

# Exploring the role of children's social workers-Take B Children's Service Station in City A as an example

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**Abstract:** Children are a special stage of life development, and the goodness of children's social workers affects the lifelong development of the clients, and one of the key factors is the role orientation of social workers. Taking B Children's Service Station as an example, through interviews with four social workers, three volunteers and three parents, the role connotation of different children's social workers and their role dilemmas were analyzed, and the significance and value of the diverse role positioning of children's social workers were pointed out. Ultimately, on the premise that the specificity of different social work roles should be understood, it is proposed that children's social workers should reasonably carry out role play and develop a sound career path on this basis.

## 1. Introduction

In the development of children's social work practice, although the number of talents of children's social workers has increased to a certain extent, there is still room for improvement in the level of specialization, which is manifested by the lack of specific policy support, lack of standardized system construction, and lack of standardized career pathways<sup>[1]</sup>. On the other hand, with the development of society, children's needs have become diversified<sup>[2]</sup>.

This study takes the B Children's Service Station as an example, which is a comprehensive service station for children jointly established by A Social Work Agency, Xinhe Road Street, Geological Community and Huazhong Road Third Primary School<sup>[3-5]</sup>. This children's service station usually has a station manager and a full-time staff, while the service targets are children aged 6-15. About twenty children are recruited for each group work, while residents in the community, party members and cadres, teachers of Huazhong Third Primary School, social and university student volunteer teams all participate in the service<sup>[6]</sup>.

The core of the research in this paper is social workers, and the focus of the research is the role played by social workers in it<sup>[7,8]</sup>. In order to analyze the role of social workers from different perspectives, the author first participated in a winter vacation group activity as a "volunteer" to obtain some field observation data. At the same time, four social workers, three volunteers, and three parents were selected as the interviewees to conduct in-depth interviews to explore the direction of the problem<sup>[9-11]</sup>.

## 2. The role of children's social workers connotation

### 2.1 Change agent system

One of them is the site operator. Social workers need to ensure the number of children's stations object and service hours, so full-time social workers need to be responsible for the daily operation of the stations, including counting station materials, participating in check-in management and record the daily workbook, which are trivial and specific tasks. Moreover, the social worker has to repeat these tasks from the beginning of the operation of the children's station.

Secondly, they are the activity controllers. The social workers of the children's station not only plan the activities of the station, but also control the whole process of pre-preparation, mid-term practice, and post-management. In the course of the activities, not only do we have to coordinate different resources and subjects, but we also have to ensure the physical and mental safety of the children, and plan for possible accidents to minimize the risk. In addition, in order to close the project successfully, the social worker must manage the effectiveness of the service and the funding.

#### Case 1

Children's Services staff brought the children to the park for a spring garden party. The children walk around the park, play interactive games and complete team tasks. During this process, the social worker needs to control the activities and make sure they meet expectations. Social workers are also needed to keep the children safe and guide their behavior.

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## 2.2 Client system

One of them is the caregiver of life and the emotional companion. In the interviews with parents, it can be found that social workers pay more attention to children's mental health and can give more professional care when parents and grandparents do not have time or are unable to take care of their children. In the context of the low level of public children's services, families with low economic levels are unable to obtain the demand for more professional child care from the market<sup>[2]</sup> and this role can compensate for the needs of some families.

It manifests itself in the following three ways: first, helping children with their in-class assignments together with volunteers. Social workers, influenced by their values, have a more equal relationship with children and are more actively concerned about their development. Secondly, they arrange children's after-school time and lead them to learn diversified knowledge. In this process, not only can make up for the lack of parental companionship with children, but also help children increase their life skills. Third, they can communicate with children about their problems in life and learning, channel their emotions, and provide proper guidance for their behavior and values.

### Case 2

Ms. Li, married with two children, had a serious marital crisis a few years ago. The staff of the social work agency accompanied her throughout the submission process until Li got out of her marital trouble. Later, the lady's two children also became members of the children's station. The social worker played the role of a discoverer of potential clients and successfully converted the clients into available resources, while helping the client to repair her social support system and provide emotional companionship and academic counseling for her children.

## 2.3 Target system

For school-aged children, school social work, children's social work, and youth social work are not distinct, but there are significant intersections<sup>[3]</sup>. The people in these systems also affect the achievement of service goals to some extent. By changing their behaviors and attitudes, social workers can also play a role in helping children. For schools, there are two paths of action for social workers at B Children's Station: first, social workers go to the schools to conduct activities for the children, actively communicate with the teachers, and also increase the cooperation of peer groups to help children adapt to their environment. The second is to invite teachers from the school to teach and invite party teachers to act as volunteers to tutor the children's homework. In the interaction, the school and the children's station establish a good partnership and the social workers and teachers share timely information to help children in distress. For the community, the social workers invite community representatives, including members of the neighborhood committee, community management grid members, representatives of owners- members, and party members of the community to participate in various children-themed activities, ask their opinions, and gain their

support. For families, Children's Station will communicate with the children's parents when recruiting members, planning activities, and implementing activities.

### Case 3

One day, staff from Children's Station B go into the classroom of a fourth-grade student to conduct a sex education. Through interactive games animations, they help children establish a correct gender perspective, learn to understand their own bodies, and build awareness of gender equality. In the process, the social workers of the children's station not only help the children deal with their growth troubles, but also build a bridge between the social work agency and the school. In this case, the social worker helped the school to build a platform for children's education.

In general, social workers have two roles in the target system: first, they are the platform builders. They can bring different kinds of actors together so that they can have the space and opportunity to communicate with each other and contribute their strengths and values to a target. The second role is that of a community builder. The meaning of community builder is twofold. One is to bring different resources together, here social workers are the aggregator of resources, and the other is to mobilize and act in the community to complete the process of self-organization and self-development. Social workers also play the role of mobilization.

## 2.4 Action system

In order to achieve the service goals, social workers need to cooperate with different subjects: government staff, volunteers, and agency colleagues. One of them is the collaborator of communication. This cooperation is neither leading nor encouraging, but gaining their participation and support through sufficient communication and exchange of opinions. Volunteers, in particular, work in close partnership with children's social workers. Many volunteers have skills in their own areas of expertise that can help social workers build relationships with children and can also make service programs better. Second, norm entrepreneurs and advocates for action. Sometimes, the actions of collaborators do not serve the goals of children. Social workers need to train and advocate so that their actions have meaning and direction and become part of a system that can promote children's social and psychological development.

### Case 4

On a certain day, the staff of Children's Station B, together with a team of volunteers from the Department of Chemical Engineering of a university, conducted a charity sale. First, the social worker collects twenty-five gift wish lists from the station's children in need. Secondly, the university volunteers make two hundred bottles of hand sanitizer through their professional knowledge. Part of this hand sanitizer is donated to the children at the station, and the other part is sold to raise money to buy gifts for the children. The social workers and volunteers communicate to give direction and meaning to the charity sales, in which the children receive positive feedback.

### **3. Role dilemma of children's social workers and suggestions**

#### **3.1 The role dilemma of social workers**

##### *3.1.1 Blurred role: their own confusion about their career*

social workers see themselves as managers, operators, and activity planners, but these roles are administrative and lack social work elements, and do not reflect the professionalism and uniqueness of children's social workers that are different from other identities. This role orientation makes some social workers unable to respond to children's developmental needs and achieve their professional goals. In addition, the social worker team itself has a certain degree of mobility, such as the departure of team members. These unexpected events can also affect role playing, work advancement and cooperation. Behind this fluidity is also the blurring of their roles, the gap between their actual work and their ideal work.

##### *3.1.2. Role overload: the powerlessness of playing multiple roles*

Children's social workers themselves face a lot of repetitive tasks, such as writing program materials, communicating with the community, street, school, and parents. These tasks can also increase the pressure of playing roles and distract social workers from paying attention to children. Even in the process of planning children's activities, they need to consider a range of issues such as event budgets, inviting people, volunteer training, and cooperation between teams to ensure a smooth process. Sometimes, compared to adults, children's needs are more inaccurately and insight fully expressed, so when social workers also find some potential clients at the children's station, they also need to intervene with them in time.

##### *3.1.3 . Role discord: different subjects have different expectations of their roles*

Children's social workers will come into contact with different subjects, but the role expectations of these subjects for social workers are different and even contradictory. The actions of these subjects themselves affect the role-playing of social workers, while their different expectations can put pressure on social workers to lower their original standards <sup>[4]</sup>. One of them is the contradiction between the general society and the value orientation of social work. Many parents and teachers hope that social workers can discipline children with "learning problems" so that they can better complete their learning tasks, while the core goal of social workers is to explore the potential of these children and help them develop better. Second, there is a conflict between different goals. The agency wants the children's social worker to bring more social effects to the agency, while

the community wants the social worker to be able to focus more on the children in the social work station. In order to get as much support as possible and better advance the program, social workers need to constantly balance these expectations.

#### **3.2 Recommendations**

##### *3.2.1. Social workers: improve social workers' role cognition and rational planning of role play*

Some researchers found that social workers' professional attitudes and professional behaviors are highly consistent, and professional attitudes and professional missions profoundly influence social workers' behaviors <sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, in order to professionalize social workers' role playing, the first step should be to improve social workers' perceptions of their roles. With the development of child welfare in China from gap-filling to moderate inclusion <sup>[6]</sup>, social workers should understand both the diversity and complexity of roles. Social workers should neither underestimate the value of the social worker's role nor put pressure on themselves by giving the role too much meaning. In order to make the role play smoother, social workers should consider more professionalism when playing the role, strictly distinguish themselves from teachers and volunteers, and play the role reasonably and moderately. At the same time, use their influence to eliminate the misunderstanding of people in the community about children's service stations and enhance the legitimacy of social workers. Only when social workers clearly define their own identity can they increase the public's trust in them.

##### *3.2.2 . Institutions: recognize the special nature of the role and care about the professional development of social workers*

When social workers achieve development when helping service recipients out of difficulties, they may also face professional difficulties themselves. Therefore, agency supervisors should also focus on career counseling of social workers and care about their personal development. For one thing, social workers need to consume more emotions. Social workers need more emotions to maintain working relationships and need to have stronger emotional support. This support comes not only from individuals, colleagues, supervisors, but also requires more support from the agency. Second, social workers need to identify with the value of the social work profession. Even if a child's social worker has very strong abilities, if he or she cannot identify with the values of social work, he or she cannot become qualified and professional. The professional value of social workers is a high standard moral requirement. It is difficult to either put the interests of children completely first or accept problem children unconditionally. Therefore, social workers should focus on the social workers' identification with the values when conducting professional training. Third, there is a need to maintain a lifelong learning attitude. Organizations should

provide social workers with learning opportunities and platforms, and provide social workers with learning abilities and methods.

### 3.2.3 . *Government: Increase the efforts of purchasing services and innovate the cooperation model*

The biggest dilemma social workers encounter in playing their roles is the problem of resources. On the one hand, the government should increase the efforts of purchasing social work services, improve the system of purchasing services, stimulate social work organizations to develop more quality service projects. On the other hand, social workers should, with the support of policies, make efforts to build platforms and strengthen linkages with all sectors of society to gain understanding and support for the services. Under the framework of the “five societies linkages” the development path of children's social workers is clearly defined, which is conducive to uniting social forces and effectively meeting the needs of service recipients [7].

## 4. Conclusion

Both the diversity of role orientation and the complexity of role dilemma of child social workers have put forward higher requirements on the professional ability and role play of social workers. Social workers should work with organizations, service recipients, the government, and social forces to construct a more complete role image and make the role more adaptable to the development and requirements of society.

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