant for the current study.

Quantitative research has its advantages and disadvantages. Rahman (2016, pp. 106–108) conducted a study describing strengths and weaknesses of quantitative research design. The main advantages singled out by the researcher are the following: 1) it implies random sampling of a larger population, thus generalization of findings to the whole population is possible; 2) less time-consuming data analysis (e.g., the use of SPSS); 3) employment of measuring variables. One more advantage can be emphasized – quantifiable results usually seem to be more objective (DME for Peace, p. 4). The disadvantages, underlined by Rahman (2016), included: a) exclusion of the common meanings of social phenomenon; b) it does not clarify deeper meanings and explanations; c) quantitative research, according to Blaiki, "cannot account for how the social reality is shaped and maintained, or how people interpret their actions and others" (as cited in Rahman, 2016, p. 106); d) it measures variables in a certain moment in time; e) lack of direct connection between a researcher and the respondents, which results in highly controlled settings of the overlook of respondents. In addition, it should be mentioned that quantitative research design ignores an important human element (DME for Peace, p. 5).

Although the drawbacks exist, quantitative research design remains considerable and is often employed by the researchers.

Survey Research

In the current study, I relied on a specific subtype of quantitative research – the survey research. The survey is regarded to be the most widely used way to gather data in social science (Newman, 2014, p. 316). It can provide a researcher with reliable and valid data. According to Warwick and Lininger (1975), survey research "is highly valuable for studying some problems, such as public opinion" (pp. 5–6). It is appropriate when a researcher wants to ask a large number of respondents about their beliefs, opinions, behaviours, characteristics. Surveys can be carried out in different forms – phone interviews, Internet opinion polls, and various types of questionnaires (Newman, 2014, p. 316). Therefore, it is evident that survey research was suitable for the purpose of the current study. The employed instrument was a questionnaire, discussed below.

Survey Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study consists of 23 questions, 14 of which are close-ended, and 9 are open-ended. It was created with the help of online service eSurvey Creator. The questionnaire starts with the welcome, describing the purpose of the study and the process of data collection. Then it comes to general questions about a respondent's background. After that, the questionnaire proceed to the more specific questions, which were supposed to test my expectations. They reflect on such themes as the position, duties (actions, expected from a professional) and tasks (pieces of work) of social workers within school, benefits from school social workers for schools and teachers, teachers' satisfaction with social services, their collaboration with school social workers and challenges for this collaboration, areas of its improvements, etc. Thus, the items of the questionnaire were designed to collect the data on the perceptions of teachers of social workers in the school system.

The employment of mixed questions, i.e. both close- and open-ended, was significant for the current study, because it helped not to lose respondent's beliefs and opinions, what can happen when using only close-ended questions. Close-ended questions are easier and quicker to answer and it is much easier to compare the answers of different respondents. However, "total reliance on closed questions can distort results" (Newman, 2014, p. 332). Open-ended questions, in turn, are well-suited method to get more detailed and clarified answers. Moreover, they permit creativity and self-expression (Newman, 2014, p. 333).

Before starting data collection, the pilot test was conducted with a small set of respondents – three teachers. Since the questionnaire was composed in English and then translated into Russian, it was very important to know whether the questions and meanings were clear and how much time it would take to answer. After the three respondents in the pretest completed the questionnaire, they explained the process of answering. It was a valuable experience, since it helped me to make small changes to improve the questionnaire. It took approximately fifteen minutes to answer all the questions.

Sample

The population of the current research were teachers from six public schools in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The schools are located in different districts of the city. They were selected on purpose, because it was necessary for me to get an easy access to the schools and establish contacts with the principals. For that reason, I have contacted the principals I am acquainted with (especially due to my teaching practice three years ago).

In Russia, primary, basic and secondary schools are usually situated in the same building and work as a whole. Thus, primary, basic and secondary school teachers were the respondents of the questionnaire. Each school has approximately 40 teachers in general. Thus, the potential number of the respondents compiled around 240 teachers. However, the sample itself consisted of 50 teachers. There was no selection criteria for the sample, but to be a teacher from one of the schools and be willing to answer the questionnaire. The page describing the research project in detail was sent/handed in to serve as a letter of informed consent for the respondents (see Appendix B). Thus, each respondent had an equal chance to participate in the survey (i.e. random sampling). Obviously, the small number of teachers who participated could cause the bias in the results, because even half of the total population did not participate in the survey. If these teachers had a direct bearing upon school social work, it would influence the data and question its reliability.

Data Collection

The method of data collection was the use of the questionnaire (see Appendix A). The link to the questionnaire was sent out to the principals of three schools, who have agreed to participate in the survey via the online source. They posted the link on the intranet websites of the schools, thus any teacher could answer the questions anonymously. The remaining three schools have chosen the paper-based questionnaire. It was handed out to the principals and self-

administrated by the teachers. The completed surveys were put in the special box to assure anonymity, and then returned to the author. All the principals were contacted for the second time to increase participation. The first round of the survey consisted of 21 teachers (16 written and 5 online responses), the second round – 29 teachers (7 written and 22 online responses). As a result, the total of 50 questionnaires were received.

Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were collected using both email- and paper-based surveys. The collected data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics included frequency distribution. It was employed to determine the distribution of such variables as respondents' professional roles, school social workers' tasks and responsibilities, teachers' attitudes towards social services within school environment, etc.

Prior to beginning of the content analysis process for the open-ended questions, I created the list of themes, which I expected to find in the transcripts. Themes were the following: lack of understanding of a school social worker's tasks and duties, lack of time to get acquainted with all teachers and students for school social, dissatisfaction with social workers' practices, etc. Google Forms was used to collect both online and written answers from teachers together and then print them out. I printed out all the written responses from the teachers. Then, I proceeded to coding of them and composed the list of codes, which was analyzed for the dominant themes.

Strengths and Limitations

The survey has both quantitative and qualitative features, thereby it was possible to for me to get information that was more detailed and for the respondents to answer quickly at the same time. Thus, it took short time to administrate the survey. The use of online link and special box was an advantage for the participants, since it guaranteed anonymity. The quantitative research design also had one more great strength, i.e. the collection of descriptive data, which captured a snapshot of target population of the survey.

The main limitations of the research were restricted number of schools and low number of participants, since the data was only received from those who voluntarily returned the survey or completed it via Internet. As a result, the problem of bias arose. The only participants of the survey could be the teachers, who had knowledge about social work or were interested in it by some reason. Moreover, there was lack of dialogue with the participants and I was not able to

define this possible bias and clarify the other areas of the research. Bias could decrease the reliability of the study, as well as the data analysis conducted only by me.

Validity and Reliability

The concept of validity is usually used to learn "the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure" (Research Rundowns, 2017, Validity section, para. 1). In the current research, face validity was established for this purpose. To do so, I asked the thesis supervisor to review the questionnaire. The supervisor was asked to read the survey questions and write down any suggestions to improve the questionnaire. The questionnaire was revised in accordance with the recommendations in order to increase face validity of the survey instrument. Face validity defined that the questions could provide me with the answer to my research question, as well as to test the expectations.

Reliability is associated with the concept of consistency (Research Rundowns, 2017, Reliability section, para. 1). However, the lack of research on the perceptions of teachers of school social workers places reliability of the current study in question. I have pedagogical background and some experience in working as a teacher and that is why I am able to look on the social services within school environment through two perspectives – teachers' and school social workers'. However, if a person without such background conducted the same study, the results would differ. I assume that a potential reason could be narrower view of such a researcher.

In addition, one of the limitations, i.e. small number of participants, had an impact on the data. If 100 or more teachers participated, the results would probably change. It could be, because the more sample a researcher has, the more opinions it is possible to get. There are diverse schools in Saint Petersburg and some of them have more favourable environment for children than the others. Moreover, teachers differ according to their qualifications and involvement with school social services. All these could affect the gathered data.

Ethical Concerns

The research was designed to protect the participants of the survey. All respondents were provided with an informed consent at the beginning of the survey (see Appendix B). The gathered data remained confidential. The target population for the survey was schoolteachers, who are the professionals and not a vulnerable group. Moreover, I have filled in the notification form by NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) before collecting the data. This form stated

that the participation in the survey was voluntary; the data was confidential and would be made anonymous by the end of the research project.

The study was anonymous, since each respondent had either free access to the online link or paper version of the survey and special box. The survey instrument does not consist any sensitive questions and there was no identified risks or benefits concerned with it. Participation in the survey was voluntary and each participant could exit the survey whenever he/she wanted.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Children have to face many challenges (emotional, social, etc.) during their moving into adulthood (Proctor & Ruskin, 2011, p. 23). However, they are more vulnerable than adult, and thus they cannot overcome these challenges independently. They need assistance, but it is often a complex issue which way is the best to help children. Sometimes it happens that the involvement of several actors at different levels is necessary to support a child at risk. As my research had a focus on school social work, I believe that it is indispensable to investigate the relationship between the important actors of school community, who have a great impact on children. Therefore, I conducted a study on the teachers' perception of school social workers. However, there has been little research on this subject and there has been no research on the Russian context at all. Thus, my study adds to this literature and the ecological perspective of school social work. Before presenting the detailed findings, I would like to describe the specific sample of my research.

The Sample

Teachers

The first six questions reflected upon the respondents' backgrounds. Of the 50 surveys, which were fully completed, 98% (n=49) were female and 2% (n=1) were male respondents. The findings also indicated that the majority of respondents was from 35 to 44 years old, 32% (n=16), and from 45 to 54 years old, 28% (n=14). The respondents from 18 to 24 years old consisted of 10% (n=5), then 16% (n=8) of respondents were from 25 to 34 years old. Twelve percent of respondents (n=6) were from 55 to 64 years old and only one respondent, that is 2%, was older than 64.

Of the teachers who responded, 22% (n=11) were from Primary School, then 18% (n=9) were Basic School teachers and 8% (n=4) were Secondary School teachers. Some part of the sample consisted of combined positions. 24% (n=12) of respondents were both Basic and Secondary School teachers, 8% (n=4) worked in Primary, Basic and Secondary Schools, and 2% (n=1) presented a teacher from Primary and Basic Schools. The rest of the respondents combined both teaching and administrative functions. Thus, 10% (n=5) of the respondents were Directors of Studies and teachers from Basic and Secondary Schools. 2% (n=1) occupied the positions of Director of Studies and Primary School teacher and the other 2% (n=1) presented the Principal who worked also as Basic and Secondary School teacher. The respondents

who selected the answer "Other", (Assistant Principal and Chief Librarian) consisted of 4% (n=2).

Table 1. Time of Work in a Particular School

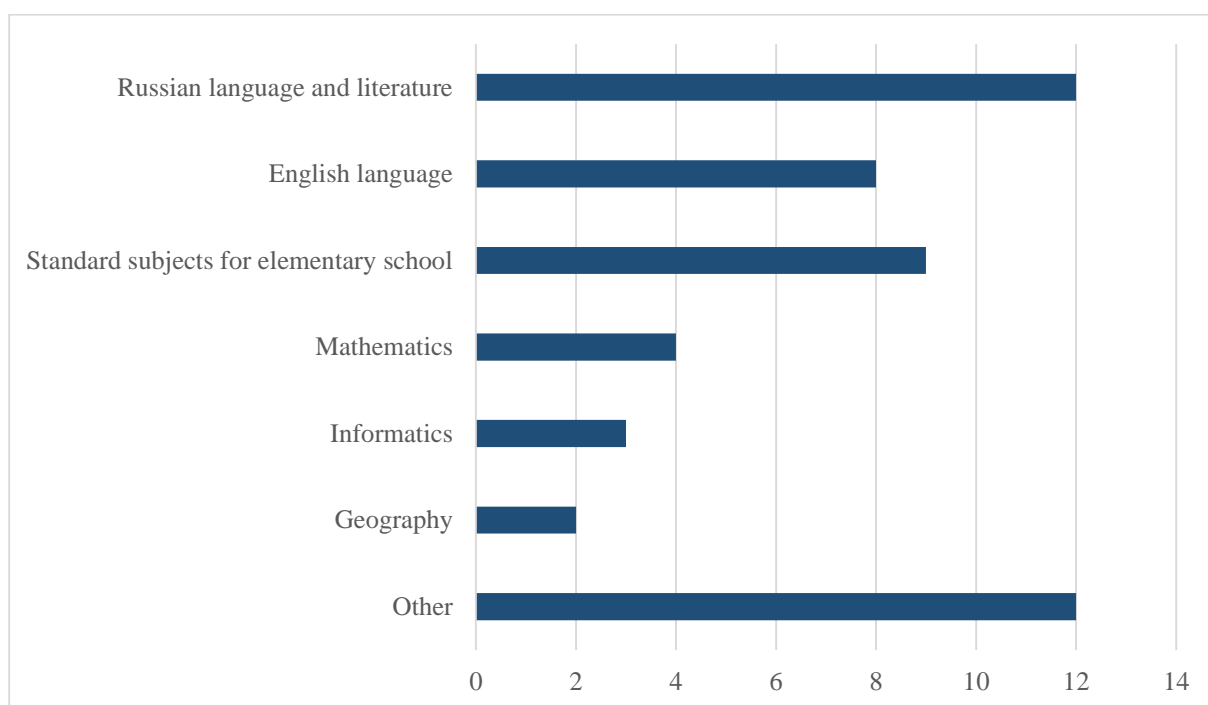| Variable	Frequency
Less than 1 year	8% (4)
1-5 years	32% (16)
6-10 years	20% (10)
11-15 years	8% (4)
16-20 years	14% (7)
21+ years	18% (9)
Total	100% (50)

The time of work at particular school also varied. The most common answers were from 1 to 5 years, 32% (n=16), and from 6 to 10 years, 20% (n=10). The teachers who responded less than 1 year of work consisted of 8% (n=4). Also 8% (n=4) of the respondents selected the answer "11-15 years". 14% (n=7) of the respondents have been working in a particular school from 16 to 20 years. Of the teachers who responded, more than 20 years were 18% (n=9).

Table 2. Educational Background of the Sample

Variable	Frequency
Pedagogy and Education	88% (44)
Special Education	0% (0)
Psychology and Social Pedagogy	0% (0)
Other	6% (3)
Pedagogy and Education + Psychology and Social Pedagogy	2% (1)
Pedagogy and Education + Other	4% (2)
Total	100% (50)

Educational background of teachers was mostly homogeneous. 90% (n=45) of the respondents had educational background in Pedagogy and Education. Then, 2% (n=1) had a degree in Pedagogy and Education and Psychology and Social Pedagogy. 6% (n=3) of the respondents selected the answer "Other", which implied educational background in Engineering, Economic and Technical Education. Of the teachers who responded Pedagogical Education and Other (Management), were 2% (n=1).

Table 3. Subjects Taught by the Teachers

The open-ended question about subjects taught by the teachers indicated that the most part of them were humanitarian. The teachers who taught the Russian language and literature comprised n=12, the English language – n=8. Standard subjects for elementary education were taught by n=9 teachers. The fewer other subjects were also presented – Mathematics (n=4), Informatics (n=3), Geography (n=2). The other subjects included Biology, Physics, Technology, Art, Health and Safety, etc.

The discussion demonstrates that the sample was quite diverse depending on variables. The population was drawn from six public schools in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The majority of teachers were women, which confirms the idea of Bronstein and Abramson about women's predominance in this profession (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003). However, I was hoping to find more representation from male respondents. Women, working at schools, usually have to

"confront competing areas for attention: work and home" (Bronstein & Abramson, 2003, p. 2), in contrast with men. Thus, the bias of the results could have occurred, because the women from the sample could be under greater pressure and needed support from school social workers.

The number of teachers of middle age prevailed. Thus, I could assume that they had good experience in teaching profession, even though some of teachers have not been working in a particular school for a long time.

The data captured a good sample of teachers combining different practices within a school. It is a common practice in Russian schools, when a teacher occupies various positions and teaches on different levels. The most common combination is to be a teacher of Basic and Secondary schools. It is interesting to point out that "Other" included Librarian and Assistant Principle. There was also a significant representation of Directors of Studies, since usually there is one person within a school, who is responsible for this position and is supposed to contact with social worker the most due to their role. In addition, the combination of diverse duties and thus heavy workload of teachers implies the necessity of support from school social workers concerning many issues.

Answers considering educational background indicated that education in Pedagogy and Education was an important requirement for teachers to work in school. However, the data also showed that it was possible to teach without such educational background. It happens sometimes in Russian schools that people without proper education start teaching[5].

As mentioned above, the majority of subjects taught by the teachers were humanitarian. Such results could imply the bias in sampling method. I intended to use random sampling, but one could conclude that it was snowball sampling. The large representation of humanitarian subjects comparing to the others, could appear because some teachers asked their colleagues, who taught the same subject, to participate in the survey.

Despite of evident limitations, I believe that the data represents a good sample of teachers, which was quite helpful for the current study.

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[5] However, the situation has changed in the beginning of 2017 and currently it is necessary to attend additional training to teach any subject in school.

School Social Workers

From the perspective of the study conducted by Koroleva (2010), I expected that the staff without proper educational background and experience (e.g. teachers) would occupy the position of school social worker. The main reasons for that were low wages and the lack of demand for the profession (Koroleva, 2010).

Of the teachers who responded, 66% (n=33) had the position of school social worker occupied by social pedagogue. The sample consisted of 34% (n=17) reported that this position was occupied by one of the teachers.

Table 4. The Position of a School Social Worker

Variable	Frequency
One of the teachers	34% (17)
Social worker	0% (0)
Social Pedagogue	66% (33)
Other	0% (0)
Total	100% (50)

Table 4 indicates that the school social worker is one of the teaching staff in some schools. In Russia, it happens that a teacher hold two positions concurrently. The school social worker sometimes is not regarded as sought-after specialist within school environment and the position remains vacant (Koroleva, 2010). In this case, a teacher can become a part-time school social worker. However, it means that this person probably does not have proper educational background. Thus, the quality of social services provided in schools is questionable. In turn, the social pedagogue is the professional, who is trained to work within school settings and provide these services. Freedom from teaching allows him/her to focus on the primary duties.

Perception of Educational Background

By the reference to Iarskaia-Smirnova (2001), I affirm that school social workers should have proper educational background to avoid conflicts within the workplace. Moreover, it helps not to confuse the expertise and perform the duties effectively. Therefore, I expected that the most part of the respondents would support this idea and agree that the school social

workers' education should be focused on Psychology and Social Pedagogy. This particular specialty allows people to work as a social worker within schools in Russia.

Table 5. Educational Background of a School Social Worker

Variable	Frequency
Social Work	8% (4)
Pedagogy and Education	2% (1)
Psychology and Social Pedagogy	50% (25)
Social Work & Pedagogy and Education	12% (6)
Social Work & Psychology and Social Pedagogy	8% (4)
Pedagogy and Education & Psychology and Social Pedagogy	8% (4)
Social Work & Pedagogy and Education & Psychology and Social Pedagogy	10% (5)
Other	2% (1)
Total	100% (50)

50% (n=25) of respondents reported that the school social worker should have a degree in Psychology and Social Pedagogy. Eight percent (n=4) selected the educational background in Social Work. The teachers who answered "Pedagogy and Education" consisted of 2% (n=1). Then, there are options that present combinations of different educational backgrounds. Of the teachers who responded 12% (n=6) reported the need in both Social Work and Pedagogy and Education. 8% (n=4) selected "Social Work & Psychology and Social Pedagogy". Also 8% (n=4) of the respondents agreed that the school social worker could have educational background in both Pedagogy and Education, and Psychology and Social Pedagogy. Ten percent (n=5) of the teachers selected three presented options. "Other" was selected by 2% (n=1) of the respondents and included educational background in Legal Studies.

The requirements for school social worker's education varied. Half teachers reported that educational background in Psychology and Social Pedagogy was sufficient to work as school social worker. Interestingly, the next high rated answer was "Social Work & Pedagogy and Education". I could assume that the teachers expected the school social worker to be familiar with all nuances of their practices. Moreover, it referred me to the study by Picton and
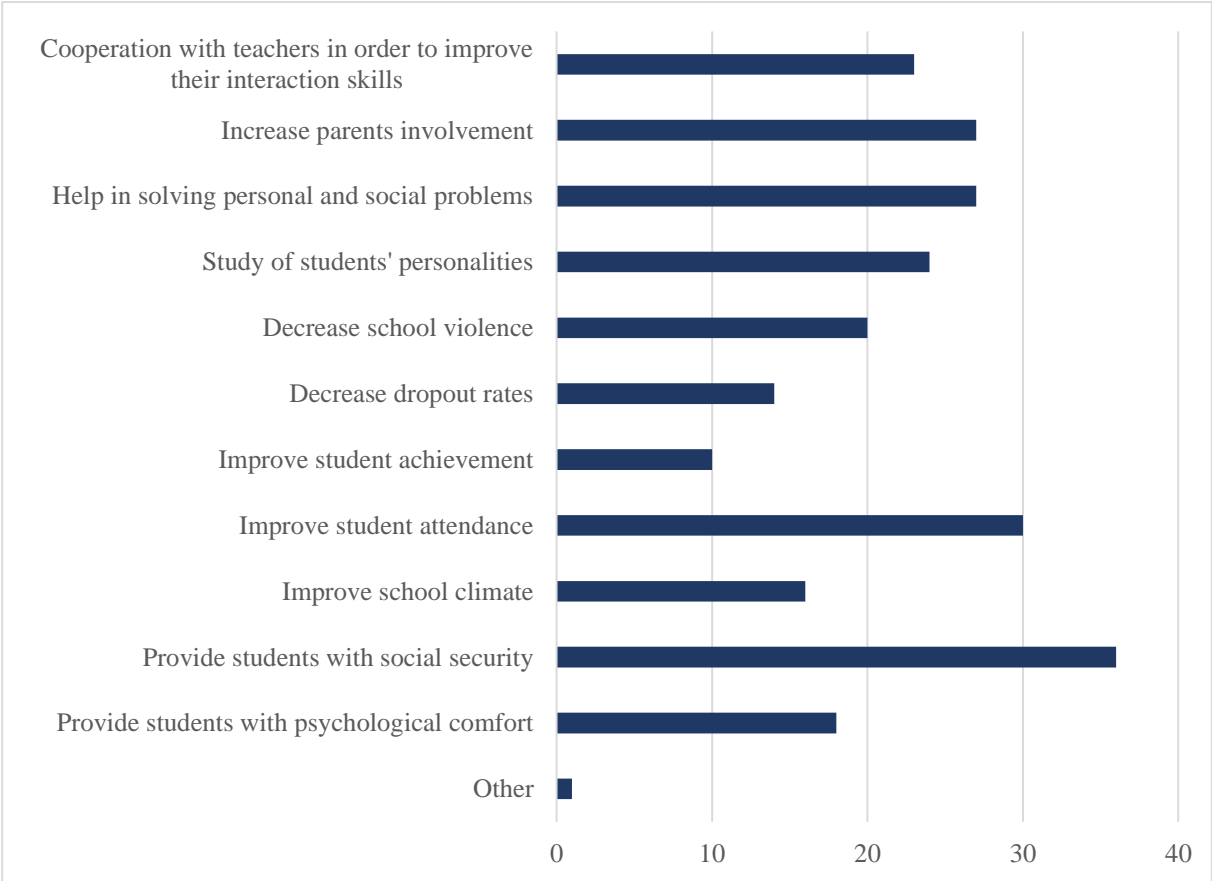
Keegel (1978), which stated that school social worker in Australia should have teaching background. The choice of diverse combinations of education can be interpreted in the same way: as you have more educational backgrounds, your knowledge is broader and school is able to benefit from it. You are regarded as multi-skilled worker and valued. However, school environment can put pressure on you when forcing on more duties and it can have the negative impact on your practice.

Role of a School Social Worker

The teachers' perceptions of the functions and tasks of a school social worker are presented in the tables below. The respondents could select more than one option in two first questions.

Based on several studies (Lee, 2012; Lyons, 2002; Sheptenko, 2014), I expected that the most important function of a school social worker would be the improvement of school climate, since the researchers considered the provision of healthy environment, improvement of school culture and creation of favourable condition for students as primary functions.
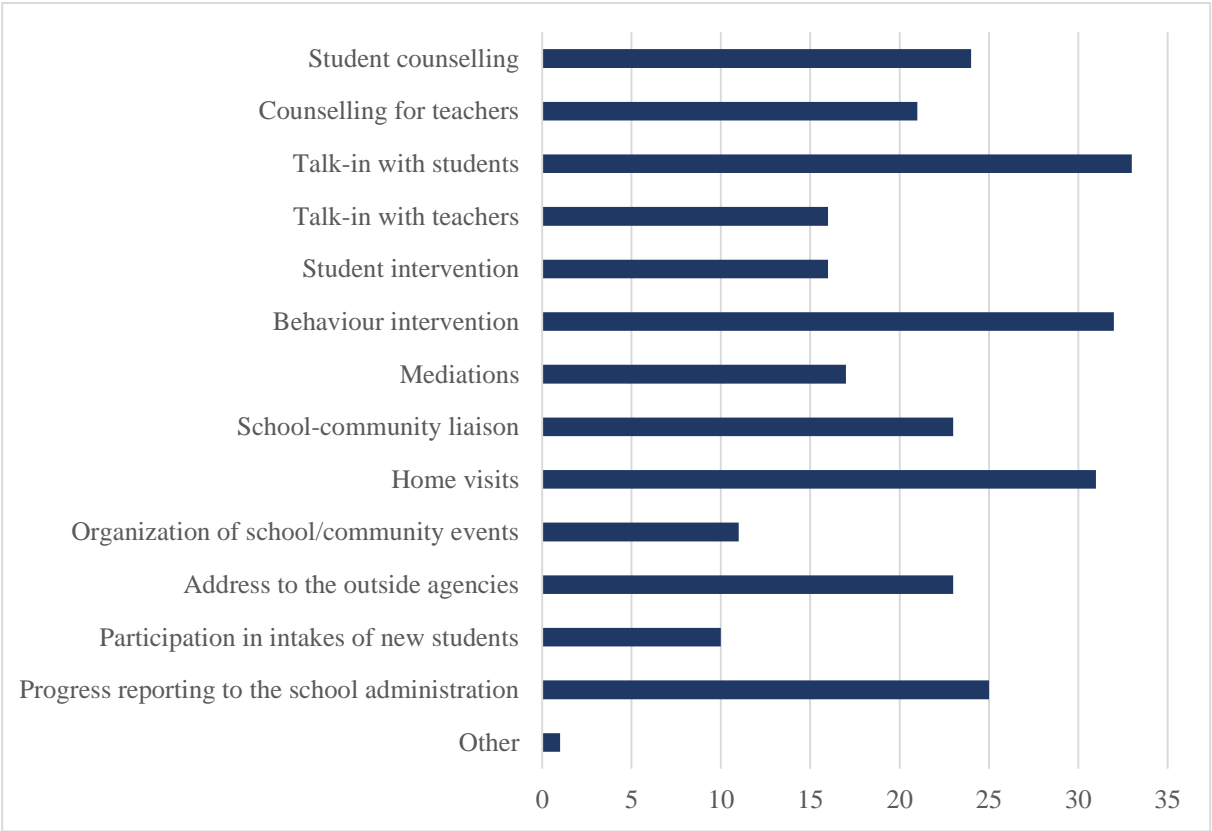
Table 6. The Functions of a School Social Worker

However, the most part of the respondents agreed that to provide students with social security (72%) and improve student attendance (60%) were the two highest rated duties of the school social worker. The least important functions included decrease of dropout rates and improvement of student achievement.

Then, I assumed that the most significant tasks from the teachers' perspective would be counselling and progress reporting (based on Lee, 2012), as well as home visits and address to the outside agencies (Allen-Meares, 1994).
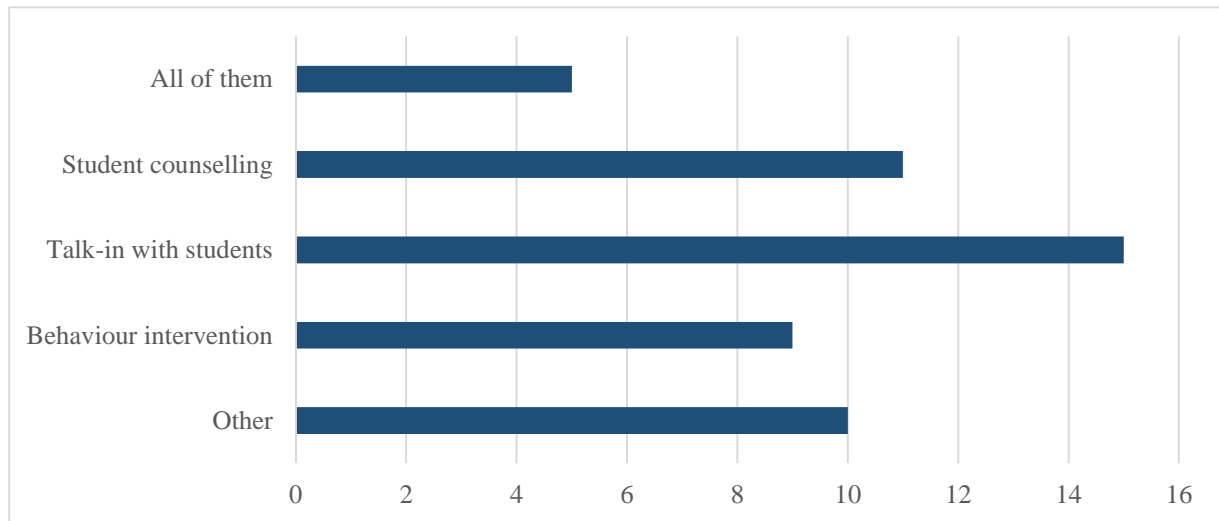
Table 7. The Tasks of a School Social Worker

The teachers responded that the primary tasks for the school social worker were talk-in with students (66%), behaviour intervention (64%) and home visits (63%). The other high rated tasks included progress reporting to the school administration (50%) and student counselling (48%).

The qualitative responses regarding the tasks of the school social worker, which were to be prioritized, showed that talk-in with students (n=15), student counselling (n=11) and

behaviour intervention (n=9) were the most significant ones. Some of the teachers stated that "*talk-in [was] a very effective preventive measure*".

Table 8. The Tasks of a School Social Worker to Be Prioritized

The teachers indicated that the most significant functions of the school social worker were to provide students with social security and improve student attendance. This finding brought me back to school social work's roots. Primarily, school attendance and the causes of absenteeism formed the focus of school social workers (Dupper, 2003). These areas seem to remain dominant long after.

It is also important to mention that for some of the functions the percentage of significance ranged only from 20% to 35% (Table 6). I could assume that probably not all the functions were essential for the practice of school social worker in Russian schools. Then, the list of tasks performed by the school social worker (Table 7) showed the importance of the school social worker in talk-ins with students, behaviour intervention and home visits. They support the importance of different categories of functions worked out by Abramovskih (2009), i.e. preventive and communicative organizational categories. Interestingly, the large number of respondents selected home visits, thus confirming the idea of Volodarskaya (2014) that a school social worker is the link between school and family. However, only few of teachers (n=5) prioritized them in the qualitative responses. In addition, I was hoping to see counselling and talk-in for teachers higher rated.

The data indicates the most common areas of work of the school social worker in the Russian context. It creates a broader picture of school social services and provides me with the

answer to one of the research sub-questions, which reflects on social services provided in Russia schools.

The Benefits

For Schools

The qualitative responses emphasized several dominant themes concerning the way the school social work services benefit the school in general. They included the improvement of school environment, promotion of collaboration within school settings, improvement of education quality, support for students, mediations, support for teachers, work with families and maladjusted children. The following tables with the dominant themes and corresponding quotes reflects on these benefits. Overall n=47 teachers answered the question.

The first dominant theme to the school benefits from the school social worker was the *support for studen*ts. Overall n=16 teachers regarded support the school social worker provided for students as the significant benefit for their schools. The following quotes reflect on it:

a) *"Provide individual work with students who are in difficult situations in life and their protection"*.

b) *"Help to solve problems of students who are in difficult situations in life"*.

c) *"Help students to establish their relationships with teachers and classmates"*.

d) *"Social worker can present students' interests"*.

Of the teachers who responded, n=13 advanced the idea that the school social worker was an important *support for the teaching personnel*: he/she provided help with maladjusted children, contact with problem families, etc.
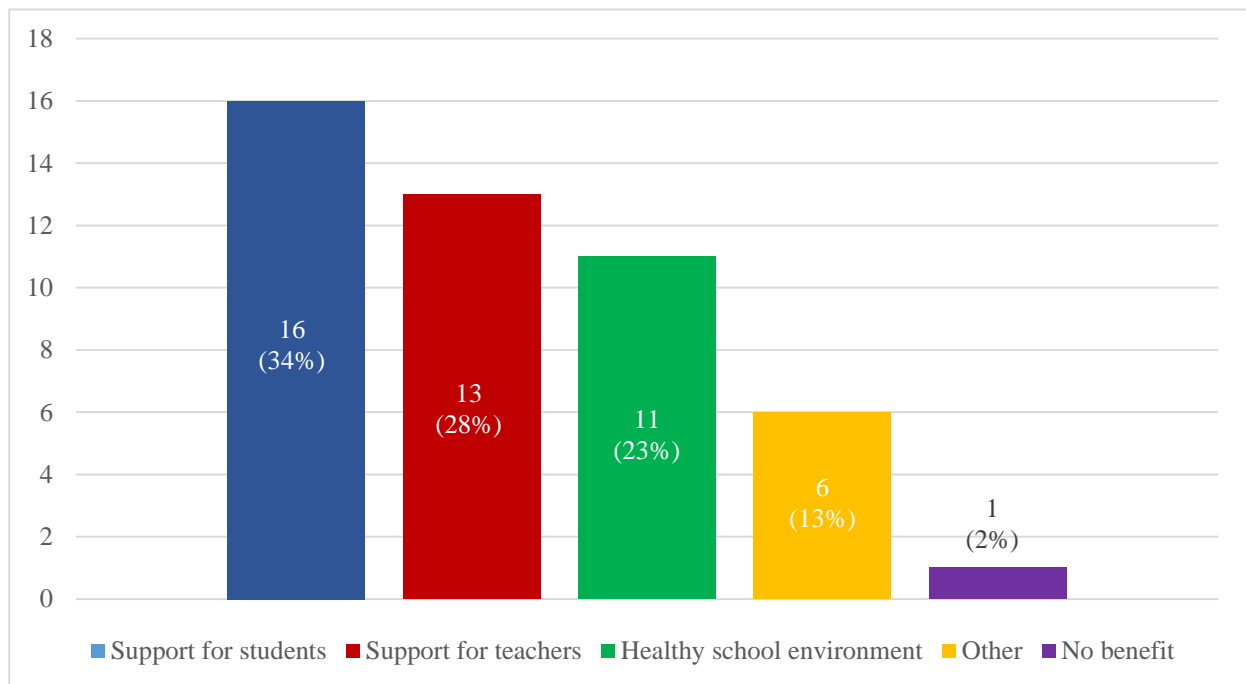
a) *"Effectively help form-masters to solve social problems of students"*.

b) *"In case of decrease of academic progress or misbehaviour, help to figure out the reasons"*.

c) *"Help to be in contact with students' families"*

d) *"Teachers do not have to deal with the mentioned tasks"*.

One more dominant theme was the creation of *healthy school environment*. Of the teachers who responded, n=11 mentioned the benefit of their school social worker providing healthy environment both for teachers' work and students' development.

a) *"Improve psychological climate"*.

b) *"Provide comfortable environment both for teachers and students"*.

c) *"Promote better collaboration within school community"*.

d) *"Improve the quality of education and mutual understanding between teachers and students"*.

The other responses reflected on the following themes: merely positive impact (n=3), assistance in maintenance of documents (n=1), management of attendance accounting (n=1), special perspective on students (n=1). One teacher mentioned that there was *"not much benefit"*.

Tables 9. Benefits of a School Social Worker for School

For Teachers' Practices

The qualitative responses indicated that there were two dominant themes concerning the benefits of the school social worker for teachers. They were the following: assistance in work with students and their families. Overall n=36 teachers answered the question. Four of them reported that there was no benefit for them at all.

Of the teachers who responded, n=20 emphasized the importance of the school social worker in their work with students. The main areas of help concerned counselling and interaction with students.
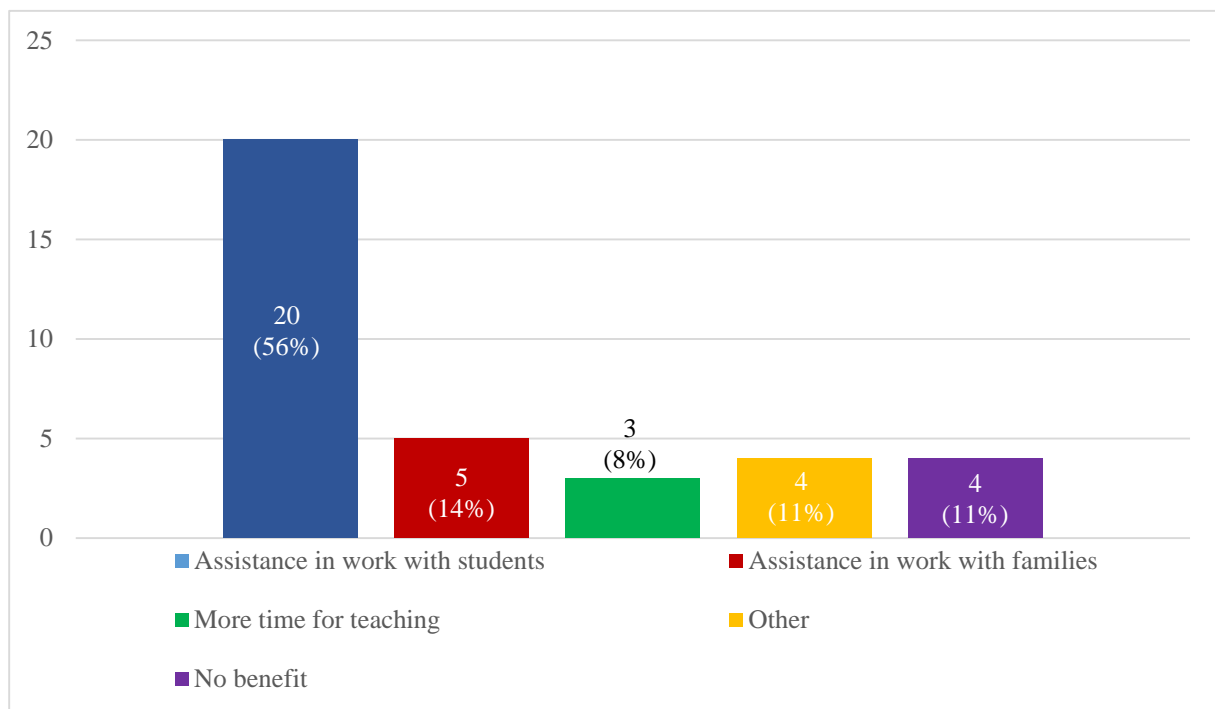
a) *"The school social worker helps to conduct educational work with students".*

b) *"Finds new ways to work with children".*

c) *"Helps to organize individual educational process for some students".*

d) *"Assists to establish contact with students".*

e) *"Helps to interact with students and find effective solutions for their problems".*

f) *"Provide recommendations about teaching and communication with students".*

Overall n=5 teachers reflected on the school social worker's role in their interactions with families.

a) *"Help to work with problem families".*

b) *"Helps to interact with families".*

c) *"Support teacher-student-parents interaction".*

d) *"Help to learn more about students' families".*

The rest of responses implied such themes as more time for teaching (n=3), assistance in difficult situations (n=2), support for form-master's duties (n=1) and promotion of better collaboration within school community (n=1). The rest of the responses were mostly negative (*"No benefit", "No that much"*).

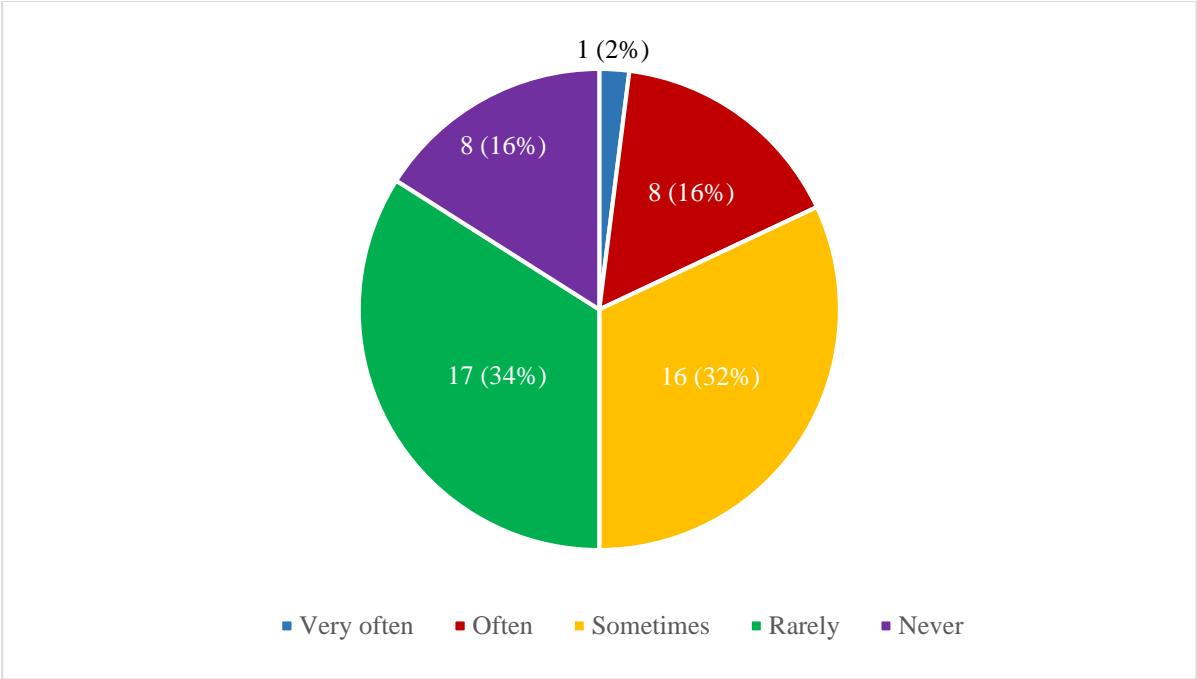Tables 10. Benefits of a School Social Worker for Teachers

The results from the qualitative questions concerning the benefits of a school social worker were significant and mostly positive. Many teachers singled out similar benefits for their schools and regarded a school social worker as the great supportive staff who helped both students and teachers. However, it was surprising for me that so many teachers n=14 could not define the benefits of a school social worker for their own practices (*"Cannot say", "I do not know"*). Galaguzova (2010) stated that the role of a school social worker was not clearly defined in Russia and consequently he/she was not valued within school community. Thus, I could assume that these teachers had only the general idea about social services in their schools and preferred to disregard them for that reason.

Collaboration

The next important question of the survey concerned the rate of the address to the school social worker. Of the teachers who responded, 34% (n=17) rarely addressed to the social worker in their schools. Thirty-two percent (n=16) of the respondents selected the answer "Sometimes". Eight teachers (16%) reported that they often applied to the school social worker. Then 16% of the teachers (n=8) did not do this at all. Only one teacher (2%) selected the answer "Very often".

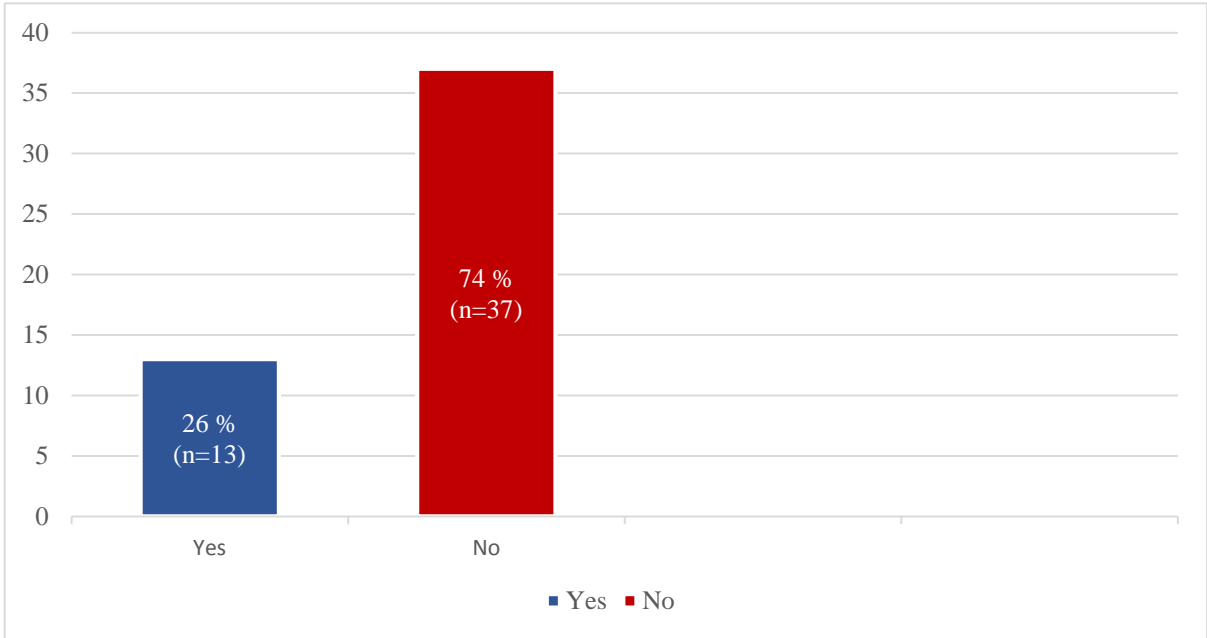Table 11. Address to a School Social Worker

The qualitative answers about the cases the teachers preferred to involve the school social worker indicated that n=18 of them needed assistance in cases of misbehaviour. The other

high mentioned answers included the cases of the absenteeism (n=9), interaction with parents (n=8) and poor academic progress (n=7). The following quotations reflect on these cases:

a) *"When a child cannot socialize, in cases of absence from school without reasonable excuse, decrease of academic progress, when I have a talk with parents".*

b) *"In case of absence from school, misbehaviour, problems with parents".*

c) *"Decrease of academic progress or misbehaviour".*

d) *"Absence from school, no motivation for studies, conflicts with teachers".*

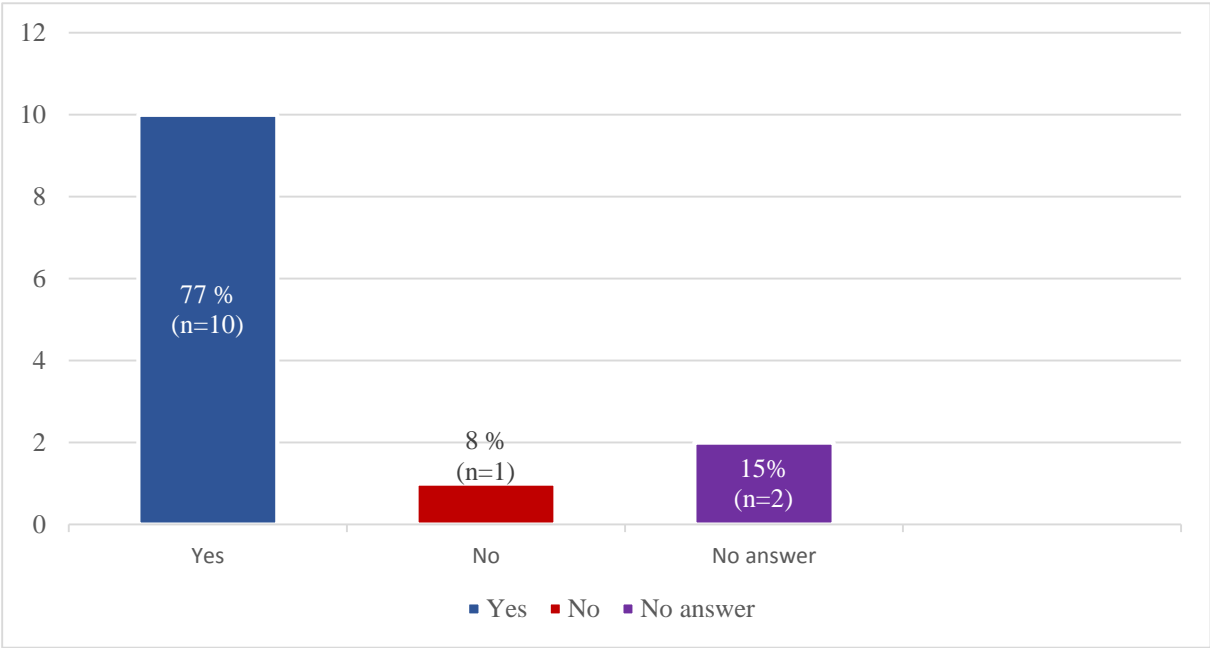e) *"I would like to address to social worker when there are conflicts with parents".*

Of the teachers who responded, 74% (n=37) answered that there were no activities oriented to the improvement of relationships between them, the school social worker and students. Twenty-six percent (n=13) of the respondents indicated that they had such activities in their schools. However, these activities were presented only during teachers' meetings. It implies that a school social worker participates in these meetings and is involved in the discussion of students' problems, social services provision, etc.

Table 12. Activities to Promote Collaboration between a School Social Worker, Teachers and Students

The teachers consisted of 77% (n=10) took part in the activities discussed above. Of the teachers who responded 8% (n=1) denied the participation. Two teachers (15%) refused to answer.

Table 13. Participation in the Activities

The data indicated that the teachers did not often address to the school social worker. With the reference to the discussion about benefits, I could expect that the significant part of the teachers would prefer to involve the school social worker in their practices. However, the answers "Rarely" (34%) and "Sometimes" (32%) prevailed. Thus, I could place the mentioned benefits in question. If you see no benefit, you will not address to the school social worker. In addition, the study supports the finding of Dash and Mohan (2015) about the lack of initiative from teachers to collaborate with school social workers, because they regard them as administrative personnel. However, it is also fair to assume that the reason of such statistics could be the overscheduling of the school social worker.

The lack of activities to increase collaboration within school community was rather surprising for me. It was possible to assume that the lack of variety of activity types had an impact on the answers, since the collaboration was presented only during teachers' meetings. Moreover, it could influence the low level of participation. It is important that the administrators consider the possibility to find the ways to increase the variety of such activities and involvement.

The highest rated cases when the teachers addressed to the school social worker included misbehaviour, absence from school, interaction with parents and poor academic progress. The research confirms the finding by Petrikova and Barkunova (2015), who stated that the focus of school social work was dealing with maladjusted children, then interaction
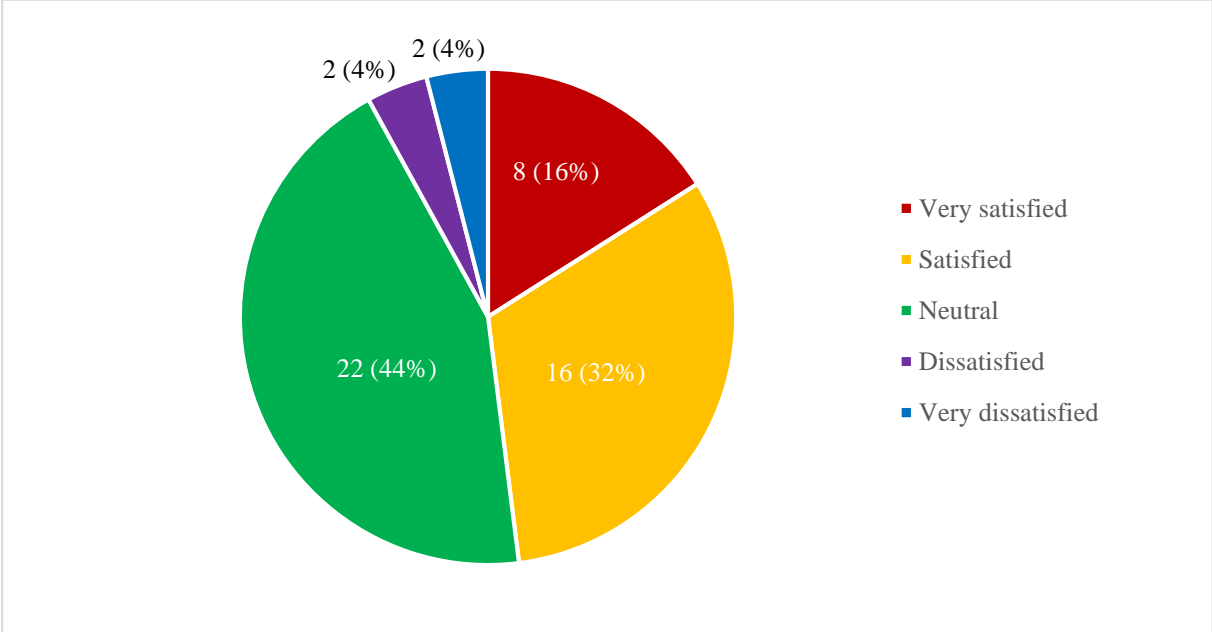
with families of these children and solutions to the family conflicts. Interestingly, of the teachers who responded n=9 could not answer the question (*"Cannot say"*). I assumed that they rarely or never have address to a school social worker and it was the reason why these respondents could not articulate their idea of cases.

To sum up, the results demonstrate that the collaboration between the teachers and the school social worker is poor in spite of the obvious benefits. It is quite disappointing, because in terms of changing and challenging world, it is increasingly evident that this collaboration is indispensable. Teachers and school social workers should work together and promote supportive collaboration to assist students and contribute to their success (Dente, 2011). In addition, it remains questionable whether the respondents really value the school social worker or not. The further responses made teachers' perception clearer.

Evaluation of School Social Workers

Of the teachers who responded, 44% (n=22) were neutral in their attitudes towards the school social worker's practice. Thirty-two percent of the respondents (n=16) stated that they were satisfied. 16% (n=8) of the teachers selected the answer "Very satisfied". Then, 4% (n=2) of the respondents were dissatisfied and as many were very dissatisfied with their school social worker.

Table 14. Satisfaction from Social Work Services

By reference to the studies conducted by Avant (2014) and Dash and Mohan (2015), I expected that the teachers would not appreciate their school social worker and would not be satisfied with his/her work within school environment.

The data clarifies to what extent the teachers valued the school social worker. Interestingly, the highest rated answer was "Neutral". I could assume that the reason for that was disinterest in and lack of understanding of the benefits for their practices. Moreover, many of the respondents did not often address to the school social worker and thus they could not measure the outcomes. However, those teachers who were satisfied or very satisfied also presented a large group. Thus, it could be expected that even though they did not apply to the school social worker often, they had successful experience every time and the school social worker was able to meet their needs.

The Areas of Improvement

I expected that there would be two main areas of improvement of school social work. The first one concerned professional development, since it was significant for the increase of social services' efficacy (Koroleva, 2010). The other area implied the increase of collaboration, which was mentioned by many researchers as indispensable part of successful assistance to students (e.g. Dente, 2011).

Thirty (n=30) teachers answered the qualitative question about the way they would improve or change the social work services in their schools. Six (n=6) of them reported that there was no need for changes and two (n=2) wrote that it was not their responsibility. However, I singled out two dominant areas of improvements suggested by the other teachers.

Collaboration

Of the teachers who responded, n=10 reflected on the necessity to improve collaboration within school community. Some of them would increase the interaction between teachers and the school social worker:

a)   *"Provide training for teachers"*.
b)   *"There is a need for counselling for teachers"*.
c)   *"I would start planning face-to-face work with youth at risk"*.

The other teachers emphasized the increase of collaboration between the school social worker and students:

a) *"Social worker should communicate with students more and know them by sight"*.

b) *"School social worker should meet with children regularly"*.

c) *"It is necessary that she work more often and has a separate office, so children know about her"*.

In addition, one more dominant theme of collaboration concerned interaction with families:

a) *"Give more rights to social worker with her collaboration with parents"*.

Professional

Another significant area of improvement regarded the school social worker as a professional. There were several suggestions from the teachers (n=12), which reflected on such themes as the provision of better knowledge about social services, the competence of a school social worker, the need for more working time and an office for the school social worker.

Some of the teachers complained that they and students did not have proper knowledge about social services within their schools:

a) *"Provide better knowledge about social services"*.

b) *"Provide teachers and students with better knowledge about social services and how social worker can help them"*.

The other teachers mentioned that it was important to consider the competency of the school social worker.

a) *"The position of social worker should not be occupied by a teacher"*.

b) *"I would like to see a school social worker with proper educational background"*.

c) *"I think that we need another person on this position"*.

The other issues, which I also considered as important, included the need for more working hours (*"Our social worker is in the school only one day a week"*) and the need for the

working place (*"I would establish social worker's office in the school and a room for psychological release"*).

Table 15. Areas of Improvement

The data shows that some part of the teachers realized the importance of collaboration with the school social worker and that it should be improved. However, the number was surprisingly small. Barr et al. claimed that inter-professional collaboration was becoming more pressing demand (Barr et al., 2008), but in Russian schools the personnel seemed not to have the strong sense of it. Then, the research supports the finding of Sheptenko (2014), who stated that one of the main tasks of a school social worker was to provide collaboration between children, families and teachers. For that reason, all these areas of improvements were presented in the data.

I expected to find out the necessity of professional improvement for the school social worker, since 34% of the respondents reported that one of the teachers occupied this position. As stated by Koroleva (2010), low wage leads to the situation when educated school social worker finds another work place and the position in school is occupied by unqualified staff. I could assume that in spite of the teachers' great knowledge and experience, they did not have proper educational background to provide social services within school settings and thus the well-being of students' could become at risk.

The Challenges for Interprofessional Collaboration

School social work in Russia is developing and there are still some misconceptions about it, which can cause diverse challenges for its effective functioning. By reference to the study of Petrikova and Barkunova (2015) and Allen-Meares (1994), I expected that one of the most serious challenges would be lack of knowledge about school social work from teachers' perspective. In addition, I assumed that lack of qualified personnel related to school social work would become problematic for interprofessional collaboration (Koroleva, 2010).

Of the teachers who responded, to the qualitative question n=38 explained whether they thought there were some challenges for their collaboration with the school social worker or not. Seven (n=7) of the respondents stated that there were no challenges for them at all. Thirty-one (n=31) teachers reflected on the challenges. The dominant areas of the challenges included lack of time, lack of knowledge and misunderstanding.

Lack of Time

Eighteen (n=18) teachers wrote that they or the school social worker did not have enough time to interact properly. The main mentioned reasons concerned heavy workloads and different working hours.

a) *"Lack of time and different working hours".*

b) *"Teachers are so busy that they often do not have time for interaction with the social worker".*

c) *"Do they have time for that? Too much paper work…"*

d) *"Social worker is often absent from the school, since she works in the 1ˢᵗ building".*

Lack of Knowledge

Six (n=6) respondents complained that they did not possess knowledge about social services provided in their schools and it influences a lot their collaboration with the school social worker. The following quotes reflect on it:

a) *"Teachers do not know in what cases they can address to the school social worker".*

b) *"Lack of timely information-sharing from the school social worker".*

c)   *"The role of the school social worker is not clear"*.
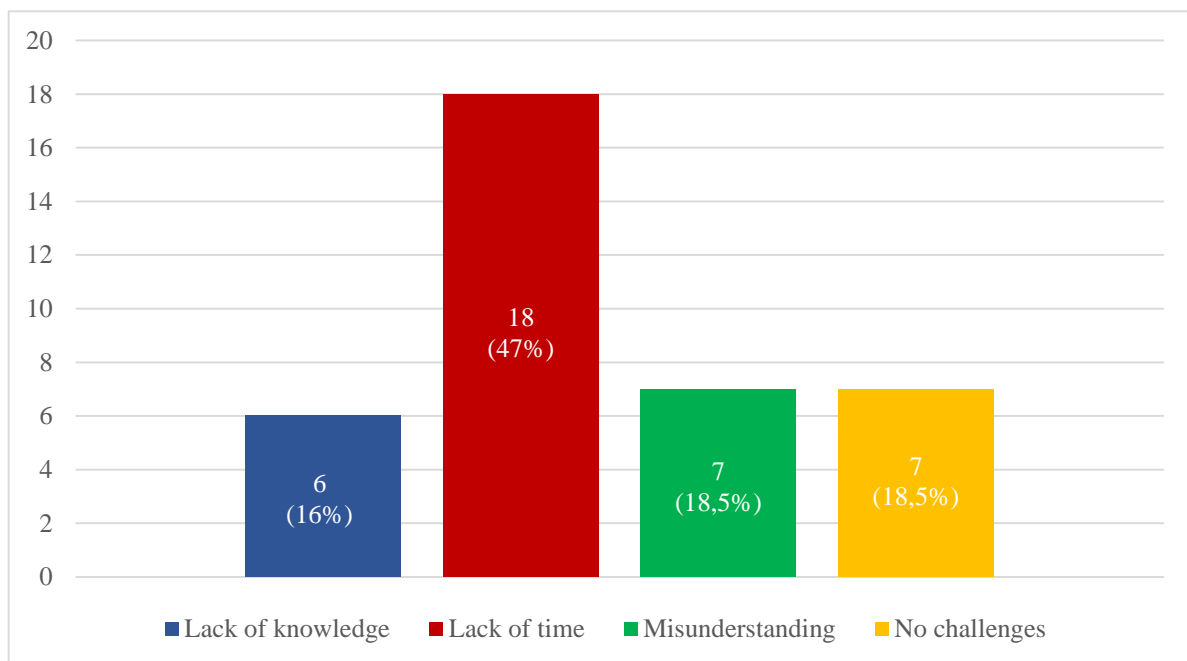
Misunderstanding

Of the teachers who responded, n=7 wrote that misunderstandings between two professions were the barriers for their collaboration. They reflected on different forms of misunderstanding:

a)   *"Sometimes the social worker cannot tell form-masters and other teachers everything she knows about a child because of confidentiality issue. It can cause difficulties in collaboration and dealing with problems"*.

b)   *"Sometimes teachers do not listen"*.

c)   *"Disagreements about correctional activities"*.

Table 16. Challenges for Interprofessional Collaboration

The lack of time and knowledge seemed to be the most common and expected challenges. For instance, diverse paper-laden processes take a lot of time and both teachers and the school social worker are so busy that they cannot interact much and get to know each other (*"Too much paper work, the need for written requests"*). Interestingly, the problem of misunderstanding was mentioned. I could refer to the work of Bronstein and Abramson (2003), who describes the differences between two profession and possible difficulties in their

interaction. Each professional applies to his/her own values and attitudes based on the experience and it results in misunderstandings during collaboration.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Keeping the Two Roles Separated

Advantages

Thirty-seven (n=40) teachers responded to the qualitative question about the disadvantages of keeping the roles of teacher and school social worker separated. The dominant themes included the division of duties and more time for practice.

Division of Duties

Of the teachers who responded, n=19 wrote that the division of duties and thus focus on primary duties was possible when the roles were separated. The following quotes support their positive attitudes:

   a)   *"The school social worker, being a professional, can focus only on his duties".*
   b)   *"The social worker is not burden with teaching".*
   c)   *"Teacher do not have to deal with the mentioned tasks".*

Enough Time for Work

The lack of time is a pressing problem for school personnel, that is why fourteen (n=14) of the respondents indicated that the role separation was significant advantage for them.

   a)   "There is time for continuous collaboration between social worker and psychologist and their work with students and parents".
   b)   "Social worker is able to spend more time working with maladjusted children and attend the classes where are children with problems in studying or behaviour".
   c)   "Enough time for service provision, more focus on students' needs".

Apart from the mentioned advantages, I also singled out the answers reflecting on different perspectives provided when the roles are separated (*"Different perspective on a problem provide best solutions"*).

Table 17. Advantages of Keeping the Two Roles Separated

Disadvantages

Of the teachers who responded, n=34 reflected on disadvantages of keeping the roles of teacher and school social worker separated. Sixteen (n=16) of them answered that there were no disadvantages. The rest of the respondents described possible disadvantages, which concerned such themes as lack of knowledge about children and absence of teamwork.

No Teamwork

Ten (n=10) teachers pointed out that the role separation led to the situation when each professional started working on his/her own and did not take into consideration the perspective of the others.

a)   *"Disagreements in the approach to students".*
b)   *"Teachers should not be outside the problem".*
c)   *"Social worker can suggest such ways to deal with problems, which are not acceptable for teachers".*

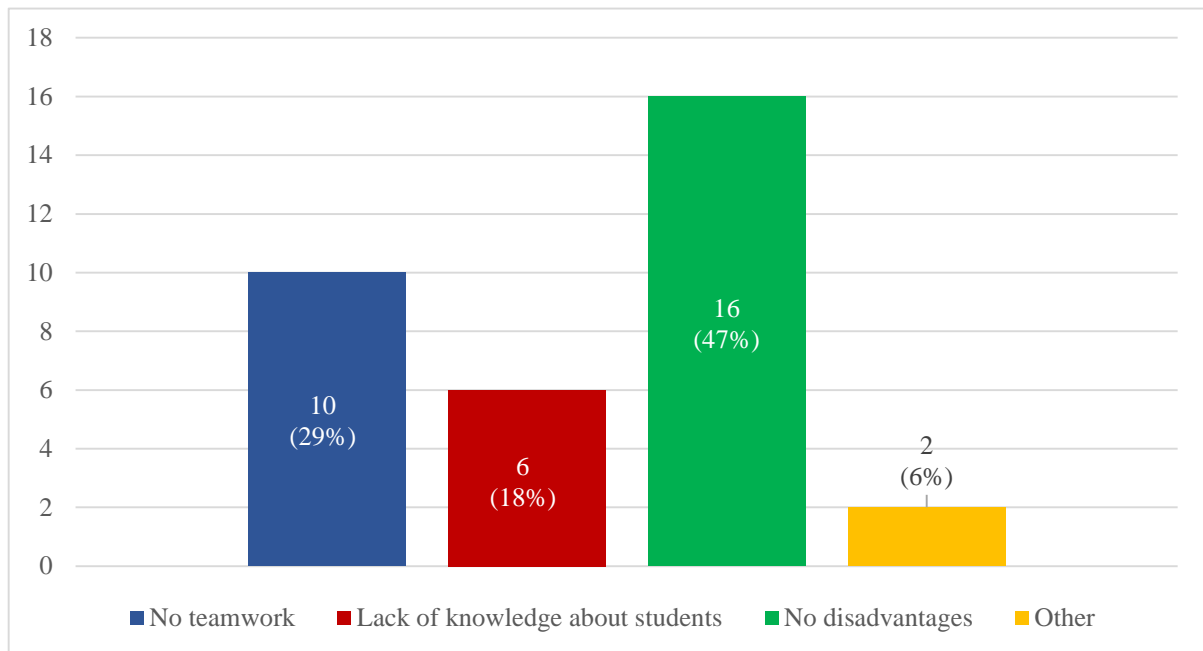*Lack of Knowledge about Students*

Six (n=6) teachers explained that the main disadvantage for them lied in the fact that the school social worker did not know children as well as they did.

a)   *"The school social worker has no insight into children from the academic perspective".*

b)   *"Less opportunities to define students' problems".*

c)   *"Social worker cannot have deep understanding of students' problems, cannot see the broader picture".*

Table 18. Disadvantages of Keeping the Two Roles Separated

The data indicates that the most part of the respondents emphasized more advantages than disadvantages. I could assume that since "roles and relationships [were] in flux" nowadays (Barr et al., 2008, p. 284), it was important for the professionals to define some specifics of their positions. Thus, it will be easier for them to concentrate on their duties and work effectively rather than try to fit for each position. It is especially significant for a school social worker, whose role still is not clear within Russian schools.

Other Issues to Discuss

Seven (n=7) teachers proposed the issues that they would like to discuss. The dominant theme concerned the collaboration with the school social worker. The following quotes give an idea of the theme:

a)   *"Why are there no activities, which can provide teachers with better understanding of school social work and in what cases they can address it?"*

b)	*"How can teachers help the social worker when they do not have copious information about his/her functions? Does the social worker reach all goals?"*

c)	*"I would like to have better understanding about the cases, in which I can and should address the school social worker".*

The other issues, which were of interest, included training for teachers and their rights (*"Teachers do not have enough psychological training for working with increasing number of students with mental disorders". "The rights of teachers".*).

I was hoping that more teachers would respond to this qualitative question. However, only few of them advanced their opinions. In contrast to the bias discussed above, I think that such small number of respondents demonstrates some degree of teachers' disinterest in school social work. Then, the data shows that collaboration remains the sticking point for the professionals. In addition, lack of knowledge about the role of school social worker also has an effect on it.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

It is generally accepted that school system has a great impact on children and their development (Lynn, McKay & Atkins, 2003, p. 198). Children spend very important period of their life in school and their future oftentimes depends on it. However, they present vulnerable group and thus can easily become "at risk" students. In view of this, school system should work to support students and reduce the risks. It is indispensable that students are provided with healthy environment for development and socialization. The important role within school system is allotted to teachers, who communicate with students the most. School social workers present the other significant group. Through the ecological perspective, collaboration between teachers and school social workers becomes a centerpiece for children's wellbeing (Lynn et al., 2003, p. 197). Their strong collaborative relationship can contribute a lot to children's success.

Therefore, I looked into this relationship, particularly into the way teachers perceived school social workers, how they understood and valued school social workers' role. The present study focused on the views of 50 teachers from six public schools in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

The result of the survey revealed that the main services provided by the school social worker were focused on such functions as the provision of social security for students and the improvement of students' attendance, and such tasks as talk-in with students, behaviour intervention and home visits. I also found that the teachers did not often address to the school social worker and the most part of them were neutral to the social work services provided in school. This certain disinterest in school social work could be explained by the range of challenges, which prevented the teachers from interprofessional collaboration. The main challenges were the following: the lack of time and knowledge about school social work, and misunderstanding between the professionals. When a professional knows nothing about the other professional, he/she even will not try to find time for interaction. For that reason, I believe that the most important step here is to provide the teachers with particular knowledge about school social work and the way they can benefit from it. Where there is a will, there is a way to find time for collaboration. It is significant to awake the interest in teachers and that is why one of the areas of improvement, found in the data analysis, concerned the provision of better knowledge about school social work for teachers and students. The other improvements consisted of the employment of a person with the proper educational background and the increase of working hours for the school social worker. Then, the issue of collaboration was touched upon one more time. The teachers advanced the idea that the school social worker

should work more and closer with them, students and families thus increasing interaction within school community.

The study demonstrated that the teachers had general idea of school social work's role within school system and its importance, but they did not fully understand how they could benefit from it during their own teaching practices. Currently, school social work in Russia is in development stage and I assume that it was the main reason of these results. The complete acceptance and recognition of school social work is not achieved. School social work has to strengthen its position by developing single structure and clear arrangement, producing official documents (general standards), etc. Therefore, the school social work services will be widely used and valued.

The current research was mainly limited by the small number of schools and low number of participants. Thus, the potential bias in the study implies that the respondents could be only those teachers who had particular knowledge of school social work or were the most interested in it. Nevertheless, I believe that the research remains interesting and significant, since the Russian context differs from many countries. I also hope that the findings add to a growing body of literature on school social work, especially in Russia, since there has been no previous research on the teachers' perception of the role of school social workers. I believe that this study can be the first step towards a deeper investigation of the subject. It can serve as a base for future studies of collaboration within school system. I think that it will be possible to increase the number of participants by making the questionnaire briefer and easier to fill in. Moreover, there is a potential to expand the perceptions of school social workers by studying the other perspectives, i.e. families and students.

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Survey questions

A Study of How Teachers Perceive School Social Workers in Russia

Dear Sir or Madame,

You are being asked to participate in the research study of the role of social workers in Russian schools. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the role of social workers in the educational process and the way their work is perceived by teachers. The current survey is the part of my master's thesis in Nord University (Norway). I ask that you fill in the questionnaire that consists of 23 questions. It may take 10-15 minutes. The results of the survey will be employed in the thesis.

Regards,

Olga Pushkina

(pushkina.olyaa@gmail.com)

1. What is your gender?

    □ Female

    □ Male

    □ Other: _____

2. What is your age?

    □ 18-24 years old

    □ 25-34 years old

    □ 35-44 years old

    □ 45-54 years old

    □ 55-64 years old

    □ 65+ years old

3. What is your current role within the school? (Check all that apply)

    □ Principal

    □ Director of Studies

    □ Primary school teacher

    □ Basic school teacher

□   Secondary school teacher

□   Other: _____

4. What subject(s) do you teach?

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5. How long have you been working at this school?

□   Less than 1 year

□   1-5 years

□   6-10 years

□   11-15 years

□   16-20 years

□   21+ years

6. What is your educational background (Check all that apply)

□   Pedagogy and Education

□   Special Education

□   Psychology and Social Pedagogy

□   Other: _____

7. The position as the social worker at your school is occupied by:

□   One of the teachers

□   Social worker

□   Social pedagogue

□   Other: _____

8. In your opinion, what sort of educational background should a social worker at school have? (Check all that apply)

□   Social Work

□   Pedagogy and Education

□   Psychology and Social Pedagogy

□   Other: _____

9. The role of your school social worker includes the duties (Check all that apply):

- □ Provide students with psychological comfort
- □ Provide students with social security
- □ Improve school climate
- □ Improve student attendance
- □ Improve student achievement
- □ Decrease dropout rates
- □ Decrease school violence
- □ Study of students personalities
- □ Help in solving personal and social problems
- □ Increase parents involvement
- □ Cooperation with teachers in order to improve their interactive skills
- □ Other: _____

10. The social worker at your school usually participates in the following practical tasks (Check all that apply):

- □ Student counselling
- □ Counselling for teachers
- □ Talk-in with students (lectures or discussions with students of diverse issues such as the harm of drug use, e.g.)
- □ Talk-in with teachers (discussions of the teacher-student interaction, e.g.)
- □ Student intervention (personal talk to a student in case of poor progress)
- □ Behaviour intervention (personal talk to a student in case of misbehaviour)
- □ Mediations (the school social worker as a representative of a student)
- □ School-community liaison
- □ Home visits
- □ Organization of school/community events
- □ Address to the outside agencies
- □ Participation in intakes of new students
- □ Progress reporting to the school administration
- □ Other: _____

11. Which tasks listed above would you prioritize for the school social worker?

12. In your opinion, how does the school social work services benefit your school?

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13. How do they benefit your own teaching practice?

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14. How often do you prefer to involve the school social worker in your teaching practice?

- □ Very often
- □ Often
- □ Sometimes
- □ Rarely
- □ Never

15. In what cases do you usually have to involve the school social worker in order to help you?

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16. Are there any activities in your school to support collaboration between the school social worker/teachers/students?

- □ Yes
- □ No

17. If there are such activities, do you take part in them?

- □ Yes
- □ No

18. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the social work services provided in your school?

- □ Very satisfied

□ Satisfied

□ Neutral

□ Dissatisfied

□ Very dissatisfied

19. How would you improve/change the school social work services in your school?

20. What, in your opinion, are the main challenges to the collaboration between teachers and the school social worker in your school?

21. What are the advantages of keeping the two roles, teacher and school social worker, separated?

22. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of keeping the two roles, teacher and school social worker, separated?

23. Are there other issues concerning the role of a social worker and its relation to teachers that you would like to talk about?

The letter of informed consent

A Research Study

Nord University, Bodø, Norway

Title of Study: A Study of How Teachers Perceive School Social Workers in Russia

Researcher:

Name: Olga Pushkina   Email: pushkina.olyaa@gmail.com

Introduction:

- You are being asked to participate in a research study (that is a part of my masters' thesis) of the role of social workers in school.

- You were selected as a possible participant because you are a representative of the teaching staff.

- The participation is voluntary. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before making your decision to participate in this study or not.

Purpose of the study:

- The purpose of the study is to evaluate the role of social workers in the educational process and the way their work is perceived by teachers in Russia.

Study procedures:

- If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to fill in the questionnaire that consists of 23 questions.

- It may take 10-15 minutes.

Risks:

- The study has no foreseeable risks.

Confidentiality:

- Your information is confidential. Your answers will not be linked to your named and will only be used for making the evaluation.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study by completing the questionnaire.