Investigating Community Engagement: Social Work in Libraries Ethnographic Research

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ABSTRACT

Libraries engage with their surrounding community members on a daily basis. These interactions are formally known as community engagement activities. OCLC defines community engagement as "interacting, connecting and communicating" with library patrons (OCLC, 2023). This poster demonstrates ethnographic approaches studying the impetus for social work in libraries. Data collection will occur through observations of reference desk interactions between librarian staff and patrons inside the library. Ethnography will be used as a research method to evaluate these interactions from a staff perspective to investigate the lived experiences of library staff to assess their preparedness to interact with members of their community appropriately. Interviewing staff and observing them interacting with patrons in the public library environment will be tools for collecting data. Field notes will inform the need for staffing social workers in libraries to deal with socio-economic issues and socioemotional needs of patrons. Lastly, the research addresses whether having social workers or auxiliary staff equivalent to social workers is effective from the perspective of frontline library staff. The poster presents a research path for implementing ethnographic approaches in making known the possibilities for social workers in public libraries. The literature review provides information about how librarians feel the need to have social workers on staff, due to the high volume of unusual incidents that occur in the public library. These incidents typically involve patrons with psychosocial issues.

REFERENCES

OCLC. (2023, March 15). *Community engagement: Build connections, grow relationships, and increase your impact | OCLC*. https://www.oclc.org/en/community-engagement.html

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Public libraries; Community engagement; Critical librarianship; Community-led service; Research methods.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

social work; preparedness; socio-economic issues; socioemotional needs.