Does Social Work Need Technology or Does Technology Need Social Workers?

Keynote Presentation For Power Conference
March 6, 2020
By Sean Erreger (@stuckonsw)

NASW Social Work Core Values

• Service
• Social justice
• Dignity and worth of the person
• Importance of human relationships
• Integrity
• Competence

Why Should Social Workers Care?
Sleep Apnea Insurance Findings

- CPAP is a costly device $400-800 and often “rentals” are more expensive.
- Both insurance companies and the device makers monitor results.
- Lack of Informed Consent
- Decisions are made based on use or lack thereof
- Lack of Transparency how the data would be used

Two Tech Concepts to Explore

- Algorithms
- Privacy and Terms of Service
- Good, the bad, and the ugly from the social work perspective

Algorithms
Books about Algorithms

Main Points

• Conclusions from data are only as good as the data that is entered and how.
• AI has several “blind spots” that leave out important information, conflate information, and introduce bias.

AI Blindspots
A Social Work Voice

- Clients are often affected by unintended consequences of algorithms
- We should have the tools to ask questions about this but more importantly have a seat at the table at all processes

Natural Language Processing (NLP)

- Another sub-type of artificial intelligence (AI)
- Analysis text for themes and sentiment (meaning)
Could have missed from a static list: “Help me. I’m so depressed and just want to take my life.”

Static list could be a false positive: “I’m in love with a girl who wouldn’t even care if I died.”

So they analyzed word frequency to screen out risk a bit more to increase and decrease with risk versus protective language.
Privacy and Terms of Service

• Powell A, Singh P, Torous J (2018) found in a sample of Privacy policies were written about the college level.

• Parker et. Al (2019)
• 41% of Apps examined did not have a privacy policy to inform users about how and when personal information would be collected and retained or shared with third parties.
• Approximately 57% didn’t have a complaint policy
• Only 50% described how the purpose of 3rd party disclosure.

Ethics, Technology, and Choice

Meeting People Where They Are...

Figure 1: Reported use of online health resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some online health information</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most health apps used for health</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read or watched someone else's health</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for people with similar concerns</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect to health providers online</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hamilton Institute, Food and Farming and Young Adults Survey, February 2016. American young adults aged 18-30.
Tech That Empowers/Connects

Action Steps

• Be A Founder
• Be An Employee
• Be on an Advisory Board (internal and external)
• Speak Up Where You Can for Social Work and Those We Serve

References


Histoftech (2019, Jan 25) “It's such an important point that if you (or the class of people to which you belong) don't have the right to refuse a system, you don't have any power to change it (like making it more ethical)” Found at: https://twitter.com/histoftech/status/1217638956507987968


