RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mjournals

Journal of Social Solutions
August 2026
Volume 1, Article No e0001
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mjournals.org/journal/social-solutions

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Students' Multidimensional Needs And School Social Work: A Qualitative Study

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Received: 09 June 2026 | **Accepted:** 01 August 2026 | **Published online:** 27 August 2026

Keywords: School social work | school counseling | school–family collaboration | interprofessional collaboration

ABSTRACT

This study examined students' multidimensional needs in the school environment and school social work in relation to these needs from school counselors' perspectives. The qualitative study included 20 school counselors working in 15 primary and middle schools in Tuzla, Istanbul. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis. Three themes emerged: students' problems and existing support practices, family- and school-related factors, and perceptions of school social work and interprofessional collaboration. Findings showed that students' needs involved individual, familial, social, and environmental dimensions. Participants viewed school social work as a complementary professional field that could strengthen counseling services and school–family–community linkages. By demonstrating the relationship between students' multidimensional needs and the complementary and interprofessional functions of school social work from school counselors' perspectives, the study contributes to the school social work literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Schools are fundamental environments in which students' social, emotional, and behavioral development takes shape alongside academic learning. Students' needs and difficulties are influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by family relationships, socioeconomic conditions, peer interactions, and the broader social environment. Therefore, multidimensional needs affecting students' academic engagement, school adjustment, and psychosocial well-being should be addressed through holistic school-based approaches that consider the interactions among individual, family, and environmental systems (Guest et al., 2024).

In this context, school social work represents an important field of social work practice that addresses the individual, family, social, and environmental factors affecting students' educational experiences and well-being. Its scope extends beyond responding to existing problems to include early identification of risks, protective and preventive interventions, and differentiated support based on students' levels of need. Within this framework, school social workers can implement interventions at both individual and systems levels to address students' multidimensional needs in collaboration with students, families, and school personnel (Ding et al., 2023).

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The holistic orientation of school social work is grounded in ecological and person-in-environment perspectives, which understand students' needs and difficulties through the dynamic interactions between individuals and the multiple social systems surrounding them. From this perspective, students' problems are not viewed solely as individual concerns but as potentially shaped by interconnected family, peer, school, socioeconomic, and community conditions. Accordingly, families, peers, teachers, schools, and community resources constitute interrelated systems that may both influence students' academic and psychosocial well-being and become part of the intervention process. This theoretical orientation provides an appropriate framework for understanding the multidimensional needs examined in the present study and the complementary role of school social work in responding to them. Recent literature in Türkiye similarly emphasizes school social work as a field of practice that facilitates holistic intervention and coordination among students, families, schools, and their broader environments (Korkmaz, 2025).

This holistic approach requires school social work and school counseling services to be viewed not as alternatives to one another but as complementary professional fields that address students' diverse needs within their respective areas of expertise. School social workers can contribute to this process by assessing social and environmental risks, strengthening relationships with families and communities, facilitating access to social resources, and establishing linkages across service systems. In school-based mental health services, the coordinated use of both shared competencies and profession-specific functions among different professionals is considered essential (Zabek et al., 2023). While the functions of school social work within multi-tiered systems of support can facilitate responses to students' varying levels of need (Ding et al., 2023), interprofessional collaboration can help integrate different areas of expertise around student well-being (Testa, 2025).

Although academic interest in school social work has increased in Türkiye, limitations regarding its institutionalization as a professional field of practice within the school system persist. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of school social work in addressing students' individual, family, and environmental needs holistically and in developing protective, preventive, and supportive services (Yeşilkayalı & Meydan, 2017). Similar institutional challenges have also been identified internationally, with inadequate service infrastructure, ambiguity in professional roles, and structural factors within school settings reported as barriers to effective practice (Binks et al., 2024). In Türkiye, Tekgöz Obuz (2025) found that although school social work is considered necessary, it has not yet developed into an effective field of practice. Önkol and Kırlıoğlu (2025) further showed that research has predominantly focused on students and problem-oriented issues, while teachers and parents remain less represented and gaps in institutionalization and professional practice persist. These findings indicate an ongoing need to examine the professional position of school social work and opportunities for collaboration with other school-based professionals in Türkiye from practitioners' perspectives.

In this context, the perspectives of school counselors who work directly with students' academic, behavioral, social, and family-related problems are important for understanding students' multidimensional needs and the support currently available within school settings. Despite the growing literature on school social work in Türkiye, limited attention has been given to how school-based professionals simultaneously assess students' multidimensional needs, existing support practices, and the complementary role that school social work may assume within these processes. This study therefore jointly examines, from school counselors' perspectives, the problems experienced by stu-

dents and existing support practices, family- and school-related factors, and perceptions of school social work. By bringing these dimensions together, the study contributes to the school social work literature in Türkiye by providing a practitioner-based understanding of the relationship between students' multidimensional needs and the complementary and interprofessional functions of school social work.

2. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

This section describes the research design, participants and sampling process, data collection and analysis procedures, measures taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine school counselors' views and assessments of students' multidimensional needs, existing support practices, family- and school-related factors, and school social work. Qualitative research enables an in-depth examination of individuals' experiences, perceptions, and assessments of a particular phenomenon or problem within their specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Karasar, 2016).

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The study group consisted of 20 school counselors working in primary and middle schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in the Tuzla district of Istanbul. According to information obtained from the Tuzla District Directorate of National Education at the time of the study, a total of 82 school counselors were employed across 52 primary and middle schools in the district. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, which involves including individuals who are accessible and willing to participate in the study (Karasar, 2016). The participants worked in 15 different schools, comprising nine primary schools and six middle schools. The inclusion criteria were: (a) working in a primary or middle school affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Tuzla, (b) working as a school counselor, and (c) voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study.

To protect participants' confidentiality and systematically present direct quotations, anonymous codes based on gender and participant sequence were used. In the coding scheme, P denotes "participant," F denotes "female," and M denotes "male"; female participants were coded PF1–PF10 and male participants PM11–PM20. Participants' demographic characteristics and codes are presented in Table 1.

2.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a **semi-structured in-depth interview form** developed in accordance with the study objectives. The form consisted of open-ended questions covering ten main topic areas: problems encountered by students in the school environment and the extent to which existing school counseling services address these problems; knowledge, definitions, and assessments regarding the necessity and importance of school social work; the potential contributions of school social work to addressing student problems and supporting school counseling services; professional groups expected to be involved in school social work and their potential contributions; recommendations for addressing student problems and strengthening school–family–community relationships; and expectations regarding the future of school social work. Semi-structured interviews allow predetermined questions to be addressed systematically while also enabling follow-up questions to clarify and further explore participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, follow-up questions were used during the interviews when necessary to elicit further detail from participants' responses.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Years of Professional Experience as a School Counselor
PF1	Female	39	15
PF2	Female	38	16
PF3	Female	31	10
PF4	Female	46	24
PF5	Female	38	16
PF6	Female	34	10
PF7	Female	39	13
PF8	Female	32	9
PF9	Female	34	9
PF10	Female	38	15
PM11	Male	29	8
PM12	Male	42	20
PM13	Male	36	12
PM14	Male	30	8
PM15	Male	35	13
PM16	Male	29	7
PM17	Male	28	1
PM18	Male	32	9
PM19	Male	30	8
PM20	Male	29	3

Note. P = participant; F = female; M = male. Female participants were coded PF1–PF10 and male participants PM11–PM20.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in December 2022 through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with school counselors who voluntarily participated in the study in the Tuzla district of Istanbul. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study, the interview procedure, and the voluntary nature of participation, and informed consent was obtained. The interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview form described above, with follow-up questions used when necessary to clarify or elaborate participants' responses. Audio recordings were made with participants' knowledge and permission and constituted the basis for the subsequent qualitative analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained in the study were analyzed using content analysis. Qualitative content analysis enables the systematic examination of data, the coding of meaningful units of data, and the organization of related codes into categories or themes (Baltacı, 2019; Schreier, 2012). Accordingly, participants' responses were examined, statements relevant to the study's objectives were coded, and codes with similar meanings were grouped to form themes. Code maps were developed based on participants' views, and the codes and themes were interpreted by considering similarities and differences across participants' accounts. The findings were supported by code frequencies and direct quotations reflecting participants' views, with anonymous participant codes used when presenting quotations. Frequencies were used not for quantitative generalization but to indicate how often particular codes occurred in participants' statements.

In qualitative research, transparent and systematic reporting of the research process, traceability of data collection and analysis procedures, and a clear connection between interpretations and participants' accounts are important for enhancing trustworthiness (Baltacı, 2019). In the present study, the research context, participant characteristics, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and analytical process were explicitly described to enhance transparency and methodological traceability. During the analysis, participants' responses were systematically examined, relevant meaning units were coded, and codes reflecting similar meanings were grouped into broader themes. The developing code–theme structure was subsequently reviewed against participants' accounts, with attention to similarities and differences across responses. In reporting the findings, code frequencies were used descriptively rather than for statistical generalization, and representative direct quotations were included to maintain a clear connection between the analytical interpretations and participants' original statements. Together,

these procedures enhanced the transparency and consistency of the analytical process and maintained traceability from participants' accounts through coding and theme development to the reported findings.

2.6 Trustworthiness / Rigor

In qualitative research, transparent and systematic reporting of the research process, traceability of data collection and analysis procedures, and a clear connection between interpretations and participants' accounts are important for enhancing trustworthiness (Baltacı, 2019). In the present study, the research context, participant characteristics, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and analytical process were explicitly described to enhance transparency and methodological traceability. During the analysis, participants' responses were systematically examined, relevant meaning units were coded, and codes reflecting similar meanings were grouped into broader themes. The developing code and theme structure was subsequently reviewed in relation to the participants' accounts, with attention to similarities and differences across responses. In reporting the findings, code frequencies were used descriptively rather than for statistical generalization, and direct quotations were included to demonstrate the connection between the analytical interpretations and the participants' original statements. Together, these procedures were intended to strengthen the transparency, consistency, and interpretive grounding of the qualitative analysis.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University on November 30, 2022 (No. E-20292139-050.01.04-39524). Permission to conduct the study in schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education was obtained from the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education on December 9, 2022 (No. E-59090411-44-65466844). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

3. RESULTS

The findings derived from the content analysis were organized into three main themes: (1) student problems and existing support practices, (2) family- and school-related factors, and (3) perceptions of school social work and interprofessional collaboration. The overall structure of the themes and subthemes is presented in Figure 1.

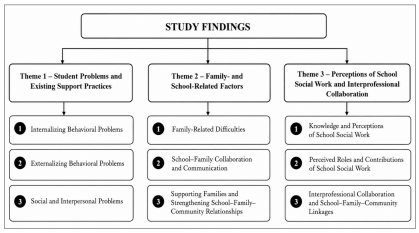

Figure 1. Themes and Subthemes of the Study

Note. The figure presents the three main themes and their subthemes derived from the perspectives of school counselors.

3.1 Theme 1 – Student Problems and Existing Support Practices

Based on participants' assessments, the problems students encountered in the school environment were organized into three subthemes: internalizing behavioral problems, externalizing behavioral problems, and social and interpersonal problems. Existing support practices addressing these problems were examined within the respective subthemes.

3.1.1 Internalizing Behavioral Problems and Support Provided

Support for internalizing behavioral problems was grouped into three codes: individual counseling (n = 7), family consultation (n = 5), and referral to a Guidance and Research Center (RAM) (n = 3). Participants reported that students' problems and related factors were assessed through

Table 2. Support/Intervention Codes by Problem Area

Problem Area	Support/Intervention Code	n
Internalizing behavioral problems	Individual counseling	7
	Family consultation	5
	Referral to a Guidance and Research Center (RAM)	3
Externalizing behavioral problems	Individual counseling	2
	Group activities	3
	Trust-building activities	7
	Referral to relevant public institutions	5
Social and interpersonal problems	Individual and group counseling	6
	Classroom activities	5
	Development of communication skills	5

Note. Frequencies indicate the occurrence of the relevant codes in participants' statements; the same participant may have reported more than one form of support/intervention.

individual counseling, that families and teachers were involved when necessary, and that students were referred to RAM or relevant healthcare institutions when further assessment or support was required. PF3 described this multifaceted assessment and referral process as follows:

> *The problem is investigated and assessed physiologically or psychologically; the student's history is taken; consultation is provided to the family and teacher; individual counseling is conducted; and, when necessary, the student is referred to a hospital or RAM. (PF3)*

3.1.2 Externalizing Behavioral Problems and Support Provided

Within the context of externalizing behavioral problems, support for peer bullying was particularly prominent. School counseling practices were grouped into four codes: individual counseling (n = 2), group activities (n = 3), trust-building activities (n = 7), and referral to relevant public institutions (n = 5). In the accounts of PF2 and PF6, individual and group counseling and, when necessary, family involvement were emphasized in interventions addressing peer bullying. PF2 described this process as follows:

> *The process is similar in cases of peer bullying. Individual counseling is provided, small-group sessions are conducted, and families are involved when necessary… (PF2)*

When a problem required intervention beyond the scope of school counseling practices, collaboration with and referral to relevant public institutions became particularly important. PM19 explained this process as follows:

> *We report the situation to the school administration, which then refers the matter, depending on its nature, to relevant public institutions such as social services or law enforcement. During this process, we continue to provide supportive counseling to the student through the school counseling service… (PM19)*

3.1.3 Social and Interpersonal Problems and Support Provided

In participants' assessments of **social and interpersonal problems**, the support provided by school counseling services was grouped into three codes: individual and group counseling (n = 6), classroom activities (n = 5), and development of communication skills (n = 5). Participants reported that individual and group counseling was used to identify areas in which students required support and to promote their social adjustment. Classroom activities addressed problem-solving, emotion regulation, social skills, peer relationships, and communica-

tion, while individual and group interventions were also used to develop students' communication skills. The accounts of PF8 and PM16 similarly emphasized the importance of individual and group interventions in identifying students' support needs, developing communication skills, and strengthening peer relationships. PF8 described this process as follows:

> *Individual and group interventions are conducted to identify the areas in which the student needs support, develop communication skills, and provide peer support… (PF8)*

3.2 Theme 2 – Family- and School-Related Factors

Participants' assessments highlighted various family- and school-related factors associated with the problems experienced by students in the school environment. The findings were organized into three subthemes: (1) family-related difficulties, (2) school–family collaboration and communication, and (3) supporting families and strengthening school–family–community relationships.

3.2.1 Family-Related Difficulties

Family-related difficulties were grouped into three codes: lack of parental involvement (n = 4), family behavioral problems (n = 3), and insufficient participation in parent education programs (n = 2). Participants' assessments indicated that some families were not sufficiently involved in their children's educational processes and that participation in school-organized activities could remain limited. PF5 drew attention to the lack of parental involvement:

> *Families do not pay enough attention to their children… (PF5)*

PM11, in contrast, emphasized insufficient parental participation in educational activities organized by the school:

> *We invite parents to the training sessions, but they do not attend… (PM11)*

3.2.2 School–Family Collaboration and Communication

Assessments of school–family relationships were grouped into two codes: openness to collaboration (n = 4) and difficulties in establishing collaboration (n = 2). Participants indicated that families' openness to collaboration facilitated the identification of students' problems and the implementation of support processes, whereas difficulties in establishing collaboration could hinder these processes. PF1 and PF9 emphasized the facilitating role of collaboration in providing support to students:

> *They are open to collaboration. The more effectively the school can reach the family, the faster and more effective the support provided to the child becomes. (PF1)*

> *When the family collaborates with us, we can understand the student's problem more easily and develop solutions together more quickly. (PF9)*

PM12 described the difficulties encountered when families could not be effectively involved:

> *We sometimes have difficulty reaching certain parents or involving them in the process. When the family is unwilling to collaborate, the work we can carry out with the student also becomes limited. (PM12)*

3.2.3 Supporting Families and Strengthening School–Family–Community Relationships

Participants' recommendations for strengthening school–family–community relationships were grouped into two codes: parent education (n = 12) and strengthening collaboration and communication (n = 8). Participants emphasized the need to promote more active family involvement in school processes, expand education and awareness-raising activities for parents, and strengthen school–family communication.

The accounts of PF2 and PM13 similarly highlighted the importance of parent education, family involvement, and healthy communication. PF2 expressed this need as follows:

> *Educational and awareness-raising activities should be provided for families, perhaps even with mandatory participation. I think healthy communication should be at the forefront of these programs—communication with themselves, with their children, and with teachers. (PF2)*

Table 3. Family- and School-Related Factors

Subtheme	Code	n
Family-related difficulties	Lack of parental involvement	4
	Family behavioral problems	3
	Insufficient participation in parent education programs	2
School–family collaboration and communication	Openness to collaboration	4
	Difficulties in establishing collaboration	2
Supporting families and strengthening school–family–community relationships	Parent education	12
	Strengthening collaboration and communication	8

Note. Frequencies indicate the occurrence of codes in participants' statements. Because a participant could express views corresponding to more than one code, the frequencies do not represent the total number of participants.

3.3 Theme 3 – Perceptions of School Social Work and Interprofessional Collaboration

The findings related to this theme were organized into three subthemes: (1) knowledge and perceptions of school social work, (2) perceived roles and contributions of school social work, and (3) interprofessional collaboration and school–family–community linkages.

3.3.1 Knowledge and Perceptions of School Social Work

Eight participants (40%) reported being knowledgeable about school social work, six (30%) reported being partially knowledgeable, and six (30%) reported having no knowledge of the field. Participants who indicated that they had no knowledge of school social work were not asked to define the service. Participants' definitions of school social work were grouped into two codes: psychosocial services (n = 4) and socioeconomic services (n = 7). PF7 emphasized support for students' psychosocial needs, PM15 highlighted the assessment of students' and families' social and economic circumstances and referral to appropriate support services, while PM20 emphasized addressing problems related to the family and social environment. PF7 described the psychosocial dimension of school social work as follows:

> *I think of school social work as assessing the social and psychological problems experienced by students and providing support to address these problems. (PF7)*

PM15 described the social and economic dimension as follows:

> *I think it involves assessing the economic and social circumstances of the student and family, identifying their needs, and referring them to appropriate social support services. (PM15)*

3.3.2 Perceived Roles and Contributions of School Social Work

Participants' assessments of the role and importance of school social work in the school setting were grouped into four codes: social work (n = 2), support for the school counseling service (n = 5), support for academic achievement (n = 3), and support for personal development (n = 4). Their

assessments particularly emphasized supporting school counseling services and contributing to students' academic and personal development.

The potential contributions of school social work to school counseling services were grouped into two codes: school-oriented contributions (n = 6) and student-oriented contributions (n = 5). The accounts of PF10 and PM17 commonly emphasized assessing students' family and social environments beyond the school setting, working with families, establishing connections with relevant institutions when necessary, and collaborating with the school counseling service. PF10 described these contributions as follows:

> *It could contribute by reporting identified problems to the relevant public authorities, mobilizing appropriate institutions, obtaining information about the student's family environment through home visits, and collaborating with the school counseling service. (PF10)*

3.3.3 Interprofessional Collaboration and School–Family–Community Linkages

Among the professionals and actors considered necessary for involvement in school social work, social workers (n = 11) were mentioned most frequently, followed by school counselors (n = 7), health professionals (n = 7), psychologists (n = 6), law enforcement personnel (n = 4), legal professionals (n = 3), classroom teachers (n = 2), municipalities (n = 1), and sociologists (n = 1). These findings indicate that school social work was viewed as an interprofessional field requiring the involvement of multiple professions and institutions.

Participants also indicated that school social work could help establish linkages among students, families, schools, and relevant institutions. The accounts of PF4 and PM18 commonly emphasized the need to assess students' needs in conjunction with their family and social environments and to work collaboratively with different professionals and institutions. PF4 expressed this need as follows:

> *Given the high number of student problems in schools and the limited time available for students who need support, establishing a social work unit could allow more time to be devoted to these students through collaborative work. School social work units could also support school counselors, who are unable to observe students outside the school environment, by assessing students' family environments. Such units should begin operating in schools as soon as possible. (PF4)*

4. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that students' needs within the school environment were not limited to individual problems but reflected a multidimensional structure associated with family, school, and the broader social environment. Participants viewed school social work as a complementary field of practice capable of addressing students' psychosocial and socioeconomic needs, supporting school counseling services, and facilitating linkages among students, families, schools, and relevant service systems. This holistic pattern can be discussed within the framework of the ecological and person-in-environment orientation of school social work and the need for interprofessional collaboration in school settings.

The inclusion of individual, group, family, and interagency interventions in the support provided for student problems indicates the need to address students' needs at multiple levels. This finding is consistent with the multilevel practice structure of school social work, which extends beyond interventions at the individual level. Ding et al. (2023) demonstrated that school social work encompasses not only services addressing students' social, behavioral, mental health, and academic needs but also preventive and systems-level practices.

Recent literature in Türkiye similarly indicates that school-based risks, such as peer bullying, should be addressed through a multidimensional approach. Kayadibi (2025) emphasizes that peer bullying is a multidimensional

Table 4. Perceptions of School Social Work and Interprofessional Collaboration

Subtheme	Dimension	Code	n
Knowledge and perceptions of school social work	Level of knowledge	Knowledgeable	8
		Partially knowledgeable	6
		Not knowledgeable	6
	Definition of the service	Psychosocial services	4
		Socioeconomic services	7
Perceived roles and contributions of school social work	Perceived role and importance	Social work	2
		Support for the school counseling service	5
		Support for academic achievement	3
		Support for personal development	4
	Perceived contributions to the counseling service	School-oriented contributions	6
		Student-oriented contributions	5
Interprofessional collaboration and school–family–community linkages	Professions and actors expected to be involved	Social worker	11
		School counselor	7
		Health professional	7
		Psychologist	6
		Law enforcement personnel	4
		Legal professional	3
		Classroom teacher	2
		Municipality	1
		Sociologist	1

Note. Frequencies for level of knowledge represent the total number of participants (N = 20), whereas the other frequencies indicate the occurrence of the relevant codes in participants' statements. Because a participant could express views corresponding to more than one code or profession/actor, the sum of these frequencies does not represent the total number of participants.

risk that can affect children's social, emotional, and academic development and highlights the importance of assessing the child in conjunction with school and family systems. Similarly, multi-tiered school-based supports require differentiated interventions to address students' social and emotional needs (Guest et al., 2024), while Guz and Irsheid (2024) argue that school engagement and attendance problems should be considered in relation to the broader social and structural conditions surrounding students. Consistent with these studies, the present findings support the importance of addressing students' needs through holistic and multilevel support mechanisms that extend beyond the individual level to incorporate family and school contexts.

The prominence of peer bullying in the present study highlights the importance of preventive interventions addressing behavioral and social risks in school settings. In Türkiye, Ersoy et al. (2023) draw attention to the preventive function of school social work in addressing risks such as peer and social media bullying, while Anılgan (2024) emphasizes collaboration among school personnel, social work professionals, and relevant institutions in promoting a safe school environment. Erdemir Turgut and Saban (2026) further associate the role of schools in the early identification of social and environmental risks

with a school-based child protection approach. Consistent with these studies, the present findings underscore the importance of the preventive and protective functions of school social work, as well as its role in facilitating interagency collaboration in responding to students' multidimensional needs.

Another important finding of the study is that student problems cannot be considered independently of the family context and that school–family collaboration constitutes an important component of the support process. This finding is consistent with an ecological orientation that considers students within the reciprocal interactions between family and school systems. Sugrue et al. (2023) identify communication and engagement with families as important dimensions of school social work and emphasize the need for these processes to be systematically structured, while Lochner and Richter (2024) highlight the importance of considering parents as a direct focus of school social work practice. In the context of Türkiye, Şen (2024) similarly draws attention to how changes in family life may affect students' academic functioning and adjustment and to the role of school social work in strengthening student–family–school linkages. Consistent with these studies, the present findings concerning parent education and the strengthening of school–family communication and collaboration support the importance of considering the family as a central component of school-based support processes.

Another important finding of the study is that student problems cannot be considered independently of the family context and that school–family collaboration constitutes an important component of the support process. Participants' accounts concerning limited parental involvement, difficulties in involving some families in school processes, and the need for parent education further demonstrate the relevance of the family dimension in responding to students' needs. This finding is consistent with an ecological orientation that considers students within the reciprocal interactions between family and school systems and highlights the family-oriented functions of school social work. Sugrue et al. (2023) identify communication and engagement with families as important dimensions of school social work and emphasize the need for these processes to be systematically structured, while Lochner and Richter (2024) highlight the importance of considering parents as a direct focus of school social work practice. In the context of Türkiye, Şen (2024) similarly draws attention to how changes in family life may affect students' academic functioning and adjustment and to the role of school social work in strengthening student–family–school linkages. Consistent with these studies, the present findings suggest that parent education, stronger school–family communication, and greater parental involvement may contribute not only to supporting students but also to strengthening broader school–family–community linkages within an ecological school social work perspective.

Another prominent finding is that school social work was viewed not as a replacement for school counseling services but as a field of practice that complements existing services through its distinct professional functions. Participants' views regarding the assessment of students' family and social environments, work with families, and linkages with relevant service systems are consistent with the person-in-environment orientation of school social work. Daftary et al. (2021) similarly demonstrate that school social work extends beyond students' circumstances within the school to include supporting families and connecting them with necessary resources and services. In the context of Türkiye, Yeşilkayalı and Meydan (2017) emphasize the importance of addressing student problems through a holistic and interprofessional approach encompassing students, families, schools, and environmental systems.

The present findings are also consistent with studies examining school counselors' assessments of school social work in Türkiye. Özkan et

al. (2019) found that although school counselors considered their knowledge of school social work to be insufficient, they held positive attitudes toward working with social workers and toward a psychosocial team approach. Similarly, Atagül et al. (2025) highlighted the family and economic dimensions of student problems and identified school social work as an important need within the education system. These findings are consistent with the present study, in which school social work was viewed as a field of practice capable of complementing school counseling services.

International literature likewise highlights the roles of school social workers not only in working directly with students and families but also in establishing linkages across systems and facilitating interprofessional collaboration (Ding et al., 2023). Wollter (2024) illustrates these multiple roles particularly through mediation and advocacy functions, while Gherardi et al. (2022) demonstrate that effective interprofessional practice also depends on organizational conditions such as adequate time and institutional support. These findings suggest that the complementary role of school social work requires not merely the presence of different professions within the school setting but a functional and institutionally supported structure for collaboration.

Participants' views regarding the involvement of social workers, school counselors, health professionals, psychologists, legal professionals, teachers, and other relevant actors highlight the interprofessional nature of responding to students' multidimensional needs. This finding suggests that effective school-based support may require not only the involvement of multiple professions but also clearly defined professional roles, referral pathways, and mechanisms for coordination across school and external service systems. This is consistent with literature in Türkiye emphasizing a multidisciplinary approach to the diverse problems encountered in school settings (Aktan, 2016). Effective interprofessional practice also requires supportive institutional conditions. Binks et al. (2024) identify inadequate service infrastructure and ambiguity in professional roles as barriers to implementation, while highlighting collaboration with professionals, students, families, and communities as a key facilitator.

Practice examples further support the importance of institutionally structured interprofessional collaboration. Westlake et al. (2024) show that embedding social workers in schools can facilitate closer collaboration with school personnel, but that effectiveness depends on their integration into the school system rather than their physical presence alone. Similarly, Sülü Akgül (2025) highlights collaboration among children, families, schools, and relevant institutions, together with teamwork and pilot practices, as important for developing school social work in Türkiye. These findings suggest that school social work should be developed not merely through staffing arrangements but through an integrated institutional model.

Despite growing academic interest in school social work in Türkiye, challenges related to its institutionalization within the education system persist. Cebeci and Artan (2024) note the absence of a formal practice structure, while Kuli and Yıldırım (2019) and Şimşek and Ceyhan (2025) demonstrate the continuing need for school social work in addressing students' multidimensional problems. Tekgöz Obuz (2025) and Önkol and Kırlıoğlu (2025) similarly identify continuing needs related to institutionalization, legislative infrastructure, and professional practice. Internationally, Lucio et al. (2024) highlight ambiguity across school social work practice models and call for greater clarity regarding professional roles, responsibilities, and boundaries of practice. Consistent with this literature, the present findings support the development of school social work in Türkiye as an institutionalized and complementary field of practice with clearly defined professional roles.

Within this institutionalization debate, the present study contributes the perspectives of

school counselors who work directly with student problems. Variation in participants' knowledge of school social work points to a need for greater visibility and professional recognition within school settings, while the complementary and linkage functions they attributed to the field provide practitioner-based insight into its potential role within the school system.

Taken together, the findings support an ecological and person-in-environment understanding of students' multidimensional needs and indicate that school social work can complement existing school-based services by addressing the connections among students, families, schools, and the broader social environment. By incorporating the perspectives of school counselors who work directly with student problems, the study provides a practice-based contribution to discussions on the development of school social work in Türkiye.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrated, from the perspectives of school counselors, that students' needs within the school environment are not limited to the individual level but reflect a multidimensional structure related to family, school, and the broader social environment. The findings indicate that students' behavioral and social problems, family-related difficulties, school–family collaboration, and the need for different support systems are interconnected. Therefore, students' needs should be addressed not solely through individual interventions but through holistic and multilevel support mechanisms that take school–family–community linkages into account.

One of the key conclusions of the study is that school social work was viewed not as a replacement for school counseling services but as a field that complements existing school-based services through its distinct professional functions. In particular, assessing students' family and social environments, working with families, establishing linkages with social resources and services, and facilitating interagency coordination highlight the complementary role of school social work grounded in the person-in-environment perspective. In this respect, school social work can be regarded as a field of practice that can contribute to addressing students' multidimensional needs through consideration of the interactions among different systems.

From practice and policy perspectives, the findings suggest that the development of school social work in Türkiye should not be reduced merely to the employment of social workers in schools. Given the qualitative design and the specific local context of the present study, these findings should be considered as practice-based insights rather than as a basis for proposing a single nationwide model. Any potential model should clearly define social workers' roles and responsibilities, delineate professional boundaries and complementary roles in relation to school counseling services, and establish structured mechanisms for interprofessional collaboration and referral. In addition, practices that promote family participation in school processes and linkages between schools and health, social services, child protection, and other community support systems should be considered within such models. In this regard, pilot initiatives across different school types, socioeconomic settings, and regional contexts could provide further practice-based evidence regarding the feasibility and potential organization of school social work in Türkiye.

This study makes a practitioner-based contribution to the literature on school social work in Türkiye by presenting the experiences and assessments of school counselors who work directly with student problems. Future research could incorporate the perspectives of students, families, teachers, school administrators, and social workers alongside those of school counselors, thereby enabling a multi-stakeholder assessment of needs and expectations related to school social work. Comparative studies conducted across different school types, socioeco-

nomic contexts, and regions could further identify contextual variations in the need for school social work. Moreover, evaluating the effects of newly developed school social work models on outcomes such as student well-being, school engagement, school–family collaboration, and access to relevant services through applied and longitudinal research could contribute to the development of evidence-based school social work models appropriate to the Turkish context.

6. LIMITATION

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study was conducted with 20 school counselors working in 15 primary and middle schools in the Tuzla district of Istanbul, and participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The study's focus on a specific local context and participant group limits the direct generalizability of the findings to other schools and local contexts. Second, the study examined school social work solely from the perspectives of school counselors; the views of students, families, teachers, school administrators, social workers, and other relevant professionals were not explored. This limits the possibility of comparing perspectives across different stakeholder groups. Finally, because the data were based on participants' self-reports obtained through semi-structured interviews, the findings should be interpreted within the context of their experiences, perceptions, and assessments. Accordingly, rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study provides context-specific qualitative findings that contribute to understanding school counselors' perspectives on school social work within the setting examined.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the conduct or publication of this study.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University on November 30, 2022 (No. E-20292139-050.01.04-39524). Permission to conduct the study in schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education was obtained from the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education on December 9, 2022 (No. E-59090411-44-65466844). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Availability

The qualitative data generated in this study are not publicly available to protect participant confidentiality and privacy.

Author Contributions

- **Mehmet Gedik:** Conceptualization, research design, methodology, supervision, reassessment of data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript development and writing, critical review, and final editing.
- **Sena Öksüz Poplata:** Literature review, evaluation of data analysis, interpretation of findings, development of the Discussion section, and academic review of the manuscript.
- **Yavuz Emrah Demir:** Conduct of the original master's research, fieldwork and data collection, initial data analysis, and preparation of the initial research manuscript.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

During the preparation of this manuscript, ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to improve language and academic

expression, support the structural organization of the text, and enhance academic readability. All text revised with AI assistance was reviewed and verified by the authors, and necessary modifications were made. The authors retain full responsibility for the analysis and interpretation of the research data, as well as for the scientific content and final version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the school counselors who voluntarily participated in the study and contributed by sharing their perspectives.

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