

NASW Center for Workforce Studies
& Social Work Practice

Social Workers in Mental Health Clinics & Outpatient Facilities

occupational profile



Overview

Social workers play a prominent role within mental health clinics and outpatient facilities. Mental health clinics can be supported by both private and public funding. Mental health services provided in these settings can vary greatly in terms of intensity and duration. Social workers working within a mental health setting can provide case management services and direct mental health services. Frequently, social workers in mental health clinics work as part of a team (Gibelman, 2005). The problems addressed by social workers in mental health clinics and outpatient facilities include those associated with the stress of everyday living; behavioral deficiencies; crises brought on by emotional, environmental, or situational occurrences; eating disorders; parent child problems; marital problems; depression; schizophrenia; bipolar disorders; and other forms of psychopathology (Gibelman, 2005).

Overview of Functions

Social workers employed with mental health clinics can have a range of job functions depending on their specific roles. Possible job titles include, but are not limited to, clinical social worker, licensed clinical social worker, mental health specialist, clinician, therapist, counselor, director or case manager. Job functions that a social worker might perform within a mental health clinic include:

- Determining client eligibility for services;
- Conducting bio-psychosocial assessments and social histories;
- Assessing clients for substance use, support systems, physical and emotional functioning, financial stability, safety, suicidal/homicidal ideation, etc.;
- Developing and implementing treatment plans and discharge plans that adhere with client self-determination;
- Providing direct therapeutic services such as individual, family or group therapy regarding a specific mental health issue;
- Providing crisis management including assessment for safety;
- Advocating for client services;
- Providing case management services including, but not limited to, referrals to community resources, collaboration with other professionals, etc.;
- Promoting mental health services provided by the clinic to the greater community;
- Participating in grant writing and evaluation to garner or maintain program funding;
- Identifying and resolving ethical issues;
- Managing, training and supervising staff; and
- Functioning as part of a multidisciplinary treatment team.

Benefits and Challenges of Working in a Mental Health Clinic or Outpatient Facility

Social workers employed with mental health clinics play a vital role in addressing and treating mental health issues. Through the roles social workers assume, they have the opportunity to collaborate in the improvement of the lives of the people they serve. Social workers who provide mental health services are required to be licensed by the state in which they practice. Social workers providing therapy are also required to have a master's degree. Their roles can vary from client to client, providing a variety of experiences on a daily basis. However, like social workers in other settings, the caseloads of social workers in a mental health clinic or outpatient facility may be high. Clinics and agencies often face resource constraints, such as limited space, as well as insufficient funding for supplies or additional training. Social workers in these settings may also experience secondary trauma or emotional stress from helping their clients manage intense circumstances.

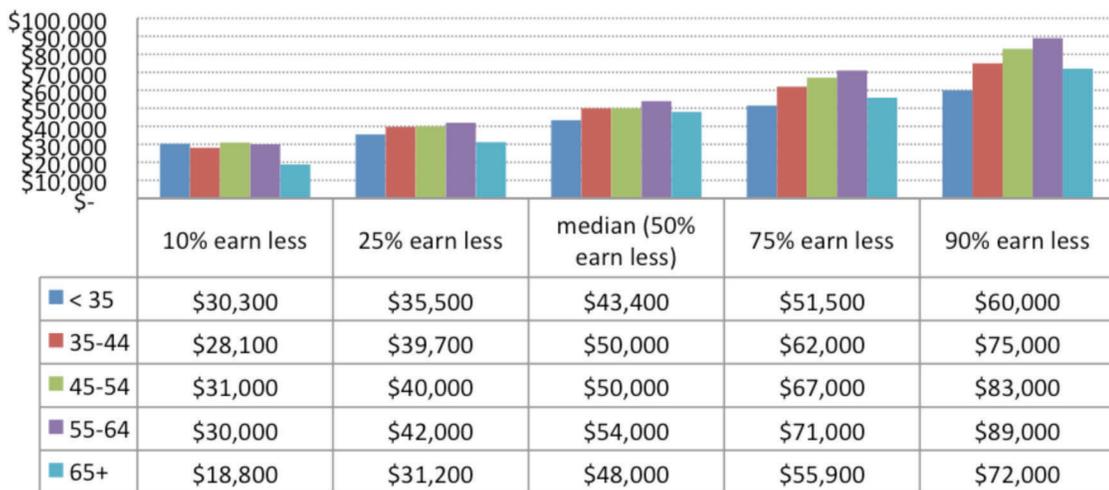
REFERENCES

Gibelman, M. (2005). *What social workers do*. (2nd 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 Mental Health Clinics & Outpatient Facilities (n=1,836)

ANNUAL SALARY BY AGE¹

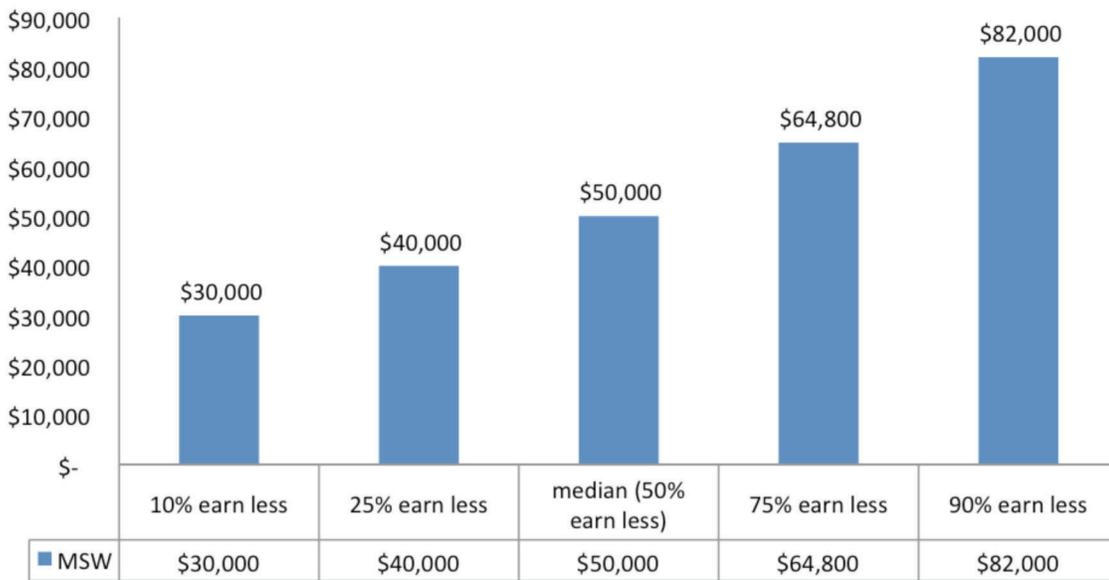


¹ Your age? (under 25; 25-29; 30-34; 35-39; 40-44; 45-49; 50-54; 55-59; 60-64; 65 and older)

ANNUAL SALARY BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE²



ANNUAL SALARY BY DEGREE³



² In what year did you first begin working in the social work field?

³ Which of the following academic degrees do you hold (if any)?

ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION⁴



ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION (CONTINUED)

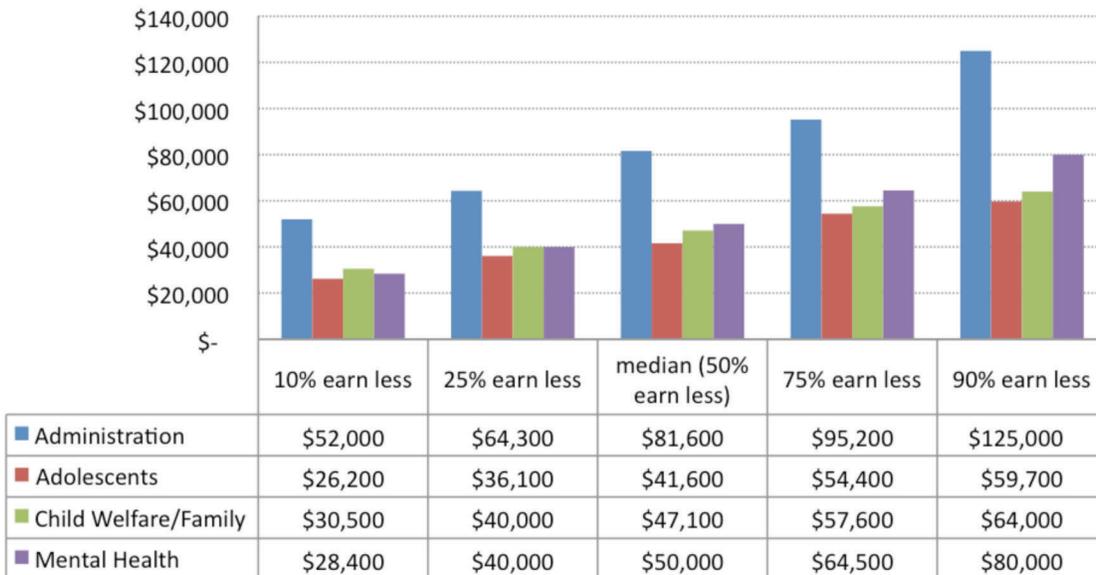


⁴ In which of these areas (if any) do you hold current certifications? Please check all that apply.

ANNUAL SALARY BY SECTOR⁵



ANNUAL SALARY BY PRACTICE AREA⁶



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

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

ANNUAL SALARY BY REGION⁷



ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION



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

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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