

EVIDENCE CENTRE
TE POKAPŪ TAUNAKITANGA

SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCHOOLS

LITERATURE REVIEW

Examples of key strengths and challenges in the delivery of school-based social work support

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EVIDENCE CENTRE

TE POKAPŪ TAUNAKITANGA

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The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand's children, young people and their whānau.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to support research conducted during 2018/19 on the early intervention programme ‘Social Workers in Schools’ (SWiS) by the Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre. This report summarises examples from a time-limited scan of recent literature on school-based social work, which included sources from Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. The report uses limited Aotearoa New Zealand Māori literature and no indigenous literature from overseas was found.

In school-based social work, social workers work for a school and provide services to students and their families. Internationally, school-based social work has existed for over a century, and the school environment is increasingly seen as a valuable place to deliver social work. SWiS in Aotearoa New Zealand was first implemented in selected schools and kura from 1999 following a successful pilot (Belgrave et al., 2000), and has undergone expansions since. SWiS currently operates in most schools in low socio-economic areas and many Kura Kaupapa Māori, Kura-a-iwi, and other Māori-medium kura/schools.

The findings from the literature scan are divided into the following three sections: (1) enablers of good practice; (2) challenges to good practice; and (3) school-based social work in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The key findings that **enable good practice** were as follows:

- To enable good social work practices in a school-based environment, social workers need to develop relationships and partnerships with parents and families. Good relationships enable social workers to become advocates who mediate between the school and the home.
- Social workers also need to build relationships with their schools and the staff and teachers. They play a key role in working with the school in assessments, training, and school activities, all of which support student learning. They work best in a school multidisciplinary team, where, as a central node within the team, they can connect with their communities and make referrals to other services.
- Autonomy and flexibility allow social workers to deliver an effective practice, however there is also a call to promote the use of evidence-based practice and interventions. For instance, a social work framework called ‘Response to Intervention’ is proposed in key literature, which outlines a four-levelled approach of capacity-building, evidence-based interventions, prevention-focused, and data-driven decision making – designed to deliver a more preventative and socio-ecological approach.

There are also some key **challenges to good practice**, summarised as follows:

- School-based social work is sometimes seen as ‘under threat’ as a discipline and needs to establish itself as a unique profession. Social work in an educational context has been met with misunderstanding and been under-appreciated by schools. School-based social work sometimes struggles to create a ‘point-of-difference’ from other school professionals, such as psychologists, mental health providers, and counsellors.
- Internationally, there are calls for reformed and expanded school-based social work to keep up with increasing complexities in student needs, including the use of more evidence-based practice and systemic interventions with students, parents, schools, and communities. Going forward, school-based social work may require a ‘paradigm-shift’, according to the literature, to change the way it is delivered. A more ecological practice that moves away from a clinical-based approach that targets only student change is proposed.

- However, there are several challenges to implementing a more ecological and evidence-based practice. In some cases, social workers have to address crises and student issues outside of the normal social work practice, for example mental health challenges due to a lack of appropriate community-based support. Social workers are required to respond to the immediate needs of students, which affects their ability to apply a more ecological or macro-level practice.
- High case-loads and administrative burden challenge the social workers ability to focus on more ecological practices. Some social workers serve several schools, adding pressure to travel times, relationship-building, and building a sense of belonging within the school environment. In Aotearoa New Zealand, SWiS guidelines require social workers to serve school populations of between 400 and 700 students, with caseloads between 16 and 20 students. In the United States, ratios of one social worker to 1,300 students were found in one study. Further, social workers may spend as much as 30 per cent of their time on administrative tasks, according to another study.
- These issues are exacerbated by increasing complexity of the school populations, such as the prevalence of mental health and behavioural problems, as well as external pressures such as poverty, poor or unstable housing, unaddressed health needs, and discrimination. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori communities in particular face highly complex and long-term, sometimes intergenerational, challenges.
- To further complicate these issues, social workers can be made to feel like ‘guests’ by their host schools making it difficult for them to build effective relationships with school staff. School staff often misunderstand and do not appreciate the role of social workers and marginalise them, often leading to inter-professional tension and resistance. There is also confusion about and a lack of a common vision for the role of social work in schools, which may arise from the fact that education and social work come from two different epistemologies.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, school-based social work has some **unique differences and strengths**:

- SWiS is unique compared with overseas models of school-based social work. One of the key differences is that SWiS workers are employed by non-government organisations (NGOs) to work at schools rather than being employed directly by schools. Further, NGOs, including the five Māori iwi (tribal) NGOs originally contracted at the start of the SWiS programme, are contracted by central government. This contracting model means that school objectives are not the primary focus for SWiS and they find they can advocate for the child and family, which aids in developing trust and strong relationships. Another advantage is that the SWiS worker is supported by an NGO that is community-based and has access and connections to community members and services. Despite the advantages of the NGO model, some schools may prefer to employ their own social workers and sometimes resent having a social worker assigned to them.
- The literature scan uncovered limited indigenous and Māori literature on social-based social work and SWiS. However, there are good examples of kaupapa Māori research and sources on SWiS. A key finding is that the kaupapa Māori method of SWiS places strong emphasis on relationships and the SWiS worker’s obligations to their community. Further, being of Māori descent, understanding te ao Māori, and having genealogical ties to the community are important for SWiS workers to earn trust and break down any barriers between themselves and whānau. Māori SWiS workers apply the language (te reo Māori) and the ways (tikanga) of their iwi and communities. They have obligations and family connections to their schools, iwi, community and whānau, but also know how to remain objective and professional.

INTRODUCTION

Background

This report summarises examples from a literature scan of recent Aotearoa New Zealand and international research on school-based social work services. Internationally, social work support has been a feature of the education landscape for over a century, and schools are increasingly recognised as a valuable site for delivering these services. In an Aotearoa New Zealand context, the Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) initiative has been offered in selected schools and kura since 1999, following a successful pilot and subsequent national expansion (Belgrave et al., 2000; Belgrave et al., 2002).

The current report supports SWiS research (2018-2019) undertaken by Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre. While SWiS in Aotearoa New Zealand has developed a solid research base since its establishment, there are outstanding questions around its current relevance and the benefits of participation for tamariki and whānau. Further, on-going interest in examining SWiS reflects changes in the Oranga Tamariki operating model, and a renewed focus on delivering early intervention services to tamariki and whānau.

This report is one of a three research activities within the current Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre SWiS research project. The other two research activities are case studies in Kura Kaupapa Māori/Kura-a-iwi and case studies in English Medium schools, using in-depth qualitative interviewing. The results of the three research activities are synthesised into a single report that applies a He Awa Whiria or Braided Rivers approach. This approach, based on Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu) publication 'Bridging Cultural Perspectives' (Arago-Kemp & Hong, 2018)¹, allows kaupapa Māori research and non-Māori research or 'other knowledge' research to be combined while preserving the integrity of both research methods.

The research activities provide insights from several case studies involving tamariki, whānau, social workers, NGO providers and school leaders. The specific focus of this current report is to identify key success principles and challenges from the literature to the delivery of school-based social work support, internationally and within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Methodology and limitations

The literature scan is a time and resource limited project aimed to better understand school-based social work and its practice and application, both overseas and in Aotearoa New Zealand. The following methods and limitations apply:

- The literature sources include journal articles, government reports, academic theses, grey literature, and magazine articles, where full-text articles were publicly available for downloading.
- The international literature is largely based on North America and does not include any overseas indigenous literature.

¹ <https://thehub.sia.govt.nz/resources/bridging-cultural-perspectives/>

- The literature scan excluded examples of evaluations and research into effectiveness and impact of school-based social work.
- The report integrates Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas findings where they are relevant to both situations. A section is written to the Aotearoa New Zealand literature and includes literature that relates to specific local adaptations and indigenous literature.
- Because the literature scan is time-limited, it is not exhaustive and may not cover all relevant findings. In particular, specific findings from past evaluations in Aotearoa New Zealand are not comprehensively summarised but are included in broad findings where relevant.

ENABLERS OF GOOD PRACTICE

Partnerships are central to the delivery of effective school-based social work

Working in partnership with parents and families, and building relationships, is essential for effective practice

Partnerships and relationship-building are key components of the school-based social work model. International and local literature highlights the importance of social workers engaging with parents and other family members, and establishing positive and supportive relationships (Teasley, 2012; Beddoe and de Haan, 2018; Beddoe, 2017; Beddoe, de Haan, and Joy, 2018). Effective relationship-building is facilitated by time, being visible and accessible within the school environment, and non-judgmental engagement (Belgrave et al., 2000; Davidson, 2007; Beddoe, 2017; Wilson et al., 2018). Through building relationships, social workers play an important role facilitating partnerships between schools and parents, and encouraging parental involvement in the school environment and investment in their child's learning (Corbin, 2005; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Davidson, 2007). In this sense, school-based social workers act as advocates, who mediate between the worlds of school and home (Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Belgrave et al., 2000; Belgrave et al., 2002).

Partnerships with teachers and schools are also key enablers for effective practice

Along with engaging with parents and families, it is also essential for social workers to build effective partnerships with teachers, and other professionals within the school environment. Social workers can play a key role supporting teachers to meet the learning and other needs of students, and undertaking collaborative exercises, such as providing training, or completing joint assessment and planning (Frey and Dupper, 2005; Kelly et al., 2016; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Beddoe, 2017). The literature suggests this partnership-based approach – encompassing collaboration, communication, and cooperation – is effective, and that good relationships between school staff and social workers are a key facilitator (Teasley, 2012; Belgrave et al., 2002; Beddoe, 2017; Hollis-English and Selby, 2015). If social workers are not successful at building these relationships, the quality and effectiveness of the model is undermined (Davidson, 2007; Belgrave et al., 2002; Teasley, 2012).

The literature suggests that alignment between school-based social workers' activities and school priorities is another enabler for partnership-based practice. For example, Garrett (2006) highlights the importance of social workers' ability to "demonstrate their relevance" (Garrett, 2006: p. 115) by understanding a schools' specific mission, and prioritising goals and activities that reflect these values. Knowing how schools and the broader education system operate, and understanding strategic priorities, allows social workers to build partnerships and provide more effective support (Beddoe, 2017; Beddoe, de Haan and Joy, 2018).

Participating in multi-disciplinary teams and making referrals to other services are key aspects of the school-based social worker role

School-based social workers play a key role as a member, and central node, within multi-disciplinary teams. The model of school-based social work relies extensively on access to a range of health, social, and education services, and social workers play an essential integration role – making referrals and coordinating services around the student, family or community (Belgrave et al., 2002; Allen-Meares and Montgomery, 2014; Swiefach, 2016; Beddoe, 2017; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001). This partnership model, supported by positive inter-professional relationships, is associated with

improved planning and decision-making, better access to needed services, and more opportunities for applying effective interventions that can meet identified needs (Sweifach, 2016; Beddoe, 2017; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Belgrave et al., 2002).

Some specific practice approaches may be associated with effective support

Autonomy and flexibility are enablers of effective practice

Local literature from Aotearoa New Zealand and international literature highlights the value of school-based social workers being autonomous, and having a flexible and creative approach. For example, research by Belgrave et al. (2000; 2002) identifies flexibility as one of the major strengths of the SWiS model, seeing this approach as a key enabler for the use of discretion, and ability to take a non-prescriptive approach when working with families. Belgrave et al. (2000) also notes a non-prescriptive approach is central to developing culturally appropriate practices, which reflect local communities. Internationally, comments around the importance of discretion are reflected by Agresta (2006), who notes school-based social workers should be afforded “the greatest possible amount of professional autonomy...” (Agresta, 2006: p. 51).

The *Response to Intervention* framework is one potentially effective practice approach

North American literature highlights the potential benefits of school-based social workers adopting the *Response to Intervention* framework (see Berzin and O’Connor, 2010; Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Kelly, Frey, and Anderson-Butcher, 2010). *Response to Intervention* is the practice of providing research-based instruction and intervention that matches students’ needs (Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010). The approach is based on four overarching principles (Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010):

1. *Capacity-building*: providing direct services to children, and also engaging in activities that grow the capacity of school staff and parents to provide support.
2. *Evidence-based*: implementing high-quality, empirically supported interventions (or evidence-based practices) with fidelity.
3. *Prevention-focused*: delivering support within a three-tiered framework, which includes school-wide interventions, targeted group interventions for unresponsive students, and subsequent intensive interventions for those individuals who still require support.
4. *Data-driven*: using data at the system-level and child-level to support decision-making, and assess what level of support students require.

This framework is seen as an opportunity to better target students who require support, and ensure the interventions provided can effectively meet their needs (Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010). *Response to Intervention* is also a means of embedding a more preventative approach, and is one potential method for operationalising the ecological practice model (Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2016).

School-based social workers can apply an evidence-based approach to their practice and to promote the use of effective interventions

In addition to the *Response to Intervention* framework discussed, international literature highlights the importance of school-based social workers applying an evidence-based approach. The use of evidence-based practice is seen as a key enabler for providing effective interventions, and ultimately, improving outcomes for students (Phillippo and Blosser, 2013; Berzin and O’Connor, 2010). As Garrett (2006) notes, social workers’ use of an evidence-based practice also reflects “an ethical mandate to use methods known to be effective, to monitor the outcomes of their practice to ensure

that clients are receiving appropriate services, and to report those findings accurately.” (Garrett, 2006: p. 115). However, while the utility of this approach is recognised, research also acknowledges implementation ‘on-the-ground’ has been limited, and further work to embed evidence-based practice is required (Berzin and O’Connor, 2010; Bye et al., 2009; Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010; Kelly, Frey and Anderson-Butcher, 2010; Teasley, 2012).

CHALLENGES TO GOOD PRACTICE

The role and value of school-based social work services is contested

School-based social work is sometimes characterised as a discipline under threat

While school-based social work has sought to establish itself as a unique profession in past decades, international literature suggests this task is still ongoing. Compared to other school-based non-teaching professionals, the presence of social workers within an educational context is characterised as tenuous, vulnerable to under-appreciation, and misunderstanding (Altshuler and Webb, 2009; Frey et al., 2012; Garrett, 2006; Kelly et al., 2016). The literature highlights a need to establish and defend a professional jurisdiction, or 'turf', for school-based social workers, and advance the profession's legitimacy (Altshuler and Webb, 2009; Frey et al., 2012; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Lee, 2012; Phillippo and Blosser, 2013).

One useful lens for considering these challenges is presented by Phillippo and Blosser (2013), who discuss the nature of school-based social work as an incomplete 'interstitial practice'. The term 'interstitial' comes from 'Interstitial Emergence Theory' (Morrin, 2009. As cited in Phillippo and Blosser, 2013), where Morrin describes school-base social work as an interstice or very small intervening space created by the intersection between education and social work. Phillippo and Blosser (2013) argue that while school-based social work is "more than simply social work in a 'non-social work setting'" (p. 19), it is yet to establish a legitimate independent identity or professional ideology.

In an Aotearoa New Zealand context, Beddoe (2017) presents another useful conceptual frame, describing school-based social work as a discipline lacking professional capital. Beddoe (2017) references the Bourdieusian² concept of "social distinction based in a territory of social practice" (Beddoe, 2010, as cited in Beddoe, 2017, p. 14) as an indicator of professional capital. Key characteristics of professional capital include a clear and well understood knowledge base, a differentiated territory of practice, and public visibility for a distinctive contribution to social well-being (Beddoe, 2017). Beddoe (2017) notes that achievement of these factors has been "problematic" (p. 15) for school-based social work, which retains the status of "pretentious challenger" (p. 5).

Efforts to promote school-based social work, and "broaden the profession's influence and attain greater distinction" (Sweifach, 2016: p. 12) may be supported by advocacy and education. The literature highlights the importance of school-based social workers clearly identifying and communicating their distinct value, and contribution to student learning outcomes (Bye et al., 2009; Dupper et al., 2014; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Garrett, 2006; Kelly et al., 2016; Lee, 2012). Demonstrating the benefits of school-based social workers is seen as central to their on-going professional survival (Frey and Dupper, 2005; Frey et al., 2012; Bye et al., 2009), and efforts to "reignite [their] status" (Sweifach, 2016: p. 12).

Other factors that may enhance the value and legitimacy of school-based social work include clearly defined role expectations and responsibilities, standardised certification and education

² Based on the social philosophy of Pierre Bourdieu, which, in summary was opposed to the 'intellectual tradition' and promoted 'bodily know-how' and competence practices. Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

requirements, creating new roles and workforce opportunities, increased funding, and on-going evaluation (Altshuler and Webb, 2009; Sweifach, 2016; Frey et al., 2012; Garrett, 2006; Kelly et al., 2016). Further discussion relating to several of these factors is presented later in this report.

The 'point of difference' for school-based social workers may not be clearly articulated

Along with general concerns around the value of school-based social workers, the literature suggests the 'point of difference' for this role is sometimes unclear. School-based social workers practice alongside a number of other non-teaching professionals, including psychologists, mental health providers, and counsellors. These professionals often perform similar roles, and it can be difficult to distinguish the unique disciplinary focus and specialised contribution of school-based social workers (Agresta, 2006; Dupper et al., 2014; Frey and Dupper, 2005).

Literature suggests the focus of school-based social work should broaden

A recent focus of the school-based social work literature is a call for an expanded scope of practice, encompassing systemic interventions with students, parents, schools, and communities. Changes in the educational landscape and policy, the increased complexity of student needs, growing calls for accountability and evidence-based practice, research and theory development in this area, and the challenges to legitimacy previously discussed, have changed the context in which school-based social workers practice (Berzin and O'Connor, 2010; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Frey et al., 2012; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Phillippo and Blosser, 2013). For effective school-based social work practice in the 21st century, these trends necessitate a "paradigm shift" (Berzin and O'Connor, 2010: p. 239) in how this support is delivered.

Efforts to reform school-based social work commonly advocate for embedding an ecological model. This systems approach acknowledges that effective practice with students should recognise the influence of their surrounding context and intervene across multiple levels (Allen-Meares and Montgomery, 2014; Berzin and O'Connor, 2010; Corbin, 2005; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010; Lee, 2012). Rather than viewing student academic, behavioural or emotional challenges as individual issues, an ecological lens acknowledges the critical influence of factors at a micro, meso, and macro level, and the need for interventions that span this continuum (Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Allen-Meares and Montgomery, 2014; Berzin and O'Connor, 2010; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Corbin, 2005).

Frey and Dupper's (2005) 'clinical quadrant' is one useful framework for understanding this model. This framework sees school-based social workers practicing across four levels (Frey and Dupper, 2005):

1. interventions involving individuals, small groups or families, which target environmental change
2. interventions involving large groups or an entire system, which target systemic change
3. interventions involving individuals, small groups or families, which target student change
4. interventions involving large groups or an entire system, which target student change.

Traditional school-based social work mainly operates in quadrant three, providing clinical-type interventions that largely target students. In contrast, an ecological model of practice across these quadrants would involve a range of different activities, including efforts to change school culture, school-wide interventions, prevention-orientated activities, community engagement, committee work and other leadership roles, advocating for policy change, offering colleagues clinical or peer supervision, and collaboration with parents, teachers and school administrators (Frey and Dupper, 2005; Berzin and O'Connor, 2010; Allen-Meares and Montgomery, 2014).

While recent literature calls for an expansion in the focus of school-based social work, this discourse is not altogether new. For example, seminal 1990's research challenged social workers to increase their participation in school-level decision-making (see Allen-Meares, 1994. As cited in Corbin, 2005), and the need for change has been debated for at least 40 years (Kelly, Frey and Anderson-Butcher, 2010). Historical analyses presented by Phillippo and Blosser (2013) and Corbin (2005) also suggest recent reform efforts represent an attempt to reclaim school-based social work's original mission, rather than adopt innovation. For example, Corbin describes a need for school-based social work "to return to its original orientation of supporting the mutual adaptation of the student and the school, not the later and more dominant orientation of supporting the adjustment of the student to the school" (Corbin 2005: p. 246).

Despite calls for change, evidence of school-based social workers practicing across multiple levels is limited

Despite theoretical developments advocating for an ecological approach, there is limited evidence of school-based social workers practical application of this model. International literature suggests school-based social workers continue to take a case management approach, and clinical interventions with individuals remains the dominant practice mode (Phillippo and Blosser, 2013; Kelly et al., 2016; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Corbin, 2005; Dupper et al., 2014). This limited progress is despite research indicating social workers are willing to embrace the ecological model, and prefer opportunities to take a more systemic or community-development orientation (Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Lee, 2012; Kelly et al. 2016; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010). This "persistent disconnect" (Kelly, Frey and Anderson-Butcher, 2010: p. 195) suggests there are barriers to implementing an ecological approach, some of which are discussed throughout the following sections of this report.

School-based social workers may prioritise narrowly focused practice modes

School-based social workers predominately provide clinical support to individuals

As discussed, despite theoretical evidence indicating an ecological approach is more effective, school-based social workers predominately provide support to students within the school environment. Research suggests school-based social workers allocate most of their professional time to working directly with students, or undertaking other individually-focused case management activities (Agresta, 2006; Bye et al., 2009; Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Kelly, Frey and Anderson-Butcher, 2010; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001). For example, a survey conducted by Dupper et al. (2014), shows school-based social workers undertake individually-focused tasks, including assessment and student counselling, more often than environmentally-focused activities, such as implementing school-wide prevention strategies or consulting with teachers and parents. The survey was of $n=75$ social workers from schools across Tennessee, United States in 2011.

School-based social work is focused on special education, mental health and crisis intervention

A focus on providing special education services and mental health interventions may be another barrier to adopting the ecological approach. Traditionally, school-based social workers have been responsible for providing special education services to students, and in North America, a majority of positions were historically funded through special education programmes (Frey and Dupper, 2005; Bye et al., 2009). Further, school-based social workers often provide counselling and therapeutic support to students with mental health challenges, who are unable to access other community-based support (Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Sweifach, 2016). Framing social workers as responsible for

providing this specialist support limits their capacity to practice in a more environmentally-focused way.

Some literature also highlights the role of crisis intervention as a barrier to implementing the ecological approach. School-based social workers must be responsive to the immediate needs of students, and often undertaken crisis intervention work (Frey and Dupper, 2005; Davidson, 2007). The need to provide reactive services is prioritised over less urgent activities, and these competing demands reduce opportunities to undertake macro or environmentally-focused practice (Lee, 2012; Frey and Dupper, 2005).

Resourcing and case-loads are key challenges for school-based social work

School-based social workers often provide support to a large number of schools, have very high student case-loads, and face an administrative burden

Rather than being situated in one school, social workers often service a large area encompassing several institutions. Research suggests serving a large number of schools may be associated with a reduced focus on macro-level practices, due to competing challenges for social workers' time (Dupper et al., 2014). A large school catchment also creates a number of other practice challenges, including coping with long travel times, difficulties building relationships and a sense of belonging within the school environment, less frequent contact with students and others requiring support, variable levels of support from schools, and the need to adapt to different institutional cultures (Lee, 2012; Beddoe and de Haan, 2018; Beddoe, 2017; Beddoe, de Haan and Joy, 2018; Belgrave et al., 2000; Belgrave et al., 2002; Davidson, 2007).

As an associated challenge, the ratio of students to school-based social workers is usually very high. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the intended ratio of social worker full-time equivalents (FTE) to student school population is between 1:400 and 1:700, with active case-loads at any one time being around 16 and no more than 20 as suggested by the Oranga Tamariki service guidelines (Oranga Tamariki, 2018). Compared to the United States, the social worker to school student-size ratio maybe more favourable in Aotearoa New Zealand, with one report estimating the United States ratio as 1:1,300 (Mandlawitz, 2000. As cited in Agresta, 2006). These high ratios are commonly cited as a key barrier to implementing an ecological approach, and are associated with the discrepancy between the actual and ideal time school-based social workers spend undertaking systemic activities (Corbin, 2005; Dupper et al., 2014; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Kelly, Frey, et al., 2010; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010). High case-loads detract social workers from important tasks, particularly when a focus on crisis intervention is required, and reduce the intensity of support provided (Frey and Dupper, 2005; Lee 2012; Teasley. 2012; Beddoe, de Haan and Joy, 2018; Davidson, 2007).

Finally, the need to undertake a range of administrative tasks is also identified as a practice challenge for school-based social workers. Survey analysis undertaken by Kelly, Berzin, et al. (2010) shows school-based social workers spend 30 percent of their time on administrative tasks, and the burden created by this work limits their capacity to undertake other important tasks, including prevention-orientated and systemic activities. This analysis was based on the United States National School Social Work Survey (2008) of $n=1,639$ social workers. Reducing this administrative burden may be one strategy for broadening the focus of social-based social work (Corbin, 2005; Lee, 2012).

These challenges are exacerbated by the increasing complexity of the school population

Research suggests resource and caseload challenges may be exacerbated by new trends in the complexities faced by students. For instance, international literature highlights the increased

prevalence of child mental health and behavioural problems, and growing concerns around school violence and bullying issues (Lee, 2012; Kelly et al., 2016; Berzin and O'Connor, 2010). Further, the complexity of underlying social issues has also grown, with literature citing challenges relating to poverty, housing, unaddressed health needs, racism and discrimination (Allen-Meares and Montgomery, 2014; Berzin and O'Connor, 2010; Frey et al., 2012; Lee, 2012). Local research also suggests whānau who are referred to SWiS often face highly complex, long-term, and intergenerational challenges, sometimes characterised as 'extreme' (Belgrave et al., 2000; Belgrave et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2018). The rising number of students experiencing complex risks at an individual, school, family and community level is a new challenge for school-based social work (Frey et al., 2012; Berzin and O'Connor, 2010).

Issues relating to resourcing, case-loads and complexity may lead to stress and high staff turnover

Practitioner burnout, and associated staff turnover, is a substantial problem for the social work profession, which also extends to those practicing within a school environment (Jayaratne and Chess, 1986 cited in Agresta, 2006). In Aotearoa New Zealand, evaluations undertaken by Belgrave (2000; 2002) and Davidson (2007) have identified high turnover levels, which are associated with caseload challenges, isolation and limited support, stress managing multiple stakeholder relationships across schools, and staff burnout. High turnover rates may also reflect low job satisfaction, stemming from professional role discrepancy, and school-based social workers' limited ability to apply an ecological practice model (Agresta, 2006).

Social workers are not always welcomed, or seen as a valuable addition to the school environment

School-based social workers are positioned as 'guests' practicing within the dominant host setting of a school

As noted, school-based social workers operate in a space where their practice of social work intersects with a predominant mode of practice of education and learning. In the literature, this context is often conceptualised by describing social workers as 'guests' practicing within a 'host setting', where education is the dominant focus (Corbin, 2005; Lee, 2012; Phillippo and Blosser, 2013; Sweifach, 2016, Teasley, 2012). This contested status limits social workers' ability to establish a formal mandate and power base, and leads to tensions when their practice is not prioritised (Altshuler and Webb, 2009; Lee, 2012, Sweifach, 2016; Teasley, 2012). A guest status may also lead to social workers suppressing their expertise, which limits their potential and may be associated with the challenges to legitimacy previously discussed (Lee, 2012; Corbin, 2005).

Findings around the existence and implications of a 'guest status' for school-based social workers are also present in Aotearoa New Zealand literature. For example, research by Beddoe (2017) suggests there are tensions inherent to navigating the dual worlds of education and social work within the SWiS model, with practitioners describing the role as "going into a workplace that was not a social work space" (Beddoe, 2017: p. 8). SWiS staff report tensions managing differing motivations and aims, and acknowledge the challenging position of social workers in the school setting (Beddoe and de Haan, 2018; Beddoe, 2017).

Social workers can have strained relationships with other professionals, and be marginalised within the school environment

While engagement between social workers and others in the school environment is often mutually respectful, this relationship can also be strained. Some literature highlights examples of hostility

between social-based practitioners and other staff, and a poor reception to the presence and contribution of social workers (Teasley, 2012; Lee, 2012). This tension can lead to social workers feeling marginalised and unwelcome (Teasley, 2012). Instances of relationship challenges between school-based social workers and other professionals are also noted in local literature. For example, research suggests SWiS workers can experience inter-professional tension, resistance and attitude from teachers or a lack of appreciation for their work, and power dynamics that act as a barrier to effective practice (Beddoe, 2017; Beddoe, de Haan, and Joy, 2018; Belgrave et al., 2000).

Other school-based professionals may have incorrect perceptions of social workers' role, which can be ambiguous

Social workers and other professionals do not share a common vision regarding their role within schools. International and local literature suggests there is confusion about what school-based social workers actually do, and misunderstanding of their expected contribution (Beddoe, 2017; Beddoe, de Haan and Joy, 2018; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Belgrave et al., 2002; Davidson, 2007; Bye et al., 2009; Garrett, 2006; Kelly et al., 2016). These divergent perspectives are associated with role ambiguity, the variety of tasks school-based social workers perform, and the fact the approach spans two different epistemologies (Davidson, 2007; Belgrave et al., 2000; Beddoe, de Haan, and Joy, 2008; Altshuler and Webb, 2009). Inconsistent perceptions also have broader implications, in that they contribute to a lack of legitimacy, and are one potential driver for the dominance of individual-level practice, as this approach reflects the expectations of others within the school environment (Bye et al., 2009; Frey and Dupper, 2005; Frey et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2016; Lee, 2012; Hollis-English and Selby, 2015).

SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORK IN AOTEAORA NEW ZEALAND

The SWiS model of employing social workers through NGO providers is unique internationally, and has some associated strengths and challenges

There are a number of benefits associated with the SWiS employment model

In contrast to the North American model, SWiS social workers are employed non-government social service providers (NGO providers) who are contracted by central government to serve specific schools, rather than employed directly by the schools. This employment model was selected during the SWiS pilot phase, and reflects a decision to view schools as the “site for social work intervention” (Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001: p. 34), rather than implement an approach where social workers serve schools directly. Under this model, the ‘client’ for SWiS is the child within their whānau. While social workers have a responsibility to improve education outcomes and support teachers, principals, and other service providers, these ‘school objectives’ are not their primary focus (Belgrave et al., 2000; Beddoe, de Haan and Joy, 2018).

The SWiS social worker’s independence from the school is one of the key benefits associated with the NGO employment model. While still involved within the school environment, social workers are able to operate as independent advocates for children and whānau (Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Belgrave et al., 2000; Belgrave et al., 2002; Davidson, 2007). Local research suggests whānau value access to an independent school-based ‘adult’, who is able to mediate conflict and communication between themselves and schools (Davidson, 2007; Beddoe, de Haan and Joy, 2018; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Belgrave et al., 2000). This model would be undermined if social workers were directly employed by schools. Social worker independence and the voluntary nature of the SWiS service is also associated with developing trust and strong relationships with whānau, which is a key enabler for effective practice (Davidson, 2007; Belgrave et al., 2002; Belgrave et al., 2000; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001).

The NGO employment model is also intended to allow greater alignment between SWiS and local communities. This contracting model is seen as a means of enabling communities to deliver locally responsive services, which meet the needs of children and whānau within their area (Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001). Because SWiS social workers are local community members, they also have greater knowledge of what services and supports are available to whānau, can tailor their practice to reflect local conditions, and are able to facilitate stronger connections between communities and schools (Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Belgrave et al., 2000; Belgrave et al., 2002).

The NGO employment model may contribute to some schools questioning the ‘intrusion’ of social workers within ‘their’ environment

While the NGO employment model has a number of benefits, research suggest some schools may prefer to directly employ social workers, and there are tensions inherent to the SWiS approach (Belgrave et al., 2002; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Hollis-English and Selby, 2015). For example, school may be territorial and suspicious of external staff, and seek to limit social workers’ ability to practice within ‘their’ environment (Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001; Belgrave et al., 2000). Because of their

'guest' status, social workers can be treated with suspicion, and experience power dynamics, where schools are protective of their 'turf' (Beddoe, 2017; Beddoe, de Haan and Joy, 2018; Belgrave and Dobbs, 2001). Further, some schools may perceive SWiS social workers as 'coming into' their environment and hold a "belief that social issues should be dealt with within the school's whānau environment rather than by referral to an external agency." (Belgrave et al., 2000: p. 86).

Some schools may feel their involvement with SWiS is not voluntary, and resent the implication they need support

Resistance to the presence of social workers may be exacerbated by the imposition of this role within the school environment. For example, Beddoe (2017) notes that when SWiS was first expanded, schools were not given the opportunity to opt-in to the programme, and were instead instructed to "take them [school-based social workers] on" (Beddoe, 2017: p. 10). Further, some schools may resist SWiS because they want to be seen as 'successful' and resent the implication that their community is experiencing challenges, and needs support (Beddoe and de Haan, 2018; Beddoe, 2017).

Findings from key Aotearoa New Zealand indigenous literature

While there were only a limited number of indigenous studies uncovered by the literature scan, and only from Aotearoa New Zealand, a small amount of relevant information was identified, such as examples of kaupapa Māori research and sources discussing effective practice with tamariki Māori and whānau. Some of the key findings from a series of three books on Māori school social work by authors Rachel Selby, Awhina Hollis-English, and Hayley Bell are summarised below.³

Indigenous social workers balance a dual role as community members and SWiS workers

The Aotearoa New Zealand model of NGO employment is intended to promote local community responsiveness, and this approach has enhanced importance and meaning for Māori SWiS workers. The indigenous Māori model of school-based social work is more embedded in the community and schools than the standard model or overseas mainstream models. The five iwi-based NGO employers contracted by government (the Ministry of Social Development) in the original expansion to provide SWiS in their rural and semi-rural Māori communities ensured that the services delivered were based on traditional Māori values and beliefs and were governed by iwi family members and representatives (English, Selby, and Bell, 2011).

The relationship between SWiS worker and the principal in iwi-based schools needs to be strong and high in trust (Hollis-English and Selby, 2015). Selby, English, and Bell (2011) note that many Māori SWiS are recognised as tribal workers, who have genealogical ties to the community in which they are employed. Because of this, their employment as a social worker cannot be separated from their wider obligations to whānau, hapū and iwi. Māori SWiS workers practicing within their own community have a vested interest through kinship relationships, which drives a commitment to their work, and to meeting obligations of accountability (Selby, English and Bell, 2011; Hollis-English and Selby, 2015).

Māori SWiS workers often have genealogical ties to communities and extensive knowledge of the whānau they work with built up over many generations. They are able to leverage strong local support including extensive personal and professional networks (Hollis-English and Selby, 2015;

³ The three books by authors, Rachel Selby, Awhina Hollis-English, and Hayley Bell are 'Working with whānau: Māori social work in schools' (2011), 'Social workers in schools: A New Zealand Māori experience' (2011), and 'Working with Whānau: Rural Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand' (2015).

Selby, Hollis-English, and Bell, 2011). These connections and networks are even stronger in Māori communities from rural areas (Hollis-English and Selby, 2015; Selby, Hollis-English, and Bell, 2011).

However, Māori SWiS workers' strong community connections, networks, and genealogical and family/whānau ties also require a complex balancing act between the professional and personal, where unavoidably boundaries are crossed. SWiS workers, especially in rural and Maori communities must be highly skilled to keep the 'professional' and 'personal' apart. Here, rural SWiS workers need good supervision to help them meet their responsibilities and they need to be supervised by people who understand the pressures on them in their communities (Hollis-English and Selby, 2015). Nevertheless, Māori SWiS workers are skilled at not allowing close relationships to "prevent professional decision making" (English, Selby, and Bell, 2011, p. 38).

Being of Māori descent and using practice models drawn from te ao Māori supports SWiS workers to build relationships and support whānau

Local research highlights the importance of shared Māori descent as a key facilitator for developing deep connections, and the central role of te ao Māori within the work of SWiS. For example, Selby, English, and Bell (2011) describe a shared spirituality and life force innate to being Māori, which supports SWiS in their work. These authors also recognise the importance of using appropriate Māori customs and protocols when engaging with whānau and cite the central role of te reo Māori as an enabler of quick rapport, which supports the ability to break down barriers between whānau and social workers (Selby, English, and Bell, 2011).

Many Māori SWiS workers have a lot of experience in their communities, often in social-work related professions. After their formal education, many 'return home' to their communities where they have intergenerational connections to practice social work. Many continue their education with Māori education institutions, the largest being 'Te Wānanga o Aotearoa' (English, Selby, and Bell, 2011) and as a result, they bring a unique way of working that combines language (te reo Māori), genealogy, the 'way' (tikanga) of the iwi and community, and spirituality (wairua) – aspects of Māori communities that are indistinct and inseparable (English, Selby, and Bell, 2011).

It is very important for SWiS workers to know and understand these aspects in order to establish the necessary relationships with families, schools, and community to be able to do their work. SWiS is a voluntary service but Māori families expect relationships and trust to be established first (English, Selby, and Bell, 2011) and SWiS workers have to earn this trust before they can begin working with their children. Being able to speak te reo Māori is more than just about language and communication; there is a spiritual dimension too. SWiS workers who can speak te reo Māori and understand the way or 'tikanga' of the iwi and community will make deeper connections than the more typical social worker (English, Selby, and Bell, 2011).

During the period of relationship building, SWiS workers take the time to understand current family issues as well as their dreams and aspirations. Māori SWiS workers focus on building up and increasing a person's and family's status or mana – mana is described as authority and status. SWiS workers are aware that they can be viewed as being in a position of 'power' over a family, so 'mana building', showing respect, and using the 'way' or tikanga of the community is very important in Māori communities. Māori SWiS workers also work beyond the school social worker role, and are connected to the community and work with those other connections. For instance, SWiS workers who work for iwi agencies are often members of large social service teams and are able to connect with other agencies and other services. This is often very important in Māori communities as many Māori families have lost faith in many government agencies that also provide social services, and SWiS workers often advocate for the families with the other agencies (English, Selby, and Bell, 2011).

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TE POKAPŪ TAUNAKITANGA
