



Original research article

The perspective of cooperation between foster parents and the school social workers in elementary schools

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Abstract

Goal: This study aims to discover the interest of foster parents in cooperating with the school social workers in elementary schools to support the children's school success during foster care.

Methods: The quantitative survey was based on a non-standardised questionnaire validated for comprehensibility and relevance by professionals in non-profit organisations who conducted a pilot survey with cooperating foster parents. The research group was created by purposive sampling ($n = 102$). Descriptive statistics and exploratory analysis methods were used to evaluate the obtained data.

Results: Foster parents are provided with expert advice by a non-profit organisation supporting foster families in social services, child rearing, education, and health. In schools, they use the entire spectrum of consulting services of pedagogical staff. They are somewhat satisfied with the support services provided, but show an interest in working with the school social worker to support the children's school success, health, and well-being.

Conclusion: The need to institutionalise the profession of a school social worker in a Czech primary school appears to be a desirable prospective support of a child's school success and healthy growth, and a necessary help for parents regarding health and social counselling and services, especially when dealing with challenging life situations associated with school attendance. The social worker's global role has already been institutionalised in many countries around the world.

Keywords: Child in foster care; Foster care; School social worker; School success

Introduction

According to Act No. 359/1999 Coll., on the social and legal protection of children, an agreement on providing foster care is an institute where the foster parent agrees with an accompanying organisation, which can be a state institution of a locally competent body for the social and legal protection of children or an authorised person, most often a non-profit organisation authorised for this activity (Pazlarová, 2016). The agreement defines the rights, obligations, and professional support for foster parents to ensure the quality of foster care, e.g., through psychological, therapeutic, or other professional assistance, by providing a free opportunity to increase knowledge and skills, which foster parents are obliged to do (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2023). Decree No. 473/2012 Coll. § 5 letter C states the obligation of the accompanying organisation to provide or mediate education for the foster parent regarding care for the child's healthy growth during changes related to the child's education and developmental stages of the child's personality. A social worker using the tools, methods, and techniques of social work for long-

term and continuous provision of the needs of foster families is assigned to the foster family by the accompanying organisation. Their duties include being in personal contact with the child and the foster carer (at least once every two months and once every six months), submitting a report on the progress of foster care to the relevant social and legal child protection body with a legal obligation to monitor the development of children who have been placed in foster care or other persons responsible for education (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2023). According to the Ministry of Social Affairs (2023), to be a key social worker providing professional social counselling, social and legal protection of children, accompanying foster families, planning and evaluating the needs of these families and entrusted children, it is necessary to meet the qualification requirements according to § 110 paragraph 4 of Act No. 108 /2006 Coll., on social services, as amended.

In the current system of the social and legal protection of children, Řezáč (2022) is convinced of the necessity of foster care to ensure the rights and best interests of the child when the original biological family does not fulfil its role and the social worker supervising the healthy development of the child

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ensures the child's needs and understands their life situation with a comprehensive insight. According to Navrátilová et al. (2021), children going to foster families are vulnerable because of challenging experiences that harm their health and well-being. According to Sears et al. (2023), many foster parents deal with the children's mental health problems, seeking a doctor, psychologist, and the school's counselling services.

Jabosen et al. (2024) emphasise the high risk of schools failing to provide children in foster care with success, which is a challenge for social workers who are competent in supporting dialogue between foster parents and educators to set equal conditions in education. Kolář and Šikulová (2009) draw attention to the need to objectively assess the achievement or non-achievement of school success from the point of view of individual student performance possibilities. Paton et al. (2022) call for the cooperation of the education and health sectors with the vital role of doctors, who are experts in mental health and, in collaboration with educators, implementing educational processes supporting the school success of pupils through proper care of pupils' mental health.

Koslouski et al. consider (2023) it challenging to create a safe and healthy environment for children from foster families in relationships with their teachers and classmates in class groups. According to Miller et al. (2021), in the school environment, children from foster families are more vulnerable in relationships compared to children living in biological families. The feelings of security arising from solid relationships with teachers, friends, and foster families are crucial for healthy growth. Vágnerová (2012) also supports the cooperation between foster parents and schools when the child's school success is at risk. This can clarify and calm the situation, enabling them to set reasonable goals for school success and experience the joy of achieving them.

Professional counselling services in Czech education are provided to pupils, their families, legal representatives and pedagogues in schools and school counselling facilities based on Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education (Education Act), Decree No. 116/2011 Coll., on the provision of counselling services in schools and school facilities, and Decree No. 147/2011 Coll., on the education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs and exceptionally gifted children, pupils and students. According to Knotová et al., the responsibility for providing counselling services in Czech schools rests with (2014) a school principal who assembles a team of professionals to form a school counselling workplace. These experts include an educational consultant, a school prevention methodologist, a school special pedagogue, and a school psychologist – focusing on, for example, the primary and secondary prevention of socio-pathological phenomena threatening the healthy development of children, prevention, and the possibility of solving school failure in cooperation with the families of pupils. Šámalová and Vojtišek (2021) describe counselling facilities cooperating with schools in providing paedagogical-psychological, health and preventive educational counselling services and interventions, such as paedagogical-psychological counselling centres and special paedagogical centres, which further cooperate with the social-legal child protection authorities, social workers, the Police of the Czech Republic, anti-drug coordinators, doctors, and non-profit organisations. Kolbe (2019) studies the impact of schools on public health and suggests that healthier children learn better. More educated adults are healthier and more economically productive, thus supporting their education, health, and social background is essential.

In the global practice of school social work, Huxtable (2022) sees significant support for the quality of the educational process with the ability to strengthen the school's resilience in the context of societal changes. According to Ding et al. (2023), school social workers play an integral part in a team of school counsellors, working through interventions and providing professional individual and group counselling to improve the social, mental/behavioural health and academic outcomes of students, primary and secondary prevention activities supporting school climate, interaction between teachers, pupils and parents, and support for parents' well-being.

Jarolmen and Bautista-Thomas (2023) consider the school as an open system constantly influenced by society's social, economic, and political climate, in which the school social worker actively interacts with these systems at the micro- and macro-level at any time. According to Forenza and Eckhardt (2020) and Gherardi and Whittlesey-Jerome (2018), a clear definition of the role of the school social worker is necessary for understanding cooperation between the school, local community, social work practice, and school social care clients. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2012), the role of the school social worker corresponds with the ecological model of school social work practice in the US with three main aspects: (1) addressing clients' behavioural and mental health according to evidence-based practice; (2) promoting a positive school culture and climate for student success; (3) increasing the availability of resources for pupils and other school social work clients within school education in a school environment connected to the local community.

According to Havlíková (2019), several experts from the environment of Czech social work and Czech schools consider school social work beneficial. However, ensuring its institutionalisation has not yet been possible. Decree No. 116/2011 Coll., on providing counselling services in schools and educational facilities, regulates the activities of social workers in education. Therefore, only school counselling services are regulated by legislation, but school social work in Czech schools as such is not. According to Elswick et al. (2019), in foreign practice, school social workers are equipped with professional competencies, enabling their unique insight into the bio-psycho-social factors influencing the well-being and health of school children. Their "person-in-environment" education offers a unique understanding of the problems in the school environment to use a holistic approach to intervene and interdisciplinary collaboration to support a positive school climate, success, relationships, health, and the well-being of students and their families. According to Matoušek (2022), the roles of the social worker are combined according to the needs of the client and the relevant context for an appropriate intervention strategy based on research or evidence-based practice. The exceptionality and irreplaceability of the school social worker profession are characterised by Franklin et al. (2009). Supporting the psychosocial needs of pupils and families in the context of the school environment is complex. Studies concur that there is a relationship between solving children's social problems and subsequent positive academic results.

Materials and methods

Procedure

This quantitative study focuses on professional foster parents. In the first phase, we approached managers of non-profit organisations accompanying foster families in the Pardubice

Region and asked for their cooperation and consent to conduct research. After obtaining the consent, we emailed the accompanying foster care organisations' staff and asked them to deliver online questionnaires to professional foster parents. The electronic link to the questionnaire was distributed to the selected respondents, the research purpose was described to them, and they were guaranteed anonymity. The study aimed to provide the identified data to these cooperating non-profit organisations to improve the quality of their services to foster families and support the coordination of services connecting educational, health, and social care for the family and the child. The respondents' credibility and cooperation in filling out the questionnaires were ensured through these non-profit organisations. Data collection took place between August and November 2023. The most significant limitations of the questionnaire survey were the problematic availability of respondents in their natural environment, the time-consuming nature of filling out the questionnaires, and the electronic form of the questionnaire as respondents needed a suitable electronic tool to fill it out conveniently.

Characteristics of the research sample

The main inclusion criteria in the research were the cooperation between the foster parent and the accompanying organisation of foster families and the education of at least one foster child who fulfilled compulsory school attendance at elementary school. The research sample ($n = 102$) included professional foster parents, clients of non-profit organisations accompanying foster families with children aged 6–15 in various forms of foster care, i.e., mediated long-term foster care 65 respondents (63.7%), non-mediated foster care – grandparent 21 respondents (20.6%), non-mediated foster care – a close person 14 respondents (13.7%), and transitional foster care 2 respondents (2.0%). The respondents in the research group cared for a total of 148 children ($n = 148$), 79 girls (53.4%) and 69 boys (46.6%). 91 children (61.5%) attended the 1st grade of elementary school, 57 children (38.5%) attended the 2nd grade of elementary school. 50 children (33.8%) were admitted to foster care from the original family, 66 (44.6%) were from facilities for institutional education or facilities requiring immediate help for the child, and 32 children (21.6%) were from temporary foster care.

Research tool

This research was based on quantitative research techniques. The data collection technique was a non-standardised questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was based on a professional literature search on educational, pedagogical-psychological and health-social issues for school children in foster care, considering foreign experiences. The study determined which experts foster parents dealt with, what form of communication they used in the educational process to support school success and the healthy growth of children, and how satisfied foster parents were with the school in relation to ensuring the children's success. It evaluated the specific needs for the cooperation between foster parents and a school social worker at an elementary school. Research goals and questions with concepts elaborated and refined in their operationalisation and determination of their indicators are based on professional theoretical and research sources. Questionnaire items reflecting operationalised concepts were used to construct the questionnaire. Researchers cooperated with representatives of non-profit organisations who accompanied foster families to validate the questionnaire's relevance and comprehensibility. Five selected cooperating foster parents ensured the piloting

of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was created in electronic form in the LIME SURVEY® program, available in the university environment.

Statistical analyses

We used descriptive and exploratory statistics to evaluate the obtained research data according to the recommendations of Jones and Goldring (2022) for the relevant choice of these statistical testing methods. The data were processed using the statistical program STATISTICA, version 14.0.0.15. Its multi-license is regularly updated by the University of Pardubice (TIBCO STATISTICA®, University of Pardubice, 2023).

We established and verified the assumption that even if foster parents caring for school children are provided with health and social counselling by non-profit organisations and the elementary school and are satisfied with this support, they need cooperation with the school social worker at the elementary school.

A non-parametric Pearson's chi-square test was used to test a specific statistical hypothesis, which verified H_0 , i.e., there is no relationship between the school social worker's assessment of the need for foster parents and their satisfaction with the current support. The non-parametric Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to express the correlation of the selected needs of foster children in the context of the required support by the school social worker.

Results

The study results summarise the cooperation between foster parents and professionals from the field of healthcare, social services, and education, who care for their foster children in the educational process while fulfilling compulsory school attendance at primary schools. The results show the individual professions with which the foster parents cooperate and the specific needs the foster parents have in the field of pedagogical, pedagogical-psychological, educational, and health-social counselling to support school success and the healthy growth of foster children.

Cooperation with professionals in the educational process of children in foster care

Table 1 presents the results of the frequency of cooperation of foster parents with professionals in the educational process, which foster parents consider the most effective and necessary to ensure the support of their children's healthy growth and school success. Most foster parents, 84 (81.55%), turn to the class teacher, and 76 (73.79%) respondents cooperate with the school principal. A key worker of the accompanying organisation helps half of the respondents (51.46%) regarding school success. Almost half of the respondents (40.77%) cooperate with a pedagogical-psychological consulting department. Other mentioned cooperating experts included the child social and legal protection authority staff, the school psychologist, and the doctor. Respondents reported very low cooperation with the educational consultant; less than 20% of foster parents used this service. Fewer foster parents (only 10%) used a special education centre worker. Table 1 includes professionals with institutionalised positions to support children's school success in elementary schools. To analyse the foster parents' interest in cooperating with the school social worker, separate questionnaire items were created with the school social worker's competencies.

Table 1. Professional support evaluations overview that foster parents deal with supporting the school success of their foster children, ranked according to the highest number of positive answers

Professionals	Number of respondents (answer YES)	Relative frequency (%)	Number of respondents (answer NO)	Relative frequency (%)	Total respondents (N)
class teacher	84	81.55	18	17.48	102
headmaster	76	73.79	26	25.24	102
a key worker of the accompanying organisation	53	51.46	49	47.57	102
employee of the pedagogical-psychological consulting department	42	40.77	60	58.25	102
the teacher of the subject in which the child has difficulties	40	38.83	62	60.19	102
OSPOD employee	31	30.09	71	68.93	102
school psychologist	25	24.27	77	74.76	102
the physician	20	19.41	82	79.61	102
school guidance counsellor	19	18.45	83	80.58	102
school special pedagogue	17	16.50	85	82.52	102
employee of the special education centre	10	9.70	92	89.32	102

The table above shows that foster parents cooperate with school pedagogues the most. Table 2 shows the forms of communication with the school. Foster parents consider personal meetings with pedagogues at class meetings (SD = 3.36) and

personal contact with pedagogues outside of class meetings (SD = 3.32) the most effective communication. They consider communication via the electronic student book the least effective (SD = 4.19).

Table 2. Evaluation of the contribution of individual forms of communication between foster parents and the school

Form of communication	Valid N	Average	Median	Total	St. dev.
in person at class meetings	102	6.362745	7.00000	649.0000	3.633696
in person and outside of class meetings	102	7.549020	10.00000	770.0000	3.325948
by phone	102	5.970588	5.00000	609.0000	3.779716
by e-mail	102	4.558824	5.00000	465.0000	3.875727
in writing	102	3.490196	2.00000	356.0000	3.754193
via electronic student book	102	4.931373	5.00000	503.0000	4.198679

Analysis of the interest and needs of foster parents in cooperating with the school social worker

Comparing groups of respondents who are “satisfied”, “dissatisfied”, or “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with the work of the school in supporting the school success of their foster children, there is no statistically significant difference in the need for cooperating with the school social worker in elementary school. Table 3 shows the analysis of the evaluation of satisfaction with providing support for school success in combination with the interest in cooperation with the school social worker in primary school. Although 55 respondents ($n = 102$) are satisfied with the school’s work, 39 respondents (70.91%) clearly need a school social worker. 23 respondents ($n = 102$) are not satisfied or dissatisfied with the school’s work, and 18 respondents (78.91%) need to cooperate with the school’s social worker. 24 respondents ($n = 102$) were not satisfied with the school’s work, and a similar overall result was recorded for 17 respondents (70.83%) who were interested in working with

the school social worker. Only 18 respondents ($n = 102$) could not assess their interest in cooperation, and 10 respondents ($n = 102$) did not show interest in a school social worker.

Table 4 presents statistical testing of the relationship between foster parents’ satisfaction with the school in ensuring support for children’s success and their interest in the school social worker’s counselling. This relationship was tested for statistical significance with the χ^2 test at the $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level. Table 4 shows the resulting value of the statistic test (5.89), the degree of freedom of the table ($df = 4$), and the achieved p (0.23) of the tested null hypothesis. Achieved $p > \alpha$ means no statistically significant relationship between the variables. The resulting finding shows that the respondents show an interest in cooperation with the school social worker – independently of their assessment of the level of satisfaction with the school’s work in supporting the school success and healthy growth of their foster children.

Table 3. Contingency table: Combination of assessment of satisfaction with providing support for school success with interest in the counselling of the school social worker

Foster carers' satisfaction with the school in ensuring support for children's school success	Bivariate table: Observed frequencies			Total
	Interest in a social worker at elementary school (answer YES)	Interest in a social worker at elementary school (unable to assess)	Interest in a social worker at elementary school (answer NO)	
neither yes or no	18	4	1	23
%	78.26%	17.39%	4.35%	
yes	39	12	4	55
%	70.91%	21.82%	7.27%	
no	17	2	5	24
%	70.83%	8.33%	20.83%	
total	74	18	10	102

Table 4. Statistical testing of the relationship between foster parents' satisfaction with the school in ensuring the support of children's school success and interest in counselling the school social worker

Statistics	Statistic values		
	χ^2	df	p
Pearson's chi-square	5.892145	df = 4	p = 0.20735
M-V chi-square	5.627649	df = 4	p = 0.22873

Table 5 presents a contingency table analysing the combination of the foster parent's assessment of the child's school success with their interest in the support of the school social worker. 90 foster parents ($n = 102$) rate their children in foster care as successful in school. 68 (75.56%) are interested in working with a school social worker, 12 (13.33%) are unable to assess their interest in this cooperation, and only 10 respondents (11%) showed no interest. 12 respondents ($n = 102$) who rated their children as unsuccessful in school were not uninterested in cooperating with the school social worker. Table 5 shows that foster parents in both groups are interested in counselling the school social worker according

to the evaluation of the school success of their foster children (yes/no).

Table 6 shows the specific needs that foster carers expect from a school social worker working in an elementary school. The numerical values in the table correspond to the average sum of the evaluation of the level of need by the respondents (who evaluated individual types of needs on a scale of 0–10, where zero meant “no” and 10 was the most intense level of need). Values highlighted in bold correspond to the highest need for specific counselling and services a school social worker can provide.

Table 7 shows the correlation matrix of the interrelationships of the assessed needs from the school social worker's role in individual types of counselling and services. Counselling in difficult life situations associated with the school attendance of foster children is linked to all other categories of needs in the assessment of foster parents. Spearman's correlation indicates the largest size of the correlation coefficient for the selected items highlighted in bold in the table. The correlation coefficients are significant at the 5% significance level. As a problematic crisis, they mostly perceive the situation in which they need to assist the family and the child ($r = 0.75$).

Table 5. Contingency table: Combining the assessment of the child's school success by the foster parents with their interest in the school social worker

Successful child	Interested in a school social worker (answer YES)	Interested in a school social worker (unable to assess)	Interested in a school social worker (answer NO)	Total
yes	68	12	10	90
%	75.56%	13.33%	11.11%	
no	6	6	0	12
%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	
total	74	18	10	102

Table 6. Evaluation of the degree of need of foster parents for individual types of counselling and services from the school social worker

Variable: Foster carers' needs from the school social worker	Descriptive statistics				
	Valid N	Average	Median	Total	St. dev.
orientation in the system of social benefits and services	102	4.117647	3.500000	420.0000	3.818387
consultation in difficult life situations	102	6.509804	8.000000	664.0000	3.871053
help with financial support for the child at school	102	3.862745	3.000000	394.0000	3.794314
educational recommendations	102	4.931373	5.000000	503.0000	3.705120
supporting communication between foster parents and the school	102	7.049020	9.000000	719.0000	3.456598
supporting communication between the child and foster carers	102	4.950980	5.000000	505.0000	3.986059
prevention of undesirable behaviour of pupils at school	102	7.539216	9.500000	769.0000	3.373371
organisation of pupils' extracurricular activities	102	6.039216	6.000000	616.0000	3.631331
connection of pupils' families and the school	102	5.872549	6.000000	599.0000	3.711560
visiting the home environment of the child's foster family	102	2.558824	1.000000	261.0000	3.274787
assistance in exercising the child's rights and needs in relation to school	102	7.147059	9.000000	729.0000	3.416318
providing crisis assistance to the family and the child	102	6.470588	8.000000	660.0000	3.796053

Table 7. Part of the correlation matrix of the mutual relations of the assessment of the individual expressed needs of counselling of the school social worker

Variable	Consultation in difficult life situations (size r , $\alpha = 0.05$)
orientation in the system of social benefits and services	0.628349
consultation in difficult life situations	1.000000
financial support for the child at school	0.473255
educational recommendations	0.451174
supporting communication between foster parents and the school	0.472798
supporting communication between the child and foster carers	0.644047
prevention of undesirable behaviour of pupils at school	0.632885
organisation of pupils' extracurricular activities	0.544267
connection of pupils' families and the school	0.642873
visiting the home environment of the child's foster family	0.434357
assistance in exercising the child's rights and needs concerning school	0.590628
providing crisis assistance to the family and the child	0.754557

Discussion

According to Font and Gershoff (2020), most children in foster care show a need for supportive social and health services that can find solutions to meet the physical and mental health needs of children through knowledgeable substitute caregivers that protect children from the possible escalation of further painful experiences. The respondents in our research cooperate with many professionals in the educational process to support school children's school success – most often with the class teacher and the social worker of the accompanying organisation. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013), such a social worker is obligated to provide professional social counselling and strengthen the competence of foster parents regarding the care of entrusted children and their relationship. They also provide an understanding of the child's problems in relation to health, upbringing, and education. Testa (2023) deals with the evaluation and benefits of professional cooperation. In his research, he demonstrates the necessity of establishing the effectiveness of interdisciplinary partnership cooperation within the school setting with the professional motivation of social workers, psychologists, and pedagogues to support school success and the well-being of pupils effectively. At the same time, many respondents expressed satisfaction with schools supporting children's success in their foster care. Průcha et al. (2013) see the school's success in a positive evaluation of the student's performance in mastering the requirements set by the school in the cooperation of the student and the teacher.

In our research, the school social worker's professional competencies correspond to the respondents' needs. They welcome the school social worker's interventions in family crises, orientation in the social benefits and services system, and support of healthy relationships – with mutual communication between children, foster parents, and the school. Our findings

also correspond with the Avant (2014) research, where families, students, and teachers predominantly use the services and advice of school social workers in supporting the health and well-being of children and their school success, providing intervention and consultations in crises, administrative support, peer mediation, and relationship counselling between actors in the school environment. Vágnerová (2012) draws attention to the need for professional help in a foster family's problematic life situations by emphasising the demanding role of a foster parent during the school year. They care for a child who must demonstrate their ability to adapt to the educational process and the assigned school obligations and confirm one's qualities concerning the demands of adults and peers. According to Matoušek (2022), essential competencies of a social worker include helping clients strengthen their ability to recognise the sources of problems, accepting responsibility for solving problems, and supporting mutual communication.

The social worker-client relationship remains central to contemporary social work and its identity. Rollins (2020) describes the context of fulfilling the role of a social worker working with children, where the social worker-client relationship is seen as a working space for intervention, and the social worker acts as a mediator in relationship building. The research findings of this study show the foster parents' need for counselling in challenging life situations of children and their family background, following the characteristics of the school social worker's role (according to Kjellgren et al. (2024)). This role includes providing professional advice to pupils, parents, and teachers with a therapeutic approach and healing help, especially to children and adolescents who suffer from a poor mental state, absence from school, or stress, which are barriers to their school success and, as a result, negatively affect the health and well-being of the children and their families.

Cutuli (2022) considers a significant benefit of school counselling to be health promotion and disease prevention for children and youth from families with insufficient health care to be its ability to remove obstacles to access to health care. According to Smékalová (2014), the strengths of school counselling include its direct association with the school environment, supporting a suitable classroom and school climate, enabling a reduction in the number of pupils/clients sent for examination and care in school counselling facilities, catching pupils with potential learning problems, preventive work with manifestations of risky behaviour threatening the child's health, as well as career counselling. In the current practice of the school social worker, Huxtable (2022) highlights the newly emerging dimension of the school social worker's communication with pupils, parents, and teachers. E-mail, telephone contact, and online communication tools and platforms are increasingly added to personal meetings in the Internet environment, facilitating the reachability of clients. Despite this current trend, the respondents in our study identify personal meetings with professionals in schools as the most effective form of communication and cooperation to support children's school success.

According to Hurjui (2016), school failure among children is increasing. A good teacher can recognise its symptoms in time and set corrective and preventive measures in cooperation with the student's family. The respondents of this study need to cooperate with the school social worker regarding prevention and working with the risky behaviour of school children that threaten their health. Findings in the research by Hrušková and Mrhálka (2018) show rising trends of risky

behaviour among school children and youth, especially in the use of analgesics, energy drinks, addictive substances, and smoking, together with risky leisure activities such as clubbing, long-term playing on the computer, and consuming energy drinks.

Sears et al. (2023) draw attention to the threat to the health of a particularly vulnerable group of rural school children and youth with signs of addictive behaviour. They often have limited access to quality health services and rely mainly on counselling in schools and the school's ability to mediate appropriate health services in the created counselling infrastructure. According to Matoušek (2020), children whose loved ones have caused them to experience trauma have a much lower resistance to the use of addictive substances, diseases, and risky behaviour in adulthood. In the context of health-social and school counselling, Marková (2007) draws attention to the situation of children marked by experienced disappointments in their biological families, where a positive role in supporting these children can be played by school social workers and the school nurse, who, by providing counselling and preventing risky behaviour of young people have significantly eased the existing burden of preventing children's dangerous behaviour in teaching.

Conclusion

The research findings show that foster parents are interested in cooperating with the school social workers in the Czech elementary schools that their foster children attend. Despite the offered possibilities of online communication, they consider school face-to-face meetings to be the most effective form of cooperation. Although foster parents are provided with professional counselling by a non-profit organisation accompanying the foster families, they need support for the school success and healthy growth of the foster children from a school social worker in the areas of health and social counselling and services, especially in solving the challenging life situations of the foster family, together with the strengthening of relational ties in the foster family and the connection between the family and the school. A school counselling infrastructure includes various health, social, and educational experts. It is the perspective and key to effectively helping parents and their children in schools, supporting their healthy growth and school success. In a society-wide context, this study provides evidence of the need to institutionalise school social work in the Czech elementary school environment. It can call for interested institutions and organisations to implement further steps and research that bring the necessary perspectives of cooperation at the level of social service clients and interdepartmental cooperation of ministries.

Ethical statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the data protection regulations (GDPR) and the Declaration of Helsinki (2013). The questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary. Participants were provided with written information about the aims and relevance of the study and data processing, including guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality of any data provided.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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