

The Grand Technological Promise in Norwegian Child Welfare Services: Social Workers' Experiences and Expectations

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Abstract : Digital government is often seen as an enabler or even driver of transformation of public administration, with the objective of creating public value. The increasing use of digital solutions in public services comes with great expectations of new and/or more efficient service provision. Digitalizing public sector services involve multi-level implementation. It involves national policy negotiations and decisions of digital government solutions. It involves co-creation/-production of ideas where planning, design, and implementation involves several groups of actors targeting end-users. Norway is among the most digitalised countries in the world, and Government spendings on digital technologies in public services are high compared to other OECD countries. This contribution studies an ongoing digital transformation in the Norwegian child welfare services. DigiBarnevern (Digi child welfare) is a nationwide project promising better and more efficient child welfare services through various digital technologies. The digitalization process, which is managed by the state and municipalities, is still in its early stages, and as of 2022, only a few services are operative. Digital technologies such as DigiBarnevern are implemented with promises of qualitatively improving child protection work, making the services more effective, foster user participation, and increase availability. There is limited research on the implications of using digital technologies in child protection work. We aim to present findings from an ongoing research project (2022-2024). Drawing on data from focus group interviews with social workers in 5 municipal child welfare services in Norway, we explore social workers' experiences and expectations towards using digital technologies in child welfare services. Technological solutions may change the services and child protection work in numerous ways. Potential points of departure for discussion are how technologies may change the relationships between social workers, children, youth, and their families, how technologies can alter and obscure responsibilities, and how technologies may demand digital competence among social workers and service recipients.

Keywords : child welfare, social work, technology, digitalisation

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