



Supervisor and policy roles in social media use as a new technology in child welfare



Melanie Sage^{a,*}, Melissa Wells^b, Todd Sage^a, Mary Devlin^c

^a Department of Social Work, University of North Dakota, 225 Centennial Dr, Grand Forks, ND 58202, United States

^b Department of Social Work, University of New Hampshire, 239 Pettee Hall, Durham, NH 03824, United States

^c 30 Pillsbury St, Concord, NH 03301, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Child welfare
Supervision
Social media
Facebook
Implementation science
Child maltreatment

ABSTRACT

This analysis examines the role of agency policy and supervision in the decision-making of child welfare workers about their work-related social media use. Data were collected using a mixed-methods internet-based survey of 171 child welfare workers and interns about their social media use related to their direct-practice work with child welfare clients. The study finds that supervisor approval and agency policy is correlated with worker's social media use, and that workers find utility in social media use, but have poor clarity about how they should use social media in the child welfare work setting. These results suggest a need for agency policy and practice guidelines. Implications for child welfare agencies include an opportunity to consider the types of policy development necessary to ensure that multiple stakeholders are represented in policy and practice decisions, and that they reflect the possible benefits and risks of social media use.

1. Introduction

Three studies demonstrate that child welfare workers use social media to inform their professional practice (Breyette & Hill, 2015; Sage & Sage, 2016a, 2016b), although the limited research in this area does not address how agency policy and practice informs workers' use of social media. Government agencies are encouraged to have social media policies (Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012), but these social media policy recommendations typically do not address the unique role of child welfare workers who might use the information to make assessments about, or communicate with, families at risk (Sage & Sage, 2016a). Whereas the typical use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in government agencies originates with policy-driven agency directives that are reinforced in training and supervision, social media has crept into the child welfare workplace through employee use (Breyette & Hill, 2015). Therefore, the ways in which workers seek guidance about the use of social media may differ from the ways they engage in other kinds of agency practice. We investigated the role of agency policy and supervision in the decision-making of child welfare workers about their work-related social media use.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Social media and its interest to child welfare workers

Social media sites allow users to share personal information and interact with other online social media users, who may be family, friends, acquaintances, or strangers. Commonly-shared information includes content such as age, occupation, location, interests, personal photos, and daily activities. Users are encouraged to identify others who use the social media site with whom they have a preexisting relationship to make an online connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media sites are used for various purposes, such as business networking, communicating with friends, to manage presentation of self, or to reshare information from news sites (Kimball & Kim, 2013). Social media sites, such as Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, each have different formats and norms regarding self-presentation and communication (Meshi, Tamir, & Heekeren, 2015).

Sixty-five percent of adults use social media across all races and ethnic groups, and use is similar across income levels (Perrin, 2015). Mobile phones with social media access are accessible across a wide population, including in runaway and homeless youth (Harpin, Davis, Low, & Gilroy, 2016; Rice, Ray, & Kurzban, 2012) and other hard-to-reach child welfare clients (Masson, Balfé, Hackett, & Phillips, 2011). Therefore, it is likely that child welfare workers have clients who are on

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: melanie.sage@und.edu (M. Sage), Melissa.Wells@unh.edu (M. Wells).

social media sites.

Child welfare workers' roles include making assessments of families as part of risk assessment and intervention decision-making, as well as frequent communication with families (Schreiber, Fuller, & Paceley, 2013). Social media may provide avenues for child welfare workers to carry out these roles. For instance, child welfare workers may gain insight by searching the public profiles of clients, or reach out to them through the social media messaging tool.

2.2. Use of social media in child welfare agencies

The new era of smartphone and internet technology has permeated social services agencies in ways that allow new kinds of access to, and communication with, clients through social media. Because social media tools are provided by third parties and not directly by the agency, workers bring them to the agency environment, often with limited agency guidance. In this way, social media use emerges directly from perceived utility, and creates some complication for agencies as they attempt to adapt policy to meet practice. Yet the utility-driven use of social media also offers the opportunity for practice-driven innovation, instead of the top-down agency-driven technology mandates which workers often find as disruptive to their practice (Baker, Warburton, Hodgkin, & Pascal, 2014). When workers are using social media tools in their agencies, their use must eventually become either institutionally-sanctioned or prohibited, or else it may cause agency liability.

2.2.1. Adoption of social media

The utility-driven model of social media innovation in public services is described in research by Mergel and Bretschneider (2013). They propose that government agencies who adopt social media do so in three stages, which they label “experimentation, constructive chaos, and institutionalization” of the new tools. In the experimentation phase, individual innovators who have some experience with technology from other work or non-work settings begin using it in the workplace, and the use spreads from worker to worker and thus may be used in a variety of informal ways. In the constructive chaos stage, users begin to recognize both benefits and risks of the technology use, which may create tensions within the organization, and organizations respond with attempts to standardize the technology use through practice or policy standards. Often in this stage organizations seek answers that other similar organizations use, or draw upon their past policies related to ICT use to drive current standards. Sometimes reactionary standards are developed in response to misuse, or concerning use, of technology. Finally, in the institutionalization stage, the agency has developed a set of standards, processes, and enforcement measures to control the use of the technology. Child welfare agencies who know about their workers' use of social media are grappling with how to move from the first two categories to the later given the perceived benefits of social media use, while also grappling with the risks and challenges related to social media use.

2.2.2. Benefits

Work-related social media is commonly seen as a useful tool to child welfare workers (Breyette & Hill, 2015; Sage & Sage, 2016b). Child welfare may see a range of utilities of social media use, including the ability to find out information about their clients through a search, to connect with difficulty-to reach clients through a messaging utility or social media connection, or to develop relationships with others in the workplace including foster parents, attorneys, and co-workers (Sage & Sage, 2016b).

While few attempts have been made to use social media as part of an intervention in child welfare settings, some efforts are documented in the literature. For instance, one intervention attempted to link foster parents and their social workers over a secure social network, and found it was generally acceptable to foster parents (Dodsworth et al.,

2013); another study of the acceptability of videoconferencing via Skype for visits between children in foster care and their siblings or parents found that child welfare workers generally thought it was an acceptable practice, and some were already using it (Quinn, Sage, & Tunseth, 2015). These types of practices are not widely documented, and insufficient data exists about how child welfare agencies and workers make decisions about embarking on the use of these types of social media use, but it appears their utility is promising and workers are helping their agencies innovate by bringing these technologies to the work setting.

2.2.3. Risks

Risks for social media use in the workplace are many, and the agency ability to monitor the use is limited. Because third-party tools can also be used on personal devices, child welfare agencies may not be able to monitor and control them in the same ways that they do other internal system technologies which require agency log-ins, and agencies may not have considered implications of the use of these third-party tools.

Another concern relates to safety and privacy issues. Dolinsky and Helbig (2015, p. 64) address the issue of communicating with clients over social media in a study that explored how public agencies used Facebook to locate and engage former foster youth. These authors point to the ethical considerations guided by the NASW Code of Ethics and ASWB Technology Standards, and offer a summary of practices used by agencies to uphold these standards on Facebook. Factors for consideration include informed consent, confidentiality, verifying identity, and avoiding disclosure of confidential client identification.

Although the afore-mentioned examples explore potential concerns of ICTs to communicate with clients, they do not address the use of social media as a tool to investigate clients. Child welfare workers report that they access social media to aid in risk assessment, and sometimes generally to learn about clients (Sage & Sage, 2016b); however, unlike public record database searches that report government-generated information about a client, social media representations are created by social media users, and self-disclosures on social media may be strategic or accidental (Bazarova & Choi, 2014), and therefore present an untrue, incomplete, or misleading picture. Ethical issues also arise related to a client's right to privacy (Groshong & Phillips, 2015) and potential relationship harm caused by this type of information use (Lannin & Scott, 2013). Therefore, clarity about when to use and not use social media for the purpose of client assessment is not always evident, and decision-making will likely not be consistent between workers if left to their own values and judgments about the appropriateness of such use.

2.3. Role of child welfare agencies

Child welfare agencies can condone, support, or exclude social media use through their policy and practice directives. Social media policy in government agencies supports accountability, communication with stakeholders, and transparency (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010; Bertot et al., 2012; Jaeger, Bertot, & Shilton, 2012; Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). Although agencies often do have general technology policies, few agency social media policies address the unique role of the child welfare workers' social media use in the context of their roles that include assessments of clients, relative searches, and communicating with vulnerable youth and adults (Sage & Sage, 2016a), and instead focus on areas such as how to present the agency and represent oneself, how to present quality content, and what to not post, such as offensive content (Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). The National Association of Social Work published technology standards in 2005 which have not kept pace with emerging communication technologies (Lopez, 2014), so there is little professional guidance for child welfare practitioners about how and whether clients' social media can be considered within a child welfare context. Therefore, it is important to understand what informa-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4936290>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4936290>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)