

# Social Workers in Social Services Agencies

## occupational profile



# Overview

Social service agencies deliver direct services to individuals and families. These services can be provided in public agencies at the federal, state and local level or in private, non-profit settings. Social services, also referred to as human services, can include services oriented toward the prevention, improvement, or resolution of health, mental health, social, or environment problems that affect individuals, families, specific groups, or communities (Gibelman, 2005). Social service agencies promote the health and well-being of individuals by helping them to become more self-sufficient; strengthening family relationships; and restoring individuals, families, groups, or communities to successful social functioning. Social service settings can vary widely—examples can include child welfare agencies, local community based youth programs, or shelters for abused women or homeless families. Specific kinds of social services can include helping people to obtain adequate financial resources to meet their needs, assessing the capabilities of people to care for their children or other dependents, providing counseling and psychotherapy services, linking clients to resources and advocating for individuals and families and social causes (Barker, 2003).

## Overview of Functions

Social workers employed with social service agencies can have a range of job functions depending on their specific roles. Possible job titles include, but are not limited to, foster care social worker, case manager, program coordinator, program director, or probation officer. Job functions that a social worker might perform within a social service agency include:

- Identifying and intervening with at-risk families;
- Analyzing an individual's or family's social support networks;
- Assessing clients for substance abuse, support systems, physical and emotional functioning, financial stability, safety, etc.;
- Assisting individuals and families in the development and management of coping skills;
- Assisting individuals and families with processing information and resolving personal issues;
- Building effective client relationships;
- Collaborating with treatment teams;
- Conducting intake interviews and assessments;
- Conducting home visits;
- Conducting psychosocial assessments and social histories;
- Determining client eligibility for services;
- Assessing abuse or neglect;
- Coordinating out-of-home placements and adoptions;
- Developing and implementing intervention, treatment and discharge plans;
- Educating and linking clients to local community resources;
- Providing case management services;

- Managing crises;
- Coordinating available services;
- Facilitating groups (individuals, families, staff, task forces or collaborations);
- Contributing to a multidisciplinary team;
- Identifying and resolving ethical issues; and
- Managing and supervising staff.

## Benefits and Challenges of Working in Social Services Agencies

The social service agencies aim to provide a safety net for children, youth and families. Social workers employed within these social service settings play a critical role in stabilizing the lives of individuals and families through a variety of interventions. Depending on their specific roles, social workers can expect to have a range of responsibilities and experiences. In addition, social workers in these settings have the benefit of collaborating across systems to provide effective services to clients. Collaborations often bring about the opportunity to build professional networks.

While there are a range of benefits of working in social service settings, there are also challenges. Some of the challenges include high rates of turnover and salaries that are not commensurate with the job demands. Though the numbers vary across agencies, some social workers can experience high caseloads. Caseload demands coupled with limited resources can make it challenging to deliver effective services.

### REFERENCES

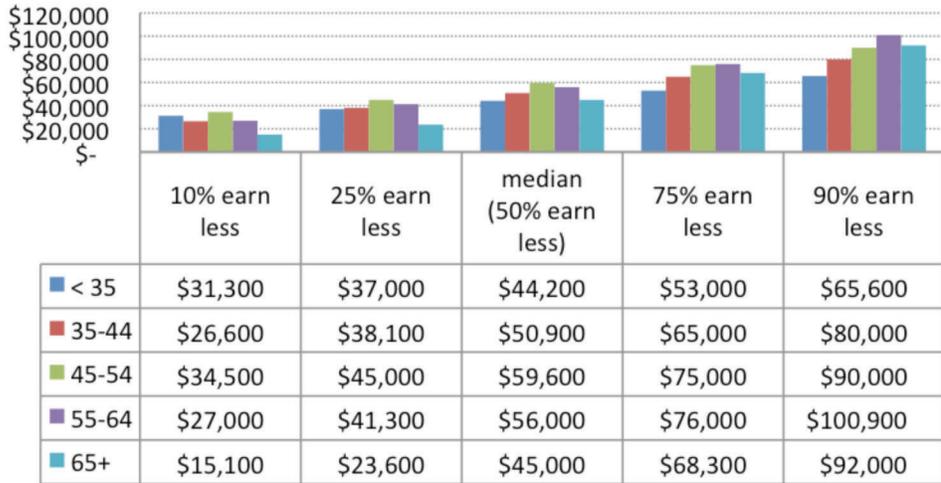
Barker, R. (2003). *The Social Work Dictionary*. (5<sup>th</sup> Edition). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Gibelman, M. (2005). *What social workers do*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

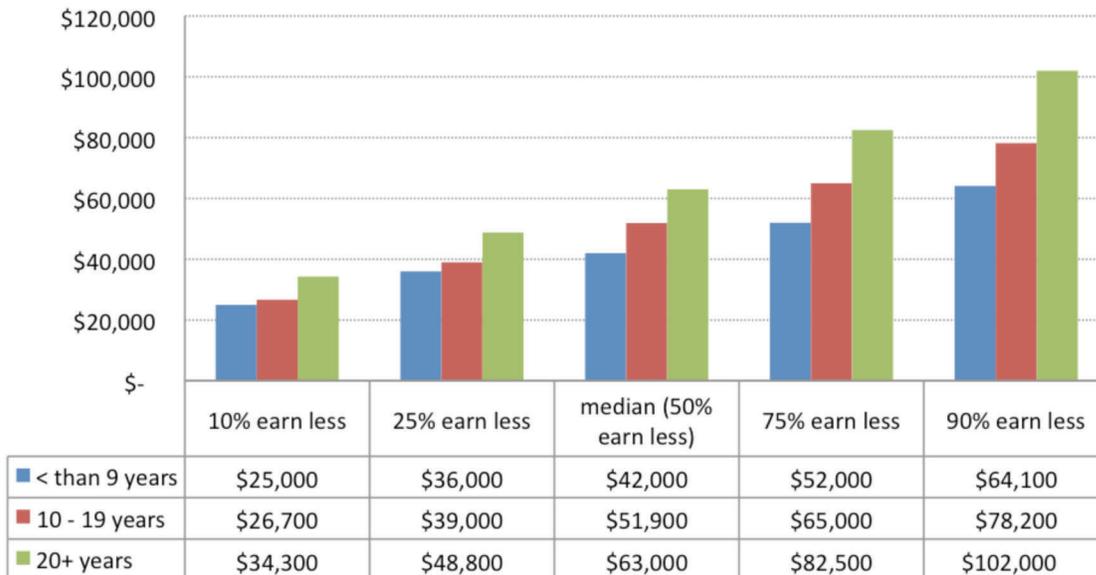
Data referenced in this profile are based upon results from the *2009 NASW Salary & Compensation Study* (see Notes).

# Salary Analysis of Social Workers in Social Services Agencies (n=1,178)

## ANNUAL SALARY BY AGE<sup>1</sup>



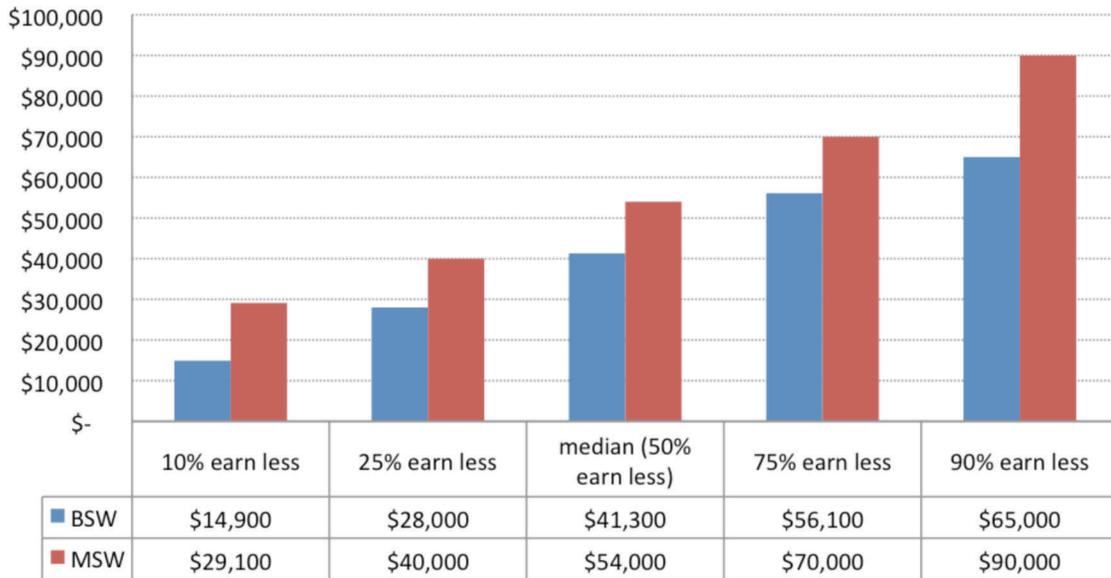
## ANNUAL SALARY BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Your age? (under 25; 25-29 30-34; 35-39; 40-44; 45-49; 50-54; 55-59; 60-64; 65 and older)

<sup>2</sup> In what year did you first begin working in the social work field?

### ANNUAL SALARY BY DEGREE<sup>3</sup>



### ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION<sup>4</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Which of the following academic degrees do you hold (if any?)

<sup>4</sup> In which of these areas (if any) do you hold current certifications? Please check all that apply.

## ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION (CONTINUED)



## ANNUAL SALARY BY SECTOR<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> On October 1, 2009, what was the sector of your primary social work position?

## ANNUAL SALARY BY PRACTICE AREA<sup>6</sup>



## ANNUAL SALARY BY REGION<sup>7</sup>



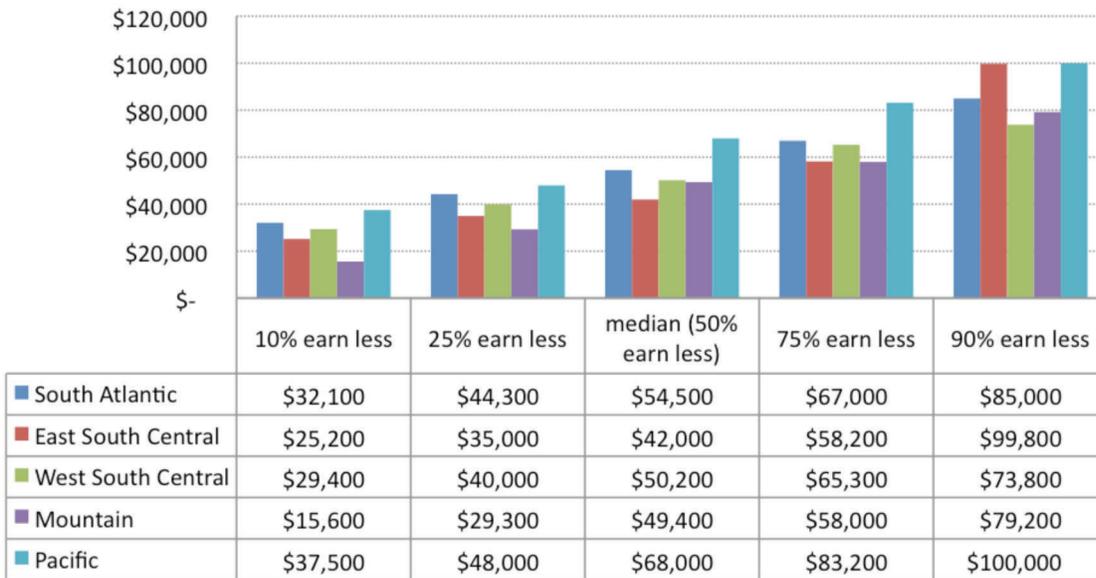
<sup>6</sup> Which one option best matches the primary practice area of your primary position? (Please check the one best option.)

<sup>7</sup> On October 1, 2009, what was the city, state, and ZIP code of your primary work location?

## ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION



## ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION (CONTINUED)



# Survey Methodology

This survey was sponsored and developed by NASW. Data were collected and tabulated by Readex Research, an independent research company. To broaden representation of the profession, NASW partnered with a number of other social work membership organizations to create an expanded list of U.S. professional social workers for sampling purposes. These partner organizations were:

- Association for Oncology Social Work (AOSW)
- National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO)
- National Network for Social Worker Managers (NNSWM)
- The Rural Social Work Caucus
- Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care (SSWLHC)

The total number of unduplicated individuals among these five lists and the NASW domestic membership was 101,995. The overall sample size of 78,777 consisted of the 73,777 with a valid email address on file and a systematic sample of 5,000 (from the 28,218 who could not be reached via email).

Data collection utilized a mixed mode approach. For those with a valid email address, invitations were sent via email to access a Web-based survey. Those without an email address were sent invitations via regular mail, with the option to fill out a provided paper survey or to access the survey online via a provided Web site address.

Data were collected between October 1 and November 24, 2009. A total of 23,889 unduplicated usable responses were received, for a 30% response rate. Among these, 22,000 responses were randomly chosen for inclusion in the final tabulation. The data have been weighted to account for disproportional response between the email and regular mail samples. Percentages based on all 22,000 responses are subject to a margin of error of  $\pm 0.6\%$ .

## RESPONDENT STATUS

The compensation analysis focuses on the subset of “valid answering practitioners”—that is, U.S.-based respondents confirming paid employment or self-employment on October 1, 2009 in a social work-related position (defined as any position that requires or makes use of one’s education, training, or experience in social work), and reporting regular salary or wages. Percentages based on these 17,851 “valid answering practitioners” are subject to a margin of error of  $\pm 0.6\%$ . *Results are not shown in this profile if there were fewer than 30 valid values in a category.*

Removed are those who did not answer at all, those who provided a report considered to be an outlier (top 1% and bottom 1% of all responses), and those who did not answer in a coherent manner. The tabulated base of the “answering practitioners” is 17,911.



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