

Digitalization, Technology advancement and social work responses: A systematic review

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Background:

The rapid developments of technology, especially in terms of the digital innovations and transformations have fundamentally reformed the world from the individual level of ways of working and living to broader changes of social-economic structures. Unsurprisingly, these transforms have brought direct and indirect impacts on social work as a profession. On the one hand, the new technologies and platforms have provided social work with innovative tools to reform the delivery of the services, improve methods of education as well as increase resilience of the profession during the covid pandemic. On the other hand, new challenges have also been presented such as digital inequality. Meanwhile, the structural changes brought by digitalization and technology advancement has also changed the contexts of social work. For instance, the significant impacts on labour market, economic structure and power shift brought by digitalisation and artificial intelligence demand the profession to rethink its commitment to human right and social justice beyond therapeutic roles but also actively engage in structural practices and innovative social changes at macro levels. Moreover, the ethical challenges that are presented at each level of practices due to the broad application of technology. Thus, to better prepare the profession's capability of responding to the technology-induced service and social changes, it is essential to understand how social work research has addressed the various challenges and opportunities.

Research Question:

What are the latest developments and gaps of social work's responses to the advancement of digitalisation and technology?

Methodology: A systematic review is adopted to review the technology and digitalisation related social work literature published in the last five years (2018-2022). The search string of (digital* or tech*) and "social work" in Title, Ab, Keywords was applied in the databases of Scopus and Web of Science. Then qualitative analysis is conducted to identify the major themes and gaps within the current literature.

Results:

Initial analysis suggests the latest technology-related social work research have mainly explored the following themes: the application of digital technology in social work education; the evaluation of digitalisation in social work services, reflection of

ethical and professional challenges related to digitalisation, the investigation of social workers and social work students' experience and attitudes, innovative social work and theoretical debates.

Discussion:

Social work research till today has actively responded to the newest development of technology and their impacts on the society, with special attention been given to practical and ethical concerns appeared in traditional fields as well as new platforms. However, some major gaps still exist and need future attentions. For instance, although social work education has been one of the most explored area regarding digitalisation, the focuses have been mostly about reflecting and improving the methods of education, the structural challenges and societal changes brought by technology advancement have yet been organically integrated into the investigation of social work education. Also, there is a clear need for interdisciplinary collaboration between social work, technology and other professions for future research. Overall, the findings from this review suggest it is important for social work to consider technology not only as a tool to achieve traditional goals but also a crucial force that is constantly changing the world and reshaping the very social foundation this profession operates on.