

[REPORT]

National Association of Social Workers
MEMBERSHIP WORKFORCE STUDY

**PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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INTRODUCTION

The 2004 benchmark national study of licensed social workers provided a wealth of information about social workers' roles and work environments. The study also raised new questions about the social work workforce that required further exploration. Although the 2004 findings pointed to a looming shortage of licensed social workers, there was still much to learn about why this was the case. In what ways did career decision points, educational debt, workplace stressors, and other factors influence the recruitment and retention of this professional workforce? The NASW Membership Workforce Study was an effort to respond to such remaining questions and to gain more insight into the social work workforce.

METHODOLOGY

The NASW Membership Workforce Survey was administered online from August 30, 2007, to November 30, 2007. NASW members were invited to participate through electronic *Memberlink* newsletters, Specialty Practice Section alerts, mailed copies of the *NASW News*, and the NASW Web site. Survey responses were anonymous. The survey received a total of 3,653 responses.

Survey respondents volunteered to participate in the survey and were not randomly selected from the total NASW membership. Due to the sample being based on those who self-selected to participate, estimates of sampling error cannot be calculated. The findings are based solely on the responses and are not generalizable to the entire population of NASW members.

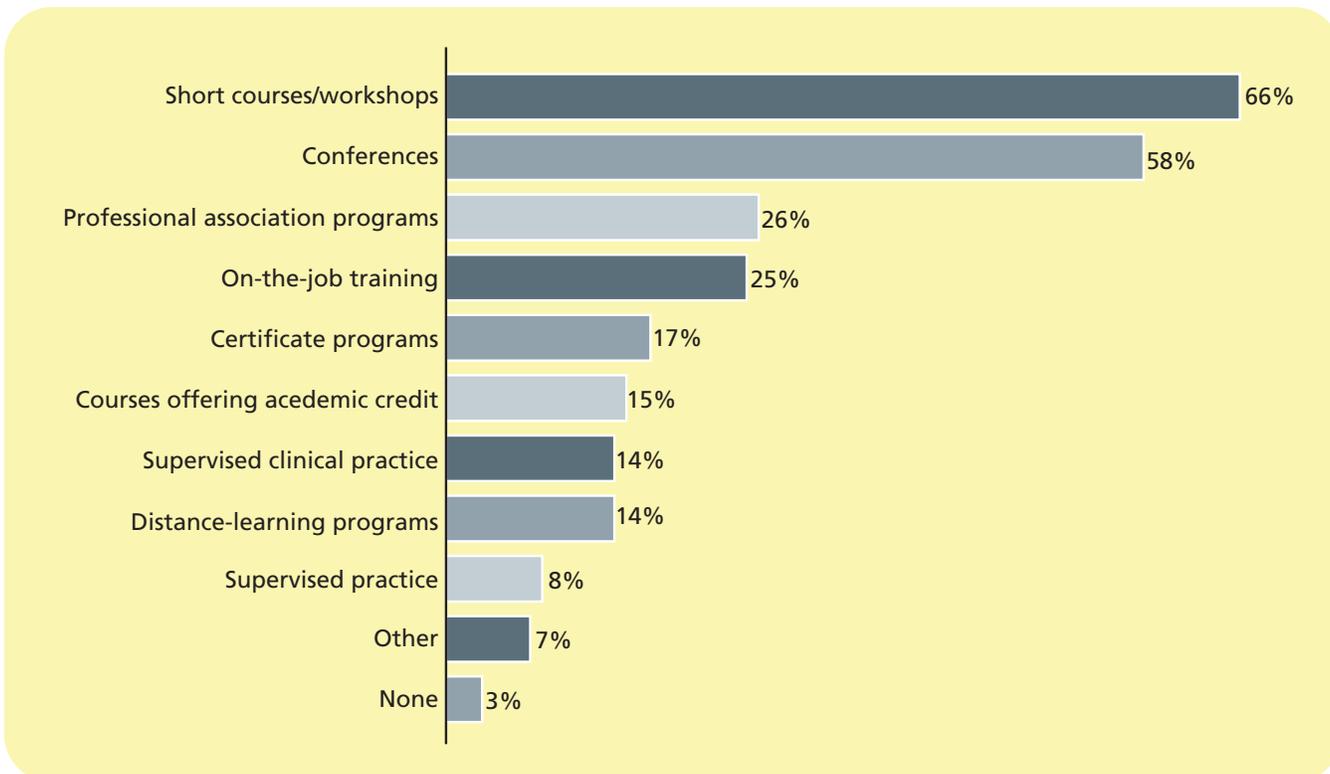
OVERVIEW

This report highlights the professional development characteristics of the survey participants and explores the continuing education training content areas, the accessibility of continuing education activities, the importance of professional development in social work, and the extent of employers' support and contribution to the professional development of social workers.

CONTENT AREAS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

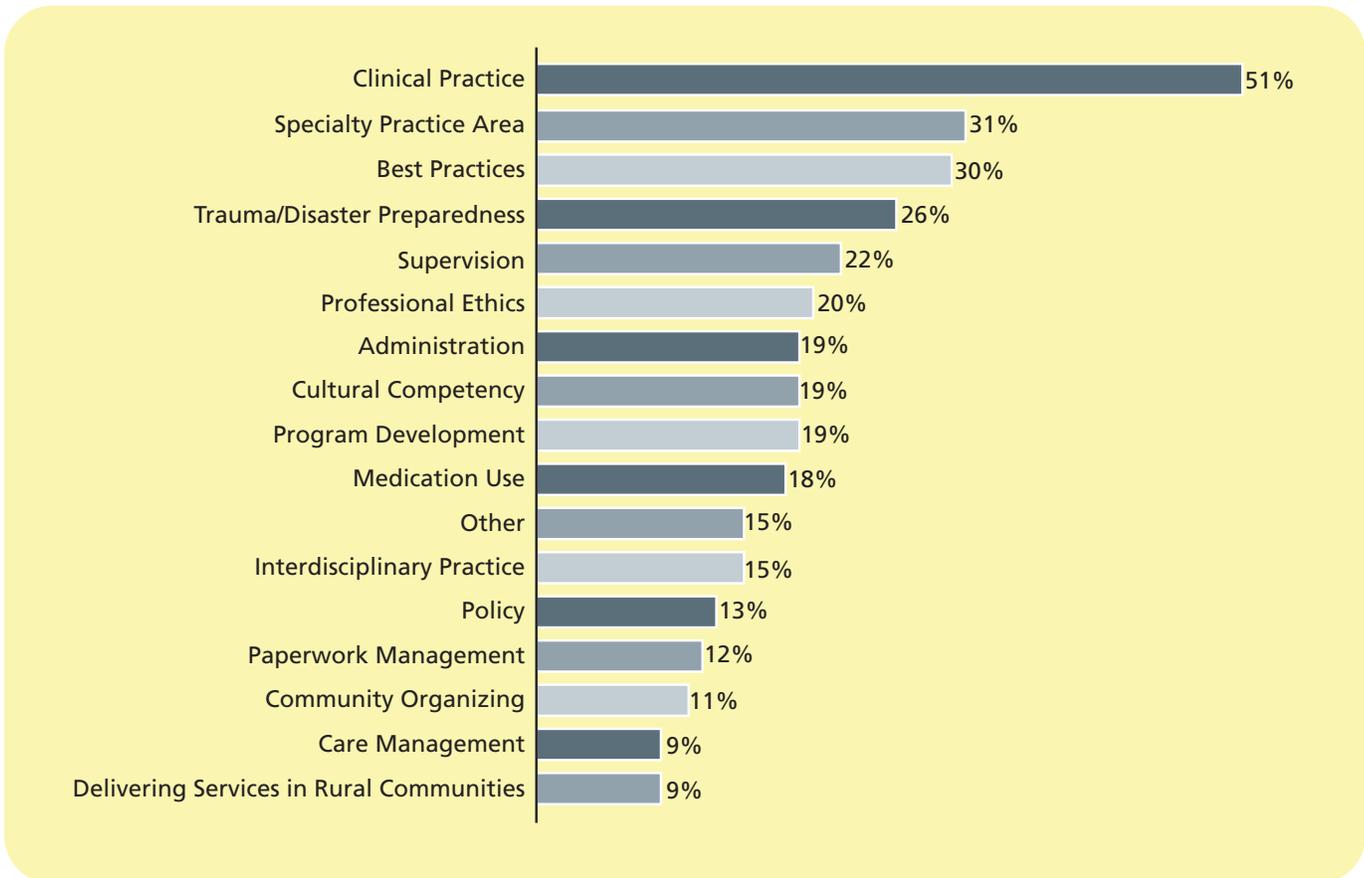
When asked to identify the types of continuing education training they had participated in during the last 12 months, 66 percent of study participants stated that they attended short courses or workshops, 58 percent attended social work conferences, and 26 percent of respondents participated in social work continuing education programs offered by professional associations (Figure 1). Twenty-five percent of social work professionals met continuing education requirements through on-the-job training, while others chose to participate in certificate programs (17%), courses offering academic credit (15%), distance-learning programs (14%), and clinical practice work under supervision (14%).

FIGURE 1. CONTINUING EDUCATION/TRAINING PARTICIPATION



Notably, when study participants were asked to identify areas of social work in which they would like to pursue further education or training, slightly more than half indicated clinical practice (51%), followed by specialty practice area (31%), best practices (30%), and trauma/disaster preparedness (26%) (Figure 2). Twenty-two percent of participants are interested in learning more about providing supervision, and 20 percent want to enhance their knowledge about professional ethics.

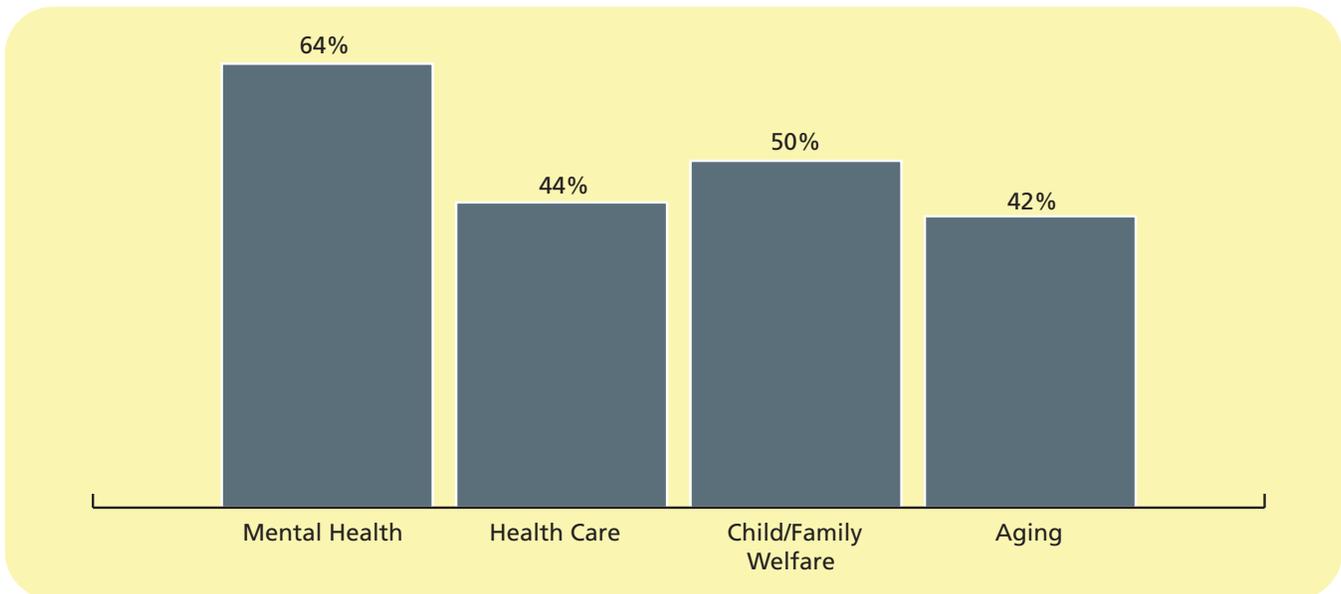
FIGURE 2. DESIRED CONTINUING EDUCATION/TRAINING CONTENT AREAS



CONTINUING EDUCATION TRAINING AND SOCIAL WORKERS

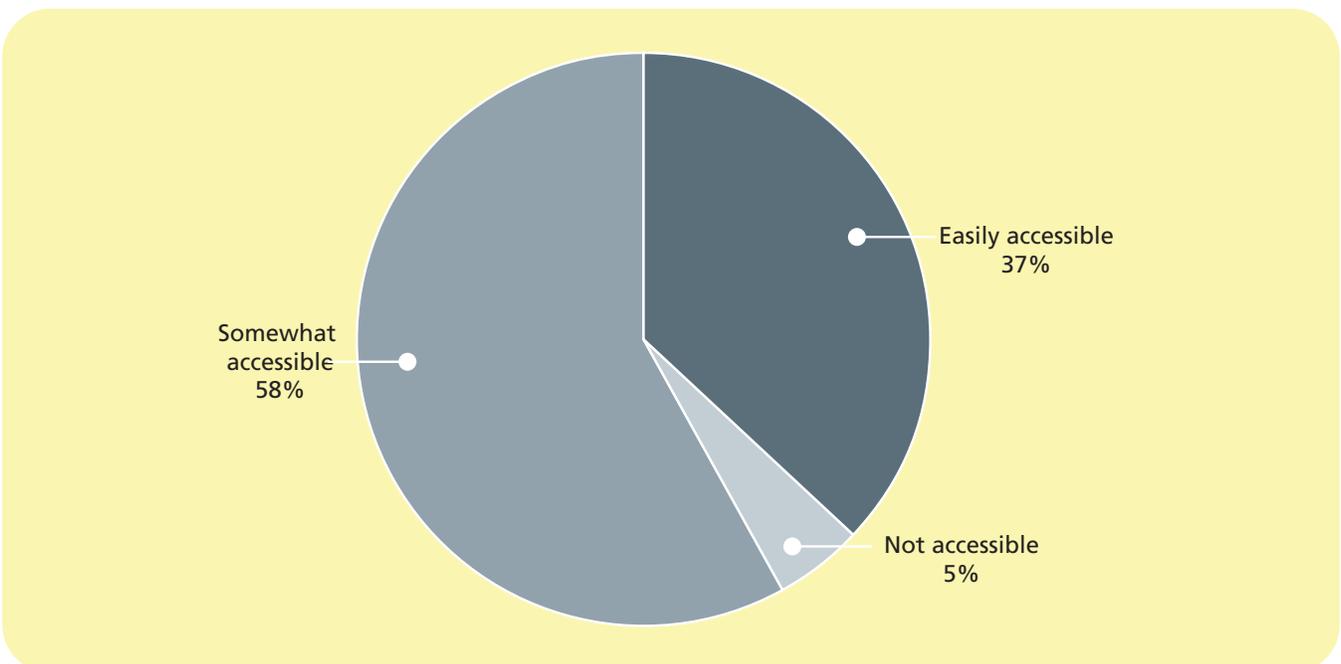
Given that clinical practice involves providing direct services to clients, it is not unusual to find that more than half (64 percent) of all mental health, 44 percent of health care, 50 percent of child/family welfare, and 42 percent of aging social workers stated that they are interested in pursuing additional social work training in the area of clinical practice (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. SOCIAL WORKERS INTERESTED IN PURSUING TRAINING IN CLINICAL PRACTICE, BY PRACTICE AREA



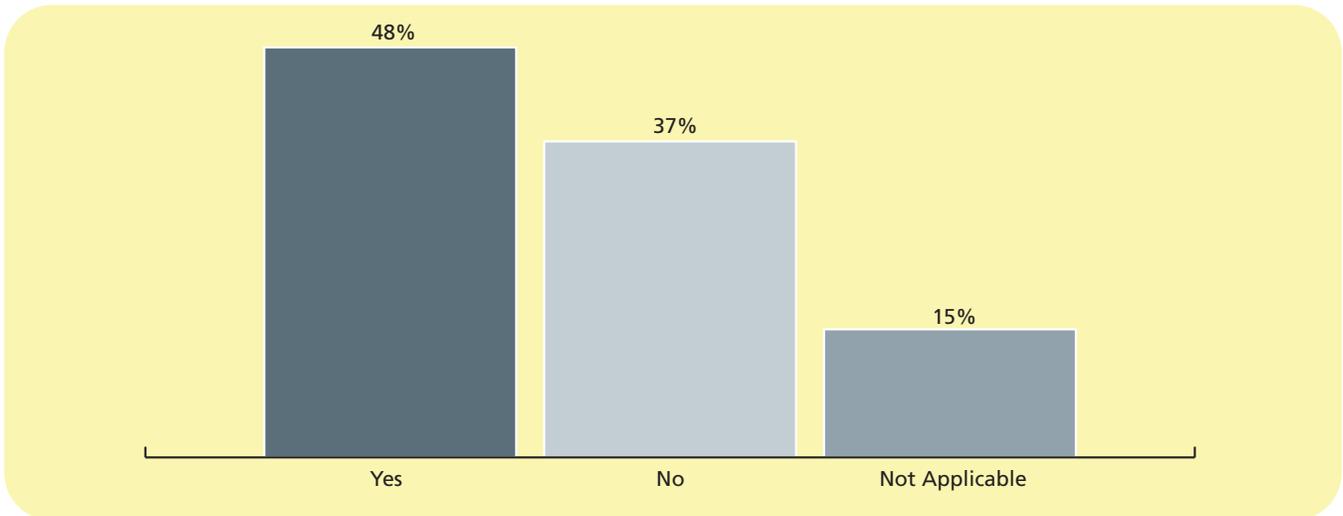
Despite often having to meet necessary state licensing requirements, five percent of study participants indicated that they do not have access to social work continuing education programs (Figure 4). More than half of the respondents (58%) stated that continuing education programs are “somewhat accessible,” while 37 percent of study participants stated that they do not experience difficulties accessing training programs.

FIGURE 4. ACCESSIBILITY OF CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMS



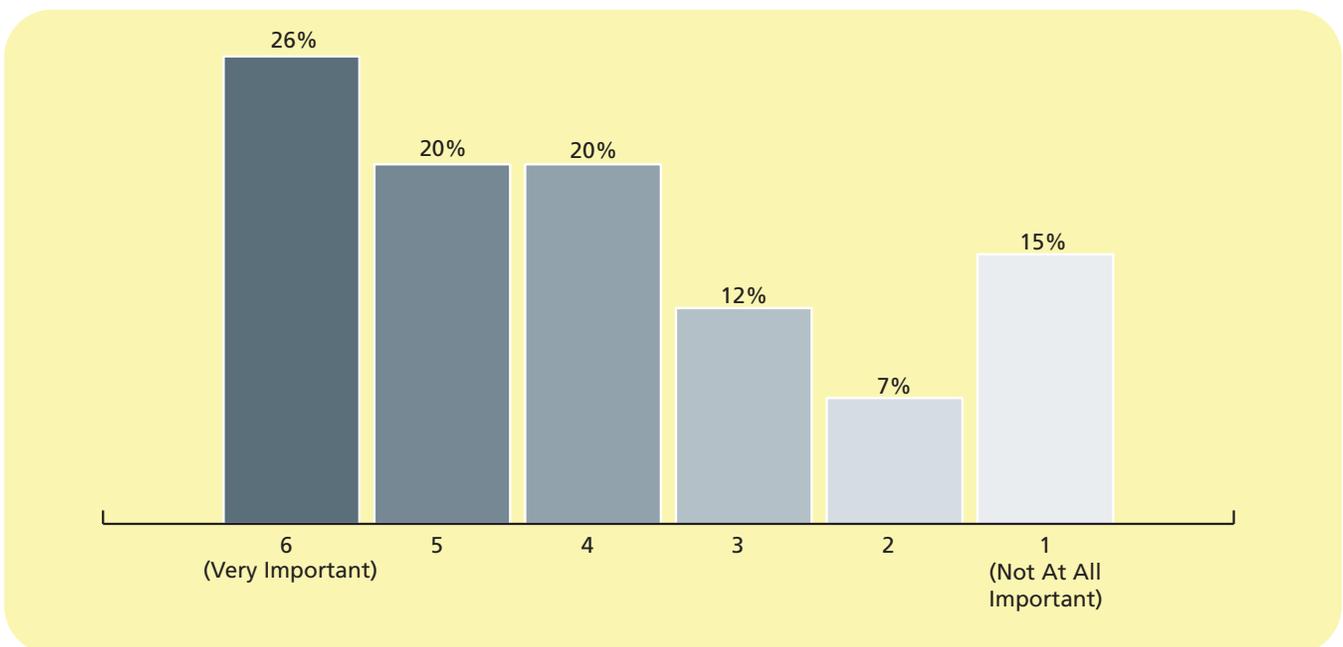
While necessary for maintaining one's social work license, 48 percent of respondents indicated that professional development is also a requisite for continued employment. Another 37 percent of respondents indicated that professional development is not required by their employers (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. IS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIRED BY EMPLOYER?



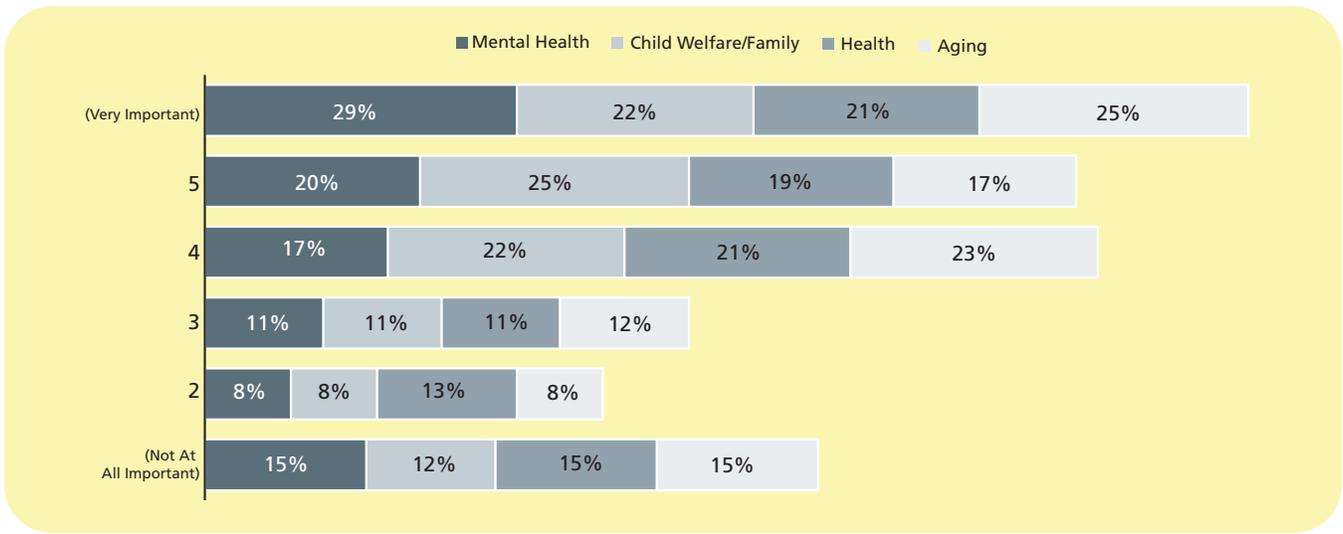
Two-thirds of the study participants indicated that professional development is important for job advancement (66%), while 34 percent of individuals believe that their participation in professional development activities and pursuit of additional social work training is not an important factor for advancement in the social work field (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. HOW IMPORTANT IS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR JOB ADVANCEMENT?



In terms of practice area, 29 percent of mental health, 25 percent of aging, 22 percent of child welfare/family, and 21 percent of health care social workers indicated that continuing education is “very important” for job advancement (Figure 7). Fifteen percent each of mental health, health, and aging social workers, and 12 percent of child welfare/family social workers stated that continuing education is “not at all important” a factor in job advancement in the field of social work.

FIGURE 7. PRACTICE AREA AND IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR JOB ADVANCEMENT



Slightly more than one-fourth of respondents acknowledged that professional development activities are not offered at their places of employment (27%) (Figure 8). Others indicated that professional development activities are offered at least once a month on average (20%), every two to three months (14%), several times a year (24%), once every few years (4%), once a year (11%), or once every few years (4%).

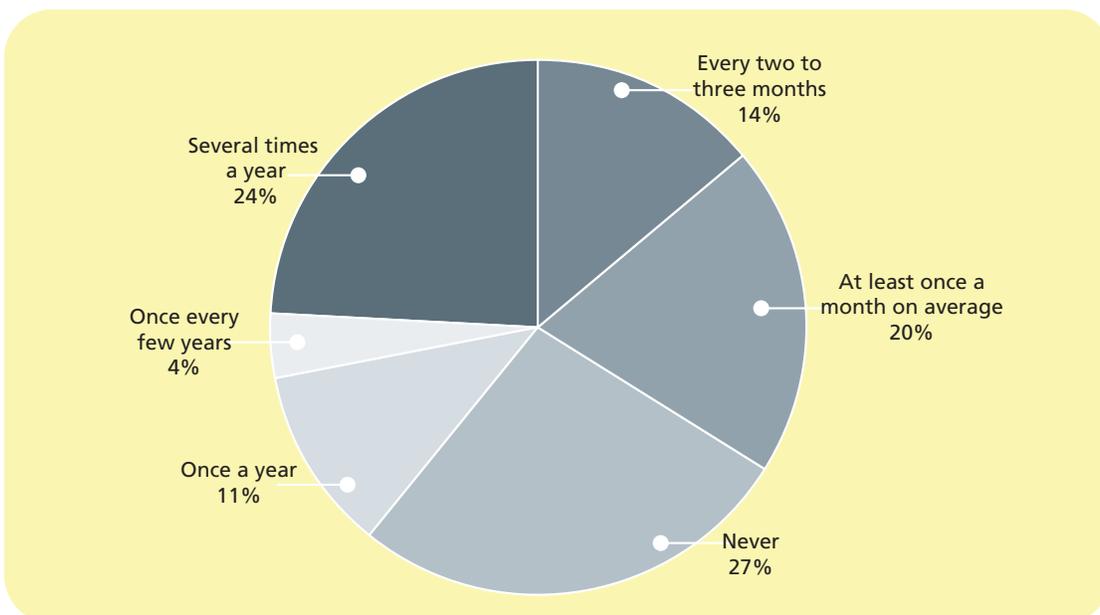
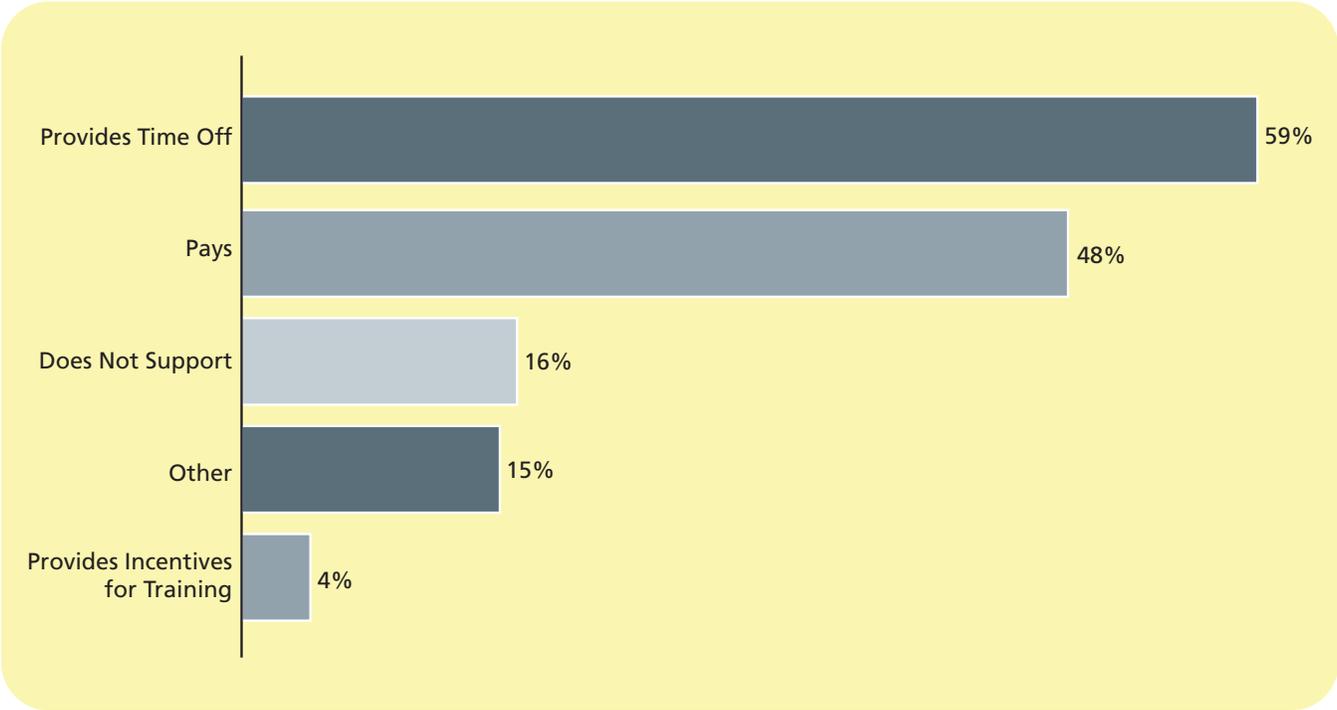


FIGURE 8. FREQUENCY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OFFERED AT PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT

Although many employers do not provide social work training for their employees at work, they tend to support the social work professional's pursuit of professional development in other ways. Fifty-nine percent of study participants stated that their employers provide them with time off from work to participate in seminars, workshops, and other professional development activities (Figure 9). Forty-eight percent of individuals indicated that their employers pay for additional training in social work, 4 percent of respondents acknowledged that their employers provide them with incentives for their participation in training activities, and 15 percent of study participants stated that their employers provide other kinds of support. Notably, 16 percent of respondents stated that their employers do not provide any support for their participation in social work training and development activities.

FIGURE 9. HOW DOES YOUR EMPLOYER SUPPORT YOUR PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?



SUMMARY

Professional social work practice requires a commitment on the part of social workers to continue their professional development throughout their careers. Social workers are also generally required to receive additional training and participate in professional development activities to maintain their social work licenses and/or to meet employment requirements. Fortunately, the majority of the social workers who participated in the survey find that continuing education programs are somewhat accessible to them. Social work conferences and continuing education programs offered by professional associations were also common venues for receiving additional training. While the majority of social workers identified clinical practice as the primary desired content area for continuing education, other study participants identified specialty practice areas, best practices, trauma/disaster preparedness, supervision, and ethics as additional areas in which they would like to receive more social work training. On the whole, professional development was regarded as a very important factor in job advancement in social work, particularly for social workers working in mental health settings. Given the importance of professional development for social workers, many employers provide their social work staff with time off to attend continuing education programs, pay for trainings, and/or provide incentives for social workers' participation in such activities. The fact that most of the respondents reported that they attended professional development activities within the last 12 months indicates the high level of value that social workers place on keeping abreast of developments within the profession.



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