

NASW Center for Workforce Studies
& Social Work Practice

Social Workers in Colleges and Universities

occupational profile



Overview

Social workers play critical roles in higher education settings. Many colleges and universities across the country employ social workers in their counseling centers or as part of their faculty. Social workers employed in colleges or universities tend to focus on the psychosocial functioning of individual students (Gibelman, 2005). Issues that social workers address can be related to academic challenges, adjustments to a new environment, or behavioral issues (Gibelman, 2005). Other issues might include campus drinking, relationships or domestic violence. Social workers in these settings can also work as faculty, preparing social work students to address individual and social problems and to bring about social change. Social work professors may also conduct research on a variety of topics.

Overview of Functions

Social workers employed with colleges and universities can have a range of job functions depending on their specific roles. Possible job titles include, but are not limited to, clinical social worker, counselor, therapist, director, field liaison or professor. Job functions that a social worker might perform within a college or university include:

- Demonstrating knowledge of specific subject area through research, writing and publishing;
- Developing assignments that promote critical thinking, practice and creativity;
- Facilitating discussions and debates;
- Incorporating information about vulnerable populations and cultural diversity into course materials;
- Identifying appropriate resources, including literature and technology, for student instruction;
- Analyzing students' learning challenges and recommending appropriate actions;
- Building effective relationships within the local community;
- Collaborating with staff from other disciplines and departments;
- Assessing students' emotional and psychosocial issues, such as substance abuse, eating disorders, support systems and/or physical functioning;
- Educating students about the wide range of issues they might be facing;
- Identifying and referring students to community resources; and
- Participating in program planning.

Benefits and Challenges of Working in a Higher Education Setting

Social workers employed in higher education settings play critical roles in the lives of young adults attending colleges and universities. Regardless of their specific roles, social workers have the opportunity to support students' academic and personal growth during this critical phase of their lives. Additionally, they have the benefit of collaborating with a network of people from other professions and disciplines. Their range of responsibilities can also provide the opportunity for involvement in program planning, development and evaluation. However, like many other work settings, social workers in higher education settings also face the challenge of limited resources and high caseloads. These challenges can sometimes make it difficult to effectively serve students.

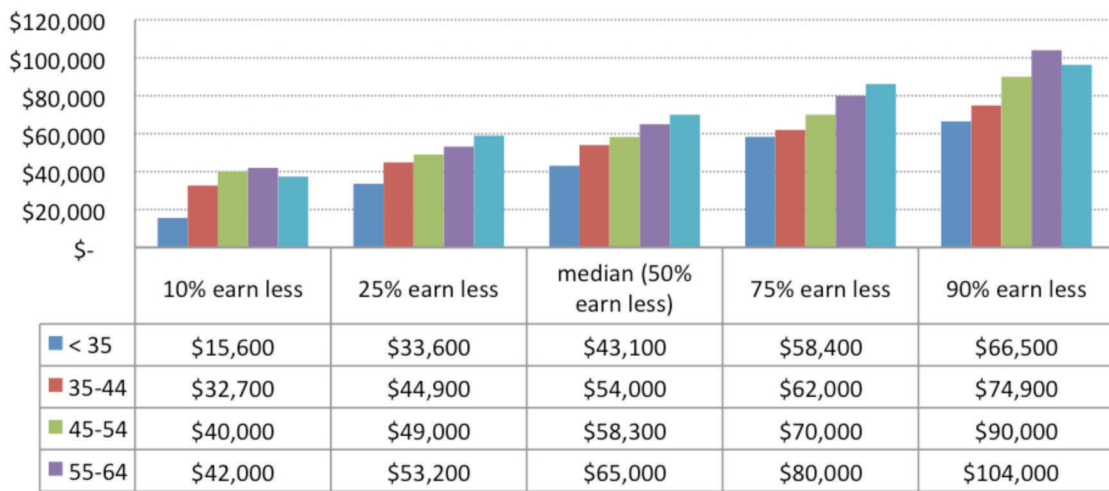
REFERENCES

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 Colleges and Universities (n= 945)

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



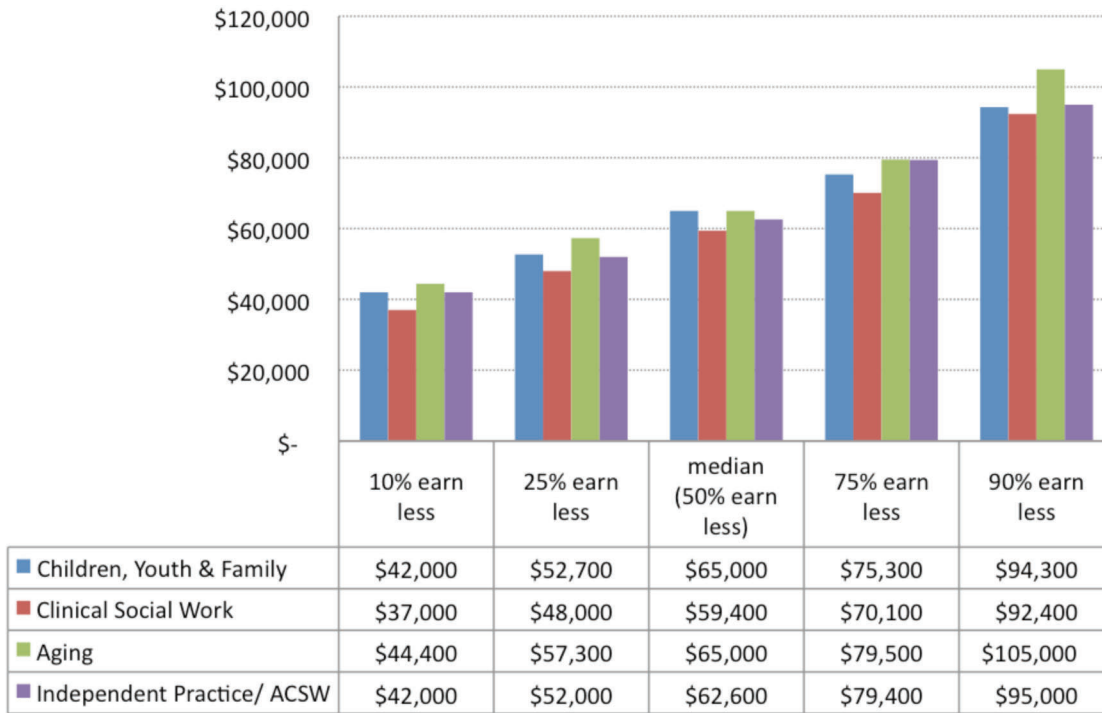
ANNUAL SALARY BY DEGREE³



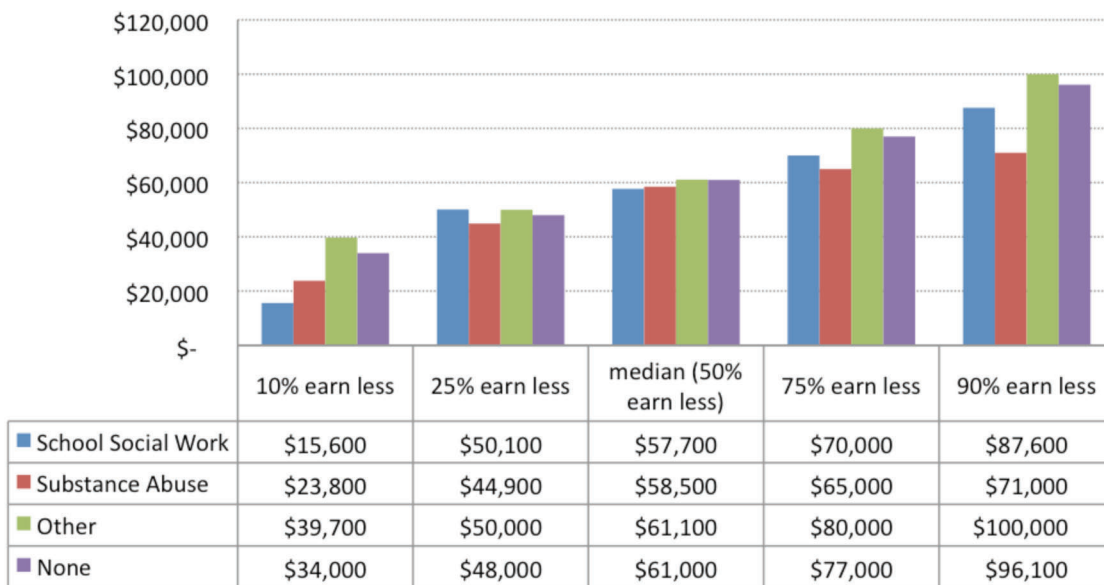
² In what year did you first begin working in the social work field?

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

ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION⁴

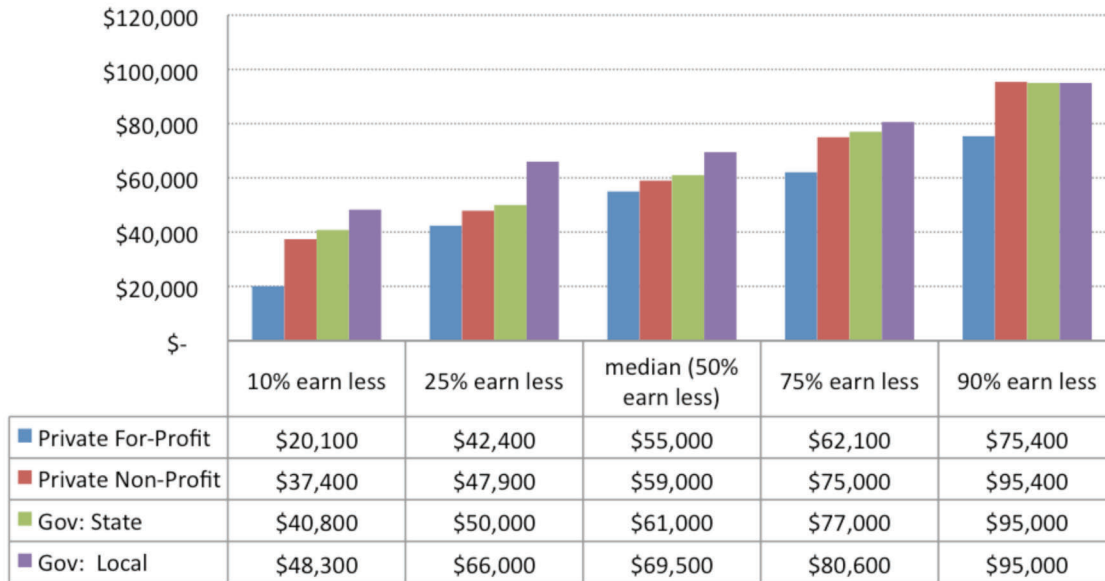


ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION (CONTINUED)



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

ANNUAL SALARY BY SECTOR⁵



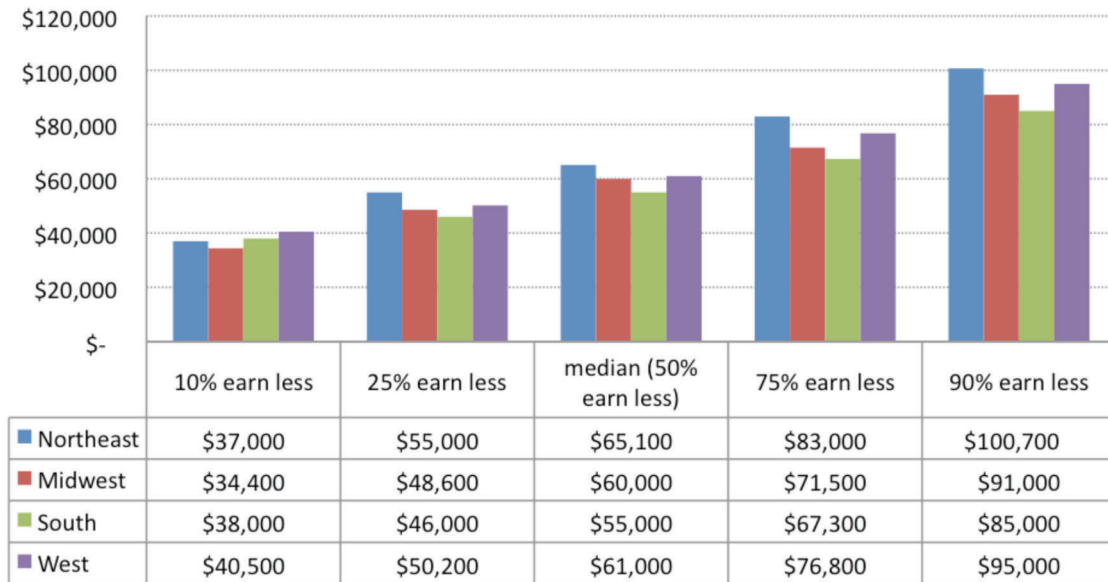
ANNUAL SALARY BY PRACTICE AREA⁶



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

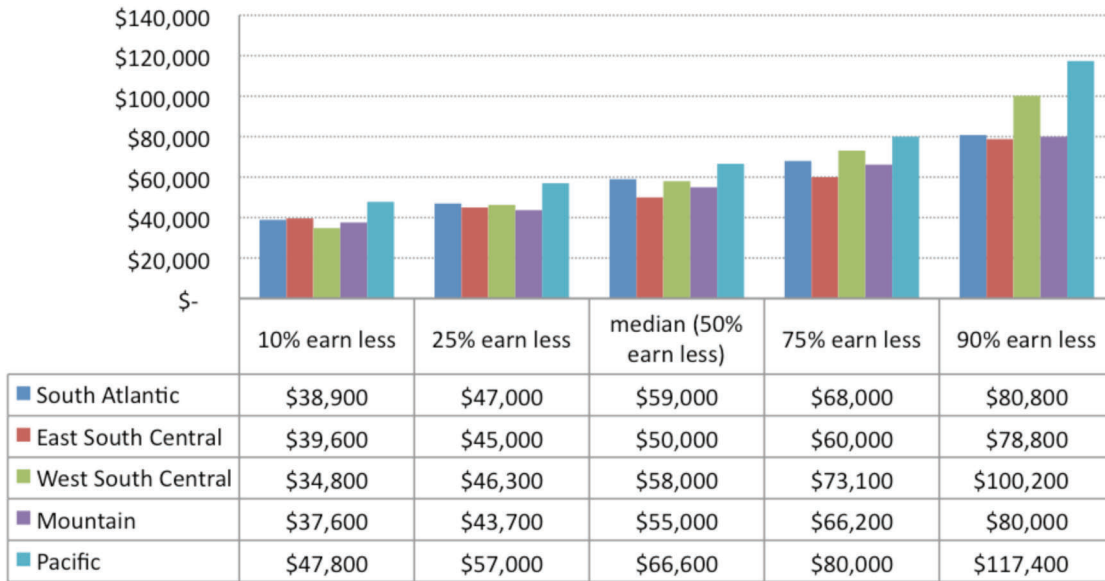


ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION



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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