

Social Work and Public Librarianship: Partnering to Support Patrons in Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Public libraries grapple with supporting patrons experiencing crises on a daily basis. Patron crises related to mental health (Torrey, Esposito and Geller, 2009; Wahler et al., 2019), and substance use (Whaler et al., 2019) have increased over several decades with changes in policies related to deinstitutionalization, and recently, the U.S. opioid crisis. These changes have resulted in additional workplace challenges for librarians, turning some libraries into social service delivery hubs (Real and Bogel, 2019; Wahler et al., 2019).

Our study explores the results of workshops on mental health, boundary management, and resilience building for public library staff. The authors completed training events with a series of participants via 3 different workshops at a large, urban public library system in the United States. Participants received pre-tests to determine their knowledge and comfort with the topics, received the training, and then completed post-tests. These assessments allowed participants to reflect on the training and the extent to which they felt more comfortable addressing mental health crises and issues related to boundaries and resilience after completing the workshops.

The major implications of conducting these workshops relate to:

- Developing professional development training for public library staff on supporting patrons in crisis while also practicing resilience and health boundary management;
- Understanding how social work and library science can partner together effectively to improve education for library school students;
- Identifying ways in which public libraries can successfully implement simple practices to support the well-being of their staff

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Public libraries; Social justice; Specific populations

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

public librarianship; social work; patrons in crisis; mental health; resilience; training and professional development