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Digital public and private services in between detective stories: A study on the expansion of library work into digital care

The digitization of society and public and private services has increased the need to provide citizens with digital support. This kind of support has significantly shifted to become the responsibility of libraries, and it has expanded the customer service work done by library employees in the direction of caring work. With the help of survey material, we investigated the experiences of librarians on the nature of digital support given to customers and the dimensions of digital advice, as well as situations that produce emotional and ethical burdens related to advice situations at work. We looked at the prevalence of certain digital support contents and emotional work and ethical questions related to digital support, analysing connections between these factors using logistic regression. Our survey data (N=274), collected by using the snowball method, consist of library workers who provide digital support in their work. In terms of gender distribution (73% women and 27% men) and age distribution (min=22, max=67, mean=47.1), the material corresponds fairly well to all employees of Finnish public libraries. Our results show that the vast majority of respondents are asked for help with using the customer's own devices (70%), online banking (60%), and Kela's online transactions (40%) at least monthly. Giving digital support in the matters in question is related to emotional work and a number of ethical considerations in digital support situations. Our research gives indications of a kind of tacit social agreement on the basis of which the private and public sector can transfer customer counselling tasks related to digital services to the customer counselling of libraries in practice.

Keywords: digitalization, care work, power relations, libraries, work change