

APPLYING GROUP SOCIAL WORK PROCESS IN SUPPORTING RAISING AWARENESS AND ENHANCEMENT OF CHILD LABOR PREVENTION SKILLS FOR STUDENTS

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Abstract. Child labor is a pervasive social issue that affects every continent and nearly every country. Addressing this issue requires active involvement and close collaboration across all levels, sectors, and components of society, including schools. Schools have organized child labor prevention activities for students; however, the integration of social work methods, particularly group social work approaches, remains limited. By applying group social work methods, social workers can create a supportive group environment where students are encouraged to enhance their skills, foster interaction, and complete both individual and collective tasks through structured group activities. Drawing from the synthesis, analysis, and evaluation of related studies, this article explores the application of group social work processes to raise awareness and develop child labor prevention skills among secondary school students. Through these methods, students can proactively build their prevention capacity while still in school, empowering them to address this critical issue effectively.

Keywords: Child labor, group social work, prevention, awareness support, skill enhancement.

1. Introduction

Child labor refers to work performed by children and minors that violates labor laws and adversely affects their physical, intellectual, emotional, and overall development [1]. It constitutes a breach of children's rights under international human rights law as well as the legal frameworks of many nations, including Vietnam [2]. Despite these protections, child labor remains a pressing issue both globally and within Vietnam.

As of June 2021, the ILO and UNICEF's latest global estimates revealed that nearly 160 million children were engaged in child labor as of early 2020, representing almost one-tenth of the world's total child population [3]. In Vietnam, there have been many different studies on the status of child labor. The MICS report specifically highlighted that 6.3% of children aged 5-11 and 3.2% of children aged 12-14 both attend school and participate in economic activities beyond the time limit. Furthermore, 2.3% of children both attend school and do hazardous work [4], categorizing them as child laborers despite being enrolled in school. Several factors contribute to the prevalence of child labor. Family-related factors play a significant role, including the household's financial situation [5-7], and the parents' education levels [8-9]. Additionally, a lack of awareness about working conditions and potential risks leads many rural families to send their children to work to supplement the family's income [10-11]. Studies also highlight personal

characteristics of children that influence child labor, such as gender [6], [12], [5], age [13-14], and children's limited knowledge and skills in both learning and working [10-11]...

Studies also identify several personal characteristics of children that influence child labor, including gender [6], [12], [5], age [13-14], and limited knowledge and skills in learning and working [10-11]. Additionally, community-related factors impacting child labor have been discussed in various studies, such as disparities in socio-economic conditions, community awareness, cultural traditions [8], [9], [13], and issues related to immigration [15-17]... Child labor has led to severe consequences for the children involved, including an inability to attend school, physical injuries, psychological trauma, and an increased risk of falling victim to human trafficking and abuse [16]. These effects extend beyond the children, impacting their families, schools, and society as a whole.

Given the current situation and consequences of child labor, there is an urgent need for appropriate strategies and programs to prevent and reduce child labor. Preventing, reducing, and eventually eliminating child labor requires active participation and close collaboration across all levels, sectors, and social components, including schools. Within schools, addressing child labor among students is a key prevention strategy, equipping them with knowledge, enhancing their skills, and building their capacity to prevent child labor while still in school. In fact, in some schools, schools have organized child labor prevention activities for students but the application of social work methods in implementing child labor prevention activities for students is still very limited.

“Social work is a profession, a professional activity aimed at helping individuals, families, and communities improve their capacity to meet their needs and enhance their social functions, while promoting a social environment to help individuals, families, and communities solve and prevent social problems, contributing to ensuring social security” [18]. These activities are often conducted by social workers, including individuals connected to schools such as teachers and administrators [19]. In some cases, teachers also take on the role of social workers to support these efforts. Social work in preventing child labor for students in schools is understood as activities carried out by professional social workers or social workers in schools, applied to students to protect them from illegal forms of labor that hinder or have negative effects on the physical, mental, personality and comprehensive development of children. Applying social work methods, including group social work methods, will help students interact in a friendly and positive group environment; be equipped with and practice knowledge and skills; and spread the knowledge and skills they have accumulated to other groups such as student groups in classrooms, schools, and the community through the group activity process. This is necessary for students and is important in guiding cadres and teachers to build processes and organize group activities to prevent child labor for students. However, in reality in Vietnam, research on this content is still very limited.

This article will focus on examining the application of the group social work process in organizing activities aimed at raising awareness and enhancing child labor prevention skills among secondary school students. These efforts aim to help students build their capacity for prevention while they are still in school.

2. Content

2.1. Research methods

This article is based on the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of global and Vietnamese documents related to child labor, child labor prevention, social work, and group social work in the context of child labor prevention. The primary sources include legal documents, textbooks, reports, articles, and research studies relevant to the topic. These sources support the author in addressing two key areas: (1) an overview of social work activities aimed at raising awareness and

enhancing skills for child labor prevention and (2) the application of the group social work process to support awareness raising and skill enhancement in child labor prevention among students.

2.2. General overview of social work activities in supporting awareness-raising and enhancing skills to prevent child labor

Activities to support raising awareness and educating to enhance skills in preventing child labor are among the important contents that help children be equipped, practice, and consolidate basic skills in preventing child labor, contributing to improving knowledge and capacity to prevent child labor for students and have been mentioned in a number of important legal documents in general and documents related to the General Education Program, child labor prevention program and social work in schools in particular, specifically:

Article 48, Section 1, Chapter IV of the 2016 Law on Children of the National Assembly clearly stipulates preventive measures in child protection, with special emphasis on education, knowledge counseling, and self-protection skills for children [20]. Key Party and State documents on the innovation of general education programs and textbooks, such as Resolution 29, Resolution 88, and Decision 404, emphasize the goal of transforming the education system. This transformation aims to shift from a knowledge-focused approach to one that fosters the comprehensive development of learners' qualities and abilities [21]-[23]. Circular No. 32/2015/TT-BGDĐT promulgating the general education program also particularly emphasizes ensuring the development of learners' qualities and capacities through educational content with basic and practical knowledge and skills, focusing on applying learned knowledge and skills to solve problems in life [24].

In addition, decisions and circulars on preventing and reducing child labor and social work in schools also mention the importance of supporting skills education for children and students. Decision No. 782/QĐ-TTg, issued by the Prime Minister, approves the Program on Preventing and Reducing Illegal Child Labor for the period 2021–2025, with a vision to 2030. This program outlines goals and tasks for child labor prevention, placing particular emphasis on educating knowledge and enhancing skills to prevent child labor, alongside other essential activities [25]. Circular 31/2017/TT-BGDĐT on guidelines for psychological counseling for high school students and Circular 33/2018/TT-BGDĐT on guidelines for social work in schools also emphasize prevention, support and intervention (when necessary) for students who are facing difficulties in studying and living will help minimize possible negative impacts; schools need to focus more on activities to enhance knowledge and educate students on prevention and response skills in addition to other activities [26-27].

Based on important guidance documents, activities to support awareness raising and skills enhancement for child labor prevention have been identified as two of the key social work activities, thereby helping to improve prevention capacity for the target group of children and students. Accordingly:

Supporting awareness raising on child labor prevention is an activity that equips students with basic knowledge, thereby helping them change their attitudes and behaviors, prevent and minimize the risks of child labor, and prevent the recurrence of child labor. This activity will focus directly on basic contents such as basic knowledge about children's rights, child labor, signs of child labor, child labor status, causes and consequences of child labor, and responsibilities of students themselves, families, schools, and communities to join hands to prevent and reduce child labor, etc. Support to raise awareness about child labor and child labor prevention is carried out through a number of specific forms such as direct communication implemented by the school through consulting activities, seminars, flag salutes, class activities, and club/group activities... In addition, the school can combine indirect forms of communication through the school's website; through social networking platforms such as Facebook, and Zalo; distributing books, and handouts; using slogans, billboards, posters, pictures, etc. [28].

Child labor prevention skills education is an activity to equip, practice, and reinforce basic and important skills in preventing child labor for students. Because there are many different approaches and concepts of life skills, there are also many different ways to classify life skills. In this study, the author relies on UNICEF's classification approach with three groups of skills: the Group of Skills to know and live with oneself; the Group of Skills to know and live with others; the Group of Skills to make effective decisions [29]. In addition, in the general education program, the content of skills education for students, including child labor prevention skills, is implemented through a number of compulsory subjects such as experiential activities, and career guidance; integrated into other appropriate subjects and implemented through extracurricular activities. According to the 2018 general education program, experiential and career guidance activities for students help equip them with knowledge and skills revolving around the relationship between students and themselves (self-oriented activities), students with the natural and social environment (nature-oriented and society-oriented activities) and students with the professional world (career guidance activities, including content related to choosing and making career orientation decisions) [30]. This approach is also similar to UNICEF's approach in classifying skills. Therefore, within the scope of this study, the content of child labor prevention skills education activities for students is implemented based on UNICEF's life skills classification framework and the content framework of experiential and career guidance activities for students in secondary schools in general and related to the necessary skills in preventing child labor in particular. Accordingly, the basic skills directly related to child labor prevention mentioned in this study include: (1) self-oriented skills: skills to identify risks of child labor; (2) socially oriented skills: skills to seek support and skills to participate in propaganda to prevent child labor; (3) career-oriented skills: skills to create motivation in learning. Activities to support education on child labor prevention skills are carried out through specific forms and methods such as: flag-raising activities, class activities, club/group activities, thematic talks, dramatization, group discussions, situation solving, etc.

2.3. Applying group social work process in supporting awareness raising and enhancing child labor prevention skills for students

In social work, to support clients to solve difficult problems, social workers will use social work methods. Social work methods are the way social workers impact the system of subjects being helped [18]. Each method has its own values, purposes, roles, and characteristics, which are effectively used by social workers to support the subjects appropriately and effectively solve the subjects' problems.

Preventing difficult problems and providing necessary measures to meet human needs is emphasized by Klein (1972) as one of the basic and important purposes of the group social work method (according to Nguyen, 2008) [31]. Besides, preventing and solving difficult problems for children and families is also one of the core purposes of the field of social work with children, including students [32].

According to Nguyen (2008), "Group social work is an intervention method of social work. This is a supportive process in which group members are given opportunities and an environment to interact with each other, participate in group activities to achieve the common goals of the group, towards solving the goals of individual members and solving difficult problems" [31]. Based on the concepts of group social work; the group social work method with child labor prevention is understood as a method to enhance and consolidate knowledge and skills to prevent child labor for specific target groups such as children, families, teachers, and communities through group activities. The group operates under the general support and coordination of the social worker and the social worker will use the group activity process to help members enhance their capacity, increase interaction, and complete individual and group tasks, thereby helping children improve their proactive prevention capacity while still in school.

In child labor prevention, to help members change their awareness, attitudes, and behaviors, thereby improving their capacity to prevent child labor, social workers will apply a four-stage process to conduct group activities. In this study, the author uses the group social work intervention process proposed by Nguyen et al. (2008) as a basis for research, evaluation, measurement, and organization of experimental activities on the group social work intervention model. Accordingly, the group social work process has four basic steps: (1) preparing and establishing the group, (2) the group starts working; (3) intervening/performing the task and (4) evaluating and concluding [31], [33].

The following section will specifically detail the application of the group social work process in raising awareness and enhancing child labor prevention skills among student groups.

*** First: Determine the purpose, objectives, and content of the group activity process**

- Purpose of the group activity process:

Help group members enhance their capacity to prevent child labor by providing knowledge and equipping students with skills to prevent child labor, thereby helping them to be prevented early, minimizing the increase and recurrence of the problem, and minimizing the risk of them having to leave school and enter the labor market.

- Objectives of the group activities:

On awareness: Provide and improve basic knowledge about child labor and child labor prevention for group members, including:

Knowledge about the concept of children, children's rights, child labor concept

Knowledge about the current situation causes, and consequences of child labor

Legal regulations on illegal child labor, thereby helping students identify situations of child labor

Aware of the responsibilities of the subjects (including the responsibilities of students themselves) in preventing child labor

Skills: Equip and strengthen child labor prevention skills for group members, including:

Child labor identification skills

Support seeking skills

Participation skills and communication activities to prevent child labor

Motivational learning skills

Regarding attitude: Forming a positive attitude of group participation among members. In addition, members feel happy, excited and enjoy participating in support activities and are proactive in accumulating, consolidating knowledge, and practicing skills during and after group activities.

- Content of the activity process:

Based on the purpose and objectives of the group activities, the group activities will be implemented with the following two main modules:

+ *Module 01: Equipping knowledge about child labor and child labor prevention. This content includes 05 modules:*

Lesson 1: Students understand the concepts of children, children's rights, and child labor. This module provides basic knowledge about the concept of children, the concept of children's rights, and groups of children's rights according to the provisions of international and Vietnamese legal documents, and clearly understands the concept of child labor

Lesson 2: Students understand the reality of child labor, the factors leading to child labor, and the consequences of child labor, especially the consequences for themselves, thereby helping them raise awareness of prevention

Lesson 3,4: Students understand the legal regulations on child labor (Minimum working age, working hours corresponding to age, types of work, working conditions, worst forms of child labor), thereby helping them identify cases of child labor

Lesson 5: Students understand the responsibilities of themselves, their families, schools, and communities in preventing child labor

Lesson 6: Knowledge system

+ *Module 02: Equip and consolidate child labor prevention skills. This content includes 04 modules:*

Lesson 1: Equip, practice, and consolidate skills to identify child labor risks, thereby helping students identify risky situations and issues; Identify the risk of violating working hours corresponding to the prescribed age, identify the risk of violating types of work, identify the risk of violating working conditions

Lesson 2: Equip, practice, and strengthen the skills of seeking support, thereby helping children identify situations that need help, find reliable addresses that can provide help, have appropriate behaviors when seeking help, and support other groups of people to seek support when facing difficulties in labor

Lesson 3: Equip, practice, and strengthen the skills of participating in propaganda and preventing child labor, thereby helping children realize the importance of participating in propaganda activities to prevent child labor, identify the target audience for propaganda to prevent child labor, identify the content and purpose of propaganda, identify the form and method of propaganda

Lesson 4: Equip, practice, and strengthen motivational skills in learning, thereby helping students understand the causes of loss of motivation to learn, how to build motivation to learn, set goals, and establish a study plan

Lesson 5: Knowledge system

*** Second: Building a group social work process**

- Phase 1. Group formation preparation stage:

+ *Identify goals and objectives for group support:*

Specific activities: students improve their knowledge and enhance basic skills in preventing child labor.

Resources: Support Staff

Expected results: Clear identification of goals to raise students' awareness of child labor prevention; Defined objectives to improve students' skills in preventing child labor.

+ *Team member selection:*

Specific activities: With the school board's approval, support staff collaborate with homeroom teachers to select participants for group activities. Selection is based on voluntary participation and the students' age, challenges, and specific needs.

Resources: Board of directors, support staff, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, students

Expected results: (1) Formation of groups; (2) Active, voluntary participation by group members.

+ *Assessing team building capabilities:*

Specific activities: Assess the ability of group members to participate; Assess the internal factors of the group; Assess the external factors of the group

Resources: Support Staff

Expected results: (1) Convenience for Participation: Suitable time, location, and living space to ensure members' ease of involvement; (2) Internal Group Strength: Active and proactive participation by members; Enhanced interaction, knowledge, and skills among group members; (3) External Group Strength: Support from the school board and teachers; Alignment with the school's development strategy for preventing child labor.

+ *Write a group proposal:*

Specific activities: Purpose of establishment: Improve knowledge and enhance skills in preventing child labor for student groups; Type of group: Education group; Activity content: Group activities based on topics to improve knowledge and enhance skills in preventing child

labor for student groups; Group structure: 10-15 members; Method of implementing group activities: Activities under the guidance of social workers, child protection officers; Assessment of group resource capacity: Internal and external resources; Prospects after the group activities end: Expanding the model of preventing child labor in schools and in the community.

Resources: Program Development Support Officer; Board of Directors approves support proposal

Expected results: (1) A formal proposal to establish a group with a well-defined structure; (2) Clear articulation of the group's purpose, support objectives, and implementation activities; (3) Approval of the proposal by the school administration.

- Phase 2. Start-up and Operation Phase:

+ *Introduction, get acquainted:*

Specific activities: Support staff introduce themselves; Members introduce themselves through specific games or activities

Resources: Support staff, student group

Expected results: (1) Introductory information is clear, concise, and comprehensive, covering key details such as name, age, ethnicity, strengths, weaknesses, and the advantages and challenges of participating in group activities; (2) An open, enjoyable, and comfortable atmosphere is fostered to encourage engagement and collaboration.

+ *Identify goals and objectives for group support:*

Specific activities: Identify the purpose of the activity: Group members are enhanced with the capacity to prevent child labor; Identify the objectives: Awareness: Provide and improve basic knowledge about child labor and child labor prevention; Skills: Equip and strengthen some child labor prevention skills for members

Resources: Support staff, student group

Expected results: 100% of team members actively participate in discussions, reach a consensus, and clearly understand the purpose and specific goals of the group.

+ *Forecasting advantages and disadvantages of group activities:*

Specific activities: Advantages: Strengths, interaction of members, support of the school...;

Difficulties: Participation throughout the activity, limitations in children's knowledge and skills, limitations in financial resources...

Resources: Support staff, student group

Expected results: (1) Most group members recognize potential difficulties and obstacles they may face while participating in the group; (2) Members develop a sense of responsibility to share and support one another in overcoming these challenges.

- Phase 3. The phase of activity concentration:

+ *Implement activities to support raising awareness and enhancing skills to prevent child labor for students:*

Specific activities:

Teaching students the concept of childhood, children's rights, and child labor; Helping students understand the reality of child labor, including its causes and consequences; Educating students on legal provisions related to child labor; Clarifying the responsibilities of students and other stakeholders in preventing child labor; Providing a comprehensive knowledge system to enhance awareness of child labor prevention.

Equipping students with skills to: Identify child labor risks; Seek support for child labor prevention; Participate in awareness-raising and prevention efforts; Strengthen learning motivation; Review, consolidate, and practice skills related to child labor prevention.

Resources: Support staff; Student groups; and Additional resources for implementation and facilitation.

Expected Results: (1) 100% of group members attend all training sessions punctually and engage seriously; (2) 100% of group members understand the content of the activities; (3) 100% of group members actively participate, demonstrate initiative, express themselves confidently, and share openly with support staff and peers.

- Phase 4. Evaluation phase, end of activity

+ Performance Evaluation:

Specific activities: Conduct output survey; Conduct summary and evaluation of support content; Complete group closing minutes

Resources: Support staff, student groups, school representatives

Expected results: (1) 100% of participants complete the exit survey; (2) Final meeting conducted with full participation of all stakeholders; (3) Comprehensive evaluation conducted on: Achievement of goals; Progress made throughout the process; Quality of team interactions; Individual progress of team members; Key lessons learned from the activities.

+ Reduces members' dependence on the group, helping group members deal with emotions when the group ends:

Specific activities: Coordinate for members to participate in sharing feelings; Recall the achievements that the group has made as well as the difficulties that members have overcome; Recognize the progress of each group member and encourage and motivate the group members

Resources: Support staff, students

Expected results: (1) Members actively share their feelings and experiences at different stages: before, during, and after participating in the group; (2) Support staff provide timely motivation and encouragement to help members maintain a stable emotional state and effectively complete subsequent tasks.

+ Develop a plan to maintain and promote positive changes:

Specific activities: Discuss plans to maintain the group and replicate the group model in schools and communities; Develop a plan for future group activities; Hand over the group to the Youth Union and teachers who are also social workers to continue to maintain and develop the model.

Resources: Support staff, students, teachers who are part-time social workers, Youth Union staff.

Expected results: (1) 100% of group members actively participate in discussions and exchanges regarding the group maintenance plan; (2) 100% of members commit to contributing to the plans for spreading and replicating the model; (3) Youth Union officers and social work staff develop and implement plans to expand these activities across the school.

2.4. Discussion

In Vietnam, comprehensive and systematic research on social work and group social work in preventing child labor in schools remains very limited. This article contributes valuable data to the research on applying group social work methods to prevent child labor among secondary school students. To effectively implement the group social work process in raising awareness and enhancing child labor prevention skills, social workers and part-time social workers can organize groups with 12–15 members. These groups should operate under the direct supervision of the school board, the head of the professional group responsible for social work, and teachers involved in part-time social work activities at the school. The established group will encounter both advantages and challenges during the four-stage process of group social work. One key advantage is that the group consists of members from the same school, making it easier for them to interact and share ideas. Additionally, the group benefits from strong support and facilitation provided by the school board, staff, and teachers, particularly those who also serve as social

workers. However, several challenges may arise during the implementation of group activities. These include the limited knowledge and skills of support staff and part-time social workers, as well as insufficient support from families, local authorities, and communities. Furthermore, difficulties may occur in applying the model effectively in practice. Maintaining and expanding the group or club model after a period of operation can also present significant challenges. These factors underscore the importance of ongoing training, collaboration, and resource allocation to ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of group activities. With the promoting conditions and challenges in implementing the process of activities, the article suggests some necessary solutions to help improve the effectiveness of applying the process of group social work in preventing child labor for students:

Firstly, staff and teachers involved in social work activities in schools play a crucial role in educating students and preventing child labor. To enhance this role, schools should implement strategies to increase training opportunities, support professional development, and improve the knowledge and skills of staff in social work, group social work, and child labor prevention. These efforts will significantly contribute to improving the effectiveness of child labor prevention initiatives within schools.

Secondly, schools should enhance resource allocation to support group social work activities in preventing child labor. This includes incorporating child labor prevention activities into the school's annual development plan. Schools should also provide clear direction, assign tasks to relevant departments, and ensure support for staff, teachers, and part-time social workers. Additionally, strengthening collaboration with families, local authorities, child protection agencies, organizations, and businesses in the community is essential to effectively promote and sustain these activities.

Thirdly, in applying group social work methods to prevent child labor among students, support staff should also flexibly incorporate other social work approaches, such as individual social work and social work consultation. These methods can help students address issues related to health, psychology, learning, communication, and career orientation. By providing support in these areas, students are better equipped, more focused, and more actively engaged in group activities aimed at raising awareness and enhancing skills to prevent child labor.

Fourthly, schools should encourage and provide opportunities for staff and teachers who are also social workers to implement the model in practice. Additionally, schools need to establish a plan to sustain the model's operations and replicate its implementation. This approach should not only focus on raising awareness and enhancing skills for preventing child labor among students but also aim to address and support other potential issues that may arise within the school environment.

3. Conclusions

The above article has focused on exploring the application of the group social work process in supporting awareness-raising and skill enhancement for student groups. By applying this method, social workers and school social workers can help students actively engage in a group environment, develop their capacities, increase interactions, and complete both individual and group tasks through a structured four-stage process. The article provides important guidance for staff and teachers in designing and organizing group activities aimed at preventing child labor among secondary school students. However, the discussion primarily remains theoretical. Schools need to implement this method in practice to more accurately evaluate its effectiveness in preventing child labor. Additionally, the current focus is limited to raising awareness and enhancing skills to prevent child labor, without addressing other critical areas such as health, psychological support, academic development, and career orientation for students. To address

these gaps, the article offers solutions to improve the application of the group social work process, ultimately enhancing students' prevention capacities and reducing their risk of becoming child laborers.

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