

NASW Center for Workforce Studies
& Social Work Practice

Social Workers in Private Practice occupational profile



Overview

Clinical social workers in private practice work in solo or group practices. Private practice services may extend beyond the office to such settings as primary care, courts, schools, and nursing facilities. Private practitioners (also known as independent practitioners) may also contract with organizations to provide employee assistance services, which may be provided within the organizational setting.

Private practitioners have a master's degree from an accredited school of social work and two years of postgraduate work experience in a supervised clinical setting. Many have a doctorate in social work. Working in solo or group practice requires a clinical license in the state of practice. Clinical social workers' licensure titles vary by state; the following are examples:

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)
- Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW)
- Licensed Certified Social Worker—Clinical (LCSW-C)

Overview of Functions

In solo or group practice, clinical social workers are mental health providers who render services to children and adolescents, adults, and older adults. They are trained to perform a host of therapeutic interventions which include:

- Individual therapy
- Family therapy
- Couples therapy
- Group therapy
- Play therapy
- Crisis intervention
- Bereavement counseling

In addition, many private practitioners serve as expert witnesses in courts and as consultants for health plans, schools, and other businesses.

Benefits and Challenges of Working in Private Practice

There are several benefits to having a career as a clinical social worker in solo or group practice, including:

- Flexible work schedules. Clinical social workers can determine their work schedules based on their lifestyle.
- Control of work environment. Clinical social workers can determine their work flow and create the work environment they desire.

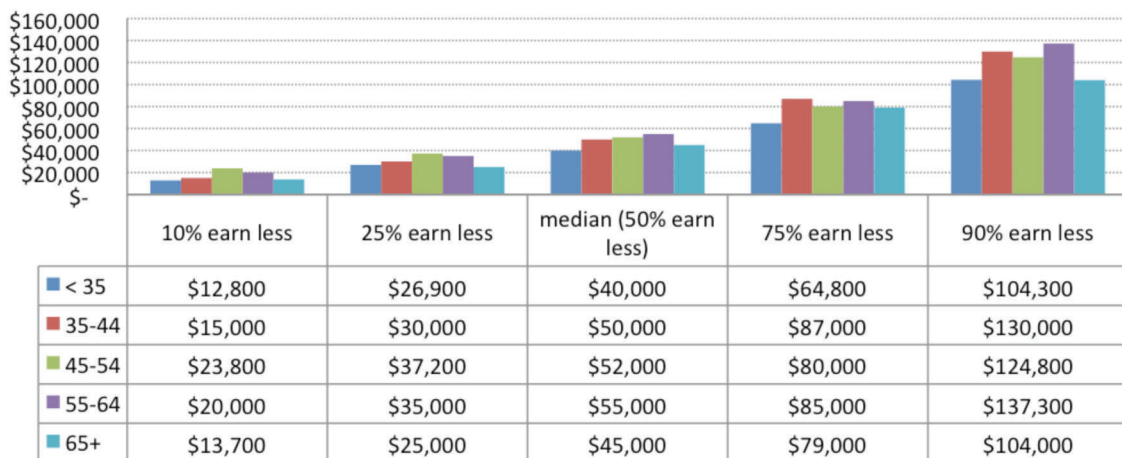
- Freedom from limitations found in organizational employment. Clinical social workers have more opportunities to work independently, compared to their counterparts in agency settings.
- Ability to maintain clinical skills. Many clinical social workers are also employed as administrators, researchers, and educators. Working in solo or group practice allows them to maintain and enhance their clinical skills.
- Opportunity to increase personal income. Experienced clinical social workers who work full-time in an agency setting may also establish a part-time solo or group practice to supplement their income.

A major challenge in working in solo or group practice is working in isolation. Clinical social workers may work alone and lack supervisory, consultative, or peer support. In such cases, it is helpful to join a network of clinical social workers who are in private practice or retain a consultant for assistance as needed.

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

Salary Analysis of Social Workers in Solo Practice (n=3,298)

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



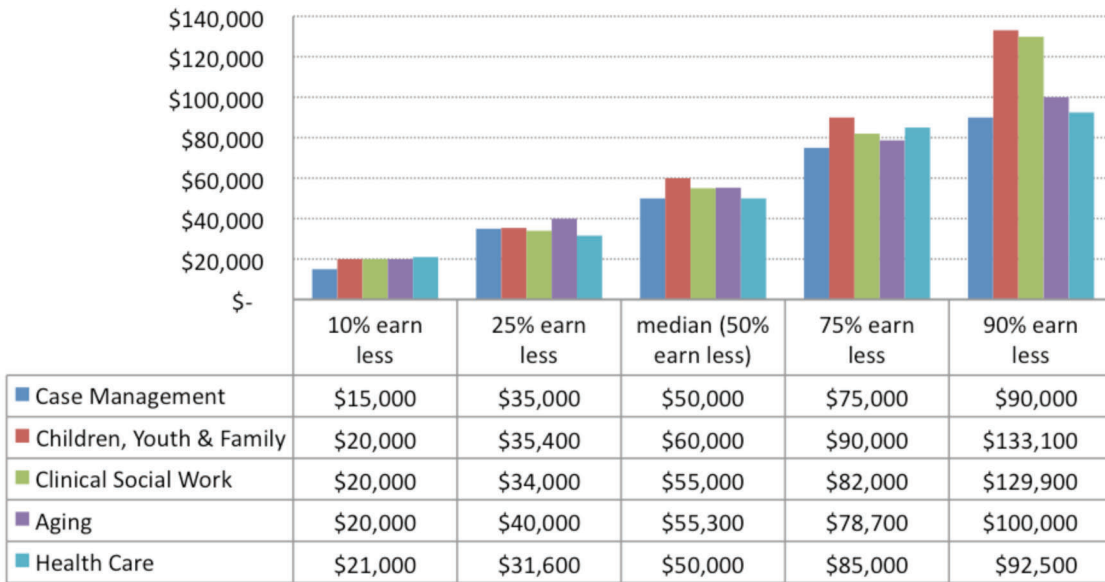
ANNUAL SALARY BY DEGREE³



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

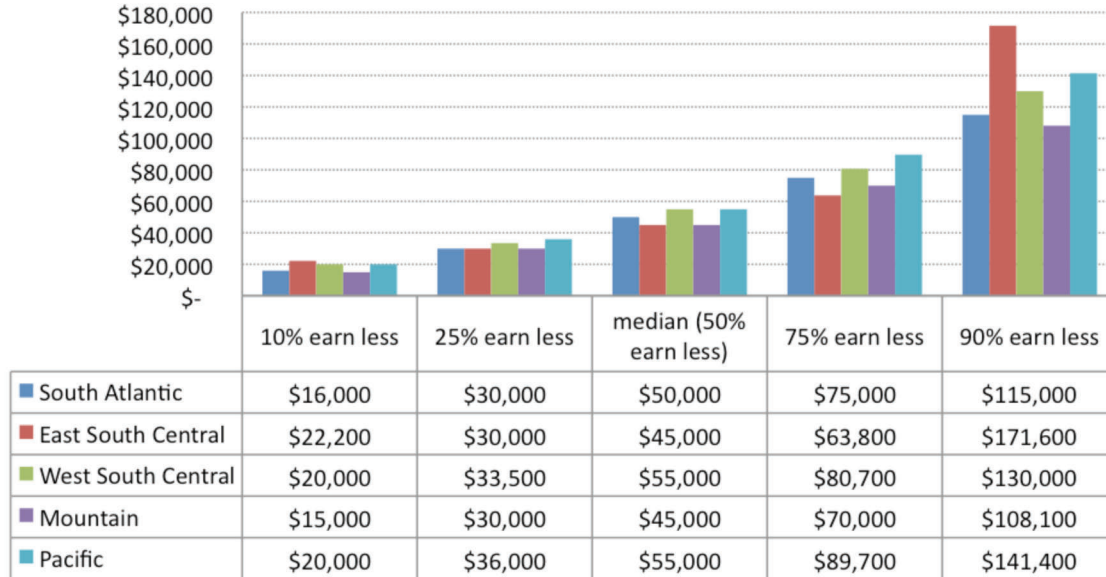


ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION



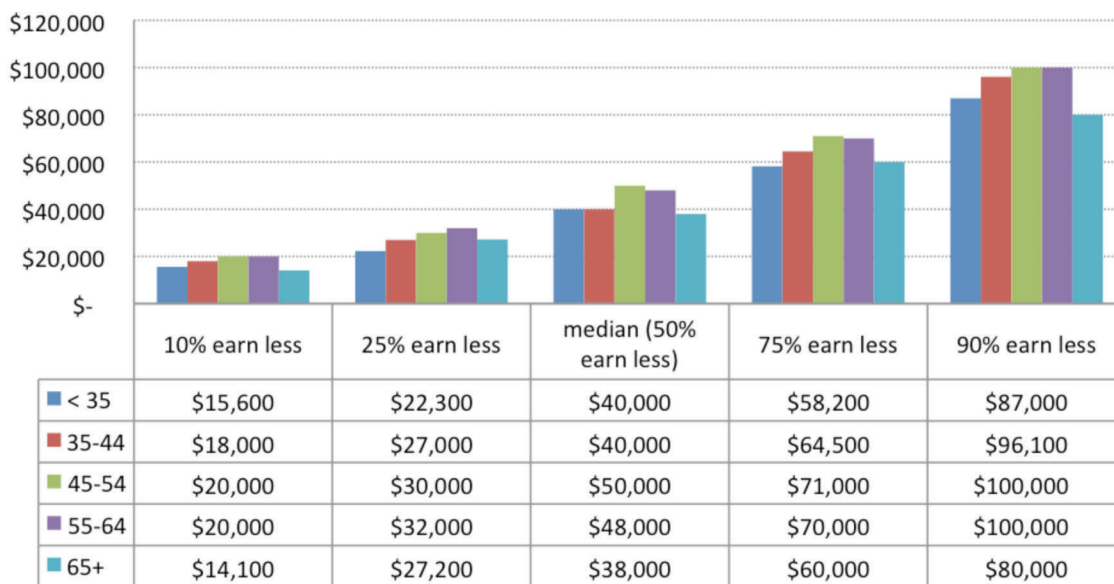
⁷ On October 1, 2009, what was the city, state, and ZIP code of your primary work location?

ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION (CONTINUED)



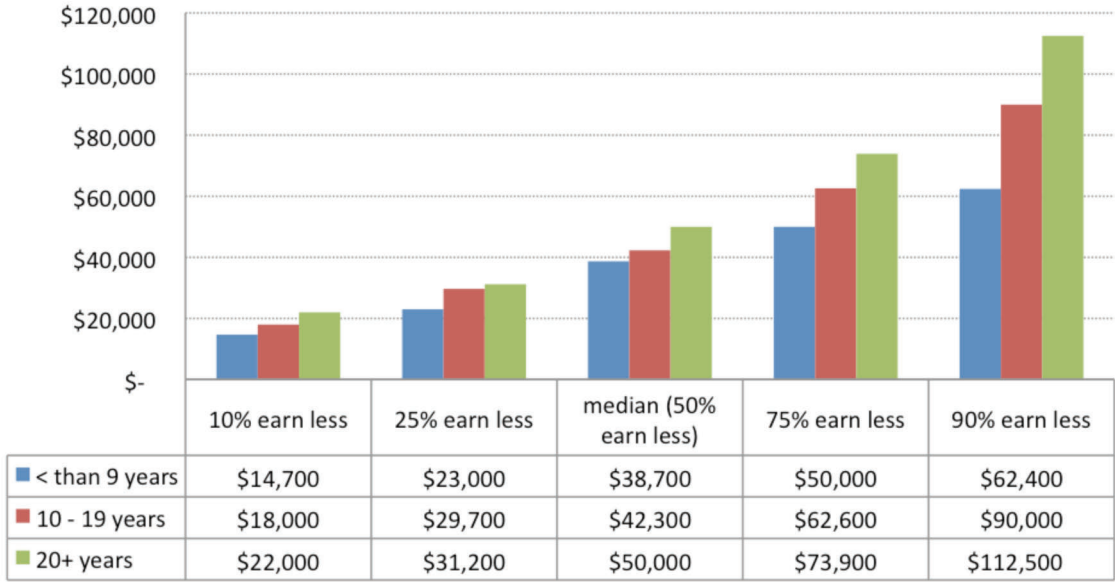
Salary Analysis of Social Workers in Group Practice (n=1,120)

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

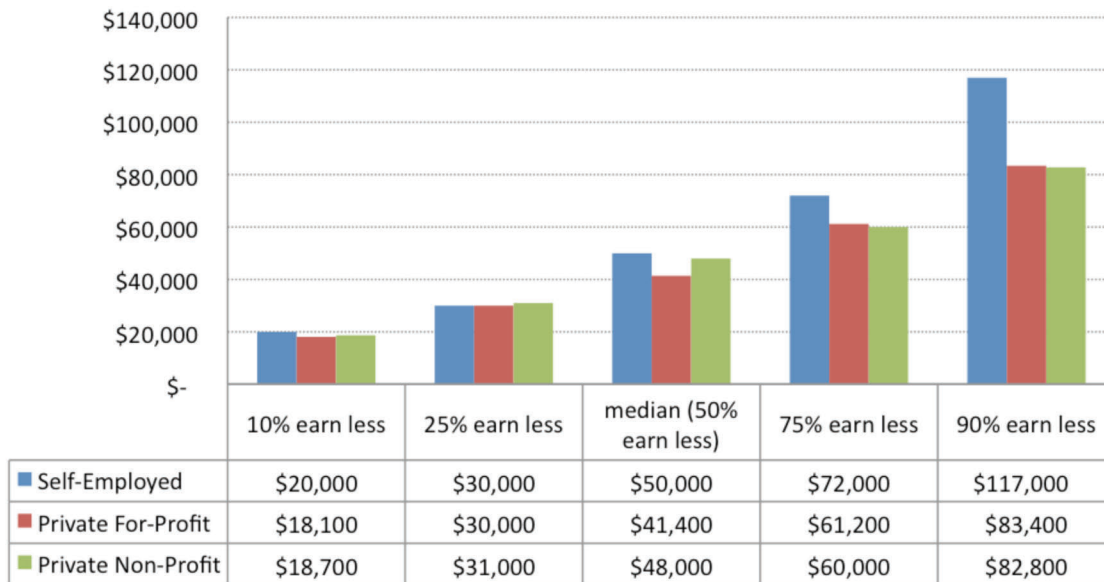


ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION (CONTINUED)

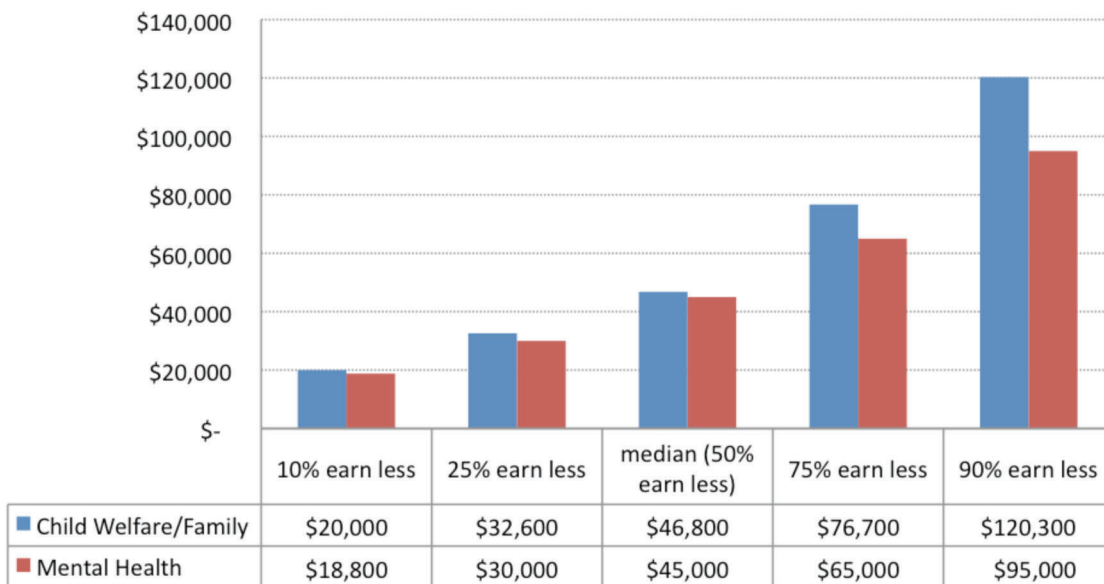


⁴ In which of these areas (if any) do you hold current certifications? Please check all that apply.

ANNUAL SALARY BY SECTOR⁵



ANNUAL SALARY BY PRACTICE AREA⁶



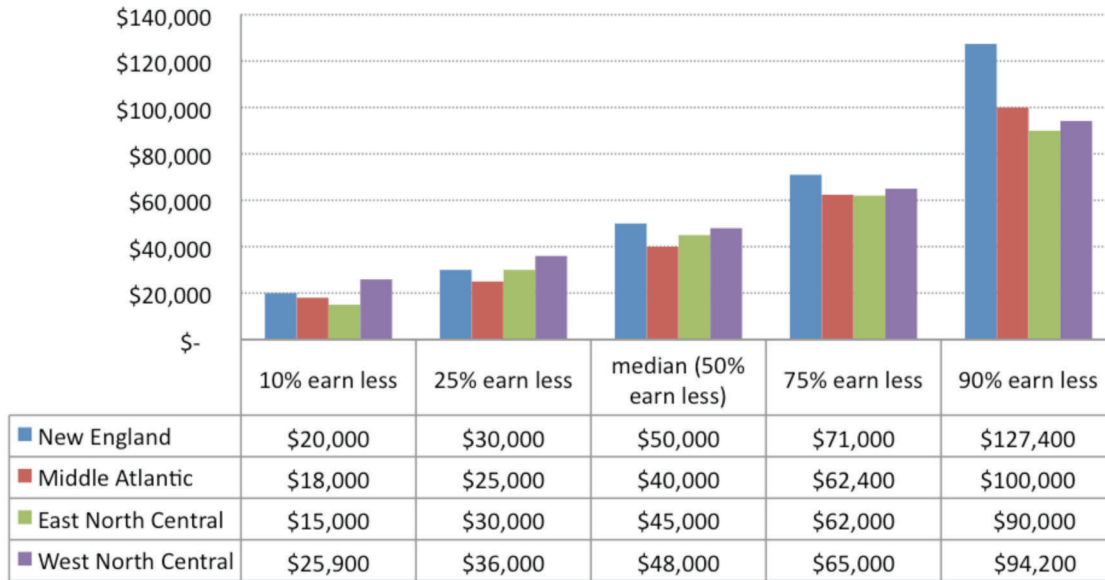
⁵ On October 1, 2009, what was the sector of your primary social work position?

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

ANNUAL SALARY BY REGION⁷

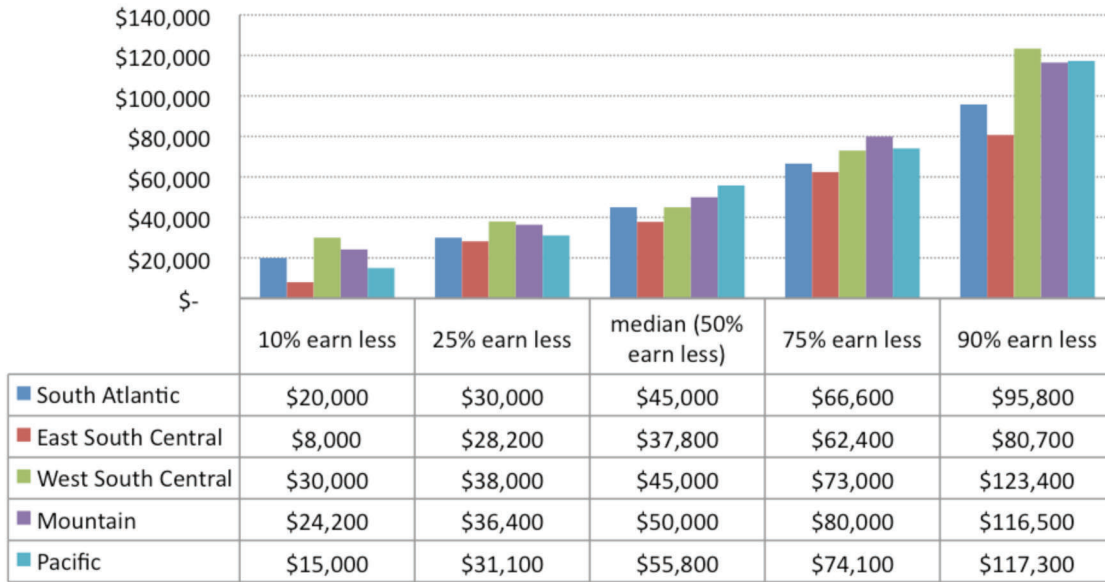


ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION



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.



National Association of Social Workers
750 First Street NE, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20002-4241

