



# Characteristics and Outcomes of School Social Work Services: A Scoping Review of Published Evidence 2000–June 2022

Xiao Ding<sup>1</sup> · Estilla Lightfoot<sup>2</sup> · Ruth Berkowitz<sup>3</sup> · Samantha Guz<sup>4</sup> · Cynthia Franklin<sup>1</sup> · Diana M. DiNitto<sup>1</sup>

Accepted: 9 April 2023

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2023

## Abstract

School social workers are integral to the school mental health workforce and the leading social service providers in educational settings. In recent decades, school social work practice has been largely influenced by the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) approach, ecological systems views, and the promotion of evidence-based practice. However, none of the existing school social work reviews have examined the latest characteristics and outcomes of school social work services. This scoping review analyzed and synthesized the focuses and functions of school social workers and the state-of-the-art social and mental/behavioral health services they provide. Findings showed that in the past two decades, school social workers in different parts of the world shared a common understanding of practice models and interests. Most school social work interventions and services targeted high-needs students to improve their social, mental/behavioral health, and academic outcomes, followed by primary and secondary prevention activities to promote school climate, school culture, teacher, student, and parent interactions, and parents' wellbeing. The synthesis also supports the multiple roles of school social workers and their collaborative, cross-systems approach to serving students, families, and staff in education settings. Implications and directions for future school social work research are discussed.

**Keywords** School social work · School mental health · MTSS · School social work practice model · Interdisciplinary collaboration

## Introduction

This scoping review examines the literature on school social work services provided to address children, youth, and families' mental/behavioral health and social service-related needs to help students thrive in educational contexts. School social work is a specialty of the social work profession that is growing rapidly worldwide (Huxtable, 2022). They are prominent mental/behavioral health professionals that play a crucial role in supporting students' well-being and meeting

their learning needs. Although the operational modes of school social work services vary, for instance, operating within an interdisciplinary team as part of the school service system, or through non-governmental agencies or collaboration between welfare agencies and the school system (Andersson et al., 2002; Chiu & Wong, 2002; Beck, 2017), the roles and activities of school social work are alike across different parts of the world (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; International Network for School Social Work, 2016, as cited in Huxtable, 2022). School social workers are known for their functions to evaluate students' needs and provide interventions across the ecological systems to remove students' learning barriers and promote healthy sociopsychological outcomes in the USA and internationally (Huxtable, 2022). In the past two decades, school social work literature placed great emphasis on evidence-based practice (Huxtable, 2013; 2016, as cited in Huxtable, 2022); however, more research is still needed in the continuous development of the school social work practice model and areas such as interventions, training, licensure, and interprofessional collaboration (Huxtable, 2022).

✉ Xiao Ding  
xiaoding@austin.utexas.edu

<sup>1</sup> Steve Hicks School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin, 1925 San Jacinto Blvd 3.112, Austin, TX 78712, USA

<sup>2</sup> School of Social Work, Western New Mexico University, Silver City, NM, USA

<sup>3</sup> School of Social Work, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

<sup>4</sup> Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

The school social work practice in the USA has great influence both domestically and overseas. Several core journals in the field (e.g., *the International Journal of School Social Work, Children & Schools*) and numerous textbooks have been translated into different languages originated in the USA (Huxtable, 2022). In the USA, school social workers have been providing mental health-oriented services under the nationwide endorsement of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) (Avant & Lindsey, 2015; Barrett et al., 2020). In the past two decades, efforts at developing a school social work practice model recommended that school social workers have a master's degree, embrace MTSS and use evidence-based practices (EBP) (Frey et al., 2012). Similar licensure requirements have been reported in other parts of the world (International Network for School Social Work, 2016, as cited in Huxtable, 2022), but the current state of research on MTSS and EBP applications in other countries is limited (Huxtable, 2022). Furthermore, although previous literature indicated more school social workers applied EBP to primary prevention, including trauma-informed care, social-emotional learning, and restorative justice programs in school mental health services (Crutchfield et al., 2020; Elswick et al., 2019; Gherardi, 2017), little research has been done to review and analyzed the legitimacy of the existing school social work practice model and its influence in the changing context of school social work services. The changing conditions and demands of social work services in schools require an update on the functions of school social workers and the efficacy of their state-of-the-art practices.

## Previous Reviews on School Social Work Practice and Outcomes

Over the past twenty years, a few reviews of school social work services have been conducted. They include outcome reviews, systematic reviews, and one meta-analysis on interventions, but none have examined studies from a perspective that looks inclusively and comprehensively at evaluations of school social work services. Early and Vonk (2001), for example, reviewed and critiqued 21 controlled (e.g., randomized controlled trial [RCT] and quasi-experimental) outcome studies of school social work practice from a risk and resilience perspective and found that the interventions are overall effective in helping children and youth gain problem-solving skills and improve peer relations and intrapersonal functioning. However, the quality of the included studies was mixed, demographic information on students who received the intervention, such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and special education enrollment were missing, and the practices were less relevant to the guidelines in the school social work practice model (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2012). Later, Franklin et al. (2009)

updated previous reviews by using meta-analytic techniques to synthesize the results of interventions delivered by social workers within schools. They found that these interventions had small to medium treatment effects for internalizing and externalizing problems but showed mixed results in academic or school-related outcomes. Franklin et al. (2009) approached the empirical evidence from an intervention lens and did not focus on the traits and characteristics of school social workers and their broad roles in implementing interventions; additionally, demographic information, symptoms, and conditions of those who received school social work services were lacking. Allen-Meares et al. (2013) built on Franklin and colleagues' (2009) meta-analysis on school social work practice outcomes across nations by conducting a systematic review with a particular interest in identifying tier 1 and tier 2 (i.e., universal prevention and targeted early intervention) practices. School social workers reported services in a variety of areas (e.g., sexual health, aggression, school attendance, self-esteem, depression), and half of the included interventions were tier 1 (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Although effect sizes were calculated (ranging from 0.01–2.75), the outcomes of the interventions were not articulated nor comparable across the 18 included studies due to the heterogeneity of metrics.

Therefore, previous reviews of school social work practice and its effectiveness addressed some aspects of these interventions and their outcomes but did not examine school social workers' characteristics (e.g., school social workers' credentials) or related functions (e.g., interdisciplinary collaboration with teachers and other support personnel, such as school counselors and psychologists). Further, various details of the psychosocial interventions (e.g., service type, program fidelity, target population, practice modality), and demographics, conditions, or symptoms of those who received the interventions provided by school social workers were under-researched from previous reviews. An updated review of the literature that includes these missing features and examines the influence of current school social work practice is needed.

## Guiding Framework for the Scoping Review

The multi-tiered systems of support model allows school social workers to maximize their time and resources to support students' needs accordingly by following a consecutive order of prevention. MTSS generally consists of three tiers of increasing levels of preventive and responsive behavioral and academic support that operate under the overarching principles of capacity-building, evidence-based practices, and data-driven decision-making (Kelly et al., 2010a). Tier 1 interventions consist of whole-school/classroom initiatives (NASW, 2012), including universal positive behavior

interventions and supports (PBIS) (Clonan et al., 2007) and restorative justice practices (Lustick et al., 2020). Tier 2 consists of targeted small-group interventions meant to support students at risk of academic or behavioral difficulties who do not respond to Tier 1 interventions (National Association of Social Workers, 2012). Finally, tier 3 interventions are intensive individual interventions, including special education services, meant to support students who do not benefit sufficiently from Tier 1 or Tier 2 interventions.

The current school social work practice model in the USA (NASW, 2012) consists of three main aspects: (1) delivering evidence-based practices to address behavioral and mental health concerns; (2) fostering a positive school culture and climate that promotes excellence in learning and teaching; (3) enhancing the availability of resources to students within both the school and the local community. Similar expectations from job descriptions have been reported in other countries around the world (Huxtable, 2022).

Moreover, school social workers are specifically trained to practice using the ecological systems framework, which aims to connect different tiers of services from a person-in-environment perspective and to activate supports and bridge gaps between systems (Huxtable, 2022; Keller & Grumbach, 2022; SSWAA, n.d.). This means that school social workers approach problem-solving through systemic interactions, which allows them to provide timely interventions and activate resources at the individual, classroom, schoolwide, home, and community levels as needs demand.

Hence, the present scoping review explores and analyzes essential characteristics of school social workers and their practices that have been missed in previous reviews under a guiding framework that consists of the school social work practice model, MTSS, and an ecological systems perspective.

## Aims

This scoping review built upon previous reviews and analyzed the current school social work practices while taking into account the characteristics of school social workers, different types of services they deliver, as well as the target populations they serve in schools. Seven overarching questions guided this review: (1) What are the study characteristics of the school social work outcome studies (e.g., countries of origin, journal information, quality, research design, fidelity control) in the past two decades? (2) What are the characteristics (e.g., demographics, conditions, symptoms) of those who received school social work interventions or services? (3) What are the overall measurements (e.g., reduction in depression, anxiety, or posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD], improvement in parent–child relationships, or school climate) reported in these studies? (4) What types of

interventions and services were provided? (5) Who are the social work practitioners (i.e., collaborators/credential/licensure) delivering social work services in schools? (6) Does the use of school social work services support the promotion of preventive care within the MTSS? (7) What are the main outcomes of the diverse school social work interventions and services?

To the authors' knowledge, this is the first scoping review to examine these aspects of school social work practices under the guidance of the existing school social work practice model, MTSS, and an ecological systems perspective.

## Method

### Design

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) extension guidelines for completing a scoping review (Tricco et al., 2018) were followed for planning, conducting, and reporting the results of this review. The PRISMA scoping review checklist includes 20 essential items and two optional items. Together with the 20 essential items, the optional two items related to critical appraisal of included sources of evidence were also followed to assure transparency, replication, and comprehensive reporting for scoping reviews.

### Search Strategy

The studies included in this review were published between 2000 and June 2022. These studies describe the content, design, target population, target concerns, delivery methods, and outcomes of services, practices, and interventions conducted or co-led by school social workers. This time frame was selected since it coincides with the completion of the early review of characteristics of school social work outcomes studies (Early & Vonk, 2001); furthermore, scientific approaches and evidence-based practice were written in the education law for school-based services since the early 2000s in the USA, which greatly impacted school social work practice (Wilde, 2004), and was reflected in the trend of peer-reviewed research in school practice journals (Huxtable, 2022).

Following consultation with an academic librarian, the authors systematically searched relevant articles in seven academic databases (APA PsycINFO, Education Source, ERIC, Academic Search Complete, SocINDEX, CINAHL Plus, and MEDLINE) between January 2000 and June 2022. These databases were selected due to the relevance of the outcomes and the broad range of relevant disciplines they cover. When built-in search filters were available, the search included only peer-reviewed journal articles or dissertations

written in English and published between 2000 and 2022. The search terms were adapted from previous review studies with a similar purpose (Franklin et al., 2009). The rationale for adapting the search terms from a previous meta-analysis (Franklin et al., 2009) was to collect outcomes studies and if feasible (pending on the quality of the outcome data and enough effect sizes available) to do a meta-analysis of outcomes. Each database was searched using the search terms: (“school social work\*”) AND (“effective\*” OR “outcome\*” OR “evaluat\*” OR “measure\*”). The first author did the initial search and also manually searched reference lists of relevant articles to identify additional publications. All references of included studies were combined and deduplicated for screening after completion of the manual search.

### Eligibility Criteria

The same inclusion and exclusion criteria were used at all stages of the review process. Studies were included if they: (1) were original research studies, (2) were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals or were dissertations, (3) were published between 2000 and 2022, (4) described school social work services or identified school social workers as the practitioners, and (5) reported at least one outcome measure of the efficacy or effectiveness of social work services. Studies could be conducted in any country and were included for full-text review if they were published in English. The authors excluded: (1) qualitative studies, (2) method or conceptual papers, (3) interventions/services not led by school social workers, and (4) research papers that focused only on sample demographics (not on outcomes). Qualitative studies were excluded because though they often capture themes or ideas, experiences, and opinions, they rely on non-numeric data and do not quantify the outcomes of interventions, which is the focus of the present review. If some conditions of qualification were uncertain based on the review of the full text, verification emails were sent to the first author of the paper to confirm. Studies of school social workers as the sample population and those with non-accessible content were also excluded. If two or more articles (e.g., dissertation and journal articles) were identified with the same population and research aim, only the most recent journal publication was selected to avoid duplication. The protocol of the present scoping review can be retrieved from the Open Science Framework at [https://osf.io/4y6xp/?view\\_only=9a6b6b4ff0b84af09da1125e7de875fb](https://osf.io/4y6xp/?view_only=9a6b6b4ff0b84af09da1125e7de875fb).

A total of 1,619 records were initially identified. After removing duplicates, 834 remained. The first and the fourth author conducted title and abstract screening independently on Rayyan, an online platform for systematic reviews (Ouzzani et al., 2016). Another 760 records were removed from the title and abstract screening because they did not focus on school social work practice, were theory papers, or did

not include any measures or outcomes, leaving 68 full-text articles to be screened for eligibility. Of these, 16 articles were selected for data analysis. An updated search conducted in June 2022 identified two additional studies. The combined searches resulted in a total of 18 articles that met the inclusion criteria. The first and the fourth author convened bi-weekly meetings to resolve disagreements on decisions. Reasons and number for exclusion at full-text review were reported in the reasons for exclusion in the PRISMA chart. The PRISMA literature search results are presented in Fig. 1.

### Data Extraction

A data extraction template was created to aid in the review process. The information collected from each reference consists of three parts: publication information, program features, and practice characteristics and outcomes. Five references were randomly selected to pilot-test the template, and revisions were made accordingly. To assess the quality of the publication and determine the audiences these studies reached, information on the publications was gathered. The publication information included author names, publication year, country/region, publication type, journal name, impact factor, and the number of articles included. The journal information and impact factors came from the Journal Citation Reports generated by Clarivate Analytics Web of Science (n.d.). An impact factor rating is a proxy for the relative influence of a journal in academia and is computed by dividing the number of citations for all articles by the total number of articles published in the two previous years (Garfield, 2006). Publication information is presented in Table 1. Program name, targeted population, sample size, demographics, targeted issues, treatment characteristics, MTSS level, and main findings (i.e., outcomes) are included in Table 2. Finally, intervention features consisting of study aim and design, manualization, practitioners’ credential, fidelity control, type of intervention, quality assessment, and outcome measurement are presented in Table 3. Tables 2 and 3 are published as open access for review and downloaded in the Texas Data Repository (Ding, 2023).

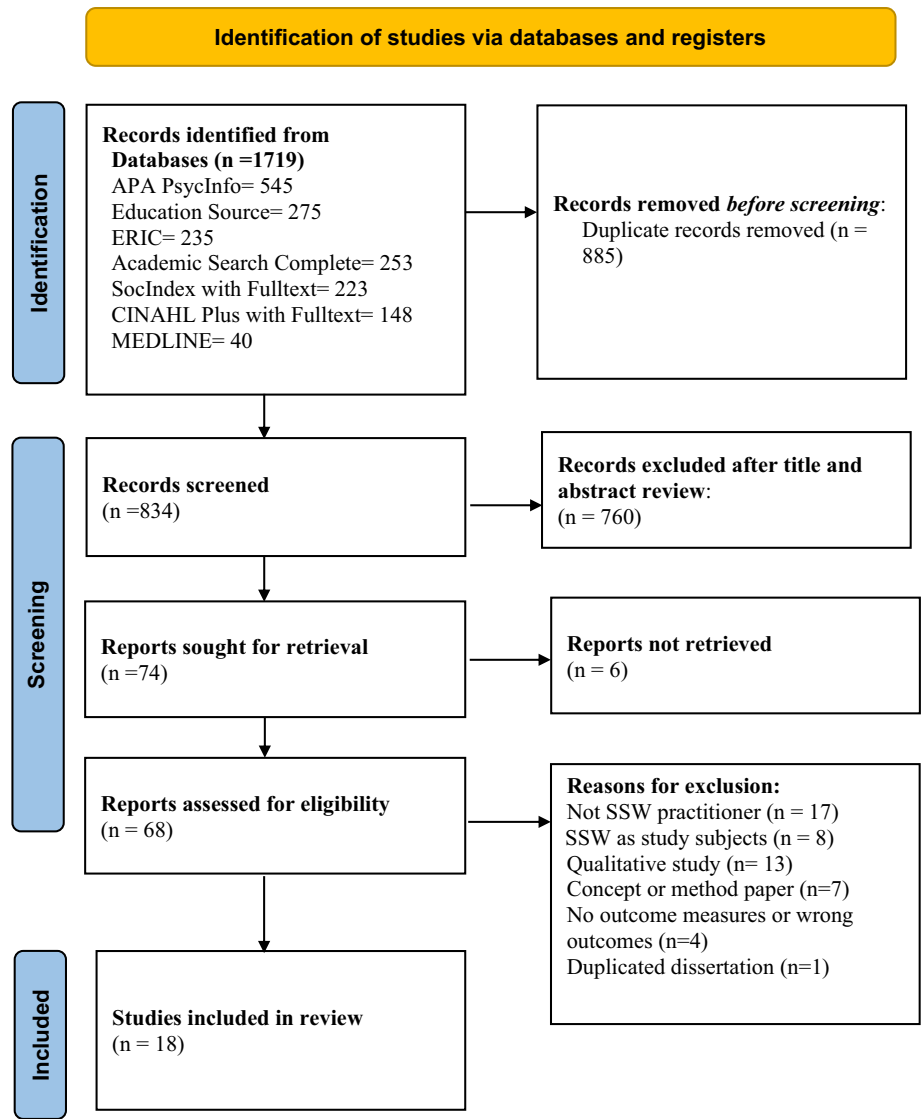
### Coding

The 18 extracted records were coded based on the data extraction sheet. The first and the fourth authors acted as the first and the second coder for the review. An inter-rater reliability of 98.29% was reached after the two coders independently completed the coding process.

### Quality Assessment

The quality of the eligible studies (e.g., methodological rigor, intervention consistency) was assessed using the

**Fig. 1** PRISMA Literature Search Record



**Table 1** Journals Reviewed, Impact Factor, and Number of Articles Selected for Review

Journal title	*IF	# of Articles
School Social Work Journal	–	2
Social Work in Public Health	1.128	1
International Social Work	2.071	1
Children & Schools (formerly Social Work in Education)	–	5
Social Work Research	1.844	1
Research on Social Work Practice	2.236	1
Contemporary School Psychology	–	1
Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	13.113	1
The European Research Institute for Social Work (ERIS) Winter 2020	–	1
Journal of Child and Family Studies	2.784	1
Georgia School Counselors Association Journal	–	1

\*The definition of impact factor (IF) is from Journal Citation Reports produced by Clarivate Analytics. IF is calculated based on a two-year period by dividing the number of citations in the JCR year by the total number of articles published in the two previous years

**Table 2** General Information on the Included School Social Work Practices

Author	Program Name	Sample Size	Demographics (Mean age/age range, race/ethnicity)	Targeted Issues	Population	Treatment Characteristics (Length & Frequency)	MTSS	Main Findings (significance & effect sizes)
Acuna et al. (2018), USA	Back to Basics Parenting Training	131	97.6% Latina/o, 2.4% Black; 87.9% participated in FRLP; 89.3% were mothers; 5–11 yo; 58% boys; 42% girls	Effective parenting and child's mental health/behavioral outcomes	Student & parent	120 min/tx; up to 10 weekly sessions	Tier 2	Significant improvements found in all child behaviors post-intervention. Intervention had a large effect size ( $d=1.11$ ) for home bx change, with large to moderate Effect sizes for social bx ( $d=0.70$ ), academic bx ( $d=0.65$ ), and school attendance bx ( $d=0.49$ )
Al-Rasheed et al. (2021), Kuwait	Fostering Youth Resilience Project	54	16.34 yo; 37% female	Promoting resilience, adaptive coping skills, and effective problem-solving	Student	60 min/tx; 9 sessions	Tier 1	At post-intervention, significant increases found in total resilience skills score, goal setting, critical thinking, and decision-making, self-esteem and respect, negotiation and conflict resolution, and social support and anger management skills
Chupp and Boes (2012), USA	Too Good for Violence: A Curriculum for Non-Violent Living	8	9–10 yo; 50% boys, 50% girls; 62.5% Black, 25% White, and 12.5% Multi-racial	Promoting social skills	Student	40 min/tx; 8 weekly sessions	Tier 1	Average student knowledge score increased by 8.3%; the majority increased in emotional skills, and a third showed improvement in inappropriate social behaviors; 33% reported improvement in grades

Table 2 (continued)

Author	Program Name	Sample Size	Demographics (Mean age/age range, race/ethnicity)	Targeted Issues	Population	Treatment Characteristics (Length & Frequency)	MTSS	Main Findings (significance & effect sizes)
Elsheerbiny et al. (2017), Egypt	Preventive Social Work Program	INT=24 CON=24	4–6 yo; 42% girls; enrolled in an inner-city private school	School refusal	Student, parent & teacher	20–30 min/tx; 4 phases, 30 sessions over a year	Tier 2	Compared to control group, improvements in the tx group were found for all four main hypotheses related to school refusal behaviors (e.g., decrease in school-avoiding stimuli, aversive social situations, attention-seeking, and tangible forces-seeking outside of school) at posttest and 6-month follow-up
Ervin et al. (2018), USA	Behavior Skills Training	6	8–18 yo ( $M = 12.3$ ); 100% enrolled in special ed	Classroom behaviors & academic difficulties	Student	30 min/tx	Tier 2	BST was effective in the classroom setting. Response to disruptive behavior measurement showed large effect size ( $d$ ) for all students, a decrease in disruptive behavior engagement was observed in both classrooms, and effect size was moderate or large for all students
Fein et al. (2021), USA	Families Overcoming Under Stress Resilience Curriculum for Parents	96	NR	Trauma-informed resilience development	Parent	60–90 min/tx; 7 sessions	Tier 2	Parents' improved significantly on one resilience item ("I am able to adapt when changes occur."), in family functioning ( $d = 0.41$ ), parent connectedness ( $d = 0.71$ ) and social support ( $d = 0.66$ ) from pre to post

Table 2 (continued)

Author	Program Name	Sample Size	Demographics (Mean age/age range, race/ethnicity)	Targeted Issues	Population	Treatment Characteristics (Length & Frequency)	MTSS	Main Findings (significance & effect sizes)
Ijadi-Maghssoodi et al. (2017), USA	Resilience Classroom Curriculum	100	NR	Resilience development	Student & teacher	45–55 min (or 25 min if needed)/tx; weekly or monthly; 9 sessions	Tier 1	Significant improvements in empathy and problem-solving observed as well as internal assets. Improved school support reported but not statistically significant. Lower odds of a positive PTSD screen were observed at posttest but not statistically significant. Medium effect sizes for improvements in problem-solving and overall internal assets; small effect size for empathy
Kataoka et al. (2003), USA	Mental Health for Immigrants Program	INT=152 CON=47	11.5 yo; 50% female, 100% immigrant Hispanic-speaking students in both elementary and middle schools	Trauma-related depression and/or PTSD symptoms	Student, parent, & teacher	One school period; 8 weekly sessions	Tier 2	Depression symptoms in the intervention group decreased from a mean CDI score of 16 to 14, and CPSS decreased from 19 to 13; no statistically significant CDI or CPSS difference for waitlist group. At 3-month follow-up, participants' CDI scores were significantly lower than waitlist group
Kelly and Bluestone-Miller (2009), USA	Working on What Works	21	NR	Create positive learning environment	Student & teacher	Over a year	Tier 1	WOWW resulted in an increase in teachers' perceptions of their classes as better behaved, and of themselves as more effective classroom managers



Table 2 (continued)

Author	Program Name	Sample Size	Demographics (Mean age/age range, race/ethnicity)	Targeted Issues	Population	Treatment Characteristics (Length & Frequency)	MTSS	Main Findings (significance & effect sizes)
Magnano (2009), USA	Partners in Success	INT=20 CON=20	10.4 yo; 12.5% female; 30% Black, 5% Hispanic, 65% White; 37.5% in foster placement; 100% enrolled in special ed; 67.5% had FRPL	Academic problems and anti-social behaviors among students with emotional/behavioral disabilities	Student & Parent	More than 16 weeks	Tier 3	Participants in both conditions improved in externalizing behaviors and academic skill development. Significant main effects found in some externalizing bxs across time points
Newsome (2005), USA	Solution-Focused Brief Therapy	26	11–14 yo (M=13.19); 27% female; 20% Black, 80% White	School failure	Student	35 min/tx; 8 weekly sessions; 4 groups	Tier 2	Social skills ratings indicated students improved dramatically after the 8-week intervention and maintained these gains at six-week follow-up but did not show further improvement
Newsome et al. (2008), USA	School social work intervention	INT=74 CON=71	66% Black, 34 White, 47% female; 70% qualify FRPL (INT only); all participating schools are Title I schools	Academic failure and chronic truancy	Student, parent, & family	Avg number of tx sessions: 5.56 for one-on-one intervention; 2.23 for group counseling; 5.96 for speaking w/ youth informally; 1.04 for one-on-one meeting w/guardian; 1.36 for phone conversation about youth; 3.46 for speaking w/ teacher about youth informally	Tier 3	School social work services had a statistically significant impact on reducing risk factors related to truant behaviors among students who received school social work services, but no significant differences between treatment and comparison groups on student absenteeism records

Table 2 (continued)

Author	Program Name	Sample Size	Demographics (Mean age/age range, race/ethnicity)	Targeted Issues	Population	Treatment Characteristics (Length & Frequency)	MTSS	Main Findings (significance & effect sizes)
Phillips (2004), USA	Group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	INT= 33 CON= 31	15.5–20.5 ( $M = 17.7$ ); 63.5% female; 11.1% Black, 23.8% Hispanic, 54% White, 11.1% Other; 34.5% lived with per capita income < \$20,000 yr	Adolescent's depression	Student	60 min/tx; 6 weekly sessions	Tier 2	The BDI change score was 3.12 for treatment group and 0.39 for control group. Eta-squared of .148 indicated a small effect. Significant differences between INT and CON groups for females, those with family history of depression, Whites, students with no other tx, and students who reported no recreational drug use
Sadzaglishvili et al (2020), Georgia	School Social Work Intervention	81	44% female, 2 <sup>nd</sup> –6 <sup>th</sup> grade students, high-number socially vulnerable families	School culture and class climate	Student, parent, & family	45 min/tx; School 1 = 45 class interventions; School 2 = 62; more than 13 months	Tier 1	Class climate more positive at posttest; students more involved in doing homework together and spent significant more free time together post-intervention; students expressed aggression less frequently; parents helped their children more and met with school administration more often to solve school related issues

Table 2 (continued)

Author	Program Name	Sample Size	Demographics (Mean age/age range, race/ethnicity)	Targeted Issues	Population	Treatment Characteristics (Length & Frequency)	MTSS	Main Findings (significance & effect sizes)
Thompson and Webber (2010), USA	The Student and Teacher Agreement Realignment Strategy	10	12 yo; 20% female; 30% Black, 70% White; all eligible for IEP	Perceptions of school and classroom norms	Student & teacher	5–10 min conference; weekly w/SSW; bi-weekly social skill lessons; 18 weeks	Tier 2	Mean number of office referrals for students during the intervention phase was significantly lower than the baseline means; required fewer suspensions and other reactive forms of discipline and classroom management
Wong et al. (2018a), Hong-Kong	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	INT=26 CON=20	11–14 yo (INT = 13.35 yo; CON = 13.15 yo); 65% lived in public housing; 90% of the INT group had income < HK\$20,000	Adolescent's anxiety	Student	120 min/tx; 8 sessions	Tier 2	Experimental group had a significant increase in cases falling back into the normal range of the HADS-A scale, and a significant decrease in number of probable anxiety cases while changes in number of anxiety cases were insignificant for the control group for all categories
Wong et al. (2018b), Hong-Kong	Group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	INT=42 CON=36	26–58 (T=47.38, C=44.06); about 50% had monthly family income btw HK\$10,001–HK\$30,000	Parental cognitions; self-efficacy, & mental health	Parent	180 min/tx; 10 sessions; 5 groups	Tier 2	Significant group by time interactions for most primary and secondary outcome variables indicating significantly greater improvement in experimental than control group; experimental group also showed greater improvement at post-test and 3-month follow-up

Table 2 (continued)

Author	Program Name	Sample Size	Demographics (Mean age/age range, race/ethnicity)	Targeted Issues	Population	Treatment Characteristics (Length & Frequency)	MTSS	Main Findings (significance & effect sizes)
Young et al. (2020), USA	Perfect Attendance Wins Stuff	41	47.1% Hispanic, 35.8% White, 7.2% Black, 7.1% Asian, 1.3% Multi-racial, 15.4% special education, 11.3% English-language learner, and 53.3% had FRPL	absenteeism	Student	Daily check-in, monthly celebration, weekly breakfast, phone calls home, referrals to community services, parent meetings, & home-visits; one year	Tier 3	significant effect in attendance percentage between time periods; post hoc tests revealed that attendance increased by an average of 12.2% after one month and remained steady at months 2 and 3

Note. Bx behavior, ed education, yo years old, yr = year. tx treatment, w with, T treatment group, INT intervention, CON control, FRPL Free/Reduced prices lunch, IEP Individualized education program, CBT cognitive behavior therapy, BST Behavior skill training, HADS-A Hospital anxiety and depression scale

Quality Assessment Tool for Quantitative Studies (Evans et al., 2015). Specifically, each included study was assessed for selection bias, study design, confounders, blinding, data collection method, dropouts or withdrawals, intervention integrity, and analyses. The first and fourth authors rated each category independently, aggregated ratings, and came to a consensus to assign an overall quality rating of strong, moderate, or weak for each of the 18 studies.

## Data Analysis

Due to the heterogeneity of the interventions, study purposes, methods, and measurements of the selected studies, and the lack of outcome data to calculate effect sizes, a meta-analysis was not feasible. Hence, the authors emphasized the scoping nature of this review, data were narratively synthesized, and descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mode, minimum, maximum, and range) were reported. Characteristics of included studies include topics, settings, participants, practice information (e.g., type of services, practitioner credential, MTSS modality, and other characteristics), and program efficacy. Within each reported category of interest, consistency and differences regarding the selected studies were synthesized. Unique features and reasons for some particular results were explained using analysis evidence according to the characteristics of the study.

## Results

### Overall Description of Included Studies

Of the 18 included studies, 16 were reported in articles that appeared in 11 different peer-reviewed journals, and two were dissertations (Magnano, 2009; Phillips, 2004). Information on each of the 11 journals was hand-searched to insure thoroughness. Of the 11 journals, seven were in the field of social work, with one journal covering social work as it relates to public health; one was a school psychology journal; one a medical journal covering pediatric psychiatry; and one journal focused on child, adolescent, and family psychology. The most frequently appearing journal was *Children & Schools*, a quarterly journal covering direct social work services for children (Oxford University Press, 2022). An impact factor (IF) was identified for six of the 11 journals. Of the six journals with an IF rating, four were social work journals. The IF of journals in which the included studies were published ranged from 1.128 to 12.113 (Clarivate Analytics, n.d.). Of the 18 studies, 5 studies (28%) were rated as methodologically strong, 8 studies were rated as moderate (44%), and 5 studies were rated as weak (28%).

The studies were conducted in five different geographical areas of the world. One study was conducted in the Middle

**Table 3** Characteristics of the Included Research Studies

Authors (year), Country/Region	Study aims	Design	Manualized	Credentialed	Fidelity control	Service type	Practitioner	Quality assessment	Outcomes (Measurements)
Acuna et al. (2018), USA	Examine feasibility and impact of a short-term school-based parenting intervention for children's disruptive behaviors	Pre-post-test	Yes	Master's-level licensed school social worker/trainee	Training of at least 8 h by program creator	EBP	SSW	Strong	Positive child behavior (Mental Health/Behavior Instrument)
Al-Rasheed et al. (2021), Kuwait	Pilot test of new universal school-based group prevention program to promote healthy attitudes and behaviors among high school students in Kuwait	Pre-post-test	Yes	NR	3 h training and workshop sessions for 5 days; ongoing evaluation	EPB	SSW & school psychologist	Strong	Resilience (The Resilience Skills Questionnaire)
Chupp and Boes (2012), USA	Examine efficacy of small group social skills lessons with elementary students based on a skills learning curriculum	Pre-post-test	NR	NR	Training (PI and SSW trained by curriculum creator)	EBP	SSW & school counselor	Weak	Social skills (Student Knowledge Survey; SBC; teacher's interview); GPA
Elsherbiny et al. (2017), Egypt	Test effectiveness of a preventive school social work program targeting school children and their parents to reduce school refusal	Experimental	NR	NR	Supervision	Long-term psycho-social intervention	SSW & school psychologist	Strong	School refusal (SRAS-C-R; SRAS-P-R)

Table 3 (continued)

Authors (year), Country/Region	Study aims	Design	Manualized	Credentialed	Fidelity control	Service type	Practitioner	Quality assessment	Outcomes (Measurements)
Ervin et al. (2018), USA	Assess effectiveness of combining behavior skill training with observational learning to train students to appropriately respond to disruptive bxs in the classroom	SS-multiple baselines	No	NR	IOA	Short-term psycho-social intervention	SSW & teacher	Weak	Behavior skills (Verbal Assessment; Classroom Observations)
Fein et al. (2021), USA	Study implementation of pilot Family Resilience Curriculum for Parents (FRC-P) in terms of functionality, feasibility, and acceptability	Pre-post-test	Yes	Master's-level social worker/trainee	Training at least 12 h; supervision (ongoing support from lead trainer)	EBP	SSW	Strong	Resilience (CD-RISC); family functioning (FAD-GFS); parent stress (PSS)
Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al. (2017), USA	Test feasibility and efficacy of adapted trauma-informed curriculum in building resilience skills among urban, ethnically diverse students	Pre-post	Partially	Licensed school social worker	Training (one day); SSWs were certified as curriculum providers	EBP	SSW	Strong	PTSD (PC-PTSD); Internal Assets & School Support (RYDM; CHKS); Student's Perception Scale

**Table 3** (continued)

Authors (year), Country/Region	Study aims	Design	Manualized	Credential	Fidelity control	Service type	Practitioner	Quality assessment	Outcomes (Measurements)
Kataoka et al. (2003), USA	Pilot test effectiveness of a school-based trauma-informed CBT group intervention for Latino immigrant students in addressing trauma and depressive symptoms due to community violence exposure	Quasi-Experimental	Yes	Master's-level social worker/trainee	Training (16 h); ongoing supervision (1 h/wk)	Short-term psycho-social intervention	SSW	Strong	Community violence (modified Life Events Scale); PTSD symptoms (CPSS); depressive symptoms (CDI) [in Spanish]
Kelly and Bluestone-Miller (2009), USA	Preliminary test WOWW program as way for school social workers to help teachers positively influence students' self-perception	Pre-post-test	Partially	NR	NR	EBP	SSW	Weak	Program effectiveness (Researcher-designed Likert Scale)
Magnano (2009), USA	Test effectiveness of a school-based case management intervention with articulated behavioral and academic outcomes of children placed in segregated settings due to emotional and behavioral disabilities	Quasi-Experimental, partial cross-over	Partially	NR	NR	Case management	SSW	Moderate	STAR Reading, Literacy, and Math scores; anti-social and aggressive behaviors (TRF; BRIC)

Table 3 (continued)

Authors (year), Country/Region	Study aims	Design	Manualized	Credentialed	Fidelity control	Service type	Practitioner	Quality assessment	Outcomes (Measurements)
Newsome (2005), USA	Test efficacy of SFBT group counseling program to enhance the behavioral, social, and academic competencies of students at-risk of school failure	Pre-post-test	Yes	Master's-level social worker/trainee	Training (a summer quarter); Supervision (1 h preceding each tx)	Short-term psycho-social intervention	SSW	Moderate	Homework completion (HPC); classroom behaviors and social skills (BERS; SSRS)
Newsome et al. (2008), USA	Examine impact of school social work services on reducing risk factors related to truancy and absenteeism in urban secondary school settings	Quasi-Experimental	NA	NR	NA	General school social work services	SSW	Strong	Risk factors for truancy (SSP); Unexcused truancy records from school district
Phillips (2004), USA	Test effectiveness of a school-based CBT curriculum for adolescents at risk for depression to improve emotional well-being	Quasi-Experimental	Partially	Master's-level social worker/trainee	NR	Short-term psycho-social intervention	SSW	Moderate	Depression (BDI)
Sadzaglishvili et al. (2020), country of Georgia	Test how an intensive school social work intervention may improve school culture in two highly vulnerable schools in Georgia, and the impact on children with special education needs	Pre-post-test	Partially	NR	NR	General social work services	SSW	Weak	School culture (self-report & case number)



**Table 3** (continued)

Authors (year), Country/Region	Study aims	Design	Manualized	Credential	Fidelity control	Service type	Practitioner	Quality assessment	Outcomes (Measurements)
Thompson and Webber (2010), USA	Pilot test a cognitive-behavioral intervention with special-ed middle school students on realigning rule perceptions at school and improve student behaviors by strengthening teacher-student relationship	SS-AB	Yes	NR	NR	EBP	SSW & teacher	Weak	Students' behaviors (teachers' rating)
Wong et al. (2018a), Hong-Kong	Examine effects of culturally attuned group CBT on anxiety symptoms and enhancing personal growth among adolescents at risk of anxiety disorders in Hong Kong	Quasi-Experimental	Yes	Licensed school social worker	Training (by experienced CBT therapists; videotape critiques); Supervision (throughout project)	Short-term psycho-social intervention	SSW	Strong	Anxiety (HADS-A subscale; Spence Children's Anxiety Scale); dysfunctional beliefs (DAS); personal growth (PGIS-II)
Wong et al. (2018b), Hong-Kong	Assess effects of a culturally attuned group CBT on mental health and quality of life of Chinese parents with children with ADHD in Hong Kong	Quasi-Experimental	Yes	Master's & Bachelor's level-social worker/trainee	Training (by experienced CBT therapists); Supervision (monthly throughout project)	Short-term psycho-social intervention	SSW	Strong	Distress symptoms (GHQ-12); quality of life (Q-LES-Q-18); parenting stress (PSI); parenting competence (PSOC); dysfunctional beliefs (DAS)

Table 3 (continued)

Authors (year), Country/Region	Study aims	Design	Manualized	Credential	Fidelity control	Service type	Practitioner	Quality assessment	Outcomes (Measurements)
Young et al. (2020), USA	Analyze a multilevel approach of the PAWS program in addressing chronic absenteeism in middle school	Pre-Post-test	NA	NR	NA	Pilot program	SSW school counselor, & psychologist	Moderate	School attendance rates

*Note.* NR Not reported, NA Not applicable, *h* hours, *tx* treatment, *wk* week, SSW School social work, IOA Interobserver agreement, SS single subject, AB baseline and intervention, SBC Student behavior checklist, GPA Grade point average, SRAS-C-R School refusal assessment scale-children-revised, SRAS-P-R School refusal assessment scale-parent-revised, CD-RISC Connor-davidson resilience scale, FAD-GFS McMaster family assessment device general functioning scale, PSS Perceived stress scale, PTSD Post-traumatic stress disorder, PC-PTSD Primary care post-traumatic stress disorder screen, RYDM Resilience youth development module, CHKS The California healthy kids survey, CPSS Child PTSD symptom scale, CDI Children depression inventory, TRF Teacher report form, RYCB Behavior rating index for children, HPC Problem checklist, BERS The behavioral and emotional rating scale, SSRS The social skills rating system, SSP The school success profile, BDI Beck depression inventory, DAS Dysfunctional attitudes scale, PGIS-II Personal growth initiative scale II, GHQ-12 Chinese general health questionnaire-12, Q-LES-Q-18 Abbreviated quality of life enjoyment and satisfaction questionnaire, PSY Parenting stress index- parent domain, PSOC Parenting sense of competence scale- efficacy subscale

East (5.56%), one in north Africa (5.56%), one in Eastern Europe (5.56%), two in East Asia (11.11%), and the rest (13 studies) in the USA (72.22%).

## Research Design and Fidelity Control

Concerning research design, most included studies used a pre-posttest design without a comparison group ( $n = 10$ , 61.11%), one used a single case baseline intervention design (5.56%), six (33.33%) used a quasi-experimental design, and one (5.56%) used an experimental design. For the control or comparison group, the experimental design study and four of the six quasi-experimental design studies used a waitlist or no treatment control/comparison group; one quasi-experimental design study offered delayed treatment, and one quasi-experimental design study offered treatment as usual. Nine studies (50%) reported that training was provided to the practitioners prior to the study to preserve fidelity of the intervention, four studies (22.22%) reported offering both training and ongoing supervision to the practitioners, and one study (5.56%) reported providing supervision only.

## Study Sample Characteristics

Across the 18 included studies, the total number of participants was 1,194. In three studies, the participant group (sample) was no more than ten, while in nine studies, the intervention group was more than 40. Overall, there was a balance in terms of students' sex, with boys comprising an average of 55.51% of the total participants in all studies. There were slightly more studies of middle school or high school students ( $n = 8$ ) than pre-K or elementary school students ( $n = 5$ ). Across the eight studies that reported students' race or ethnicity, 13.33% of the students were Black, 18.41% were White, 54.60% were Latinx, 12.38% were Asian, and 1.27% were categorized as "other." Although the studies reviewed were not restricted to the USA, the large number of Latinx participants from two studies (Acuna et al., 2018; Kataoka et al., 2003) might have skewed the overall proportions of the race/ethnicity composition of the study samples. As an indicator of socioeconomic status, eight studies reported information on free/reduced-price lunches (FRPL). The percentage of students who received interventions that qualified for FRPL varied from 53.3 to 87.9%. Five studies reported the percentage of students enrolled in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or special education, ranging from 15.4% to 100%.

## Variation in School Social Work Services

The services carried out or co-led by school social workers varied greatly. They included services focused on students' mental health/behavioral health; academic performance;

school environment; student development and functioning in school, classroom, and home settings; and parenting. More specifically, these interventions targeted students' depression and anxiety (Kataoka et al., 2003; Phillips, 2004; Wong et al., 2018a), social, emotional, and behavioral skills development (Acuna et al., 2018; Chupp & Boes, 2012; Ervin et al., 2018; Magnano, 2009; Newsome, 2005; Thompson & Webber, 2010), school refusal and truancy (Elsherbiny et al., 2017; Newsome et al., 2008; Young et al., 2020), trauma/PTSD prevention, community violence, and students' resilience (Al-Rasheed et al., 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Kataoka et al., 2003; Wong et al., 2018a), homework completion and grade-point average improvement (Chupp & Boes, 2012; Magnano, 2009; Newsome, 2005), parental stress (Fein et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2018b), family functioning (Fein et al., 2021), and parenting competence and resilience (Wong et al., 2018b). All of the studies were school-based (100%), and the most common setting for providing school social work services was public schools.

### Diverse Interventions to Promote Psychosocial Outcomes

Services can be grouped into six categories: evidence-based programs or curriculums (EBP), general school social work services, case management, short-term psychosocial interventions, long-term psychosocial intervention, and pilot program. Seven studies (38.89%) were EBPs, and four (57.14%) of the seven EBPs were fully manualized (Acuna et al., 2018; Al-Rasheed et al., 2021; Fein et al., 2021; Thompson & Webber, 2010). Two EBPs (28.57%) were partially manualized (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Kelly & Bluestone-Miller, 2009), one did not report on manualization (Chupp & Boes, 2012), and one is a pilot study trying to build the program's evidence base (Young et al., 2020). The second-largest category was short-term psychosocial interventions reported in six (33.33%) of the studies; they included cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT), and social/emotional skills training. One study reported on a long-term psychosocial intervention (Elsherbiny et al., 2017), and one was a case management program (Magnano, 2009). Two studies included general school social work services (e.g., one-on-one interventions with children and youth, group counseling, phone calls, official and informal conversations with teachers and parents, check-ins with students at school, and collaboration with outside agencies) (Newsome et al., 2008; Sadzaglishvili et al., 2020).

### Program Population

Of the 18 interventions, seven (38.89%) involved students only (Al-Rasheed et al., 2021; Chupp & Boes, 2012; Ervin

et al., 2018; Newsome, 2005; Phillips, 2004; Wong et al., 2018a; Young et al., 2020). One program (5.56%) worked with parent-child dyads (Acuna et al., 2018), and two (11.11%) worked directly with students' parents (Fein et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2018b). Four interventions (22.22%) involved students, parents, and teachers (Elsherbiny et al., 2017; Kataoka et al., 2003; Magnano, 2009), two (11.11%) were with students and their teachers (Kelly & Bluestone-Miller, 2009; Thompson & Webber, 2010), and two (11.11%) were more wholistically targeted at students, parents, and their families as service units (Newsome et al., 2008; Sadzaglishvili et al., 2020).

### Practitioners and Credentials

School social workers often collaborate with school counselors, psychologists, and schoolteachers in their daily practice. As for the titles and credentials of those providing the interventions, twelve interventions were conducted solely by school social workers (Acuna et al., 2018; Fein et al., 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Kataoka et al., 2003; Kelly & Bluestone-Miller, 2009; Magnano, 2009; Newsome, 2005; Newsome et al., 2008; Phillips et al., 2004; Sadzaglishvili et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2018a, 2018b). Four social service programs were co-led by school social workers, school counselors and school psychologists (Al-Rasheed et al., 2021; Chupp & Boes, 2012; Elsherbiny et al., 2017; Young et al., 2020). School social workers and schoolteachers collaborated in two interventions (Ervin et al., 2018; Thompson & Webber, 2010).

The most common credential of school social workers in the included studies was master's-level licensed school social worker/trainee, which accounted for 62.50% of the studies (Acuna et al., 2018; Fein et al., 2021; Kataoka et al., 2003; Newsome, 2005; Phillips, 2004). Two studies did not specify level of education but noted that the practitioners' credential was licensed school social worker (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2018a). One intervention was conducted by both master's and bachelor's level social work trainees; however, the first author confirmed that they were all registered school social workers with the Hong Kong Social Work Registration Board (Wong et al., 2018b).

### Services by Tier

The predominant level of school social work services was tier 2 interventions (55.56%), with 10 interventions or services offered by school social workers falling into this category (Acuna et al., 2018; Elsherbiny et al., 2017; Ervin et al., 2018; Fein et al., 2021; Kataoka et al., 2003; Newsome, 2005; Phillips, 2004; Thompson & Webber, 2010; Wong et al., 2018a, 2018b). The second largest category was tier 1 interventions, with five studies (27.78%) falling into

this category (Al-Rasheed et al., 2021; Chupp & Boes, 2012; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Kelly & Bluestone-Miller, 2009; Sadzaglishvili et al., 2020). Only three (16.67%) were tier 3 services (Magnano, 2009; Newsome et al., 2008; Young et al., 2020).

### Intervention Modality and Duration under MTSS

Most services ( $n = 15$ , 83.33%) were small-group based or classroom-wide interventions (Al-Rasheed et al., 2021; Chupp & Boes, 2012; Elsherbiny et al., 2017; Ervin et al., 2018; Fein et al., 2021; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Kataoka et al., 2003; Kelly & Bluestone-Miller, 2009; Newsome, 2005; Phillips, 2004; Sadzaglishvili et al., 2020; Thompson & Webber, 2010; Wong et al., 2018a, 2018b). One tier 2 intervention was carried out in both individual and group format (Acuna et al., 2018). Of the three tier 3 intervention studies, one reported using case management to serve individual students (Magnano, 2009), and two included both individual intervention, group counseling, and case management (Newsom et al., 2008; Young et al., 2020).

Intervention length and frequency varied substantially across studies. Services were designed to last from 6 weeks to more than 13 months. There were as short as a 5- to 10-min student–school social worker conferences (Thompson & Webber, 2010), or as long as a three-hour cognitive behavioral group therapy session (Wong et al., 2018b).

### Social Behavioral and Academic Outcomes

Most of the interventions focused on improving students' social, behavioral, and academic outcomes, including child behavior correction/reinforcement, social–emotional learning (SEL), school attendance, grades, and learning attitudes. Ervin and colleagues (2018) implemented a short-term psychosocial intervention to reduce students' disruptive behaviors, and Magnano (2009) used intensive case management to manage students' antisocial and aggressive behaviors. Both interventions were found to be effective, i.e., there were statistically significant improvements at the end of treatment, with Ervin et al. (2018) reporting a large effect size using Cohen's  $d$ . The SEL programs were designed to foster students' resilience, promote self-esteem, respect, empathy, and social support, and teach negotiation, conflict resolution, anger management, and goal setting at a whole-school or whole-class level (Al-Rasheed et al., 2021; Chupp & Boes, 2012; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Newsome, 2005). Students in all SEL interventions showed significant improvement at the end of treatment, and one study reported medium to small effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ) for problem-solving and overall internal assets, such as empathy,

self-efficacy, problem-solving, and self-awareness (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017).

Four studies measured the intervention's impact on students' academic performance. Magnano and colleagues (2009) reported that at the completion of the school social work case management intervention, academic skills were improved among both the intervention group students and the cross-over (control) group students who received the intervention at a later time. One study specifically addressed students' school refusal behaviors and attitudes and found improvement in the treatment group at posttest and six-month follow-up (Elsherbiny et al., 2017). Two studies that addressed students' absenteeism and truancy exhibited efficacy. School social work services significantly reduced risk factors related to truant behaviors (Newsome et al., 2008), and attendance increased post-program participation and was maintained after one, two, and three months (Young et al., 2020).

### Students' Psychological Distress

The studies that addressed students' mental health focused on psychological distress, especially adolescents' depression and anxiety. In three studies, school social workers conducted short-term psychosocial interventions, all using group-based CBT (Kataoka et al., 2003; Phillips, 2004; Wong et al., 2018a). Kataoka and colleagues (2003) reported that bilingual, bicultural school social workers delivered group CBT in Spanish to help immigrant students cope with depressive symptoms due to violence exposure. Similarly, Wong and colleagues (2018a) delivered group CBT in Chinese schools using their native language to address teenagers' anxiety disorders. In the Kataoka et al. (2003) study, all student participants were reported to have made improvements at the end of the intervention, although there was no statistically significant difference between the intervention group and waitlisted comparison group. Phillips (2004) reported an eta-squared of 0.148 for cognitive-behavioral social skills training, indicating a small treatment effect. One study used a resilience classroom curriculum to relieve trauma exposure and observed lower odds of positive PTSD scores at posttest, but the change was not statistically significant (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017).

### School Climate and School Culture

Regarding school social workers' interest in school climate and school culture, Kelly and Bluestone-Miller (2009) and Sadzaglishvili and colleagues (2020) specifically focused on creating a positive learning environment and promoting healthy school culture and class climate. Kelly and Bluestone-Miller (2009) used Working on What Works (WOWW), a program grounded in the SFBT approach to

intervene in a natural classroom setting to build respectful learning. Students were allowed to choose how to respond to expectations regarding their classroom performance (e.g., students list the concrete small goals to work upon in order to create a better learning environment), and teachers were coached to facilitate, ask the right questions, and provide encouragement and appropriate timely feedback. Sadzaglishvili and colleagues (2020) used intensive school social work services (e.g., case management, task-centered practice, advocacy, etc.) to support students' learning, whole-person development, and improve school culture. At the end of the services, both studies reported a more positive school and class climate that benefited students' behaviors and performance at school.

### Teacher, Parent, and Student Interaction

Four studies addressed interactions among teachers, parents, and students to achieve desired outcomes. For instance, two studies provided a mesosystem intervention (e.g., a parent's meeting with the teacher at the public school the child attended, which encompasses both the home and school settings). Acuna and colleagues (2018) provided a school-based parent–child interaction intervention to improve children's behaviors at school and home, boost attendance, and improve academic outcomes. Similarly, Thompson and Weber (2010) intervened in the teacher–student relationship to realign students' and teachers' perceptions of school and classroom norms and improve students' behaviors. Additionally, two interventions targeted the exosystem (e.g., positive environmental change to improve students' stability, in order to promote school behaviors and academic performance). Kelly and Bluestone-Miller (2009) modeled solution-focused approaches as a philosophy undergirding classroom interactions between teachers and students. The positive learning environment further improved students' class performance. Magnano and colleagues (2009) used a case management model by linking parents, teachers, and outside school resources to increase students' support and achieve improvements in academic skills and children's externalizing behaviors.

### Parents' Wellbeing

Most school counselors or school psychologists focus solely on serving students, while school social workers may also serve students' parents. Two studies reported working directly and only with parents to improve parents' psychological outcomes (Fein et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2018b). Fein and colleagues (2021) reported a school-based trauma-informed resilience curriculum specifically adapted for school social workers to deliver to racial/ethnic minority urban parents of children attending public schools. At

curriculum completion, parents' overall resilience improved, but significance was attained in only one resilience item ("I am able to adapt when changes occur") with a small effect size using Cohen's *d*. Wong et al. (2018b) studied school-based culturally attuned group-based CBT for parents of children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); significantly greater improvements in the CBT parent group were found in distress symptoms, quality of life, parenting stress, competence, and dysfunctional beliefs post-intervention and at three-month follow-up.

## Discussion

This scoping review examined school social work practice by systematically analyzing the services school social workers delivered based on 18 outcome studies published between 2000 and 2022. The programs, interventions, or services studied were conducted by school social workers in five different countries/regions. These studies captured the essence of school social workers' roles in mental health/behavioral health and social services in education settings provided to children, youth, families, and schoolteachers, and the evidence on practice outcomes/efficacy was presented.

Although using EBP, promoting a healthy school climate and culture, and maximizing community resources are important aspects of the existing school social work practice model in the USA (NASW, 2012), this review revealed and validated that school social workers in other countries used similar practices and shared a common understanding of what benefits the students, families, and the schools they serve (Huxtable, 2022). The findings also support the broad roles of school social workers and the collaborative ways they provide social and mental health services in schools. The review discussed school social workers' functions in (1) helping children, youth, families, and teachers address mental health and behavioral health problems, (2) improving social–emotional learning, (3) promoting a positive learning environment, and (4) maximizing students' and families' access to school and community resources. Furthermore, although previous researchers argued that the lack of clarity about school social worker's roles contributed to confusion and underutilization of school social work services (Altshuler & Webb, 2009; Kelly et al., 2010a), this study revealed that in the past two decades, school social workers are fulfilling their roles as mental/behavioral health providers and case managers, guided by a multi-tiered, ecological systems approach. For example, in more than 80% of the studies, the services provided were preventive group work at tier 1 or 2 levels and operated from a systems perspective. Additionally, the findings suggest that while school social

workers often provide services at the individual level, they frequently work across systems and intervene at meso- and exo-systems levels to attain positive improvements for individual students and families.

### **Evidence-based School Social Work Practice and MTSS**

The present review supported school social workers' use of evidence-based programs and valid psychosocial interventions such as CBT, SFBT, and social-emotional learning to foster a positive learning environment and meet students' needs. Most of the included EBPs (85.71%) were either fully or partially manualized, and findings from the current review added evidence to sustain the common elements of general school social work practice, such as doing case management, one-on-one individual and group counseling, collaborations with teachers, parents, and community agencies. One pilot study examined the effectiveness of a school social worker-developed program (Young et al., 2020), which provided a helpful example for future research practice collaboration to build evidence base for school social work practice. However, although school social workers often work with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) student populations facing multiple risk factors, demographic information on race/ethnicity, special education enrollment, and socioeconomic status were missing in many included studies, which obstructed examination of the degree of match between the target population's needs and evidence-based services or interventions provided.

Previous school social work national surveys conducted in the USA (Kelly et al., 2010a, 2015) found a discrepancy between the actual and ideal time expense on tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3 school social work activities. Even though school social workers would like to spend most of their time on primary prevention, they actually spent twice their time on secondary and tertiary prevention than on primary prevention (Kelly et al., 2010a). However, the present review found that most interventions or evidence-based programs conducted by school social workers were tier 1 and tier 2, especially tier 2 targeted interventions delivered in a group modality. This discrepancy could be due to the focus of this review's limited services to those provided by professionals with a school social worker title/credential both in the USA and internationally, and tier 2 and 3 activities were grouped together as one category called secondary and tertiary prevention in the school social work survey (Kelly et al., 2010a). Our review highlights that tier 2 preventive interventions are a significant offering in school social worker-led, school-based mental health practice. Unlike tier 1 interventions that are

designed to promote protective factors and prevent potential threats for all students, or intensive tier 3 interventions that demand tremendous amounts of time and energy from practitioners and often involve community agencies (Eber et al., 2002), tier 2 interventions are targeted to groups of students exhibiting certain risk factors and are more feasible and flexible in addressing their academic and behavioral needs. Moreover, considering the discrepancy between the high demand for services on campuses and the limited number of school social workers, using group-based tier 2 interventions that have been rigorously examined can potentially relieve practitioners' caseload burdens while targeting students' needs more effectively and efficiently.

### **School Social Work Credential**

Recent research on school social workers' practice choices showed that school social workers who endorsed primary prevention in MTSS and ecologically informed practice are more likely to have a graduate degree, be regulated by certification standards, and have less than ten years of work experience (Thompson et al., 2019). Globally, although data are limited, having a bachelor's or master's degree to practice school social work has been reported in countries in North America, Europe, and the Middle East (Huxtable, 2022). Even though all practitioners in the present review held the title of "school social worker," and the majority had a master's degree, we suggest future research to evaluate school social work practitioners' credentials by reporting their education, certificate/licensure status, and years of work experience in the education system, as these factors may be essential in understanding school social workers' functioning.

### **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

School social workers are an integral part of the school mental health workforce in education settings and often work in interdisciplinary teams that include schoolteachers, administrators, school counselors, and school psychologists (Huxtable, 2022). This scoping review found that one-third of interventions school social workers conducted were either co-led or delivered in collaboration with school counselors, school psychologists, or schoolteachers. Future research examining characteristics and outcomes of school social work practice should consider school social workers' efforts in grounding themselves in ecological systems by working on interdisciplinary teams to address parent-child interactions, realign teacher-student classroom perceptions, or student-teacher-classroom culture to improve students' mental health and promote better school performance.

## Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research

A scoping review is a valuable method for exploring a field that has not yet been extensively reviewed or is heterogeneous. Thus, a scoping review was chosen as the research method to examine school social work practice outcomes for this study. Although scoping reviews are generally considered rigorous, transparent, and replicable, the present study has several limitations. First, only published dissertations and journal articles published between 2000 and 2022 that were included in the seven aforementioned databases were reviewed. Government reports and other gray literature excluded from the present review might generate more results requiring critical evaluation and discussion. Second, although school social work practice is ecological system-centered, all studies analyzed in the present scoping review were school-based programs. The search terms did not include possible alternative settings. More extensive searches might identify additional results by specifying home or community settings. Third, this paper focused on the outcomes and efficacy of the most current school social work practices so that qualitative studies or studies that focus on practitioners' demographics were excluded even though they might provide additional information on the characteristics of social workers. Last, evidence to support school social work interventions was based primarily on pre-posttest designs without the use of a control group, and some of the identified evidence-based programs or brief psychosocial interventions lacked sufficient information on participants' characteristics (e.g., demographics, changes in means in outcomes), which are important in calculating practice effect sizes and potential moderators for meta-analysis to examine school social workers' roles and effectiveness in carrying out these interventions.

## Conclusion

The present scoping review found significant variation in school social work services in the US and other countries where school social work services have been studied. Social workers are a significant part of the mental health and social services workforce. Using schools as a natural hub, school social workers offer primary preventive groups or early interventions to students, parents, and staff. Their interests include but are not restricted to social behavioral and academic outcomes; psychological distress; school climate and culture; teacher, parent, and student interactions; and parental wellbeing. Future school mental health researchers who are interested in the role of school social work services in helping children, youth, and families should consider the changing education landscape and the response to intervention after the COVID-19 pandemic/endemic (Capp et al.,

2021; Kelly et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). Researchers are also encouraged to collaborate with school social work practitioners to identify early mental health risk factors, recognize appropriate tier 2 EBPs, or pilot-test well-designed programs to increase students' success.

## Declarations

**Conflicts of interest** We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

## References

### References marked with an asterisk indicate studies included in the scoping review.

- \*Acuña, M. A., & Martínez, J. I. (2018). Pilot evaluation of the back to basics parenting training in urban schools. *School Social Work Journal*, 42(2), 39–56.
- Allen-Meares, P., Montgomery, K. L., & Kim, J. S. (2013). School-based social work interventions: A cross-national systematic review. *Social Work*, 58(3), 253–262.
- \*Al-Rasheed, M. (2021). Resilience-based intervention for youth: An initial investigation of school social work program in Kuwait. *International Social Work*, 00208728211018729.
- Altshuler, S. J., & Webb, J. R. (2009). School social work: Increasing the legitimacy of the profession. *Children and Schools*, 31, 207–218.
- Anderson, G., Pösö, P., Väisänen, E., & Wallin, A. (2002). School social work in Finland and other Nordic countries: Cooperative professionalism in schools. In M. Huxtable & E. Blyth (Eds.), *School social work worldwide*. NASW Press.
- Avant, D. W., & Lindsey, B. C. (2015). School social workers as response to intervention change champions. *Advances in Social Work*, 16(2), 276–291. <https://doi.org/10.18060/16428>
- Barrett S., Eber L., Weist M. (2020). Advancing education effectiveness: Interconnecting school mental health and school-wide positive behavior support. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports.
- Beck, K. (2017). The diversity of school social work in Germany: A systematic review of the literature. *International Journal of School Social Work*, 2(1), 1.
- Capp, G., Watson, K., Astor, R. A., Kelly, M. S., & Benbenishty, R. (2021). School social worker voice during COVID-19 school disruptions: A national qualitative analysis. *Children and Schools*, 43(2), 79–88.
- Chiu, S., & Wong, V. (2002). School social work in Hong Kong: Constraints and challenges for the special administrative region. In M. Huxtable & E. Blyth (Eds.), *School social work worldwide*. NASW Press.
- \*Chupp, A. I., & Boes, S. R. (2012). Effectiveness of small group social skills lessons with elementary students. *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal*, 19(1), 92–111.
- Clonan, S. M., McDougal, J. L., Clark, K., & Davison, S. (2007). Use of office discipline referrals in school-wide decision making: A practical example. *Psychology in the Schools*, 44, 19–27.
- Clarivate Analytics. (n.d.). *Journal Citation Reports*. <https://mjl.clarivate.com/search-results>

- Crutchfield, J., Phillippo, K. L., & Frey, A. (2020). Structural racism in schools: A view through the lens of the national school social work practice model. *Children & Schools, 42*(3), 187–193.
- Ding, X. (2023). "Characteristics and Outcomes of school social work services: a scoping review of published evidence 2000–2022", <https://doi.org/10.18738/T8/7WQNJX>, Texas Data Repository, V1
- Early, T. J., & Vonk, M. E. (2001). Effectiveness of school social work from a risk and resilience perspective. *Children & Schools, 23*(1), 9–31.
- Eber, L., Sugai, G., Smith, C. R., & Scott, T. M. (2002). Wraparound and positive behavioral interventions and supports in the schools. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 10*(3), 171–180.
- \*Elsherbiny, M. M. (2017). Using a preventive social work program for reducing school refusal. *Children & Schools, 39*(2), 81–88.
- Elswick, S. E., Cuellar, M. J., & Mason, S. E. (2019). Leadership and school social work in the USA: A qualitative assessment. *School Mental Health, 11*(3), 535–548. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-018-9298-8>
- \*Ervin, T., Wilson, A. N., Maynard, B. R., & Bramblett, T. (2018). Determining the effectiveness of behavior skills training and observational learning on classroom behaviors: A case study. *Social Work Research, 42*(2), 106–117.
- Evans, N., Lasen, M., & Tsey, K. (2015). Appendix A: effective public health practice project (EPHPP) quality assessment tool for quantitative studies. *A systematic review of rural development research: characteristics, design quality and engagement with sustainability. USA: Springer*, 45–63.
- \*Fein, E. H., Kataoka, S., Aralis, H., Lester, P., Marlotte, L., Morgan, R., & Ijadi-Maghsoodi, R. (2021). Implementing a school-based, trauma-informed resilience curriculum for parents. *Social Work in Public Health, 36*(7–8), 795–805.
- Franklin, C., Kim, J. S., & Tripodi, S. J. (2009). A meta-analysis of published school social work practice studies: 1980–2007. *Research on Social Work Practice, 19*(6), 667–677.
- Frey, A. J., Alvarez, M. E., Sabatino, C. A., Lindsey, B. C., Dupper, D. R., Raines, J. C., & Norris, M. P. (2012). The development of a national school social work practice model. *Children and Schools, 34*(3), 131–134.
- Garfield, E. (2006). The history and meaning of the journal impact factor. *JAMA, 295*(1), 90–93.
- Gherardi, S. A. (2017). Policy windows in school social work: History, practice implications, and new directions. *School Social Work Journal, 42*(1), 37–54.
- Huxtable, M. (2022). A global picture of school social work in 2021. *Online Submission 7*(1).
- \*Ijadi-Maghsoodi, R., Marlotte, L., Garcia, E., Aralis, H., Lester, P., Escudero, P., & Kataoka, S. (2017). Adapting and implementing a school-based resilience-building curriculum among low-income racial and ethnic minority students. *Contemporary School Psychology, 21*(3), 223–239.
- \*Kataoka, S. H., Stein, B. D., Jaycox, L. H., Wong, M., Escudero, P., Tu, W., & Fink, A. (2003). A school-based mental health program for traumatized Latino immigrant children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 42*(3), 311–318.
- Keller, J., & Grumbach, G. (2022). *School social work: A skills-based competency approach*. London: Springer Publishing Company.
- Kelly, M. S., Benbenishty, R., Capp, G., Watson, K., & Astor, R. (2021). Practice in a pandemic: School social workers' adaptations and experiences during the 2020 COVID-19 school disruptions. *Families in Society, 102*(3), 400–413.
- Kelly, M. S., Berzin, S. C., Frey, A., Alvarez, M., Shaffer, G., & O'Brien, K. (2010). The state of school social work: Findings from the national school social work survey. *School Mental Health, 2*(3), 132–141.
- \*Kelly, M. S., & Bluestone-Miller, R. (2009). Working on what works (WOWW): Coaching teachers to do more of what's working. *Children & Schools, 31*(1), 35–38.
- Kelly, M. S., Frey, A. J., Alvarez, M., Berzin, S. C., Shaffer, G., & O'Brien, K. (2010b). School social work practice and response to intervention. *Children and Schools, 32*(4), 201–209.
- Kelly, M. S., Frey, A., Thompson, A., Klemp, H., Alvarez, M., & Berzin, S. C. (2015). Assessing the national school social work practice model: Findings from the second national school social work survey. *Social Work, 61*(1), 17–28.
- Lustick, H., Norton, C., Lopez, S. R., & Greene-Rooks, J. H. (2020). Restorative practices for empowerment: A social work lens. *Children & Schools, 42*(2), 89–98. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdaa006>
- \*Magnano, J. (2009). *A social work intervention for children with emotional and behavioral disabilities*. Albany: State University of New York.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2012). *NASW standards for school social work services*. <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1Ze4-9-Os7E%3D&portalid=0>
- \*Newsome, W. S. (2005). The impact of solution-focused brief therapy with at-risk junior high school students. *Children and Schools, 27*(2), 83–90.
- \*Newsome, W. S., Anderson-Butcher, D., Fink, J., Hall, L., & Huffer, J. (2008). The impact of school social work services on student absenteeism and risk factors related to school truancy. *School Social Work Journal, 32*(2), 21–38.
- Ouzzani, M., Hammady, H., Fedorowicz, Z., & Elmagarmid, A. (2016). Rayyan: A web and mobile app for systematic reviews. *Systematic Reviews, 5*, 1–10.
- Oxford University Press. (2022). *Children & Schools*. <https://academic.oup.com/cs>
- Phillippo, K. L., & Blosser, A. (2013). Specialty practice or interstitial practice? A reconsideration of school social work's past and present. *Children & Schools, 35*(1), 19–31.
- \*Phillips, J. H. (2004). *An evaluation of school-based cognitive-behavioral social skills training groups with adolescents at risk for depression*. Arlington: The University of Texas.
- \*Sadzaglishvili, S., Akobia, N., Shatberashvili, N., & Gigineishvili, K. (2020). A social work intervention's effects on the improvement of school culture1. *ERIS Journal-Winter, 2020*, 45.
- School Social Work Association of America [SSWAA]. (n.d.). *School social work practice model overview: Improving academic and behavioral outcomes*. [https://www.sswaa.org/\\_files/ugd/486e55\\_47e9e7e084a84e5cbb7287e681f91961.pdf](https://www.sswaa.org/_files/ugd/486e55_47e9e7e084a84e5cbb7287e681f91961.pdf)
- Thompson, A. M., Frey, A. J., & Kelly, M. S. (2019). Factors influencing school social work practice: A latent profile analysis. *School Mental Health, 11*(1), 129–140.
- \*Thompson, A. M., & Webber, K. C. (2010). Realigning student and teacher perceptions of school rules: A behavior management strategy for students with challenging behaviors. *Children and Schools, 32*(2), 71–79.
- Tricco, A. C., Lillie, E., Zarin, W., O'Brien, K. K., Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., & Straus, S. E. (2018). PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and explanation. *Annals of Internal Medicine, 169*(7), 467–473.
- Watson, K. R., Capp, G., Astor, R. A., Kelly, M. S., & Benbenishty, R. (2022). We need to address the trauma: School social workers' views about student and staff mental health during COVID-19. *School Mental Health, 14*, 1–16.
- Wilde, J. (2004). Definitions for the no child left behind act of 2001: Scientifically-based research. *National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction NCELA*.
- \*Wong, D. F., Kwok, S. Y., Low, Y. T., Man, K. W., & Ip, P. S. (2018a). Evaluating effectiveness of cognitive-behavior therapy for Hong Kong adolescents with anxiety problems. *Research on Social Work Practice, 28*(5), 585–594.



- \*Wong, D. F., Ng, T. K., Ip, P. S., Chung, M. L., & Choi, J. (2018b). Evaluating the effectiveness of a group CBT for parents of ADHD children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(1), 227–239.
- \*Young, S., Connolly Sollose, L., & Carey, J. P. (2020). Addressing chronic absenteeism in middle school: A cost-effective approach. *Children and Schools*, 42(2), 131–138.

Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.