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## Impact of school-based social support: a literature review on student well-being and educational outcomes

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### Abstract

**Context and relevance.** Socio-educational support is of paramount importance in the educational context, especially for adolescents. **Objective.** Our aim is to take stock of the available knowledge in this field, while highlighting the challenges it faces. **Method.** The article presents a narrative literature review, a state of the art of research, based on a total of 24 articles published between 2001 and 2025. **Results.** Despite the multiple issues identified, it has been established that socio-educational support has a significant impact on the mental health of learners, particularly adolescents, thus influencing their academic performance and the school's overall profitability.

**Keywords:** social support, school social work, well-being, school performance

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## Влияние социальной поддержки в школе: обзор литературы о благополучии и результатах обучения

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### Резюме

**Контекст и актуальность.** Социально-образовательная поддержка имеет первостепенное значение в образовательном контексте, особенно для подростков. **Цель.** Наша цель — подвести итог существующих знаний в

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этой области, одновременно выделяя возникающие перед ней проблемы.

**Метод.** Статья представляет собой обзор существующей литературы в формате нарративного обзора, основанный на 24 статьях, опубликованных в период с 2001 по 2025 годы. **Результаты.** Несмотря на выявленные многочисленные проблемы, было установлено, что социально-образовательная поддержка оказывает значительное влияние на психическое здоровье обучающихся, особенно подростков, а также влияет на их учебную успеваемость и общую эффективность школьного образования.

**Ключевые слова:** социальная поддержка, социальная работа в школе, благополучие, учебная успеваемость

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## Introduction

The social component plays a crucial role in any educational system. Numerous research studies have highlighted the magnitude of the positive impact of social support on students, particularly children and adolescents, whether it be for school engagement, success, development or otherwise (Ahmed et al., 2010; Lauzier et al., 2015; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Brioux, Oubrayrie-Roussel, 2017; R.W. et al., 2000).

Indeed, their well-being both inside and outside school has a major influence on their academic performance and commitment to education (Bacro et al., s.d.).

Moreover, students in distress find refuge with school social workers, particularly in mental health (Kelly, Berzin et al., 2010; McManama O'Brien et al., 2011a). In fact, “school social workers are the main service providers for child and family mental health problems, which are the most difficult to resolve in the communities they serve” (Kelly, Berzin et al., 2010).

The results of the study by (McManama O'Brien et al., 2011a) in turn demonstrate that social workers play a crucial role within schools, and that their roles go beyond “simple child-centered service responsibilities” especially for students who are already being followed by therapeutic professionals outside school.

However, despite the long-established importance of the functions of school social workers, a glaring lack of studies of “social support”

and “student-perceived social support” has been highlighted.

In the literature reviewed, we noted the scarcity of data concerning social work and the functions of social workers (Van Sittert, Wilson, 2018; Stanley, 2021). This shortage of studies leads to a lack of clarity in school social work, a poor understanding of it and little use of its services (Kelly et al., 2016).

It was also observed that emotional intelligence was absent from the social work literature (Stanley, 2021). Moreover, some researchers have pointed to the lack of research on the implementation of social justice in psychology (Moy et al., 2014).

This is why the acquisition of recent data on the practice of these professionals in the school environment is urgently required (Kelly, Berzin et al., 2010). Beyond the significant lack of data and research on social work in educational settings, another major gap lies in the conceptual ambiguity of the term “social support.” The literature reveals persistent confusion, as no coherent or widely accepted definition has been established since its emergence. Numerous studies confirm this lack of clarity, as highlighted by the conclusions of (Barrera, 1986). There is also confusion between the terms social support, social networks and social integration. They “refer to three different perspectives on the resources that can be found in the personal communities we inhabit. Unfortunately, these three terms are

often confused because they overlap and influence each other” (Gottlieb, Bergen, 2010).

This conceptual indeterminacy also results in a lack of clarity regarding the roles of social work professionals, naturally leading to a lack of understanding of social workers’ practices (Kelly et al., 2016). The conceptual ambiguity found in the literature extends to terminology. This article adopts “social support” as an umbrella term for various forms of student assistance, while distinguishing it from “psychosocial support” and “socio-pedagogical support”. Despite these clarifications, few studies address the practical roles and flexibility of school social workers, leaving their concrete practices largely underexplored (Kelly, Frey et al., 2010) as well as their diversifications, especially concerning the mental health practice exercised by the latter (McManama O’Brien et al., 2011a). Research has yet to determine if mental health practices vary between students primarily supported by school social workers and those accessing external counseling (McManama O’Brien et al., 2011b).

Another striking deficiency has been noted regarding reliable measurement tools to assess the effectiveness of social workers’ interventions (Lauzier et al., 2015). It has been shown that the few tools devoted to the perception of social support in children or adolescents, such as Social Support Scale for Children (SSSC) (Harter, 1985a) and Student Social Support Scale (SSSS) (Nolten, 1994) by (Kerres, Kilpatrick, 2002), have shortcomings and are not totally reliable (Kerres, Kilpatrick, 2002). Added to this is the fact that no current instrument for measuring support focuses specifically on aspects associated with anxiety disorders (St-Jean-Trudel et al., 2006). In addition, it is pointed out that there is a lack of studies devoted to the evaluation of mental health and education. Indeed, only 24 studies, conducted as randomized clinical trials, explored these areas between 1990 and 2006 (Franklin et al., 2009)

That said, social support measurement scales are in short supply, and none of the existing ones can specifically measure the different dimensions of social work (Lauzier et al., 2015; Kerres, Kilpatrick, 2002; St-Jean-Trudel et al., 2006).

Another challenge in social support is considering the broader ecological and environmental

context, which significantly impacts adolescents’ mental health. A clear gap exists between adolescents’ needs and what their environment provides, leading to heightened social and academic pressure, particularly when adequate guidance and support are lacking (Syed, Awang, 2011).

Some researchers have pointed to the lack of cooperation and prevention with teachers (Berzin et al., 2011). Others pointed to the lack of clarity in the role of school social support in relation to various important contexts, such as family and peers (Vieno et al., 2007).

The perception of social support and its impact on schooling also remain insufficiently studied.

Indeed, there is an “absence of studies on the effect of the interrelationship between perceived social support and cognitive distortions of success and dependence on depressive symptoms in adolescents during the primary-secondary transition” (Lanson, Marcotte, 2012). There is also a lack of data on the relationship between “social support, school-related stress and school burnout (Meylan et al., 2016), and a paucity of examination “of the mechanisms by which social support exerts its influence” (Ahmed et al., 2010).

There is also a concerning lack of research on coping strategies and resilience in social support, especially for youth struggling with cannabis dependence (Dorard et al., 2013). There is also a lack of studies linking social support and post-traumatic resilience (Özdemir et al., 2022).

In conclusion, many studies stress the crucial role of social support in adolescent well-being, noting that its absence can lead to demotivation and school dropout (Brioux, Oubrayrie-Roussel, 2017).

As highlighted in the (Turning Points, 1990) the lack of support places millions of youths at risk of unfulfilled and unproductive lives.

While some schools have integrated psychological services, many rely on external providers. This review focuses on schools without internal services to analyze the specific challenges of this model. Its goal is to map existing research on social support in diverse educational contexts, providing a foundation to deepen understanding and improve the roles of socio-educational workers.

## Methods and materials

This study is based on a narrative literature review. Articles were searched in scientific databases (Scopus, OpenEdition Journals, Elsevier, Érudit, Cairn, SAGE, Wiley) using French and English keywords like school social work, social support, and socio-educational support. No relevant results were found on Scopus, Elsevier, and OpenEdition for terms such as socio-educational literature review or social support in schools. Inclusion criteria were: (1) keywords in title or abstract and (2) educational relevance. From 70 initially selected articles, 24 were rigorously analyzed after three screening phases. Additionally, 27 other sources were consulted to enrich reflections on psychological and emotional support for adolescents in schools.

These articles cover different methodologies: action research, comparative, descriptive, cross-sectional, causal, exploratory, quantitative and consensual qualitative. The studies (2001–2025) total a sample of 39859 participants, conducted in various countries: USA, France, Quebec, India, Turkey, Italy, etc.

Four articles in particular identified the use of six measurement tools within this literature review, namely:

— Social support (Lauzier et al., 2015, 2015); Evaluates the perception of social support in different dimensions, such as emotional, material and informative support.

— Questionnaire sur les comportements de soutien en situation d'Anxiété (QCSA) (Guay & al., 2003); Evaluates perceived social support during moments of anxiety, focusing on emotional, social and informative support behaviors.

— Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS), (Malecki et al., 1999); Measures perceived social support in children and adolescents. It assesses different types of support, notably emotional and material, based on relationships with family, friends and school.

— Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, Griffier, 1985); Measures a person's overall life satisfaction and subjective well-being.

— Inventory of socially supportive Behaviors. ISSB (Cohen, Mermelstein, Kamarck,

Hoberman, 1985); Evaluates the social support behaviors perceived by the individual in various situations.

— Social Provisions Scale (ESSI) (Cohen, Willis, 1985); Measures an individual's perception of support in terms of affection, validation, material support, etc.

This rigorous, albeit complex, selection process has enabled us to focus on articles directly related to our topic: social support for teenagers at school. This orientation gives our magazine an original and specific scope in the field of education.

## Psychosocial disorders of schoolchildren (epidemiological review)

Preserving the mental health of every individual is of crucial importance, yet healthcare systems are facing significant precariousness, particularly in the mental field (OMS, 2022b). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one billion people suffer from psychological disorders, a figure that has risen by 25%, illustrating in particular the rise in cases of depression and anxiety since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, making the situation even worse (OMS, 2022a).

In one of its recent studies, "World Mental Health Report: Transforming mental health for all. Overview" carried out in 2022, the WHO advocates the promotion and improvement of mental health, emphasizing that the absence of pathology does not automatically guarantee psychological well-being. Indeed, "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (Constitution de l'OMS 1946, s.d.) Consequently, "anything less than optimal mental health is associated with a reduced level of functioning, whether or not the person suffers from a mental disorder" (Doré, Caron, 2017).

Despite its importance and the calls for its promotion and awareness, individual mental health remains constantly at risk and the educational context is no exception.

School can sometimes be a source of "specific suffering" and "school stress" (Romano, 2016), an environment where students, especially ado-

lescents, are particularly affected by psychological and psychosocial disorders (Levy, 2022).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition (DSM IV) confirms that psychosocial disorders emerge primarily from the environmental context, where the individual's living environment exerts a significant influence in both their emergence and resolution (Crocq, Guelfi, 2015). It classifies them into 8 categories: problems with the social support group, problems linked to the social environment, educational problems, professional problems, housing problems, problems accessing health services, problems in relation to legal institutions, and other psychosocial and environmental problems, including; lack of social services, and conflicts with external supports such as social workers, counselors (Crocq, Guelfi, 2015).

Thus, the environment in which the student evolves can lead to psychic alterations and favor the emergence of psychosocial disorders such as anxiety, mood disorders, depressive disorders, suicidal thoughts, disruptive behaviors, thought disorders or psychosis and eating disorders. (Levy, 2022) This has an impact on students' "school life" and "schooling", on their "psychological health" and "somatic health", and creates tensions between those involved in education, students, families and work teams (Romano, 2016).

It has been shown that students globally suffer from psychological disorders and that these have a great impact on them (Asima Mehaboob Khan et al., 2023). Indeed, the psychological disorders they suffer from are diverse; including: behavioral problems (Al-Adawi et al., 2023; Asima Mehaboob Khan et al., 2023), lack of self-confidence (Asima Mehaboob Khan et al., 2023; Physical Therapist, Neighborhood Physical therapy PC, New City, NY, USA & Baladaniya, 2024; Sofologi et al., 2022), anxiety, depression, stress (Asima Mehaboob Khan et al., 2023; Jörns-Presentati et al., 2021), post-traumatic stress disorders (Asima Mehaboob Khan et al., 2023; Jörns-Presentati et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020), suicidal ideation (Asima Mehaboob Khan et al., 2023), suicidal behavior (Jörns-Presentati et al., 2021), ADHD (Al-Adawi et al., 2023; Messias et al., 2022), ASD/TSA (Al-Adawi et al., 2023; Messias et al., 2022; Tiley,

Kyriakopoulos, 2021), OCD (Tiley, Kyriakopoulos, 2021) and much more. They have cognitive, emotional and social deficits of between 9 and 13% overall (Al-Adawi et al., 2023).

In addition, preventive initiatives for schoolchildren, orchestrated by medical, psychosocial and other professionals, include psychological assistance with the participation of family and friends (Romano, 2016).

We can conclude that the high prevalence of psychosocial disorders in schools is largely due to insufficient support resources. Young and vulnerable students are especially sensitive to stress, affecting their personal, social, and academic lives. This highlights the urgent need for tailored preventive and supportive approaches to promote a school environment that safeguards students' mental well-being (Romano, 2016; Beri et al., 2025).

## Results

### ***1- Results of studies into the well-being of learners in the school environment and the alleviation of learner disorders and negative behaviours***

Schools are key places for supporting and preserving adolescents' mental well-being (R.W. et al., 2000). Indeed, "The social context is important, and schools are a central context that affects the development of adolescents" (R.W. et al., 2000). However, certain studies have highlighted "a deficit, both in terms of personal resources and in the subjective perception of environmental resources" (Dorard et al., 2013) in schools.

Furthermore, the observation of the increase in students' psychosocial problems within schools as mentioned in the study by (Van Sittert, Wilson, 2018) underlines the importance of finding appropriate solutions to this challenge. This need is reinforced by (Green et al., 2013), which highlights the importance of developing and supporting appropriate school resources to encourage students' use of mental health services. Thus, research suggests that school resources, particularly those related to early identification, facilitate access to mental health services and influence the treatment trajectory of young people suffering from DSM disorders (Green et al., 2013).

St-Jean-Trudel et al. (2006) found a significant correlation between mental well-being and perceived social support, underscoring the vital role of social support for students' mental health.

As numerous authors have shown, social support at school is crucial for students (Dorard et al., 2013; St-Jean-Trudel et al., 2006; Franklin et al., 2009; Meylan et al., 2016; Özdemir et al., 2022). Perceived social support, along with other factors such as coping strategies and self-esteem, not only enable "adjustment to the environment", but also provide "protection from the multiple risks associated with adolescent development, including substance use" (Dorard et al., 2013).

Its impact has also been demonstrated on "internalized disorders" such as anxiety, depression and self-concept (Franklin et al., 2009) disorders that are widespread in the school environment due to a number of factors, but essentially those linked to school demands, which represent a permanent burden and stress for students. Social support reduces this stress (McLean et al., 2023) and helps prevent school burnout (Meylan et al., 2016).

All the more so since it is seen as a support for people exposed to trauma who need it (Maloney et al., 2024) by providing them with a high level of self-compassion and stable, consistent post-traumatic development over time ( Özdemir et al., 2022).

Its role is therefore to protect, improve, promote and maintain the mental health and well-being of students in the school context (Brioux, Oubrayrie-Roussel, 2017).

Indeed, "School social workers help support student learning and well-being through direct services, service coordination and advocacy in a school setting (Franklin et al., 2009).

It has recently been confirmed that "There is an urgent need to support the social and emotional well-being of adolescents with experiences of adversity and trauma" (Maloney et al., 2024). There is therefore an urgent need to support the social and emotional well-being of adolescents with experiences of adversity and trauma.

That said, the meta-analysis carried out by this study demonstrated small to moderate treatment effects of school-based social work practice. The conclusions state that medium-sized effects are observed for inferiorization problems ( $d = .40$ ),

while small effects are found for externalization problems ( $d = 0.23$ ) (Franklin et al., 2009).

It states that the best results "seemed to come from school-based interventions that used targeted mental health and educational interventions to change student behaviors" (Franklin et al., 2009).

Thus, school social support not only helps maintain and foster students' well-being, but also contributes to behavior modification when needed. Overall, the findings highlight the positive impact of social workers, with effects varying depending on the issue addressed emotional, mental health, behavioral, or academic.

Green et al. (2013) reveals interesting results regarding this perspective, it states that "Adolescents with behavioral disorders are more likely to receive services than those with fear, distress or substance use disorders". Negative behaviors are therefore easier to detect, and therefore more likely to be effectively supervised, unlike adolescents suffering from internalized disorders. "Early identification" (Green et al., 2013) in this case, is the key to successful care. Indeed, results from the same study show that "youth with mild to moderate mental and behavioral disorders are more likely to use services in schools with more early identification resources". These resources are presented as "the extent to which schools provide services designed to identify and/or refer students for maltreatment or emotional problems" (Green et al., 2013).

This runs counter to the results of the meta-analysis carried out by (Franklin et al., 2009) which states that school-based social work practice seems to be more effective in the case of internalization.

School-based social work seems to be more effective for internalized disorders: anxiety, depression, self-image than for externalized disorders: aggression, conduct disorder, hyperactivity. This finding is not surprising, given that internalized disorders are in many cases more sensitive to psychosocial intervention than externalized disorders (Franklin et al., 2009).

In addition to early identification, "targeted interventions" are necessary for better behavior change outcomes; "the best results seemed to come from school-based interventions that used targeted men-

tal health and education interventions to change student behaviors” (Franklin et al., 2009).

## **2- Results of studies on the impact of social support on improving school performance and the overall cost-effectiveness of the school and education system**

There are many sources of social support in the educational context of adolescents. Indeed, the entire educational network contributes to it. It has been shown that “Social support’s impact is determined by combinations of various support sources, age, and gender” (Chan et al., 2022). In addition to social workers, teachers, classmates and, more broadly, the entire educational setting play a crucial role in this dimension.

The impact and importance of this network’s support has been widely demonstrated and highlighted by various studies over the years (Brioux, Oubrayrie-Roussel, 2017; Ahmed et al., 2010; Vieno et al., 2007; Meylan et al., 2016; McManama O’Brien et al., 2011b; Azpiazu et al., 2024; Vargas-Madriz, Konishi, 2021).

All these research studies agree on one fundamental point: social support, as perceived by students, contributes significantly to academic success. Hence the importance of paying particular attention to this aspect: “Knowing more about students’ perceptions of social support can lead to interventions aimed at improving the support students receive from important people in their lives” (Kerres, Kilpatrick, 2002).

Social support as perceived by students contributes significantly to “academic engagement” (Brioux, Oubrayrie-Roussel, 2017) “cognitive engagement”, “academic effectiveness” (Syed, Awang, 2011) as well as “pursuit of higher education” through unconditional teacher support (Lauzier et al., 2015). In this way, it becomes possible to adopt “motivational and affective behaviors” that contribute to academic success (Ahmed et al., 2010; Zhang, Qian, 2024; Wu et al., 2023).

In addition, this kind of support helps prevent “school burnout” and “school stress” (Meylan et al., 2016), as well as, and above all, “suicide prevention” (Vieno et al., 2007), the prevalence of which is increasing in the school environment.

In short, although impact rates vary from one actor to another and from one situation to another, the complementarity of the latter’s academic and emotional social support remains essential. This enables “psychosocial adaptation”, and consequently, a “sense of belonging to a community” that supports them unconditionally, which will naturally have a positive impact on their “self-efficacy” (Vieno et al., 2007; Zhang, Qian, 2024) and “well-being” (Vieno et al., 2007).

## **Conclusions**

It’s true that school social work continues to develop as a social field despite the challenges it faces. However, in many communities, social workers intervene as part of the mental health service (Kelly, Berzin et al., 2010).

So “understanding school social work practice and the needs at the level of education policy and research will help us arm future social workers with the best interventions to serve students” (Kelly, Berzin et al., 2010).

This literature review reveals a significant lack of in-depth research in the field while underscoring the essential role of psychosocial support provided by social workers and educational actors in preserving and improving students’ mental health and academic performance. It highlights the prevalence of psychosocial disorders among adolescents, who are especially sensitive to stress, impacting their well-being and demonstrating the clear need for preventive measures. Beyond maintaining well-being, social support can help change negative behaviors and enhance school outcomes, thereby contributing positively to the school’s overall effectiveness and productivity. Despite the proven importance of social workers in schools, some studies express concern about the professionals and settings dedicated to this “treatment” (McManama O’Brien et al., 2011b).

Indeed, concerns have been raised about the way schools handle students’ emotional and behavioral issues, as well as doubts regarding the appropriateness of assigning such responsibilities to social workers (McManama O’Brien et al., 2011b).

They imply that school may not be the best place and that social workers are not the most qualified to deal with such cases. They propose

and call on researchers to examine “whether it is more effective to contract out specific therapeutic services or to have a school social worker address the mental health needs of students at all levels of the system” (McManama O’Brien et al., 2011b).

Further research along these lines will help to clarify the grey areas and clarify the ambiguities. The literature review we have carried out can therefore serve as a foundation for this work. This will enable us to “create an agenda for future research into practice and policy orientations” (Kelly, Berzin et al., 2010).

**Limitations.** The main limitation of this research lies in the scarcity of data available for analysis, particularly regarding social support in

educational settings for adolescents. Difficulty in finding studies focused solely on adolescent social support with a wellness perspective limits this review and prevents definitive conclusions. Data collection might have been more thorough if conducted by a more diverse research team, allowing integration of varied perspectives for a broader analysis. Another limitation concerns the uneven availability of integrated psychological services in schools; while some have in-house services, many rely on external organizations. This review focused on schools without integrated services to analyze specific challenges, often constrained by human and financial resources, highlighting the need for further research.

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