

CHAPTER TEN

SOME ASPECTS OF SCHOOL WELFARE IN THE ACCRA AREA

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Introduction

Difficulties in behaviour observed in a school child are often a sign of disturbance in the child's social or emotional life or may reflect some degree of social pathology in a given environment. The social worker concerned with school welfare has an important role to play both in helping to solve problems which lead to poor school adjustment and in discovering and promoting those situations which enhance a child's educational and life experiences. In this regard, the school social worker can make an important contribution to any preventive mental health programme.

It is perhaps not surprising that teachers and other academic staff, in their efforts to serve the primary goals of education, often overlook the importance of emotional and social factors important in the learning situation. Much has been written about the problems facing the educational system as a whole in Ghana, but little has been said about the problems facing individual school children, the factors underlying poor school adjustment, or how the broader problems affect children and their families specifically.

This paper is an attempt to outline some of the problems dealt with by school welfare officers in the Accra area. Excerpts from actual case records will be cited by way of example, and data collected from a middle school in the Accra area where a school welfare programme was recently introduced will be used to highlight some of the points under discussion.. It must be emphasized that no attempt is being made to generalize from the material cited to the nature and frequency of occurrence of these problems in the country as a whole. Information gathered from the case files of any professional treatment service is obviously selective. It is also subjective and this it is not possible to make inferences from this group to a wider population. Nevertheless such information is useful in terms of informing the public about the nature of a service, improving upon treatment techniques in relationship to the types of problems encountered, and suggesting areas in which systematic research is needed in order to understand which problems with perhaps important social implications may be widespread and as yet untreated so that a more effective curative and preventive programme can be mounted.

History and Operation of the School Welfare Service in Ghana

Prior to 1967 most school welfare problems were either directly handled by education officers themselves or were referred to social workers employed by the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development. Such referrals were made by teachers, other education staff, or by parents, or were brought to the notice of social workers and/or education officers by other concerned individuals such as the police or probation officers.

In 1966 the Ministry of Education undertook to sponsor the training of qualified teachers

who wished to specialize in school welfare. At present there are five teachers trained as school welfare officers stationed in four of the regions in Ghana. Two are in the Greater Accra region. This reflects a positive recognition on the part of the Ministry of Education that some of the problems encountered with school children can best be handled by a specialist and that the need for such professional assistance is such that provision must be made for it within the structure of the Ministry itself. Unfortunately, progress in terms of recruitment of needed social work staff, up-grading the training of present staff, provision of adequate office space, etc., has been extremely slow. It is hoped that the Ministry's interest in this service will not rest solely with this recognition of the importance of social work and that it will provide all the necessary supports for the service to function adequately. While a school welfare programme under the auspices of the Ministry of Education is perhaps seen as an innovation here in Ghana, in many countries such a service has always been an integral part of the school structure, and in some areas there is a welfare officer covering almost every primary and junior school.

The jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education welfare officers extends to all the schools under the administration of the regional education office. In actual fact, however, most of the cases handled involve the primary and middle schools. There has been little involvement with secondary, teacher training, and technical schools. Special schools for handicapped children are also serviced.

While most of the referrals come from the public schools (there are over 700 public primary and middle schools in the Accra area alone),¹ a few private schools also refer problems.² Regarding schools in the public sector, apart from referrals made by teachers, education officers, and others, parents sometimes initiate referrals. These generally centre around such complaints as charging of unauthorized fees by teachers, physical abuse of children by teachers, dismissal of pupils, unwillingness of child to attend school, uncontrollable or deviant behaviour at home, poor school performance.

For purposes of establishing criteria for referral, "welfare" is conceived of in broad terms to include anything which affects the welfare of school children. Thus the social worker's activities might range anywhere from dealing with truancy in an individual child to helping organize a Parent-Teacher Association. Problems concerning matters such as teachers' working conditions and benefits, however, are not handled. Where the nature of the referred problem does not lie within the professional expertise of the social work staff; appropriate referrals are made to other agencies; for example, Cripples Aid Society, medical or psychiatric hospitals, Youth Employment Service, etc.

Since the Ministry of Education's social work staff is so small the Department of Social Welfare still plays a role in handling school welfare cases, specially in the regions outside of Accra where the Ministry of Education has no school welfare personnel. While the lines of cooperation between these two bodies are spelled out in detail,³ there are still problems. Where two agencies are involved in the same service, there is always the danger that both assume that the other is responsible. With over 700 primary and middle schools in Accra, and a social work staff of two, it is obvious that the Ministry of Education cannot adequately cover all the schools under its jurisdiction, even if it deals with only the most pressing cases. (Ideally, all schools should be visited regularly by a social worker.) Thus, it appears that the Department of Social Welfare will have to continue to play an active role in school welfare work. Yet, for the year 1971 in the Accra area, only 17 school welfare cases were handled by that Department, and in 1972 a total of 3 cases were handled.⁴

The terms of reference for the operation of the service in both Ministries is similar. Social work activities in each involve direct treatment of school children with problems or work with significant people in the environment, indirect education of teachers to increase their understanding of factors affecting the learning process, encouraging cooperation between parents and teachers. Ministry of Education social workers, however, are in addition charged with other specific duties such as assisting with the inspection of schools, promoting the establishment of Parent-Teacher Associations and helping to organize school canteens.⁵

The Social Administration Unit and the School Welfare Service

In order to provide social work students at the University of Ghana interested in school welfare with an easily accessible, relevant field work placement, the Social Administration Unit instituted a school welfare project in the Legon Staff village Primary-Middle School in 1970. It was agreed by the school and University staff that teachers would refer to the Unit children who were having difficulties in school. A special form was designed for this purpose listing various behaviours which might be indicative of poor adjustment or other underlying problems.⁶ Once case is referred, the Unit assigns the case to a student. The student, who spends one day a week in the field and is under the direct supervision of a trained staff member, takes full responsibility for making whatever contacts are necessary in each case including working with parents and teachers. In addition, where it is felt that problems can best be tackled not on an individual basis but by social action on larger scale, this is also carried out. For example, some students are involved in working with the Parent-Teacher Association and the Staff Village Development Committee in an effort to influence policy decisions which affect the welfare of the school, its staff and pupils.

This project has several advantages: it provides a strictly supervised learning experience for the student, provides a professional service for the residents of the staff village whose children attend the school, and provides data for teaching and research in the form of case materials.

Although this school is unique in some respect it does not differ greatly from most of the public primary-middle schools in Accra in terms of teacher-pupil ratio, staff turnover, size of classes and facilities. It is perhaps unique in respect of the large number of children who live within walking distance of the school, the interest a private, outside body has taken in its development (the University of Ghana) since its establishment in 1968, the number of teachers who live nearby, the large number of parents who both live and work in the vicinity of the school,⁷ and a fairly stable community population. These unique features should mean, in fact, that this school has significant advantages over other schools, particularly in having a readily available pool of human resources in terms of parents and teachers to work for the betterment of the school. As will be shown later, however these features are not sufficient in themselves to guarantee that parents and teachers will display the necessary interest, cooperation and involvement to ensure that pupils get the most from their educational experience.

Problems as Revealed by Caseloads in the School Welfare Service

a. Ministry of Education

Because of the way in which statistics are kept in the Ministry of Education's social welfare unit, it is difficult to get a true picture of the exact nature of and the activity on the cases handled. Case files are opened only for the most difficult, complicated or long term cases, but a log is kept

which reflects the referral problem and disposition of all cases carried each year. Cases are classified on the basis of the referral problem but it is evident that there may be many other problems in each case which are not reflected in the original problem. Certainly, if one were to reclassify the cases on the basis of a diagnosis made after studying the case, the picture would be different.

TABLE 1

CASES REFERRED TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SCHOOL WELFARE UNIT, JANUARY 1971 - DECEMBER 1971, GREATER ACCRA REGION

Referral Category	Number of Cases
1. Extremely poor academic work	77
2. Stealing	57
3. Exposure to physical and moral danger	54
4. Guidance and counselling only	50
5. Truancy, irregular attendance, persistent tardiness	48
6. Social or emotional maladjustment	44
7. Problems in teacher-pupil relationships	39
8. Deprived or neglected children	35
9. Mal-nourishment or other feeding problems	24
TOTAL	428

Table I above shows the new cases handled from January 1970 to December 1971.⁸ These figures, of course, show only the cases which found their way to a social worker. There are many factors which determine which problems or which children get referred, not the least of which is the case-finding activity on the part of the social worker himself. While one cannot say that the nature of the case load reflects the degree to which such problems exist in schools, does not indicate the kinds of problems or behaviour teachers, social workers and parents find disturbing.

Although it is admitted that the figures are somewhat inadequate, they are all we have to go on.

From July 1969 to December 1970 a total of 357 cases were carried in the Greater Accra region,⁹ including new and old cases being handled.

There are many cases involving school children which do not show up in these figures; e.g. children who come under statutory services (probation, care and protection) or maintenance where a school problem may indeed exist but was not the reason for the referral. Cases involving requests for school reports or for help in enrolment in school by probation officers are also not included.

Another limitation of these figures is that the sources of referral is not specified. It is hoped that as the unit expands, more detailed records on cases will be kept in order to get a true picture of the unit's activities. Although the disposition of each case in terms of success or failure was indicated for the figures obtained, this has not been included here. Evaluation success in any counselling service is at best tenuous, and it is difficult to know within a limited

period whether success or failure is the result. Further, whether the success stems from the efforts of the worker, spontaneous remission, or other factors beyond the worker's control cannot always be evaluated. Some explanation of the categories is in order here.

Category 1: Children described as "dull" or "backward" or who are persistently at the bottom of the class fall in this category. In some cases, very serious, but undetected or untreated, physical problems like visual or auditory defects have been found responsible. In others, social and environmental problems produce or contribute to already existing emotional difficulties which result in inability to do school work. In a few cases, mental retardation was discovered.

Category 2: Cases of stealing are often referred by parents in regard to stealing incidents in the home as well as by teachers.

Category 3: Cases in this category are usually referred by teachers or parents when they feel that a child's habits are likely to get him or her into difficulty. These would include girls suspected of or involved in prostitution, those who hang around drinking bars late at night or who hawk goods after dark. Also, some children who have to travel extremely long distances to and from school are tempted to accept lifts from strangers resulting, at times in molestation.

Category 4: This involves cases which require brief advice or vocational counselling only.

Category 5: These references come mostly from teachers and the behaviour is often symptomatic of a whole range of problems. For example, inability to cope with school work, lack of motivation, fear or reprisals from teachers, inability or unwillingness of parents to pay school fees, housework demands made on students, required medical treatment resulting in long delays at crowded clinics, and dismissals by teachers can result in truancy, lateness or prolonged absences from school.

Category 6: Cases of persistent disobedience, extreme aggressiveness, excessive withdrawal or other peculiarities which point to social or emotional difficulties fall into this category. Often parents seek remedies for such behaviour from spiritualists or traditional healers resulting in long and/or frequent absences from school or the performance of certain rituals in school which further serves to call attention to the child's deviant behaviour.

Category 7: Cases of immoral behaviour or misconduct by teachers in relationship to students are sometimes referred by parents, fellow teachers or discovered and reported by others. According to an experienced welfare officer, cases of sexual misconduct involving teachers and students are disturbingly common, but because of the difficulty of proving charges or reluctance of parents to report suspected teachers for fear of victimization or embarrassment, few are handled by welfare officers. Smoking and drinking by teachers or students (which are not common), physical abuse by teachers and collection of unauthorized fees also come under this category. In regard to the latter, there have been cases where children have stolen money or sacrificed their lunch money in order to pay these fees. (On the other hand, there are instances in which teachers have been known to put these fees to very good use in providing materials for teaching.) There are cases, too, where teachers exploit children by using them as their personal servants.

Category 8: This is a rather vague category not representing any specific behavioural problem. It involves mostly children whom teachers feel are generally not being well cared for perhaps due to an impoverished situation, or where there is such disharmony, dissension or disorganization in the home environment that the child is adversely affected. In some cases it involves children who have no fixed place of abode or children whose parents give no supervision or attention to the child.

Category 9: This includes observable cases of malnutrition and improper diet. Some children do not eat breakfast and no provision is made for their lunch and as a result, they are often listless and inattentive, even sick. Although not reflected in these figures, there have been times when the social worker has had to intervene to protect children from dishonest food hawkers who operate near schools.¹⁰

Some referrals, as already indicated, reveal underlying problems far more complex than originally suspected and might even present certain risk for the worker:

The Middle Form IV teacher referred Dora, age 17, for irregular attendance. Investigation revealed that the girl was living with 3 seamen, and staying out late in the evenings drinking. The girl warned the social worker that her companions were not happy about her intervention and that some harm might come to her (the worker) unless she dropped the case. On one occasion, when the worker parked her car in the area of the girl's "residence" to look for her, she returned to find all four of the car tyres slashed.

Of course, for every child whose case becomes known to a social worker, there are no doubt many others with similar problems who remain untreated. Not until teachers recognize and understand the kind of behaviour that warrants special attention or which needs to be handled non-punitively, and the idea of social work intervention becomes accepted and feasible, can we hope for some improvement in this situation.

b. Social Administration

So far, all referrals to this Unit have come from the teachers.

Since the service was introduced, 23 cases have been actively carried although a larger number have been referred. Since the students are limited in the number of cases they can handle (the maximum being about three at any one time), we have tended to concentrate on those which seem most serious.

Most of the cases show presenting problems of truancy or habitual lateness, poor academic performance and disruptive behaviour. Further investigation reveals, however, that in most cases these overt problems are symptoms of more fundamental difficulties either within the child himself or within the home or school environment, a finding which is consistent with the experiences of school welfare officers elsewhere. A few case examples serve to illustrate this point.

John, 15, who lives in Teshie, was referred by his Form III teacher because of habitual lateness. The teacher felt that a transfer to a school nearer Teshie would solve the problem. John is the illegitimate son of a married woman who has 4 other legitimate children. When her brother observed that he was not being well treated by the mother and her husband, he brought the child to live in his household consisting of his wife, and several female daughters and nieces.

The child reported to the worker that he finds himself saddled with most of the household chores, blamed and punished for the slightest misdeed, and differentially treated from the rest of the "real" children. E.g., all the other children attend the *University Primary School*, a lunch is prepared for them to eat in school while he is given money and while they are often driven to school by the father, he is left to make his way by *tro tro*, etc. He feels his tardiness is due to these transport problems and excessive chores which he is required to finish before school. John is happy with his school, however, and does not wish to change.

While the uncle does not deny the differential treatment given to John, he does not see it as wholly unjustified. As the only boy in the house he is expected to do the heavy work. He does not see the chores as too burdensome; rather, he feels that John is deliberately slow.

While the uncle is genuinely concerned about his welfare, he feels he has already discharged his responsibility by giving John a decent home. The social worker sensed an un verbalized desire on the part of both the uncle and the boy for him to be returned to his mother, but the uncle insists that home conditions are still not suitable. In spite of the fact that the uncle has agreed to reduce the boy's workload and give him equal treatment as a trial first step, John's behaviour is deteriorating, his tardiness continues and his overall demeanour is that of a rather unhappy child. It appears that John may be deliberately misbehaving to provoke his uncle to send him to his mother. This case is still being pursued.

Janet, 12, in class six, was referred because she appeared constantly tired and sleepy in class and seemed to have no interest in school. As a result, her academic work was far below her grade level.

Study of the home situation revealed that Janet had been selling bread until very late every evening at her parents' request. When the parents were convinced by the worker that this was not in her best interest, she stopped selling bread and the problem of sleepiness and listlessness ceased, but her academic work did not improve. Although not a dull student, Janet is an under-achiever who has been consistently promoted in spite of her failure to grasp the fundamentals. Further, having been labelled as "dull" by former teachers, she has literally been written off by her parents as a "ne'er-do-well" and they therefore take little interest in her school performance or her future. The father has become discouraged with efforts he has made to help client in the home, and the mother, an illiterate trader, provides little in the way of supervision and support.

Finding that there seemed to be many cases of learning difficulties similar to Janet's, the Unit in conjunction with the Parent-Teacher Association, set up special after-school classes taught by volunteers. The intention is to help students like Janet learn, for the first time in many cases, the fundamentals of arithmetic and English on which further understanding depends. At present, classes are in operation daily for students from Primary three through Middle Form four.

Survey of Staff Village Middle School

Experience with the cases known to the Unit and discussion with teachers and social workers in the field suggest that certain factors seem to feature prominently in referred cases: poor supervision of child before and after school, selling for profit which interferes with needed rest and school attendance, lack of motivation on part of the child, or insufficient interest in or lack

of attention to the child's needs. In an effort to locate potential sources of problems, to see how widespread are certain practices which might adversely affect school children, and to examine other factors associated with school welfare, a small survey was conducted in the Staff Village Middle School in May, 1972.

a. Methodology

First, teachers were asked to list their pupils according to their position in class and to assess whether this position seemed to reflect the child's general or usual performance.¹¹ Teachers were also asked to note those pupils who demonstrated some problem behaviour or whose behaviour caused them concern in any way, plus a few other related questions.

A brief, self-administered questionnaire was given to each pupil, numbered and distributed in such a way as to enable us to link the questionnaire responses with the other data provided by the teachers. Each question was read and explained to the whole class first. A monitor (University student) was present in each class to answer any questions individually and to supervise.

While the disadvantages of this method are recognized, the advantages in terms of time, elimination of possibility of rumour bias, and minimum disruption of the school programme seemed to justify it, at least for a preliminary survey.

Out of 168 students on roll, 167 completed questionnaires. (Those absent on the day the survey was conducted were given the questionnaire to complete upon their return.) We present here only the findings which have a bearing on the points raised in this paper.

b. Findings

Interest in the welfare of school children by and co-operation between parents and teachers is essential if an educational institution is to make its maximum contribution. An important hindrance is that many parents and teachers live far away from the schools making interaction before or after school hours impossible. Such is not the case in the Staff Village. Table two indicates that most of the children live either very near the school compound or in the near vicinity.

TABLE 2

HOUSE LOCATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN

<i>House Location</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Staff Village area	66	39
Legon University and South Legon	13	8
Achimota area	8	5
Madina	38	23
Kwabinya	11	7
Accra	29	17
N.A.	2	1
TOTAL	167	100

Further the survey revealed that 82 per cent of the children live either with one or both parents and that many of the children have numerous aunts, uncles, married sibling, etc., living in the house with them.

These results indicate that there is a large potential pool of parents and relatives to support a Parent-Teacher Association or other efforts to improve the school; and that lack of availability of relatives and inaccessibility are not important hindrances to establishing communication links between home and school. However experience shows that these advantages are certainly not sufficient to ensure interest and co-operation. In spite of the large number of children reported by teachers as having behaviour problems of some kind (51 children), only four parents came in to see teachers during the year, and out of these four, three came to request additional time for payment of school fees. Parental interest in and support for the Parent-Teacher Association means minimal in spite of the intense efforts made by a few teachers and parents with the assistance of the University students.

Since most of the children live near the school, however, the potential hazards which accompany long distance travel are minimized for these children.

In regard to supervision, in several homes there are no adults present either when the child leaves for school or when he returns (see Tables 3a and 3b below). While this may not be too serious for middle school youngsters, potential problems can arise when children even of that age have to rely entirely on themselves for getting to school on time, and doing required work after school. Further, we have found that in many of the cases referred for frequent absenteeism and lateness, parents are not even aware of such behaviour until the social worker intervenes because they leave for work before the child leaves for school. In some cases, when the social worker visits the house of an absent child during school hours, the child and some of his or her friends can be found alone in the house. In 13 cases there is no adult at home either in the morning or afternoon.

TABLE 3a

PERSONS IN HOUSE WHEN CHILD LEAVES FOR SCHOOL
IN A.M., BY FORM

Persons in House when Child Leaves for School

<i>Form</i>	<i>No One</i>	<i>One or Both Parents</i>	<i>Siblings only</i>	<i>Adults but not Parents</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>N.A.</i>	<i>Total</i>
I	3	16	5	8	3	9	44
II	6	18	2	7	3	4	40
III	11	18	1	7	3	4	43
IV	8	23	2	6	1	1	40
Total No.	28	75	9	28	10	17	167
Total %	17	45	5	17	6	10	100

TABLE 3b

**PERSONS IN HOUSE WHEN CHILD RETURNS FROM SCHOOL
IN P.M., BY FORM**

Persons in House when Child Returns from School

<i>Form</i>	<i>No One</i>	<i>One or Both Parents</i>	<i>Siblings Only</i>	<i>Adults but not Parents</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>N.A.</i>	<i>Total</i>
I	3	26	1	8	1	6	44
II	1	23	3	11	1	1	40
III	7	22	2	9	3	—	43
IV	5	23	1	10	1	—	40
Total No.	16	94	7	38	5	7	167
Total %	10	56	4	23	3	4	100

Of course, there can be supervision even when both parents are present, but at least where a relative or parent is present, the potential for supervision exists. Even though the consistent absence of some adult is not so widespread in Staff Village, perhaps because parents work nearby and do not have to leave so early, the fact that this absence features prominently in referred cases is cause for concern.

Thirty-eight (38) children sell products mainly at the request of their parents or other adult relatives. While in a few cases this is intermittent (once or twice a week), the majority (22) of those who sell do so every day often both before and after school. Table 4 shows the frequency of selling and type of goods sold.

TABLE 4

FREQUENCY OF SELLING AND PRODUCTS SOLD

Products Sold

Frequency of Selling	Bread	News-papers	Cooked Food	Provisions	Not Specified	Firewood	Total
Everyday	6	7	2	6	—	1	22
3-4 times/week	3	3	1	4	—	—	11
1-2 times/week	—	—	3	—	—	—	3
Once/month or Less	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Not Specified	—	—	1	1	1	—	3
TOTAL	9	10	7	11	1	1	39*

*One child sells more than one product

Selling does not appear to be a widespread practice amongst Staff Village children, but in a few cases it does feature prominently in regard to frequent tardiness and failure to do well in school, particularly if the child does it often. Amongst Accra school children, this seems to be much more prevalent.

It is fairly well known that many school children suffer from inadequate diet, even when they eat regularly. The necessity of having to buy poorly prepared and unhygienic food from vendors, especially at lunch time, often adds to the problem. On the whole, it would appear that our Middle School children do not fare too badly in regard to eating of meals; but whether what they eat is nutritious or even harmful is another matter. See Tables 5 and 6 below.

TABLE 5

BREAKFAST

EATEN DAILY		EATEN SOMETIMES		NEVER EATEN		TOTAL	
No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent
92	55	39	23	36	22	167	100

Clearly, the majority of the children eat something for breakfast, either bread with tea or coffee or something more substantial like porridge, rice, kenkey, etc.; and all but six eat it at home.

TABLE 6

TYPE OF FOOD EATEN FOR LUNCH BY PLACE EATEN

Type of Food Eaten

Place Where Eaten	Snack* Only	Substantial Hot Meal	Not Stated	Do Not Eat Lunch	Total
Maintenance	5	73	1	—	79
Own Home	—	57	1	—	58
School Compound	3	—	—	—	3
Other (I.A.S., Staff Canteen, Kiosks)	1	24	—	—	25
Not Specified	1	1	—	—	2
Total No.	10	155	2	—	167
Total %	6	93	1	—	100

* E.g., bread only, groundnuts only, banana or orange only, etc.

As indicated above, nearly all of the children eat a substantial lunch. These children are fortunate in having several good eating facilities within the vicinity of the school. Most school children in Accra, without the advantages of a well-run canteen, must depend on food vendors for their lunch. Certainly the important thing is that the child's total daily intake be adequate. Some may eat very little breakfast but eat a substantial and nutritious lunch and dinner. Unfortunately, many of those who hardly ever eat breakfast are the same ones who also eat an inadequate lunch and these are the children who need attention.

Teachers were asked to note the number of parents or guardians who came in on their own initiative during the past year to talk with them about anything related to their wards. As reported earlier, out of four who came, only one came to discuss the child's behaviour. Sometimes parents are requested to come in by teachers who are concerned and yet they do not come in. Whether this failure to come reflects genuine disinterest in the school, disinterest in the children, the attitude that it is the teacher's responsibility to cope with behavioural problems in school, or genuine inability due to work commitments, it is difficult to say. Of course, in many cases a parent is totally unaware of a child's problem behaviour or activities in the school, especially when there is little communication at home and in this regard it is incumbent upon the teachers to inform the parents.

The fact that most of the children listed as having some kind of problem (51) fall in the bottom 1/3 of the class is interesting. If parents are not aware of any other problem, they do often know whether their child is performing poorly academically, and still they do not enquire.

Some parents may feel that as long as the child is not at the very bottom of his class, there is no problem. However, the results shown in Table 7 indicate that problems as seen by the teachers are by no means confined to those in the bottom ranks. Some means must be found to get the parents and teachers to recognize or be concerned about children who have problems of any kind, related or unrelated to academic performance.

TABLE 7

PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR AS REPORTED BY TEACHER BY POSITION IN CLASS
(Figures represent actual numbers)

<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Position in Class</i>			<i>Total No.</i>
	<i>Top Third</i>	<i>Middle Third</i>	<i>Bottom Third</i>	
Frequently Absent	11	1	9	21
Frequently Late	1	3	5	9
Malnourished, Weak, Listless	—	4	5	9
Emotional and Behavioural Problems ...	6	7	19	32
Dull	—	—	3	3
Other	—	—	—	—
Total	18	15	41	74

N = 51 (Some children appear in more than 1 category)

Time does not permit discussion of other areas explored in this questionnaire such as the expectations and aspirations of the Middle Form IV pupils, methods of discipline and punishment used by parents and teachers in respect of homework and chores, etc. It is also recognized that data collected from the Primary School will be necessary to supplement these findings, and this will be done in the course of time.

Treatment and Prevention

Nothing has been mentioned about the methods used to alleviate or treat the various problems discussed here, and that lies outside the scope of this paper. However, some mention of the problems social workers have encountered in the course of intervention which might shed light on the kind of solutions necessary to consider is in order.

The first difficulty encountered lies in the lack of recognition of a problem or potential problem both by parents and teachers. Too often, teachers do not recognize the kind of behaviour that needs to be handled non-punitively or which may be symptomatic of more serious difficulties. They often do not realize that a child who is "troublesome" may need help, or may be responding to a situation which is not geared to his learning needs. Some teachers consistently have poor relationships with students partly because they depend on their formal authority alone and stress strict obedience and discipline at the expense of helping students develop internal control and self-motivation. To some extent this can be attributed to the fact that many teachers are not trained, do not have the requisite professional orientation and dedication, or do not possess the skills to make the classroom experience interesting and challenging. It must be noted, however, that many teachers do take an interest in the problems of individual children and make an effort to meet parents, but this is not easy with 40 or more children in a classroom in a school which may be miles away from the teacher's or parents home. If there were more social workers attached to more school problems or potential problems could be detected early and treated or prevented before the crisis stage. "The Primary School is not the only diagnostic setting in which early warning signals may be seen; it is however one of them and very important one at that."¹² To some extent, introduction of the cumulative record card, may be helpful here, but unless used very carefully, it can have negative as well as positive effects.¹³

Schools and school systems can also have "problems" and recognition of and **solution** to these by educational planners and policy-makers is equally, if not more so, important in terms of prevention of individual problems. For example, teachers must be given every support in the way of textbooks for students and other teaching aids. On the other hand the indiscipline and irresponsibility of many teachers must also be checked.

From the preventive health standpoint, clinic data as well as observation on the part of teachers reveal that many school children are in a state of chronic ill-health and may be suffering from preventable or curable diseases. Provision for physical and psychological testing and examination is seen as essential if preventive care is to be given more than lip service. A school health referral service would be a necessary adjunct service. Here is an area where paramedical personnel and trained laymen be used to good advantage.

Some programme whereby school children can be provided with hygienic and nutritious food near the school area should also be considered, although it is admitted that such programmes are expensive. For many children, the lunch provided by the school may be the only adequate meal they receive all day. At the moment, a few schools in Accra through the Parent-Teacher

Association are experimenting apparently rather successfully, with the provision of canteen facilities.

The role of the school welfare officer needs to be given more prominence, support and publicity by school officials and in turn, the school welfare officer must see himself in and demand the facilities for the expanded role which he needs to perform.¹⁴ (This would naturally imply a certain minimum level of training.) Most teachers are not aware of the existence of a school welfare service and, even when they are, may not be familiar with the kinds of problems handled and ways of handling these problems, or may see the worker as an intruder on his turf. In his expanded role the trained welfare officer might perform the following functions: treat individual children, and/or parents, hold seminars for teachers for on school behaviour and related matters and help teachers improve their skills for dealing with children when requested, serve as a consultant regarding particular cases, advise on development of programmes and curricula for special children (handicapped, slow learners, etc.), encourage programmes of co-operation between parents and teachers, inform policy-makers about general problems and pose suggestions for solution. It is essential that all personnel involved in school programmes from teachers up to principal education officers, be well acquainted and in agreement with the welfare officer's role.

Once a case has been referred, there are several areas of resistance. Often parents do not see themselves as responsible for the behaviour of their children or are not willing to examine the role they play in shaping their child's behaviour. Cause is attributed to some external agent or factor or if that fails, to "heredity."¹⁵ Sometimes parents write off the school as a viable learning experience and just send the child there to keep him occupied. If he does poorly, parents and teachers anticipate failure, and the child not surprisingly often dutifully conforms to expectations. Sometimes parents send their children to stay with friends or relatives with whom they feel the child will have better opportunities. Data from our case loads reveal that in too many cases some of these children are differentially maltreated (not necessarily intentionally) and often exploited, but their foster parents sometimes fail to see that this may be a problem to the child or may reason that their responsibility rests solely with physical care and maintenance.

Teachers, too, are sometimes reluctant or unable to alter the teaching situation to accommodate the needs of a specific child, or to see how his or her behaviour or reactions might be contributing to a child's problem. (E.g., harshly punishing a child for being late or absent may do more to aggravate than to alleviate the problem). The teacher has an important role to play in the promotion of sound mental health.

On a broader scale, economic and social problems of the country in general have effects on the school situation. Parents who are not well off economically may not be able to feed their children adequately or pay what little fees are required, and may need the services bring in extra income. Often, all the available time and energy of the parents are used up in just earning a living. If a child is bright and has ambitions which can only be achieved through higher education, his parents inability to finance secondary schooling or vocational training often results in frustration and disillusionment. There is often a defeatist attitude on the part of pupils and parents alike because they realize that even with a Middle School Leaving Certificate one is not likely to get employment. Shortage of teachers and schools resulting in the necessity to run shift system which leaves children with long, unoccupied hours also bring problems.

Conclusion

One might argue that in a developing society a service which is geared to the individual problems faced by only a handful of children in any one school is a luxury, and further, that a case by case approach to the solution of these problems is at best slow and laborious. Regarding the first criticism, in the absence of hard evidence it is difficult to know how many children have problems, how severe these are and what effect they have or will have on the individual himself or on society as a whole. It is suspected, however, that the number of children in every school who have some kind of problem which might lead to difficulties and for which help can be provided would involve more than a handful.

One might question the efficacy of deploying scarce resources to alleviate individual adjustment problems or encouraging children to achieve in school when their aspirations may remain forever frustrated because of prevailing economic and social conditions. In my view, a child should be given the maximum chance to develop to his highest potential within whatever realistic that limits are posed by the situation, and to the extent that social work activity helps remove whatever obstacles exist to this fulfilment be they internal or external—the service is not only justified, it is essential.

It is certainly agreed, however, that a case by case approach to the solution of these problems is slow and laborious and often tantamount to giving aspirin when major surgery is needed. To the extent that general social and economic problems can be identified as inimical to the potential well-being of children a total systems approach is necessary in which solutions to these complex problems can be found. In this regard, direct, individualized services, if done exclusively, are not sufficient. Where manpower is limited, the social worker's role as administrator, planner and social policy maker may have to take precedence over his role as a therapist. Programmes of primary prevention have to be encouraged on all fronts.

Social work must not allow itself to be viewed solely as a curative service utilized only when individual deviance is observed. Problems in the operation of the whole system have to be tackled. Efforts have to be made in directing educations towards policies which would prevent the kinds of problems encountered on the individual level and which promote or facilitate the learning experience not only in school but in the total environment.

Summary

The history and operation of the welfare service in Ghana was outlined. The types of problem referred to welfare workers were discussed and data from case records and a small survey done in a middle school were used to highlight some of the points.

In spite of the uniqueness of each case, where problems of adjustment occurred, it seemed to be possible to identify a common theme: lack of attention by one more significant people in the child's environment to the important factors which enhance or retard his educational growth. While this may be due to negative factors such as lack of understanding, disinterest or intentional neglect, more than likely it may simply result from the actions of well-intentioned but misinformed or ill-informed parents, guardians, teachers and administrators. In addition, to the extent that economic and social problems of the country contribute to the problems and dislocations in the school situation, solutions to these have to be sought.

APPENDIX "A"

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Name of Teacher Form.....

Please check your register and write down the names of pupils who fall in the following categories:

1. Frequently absent from school

(a) Absent 2 or more times/week

/
/
/
/
/
/

(b) Absent 3-4 times/month

2. Frequently late to school

(a) Late 2 or more times/week

/
/
/
/
/

(b) Late 3-4 times/month

3. Those who seem constantly sleepy, tired, listless.

4. Those who look weak, malnourished, underfed.

5. Those who seem to always want extra attention by calling it to themselves from other children or teacher.

6. Those who seem unhappy or cry easily or appear oversensitive to criticism.

7. Those who appear shy, keep to themselves, seem to have no friends or contacts with other children.

8. Children who are very aggressive — constantly quarrelsome or who fight often with other children or who are verbally abusive to others.

9. Those who seem to have **difficulty** in **learning** or grasping subject material — appear dull, unable to comprehend, slow.

10. Those who appear bright and able to comprehend but do poor work; i.e. those who seem to be working far below their capacity.

11. Those who have either an observable physical handicap or who you feel have some physical problem (e.g. poor eyesight, poor hearing, etc.).

12. Those who have any other difficulty you have observed but which is not mentioned above. (Please specify difficulty).

FOOT NOTES

1. "List of Primary and Middle Schools, Greater Accra Region, 1971-72", Ministry of Education, Ghana.
2. These referrals often come from parents and involve charges of misappropriation of funds, poor standards, arbitrary dismissals and poor facilities.
3. See minutes of official meeting held in August, 1970 between representatives of Ministry of Education and Department of Social Welfare outlining jurisdiction of each in regard to school welfare; Ministry of Education file.
4. Department of Social Welfare and Community Development yearly returns for 1971-72. These figures do not include statutory cases involving school children handled by the Department of Social Welfare.
5. Report on School Welfare Service, Ministry of Education, July, 1969—December, 1970.
6. See appendix
7. In December, 1972 a survey conducted by the Staff Village Primary-Middle School revealed that 125 parents of children attending the school live in the staff village and thus work in the Legon community.
8. The figures for 1972 are not yet complete. While the total number of new cases is 428, there were approximately 200 cases brought forward from the previous year making a total of about 628 handled altogether. Figures obtained from Ministry of Education School Welfare Unit.
9. Report on the School Welfare Service, Ministry of Education, op. cit.
10. For example, there was a case in Tema in which a food seller whose kiosk was frequented by school children, adulterated the jollof rice with a harmful red dye (waste material from a nearby factory) to make it more attractive. This was discovered when, after receiving complaints about the vomiting of large numbers of school children, an ingenious social worker obtained and sent samples of the suspected food to the Food Research Institute for analysis.
In another incident, it was discovered by the social worker that vultures were being substituted for chicken in a cooked "chicken" dish sold to school children on the street near the School.
11. Position was determined by the average of marks on the most recent terminal examination. The teacher's additional assessment was seen as important as one's position on one group of tests may not reflect his usual performance.
12. L. G. Moseley, "The Primary School and Preventive Social Work," *Social Work*, Vol. 25, No. 2, April 1968, pg. 10.
13. The use of this card is now in the experimental stage under the auspices of the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Development and Research Unit. See "Recent Developments in Ghana Education," *Ghana Journal of Education*, Vol. 2, No. 4, October 1971.
14. See B. Gottlieb and L. Gottlieb, "An Expanded Role for the School Worker," *Social Work* (N.A.S.W.), Vol. 16, No.4, October 1971.
15. For a general discussion of causes of and reactions to stress in Ghana, see E. B. Forster, "The Theory and Practice of Psychiatry in Ghana," *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January, 1962.
16. Ika Paul-Pont, "The Teacher's Role in the Promotion of Mental Health in Underdeveloped Countries," *Progress in Mental Health*, edited by Hugh Freeman, London: Churchill Ltd., 1969.

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