

[REPORT]

National Association of Social Workers
MEMBERSHIP WORKFORCE STUDY

SOCIAL WORKERS AT WORK

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

James J. Kelly, PhD, ACSW
NASW President

Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH
Executive Director

NASW CENTER FOR WORKFORCE STUDIES

Tracy Whitaker, DSW, ACSW
Director

Melvin Wilson, MBA, LCSW-C
Manager, Workforce Development & Training

Perette Arrington, PsyD
Sr. Research Associate

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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.

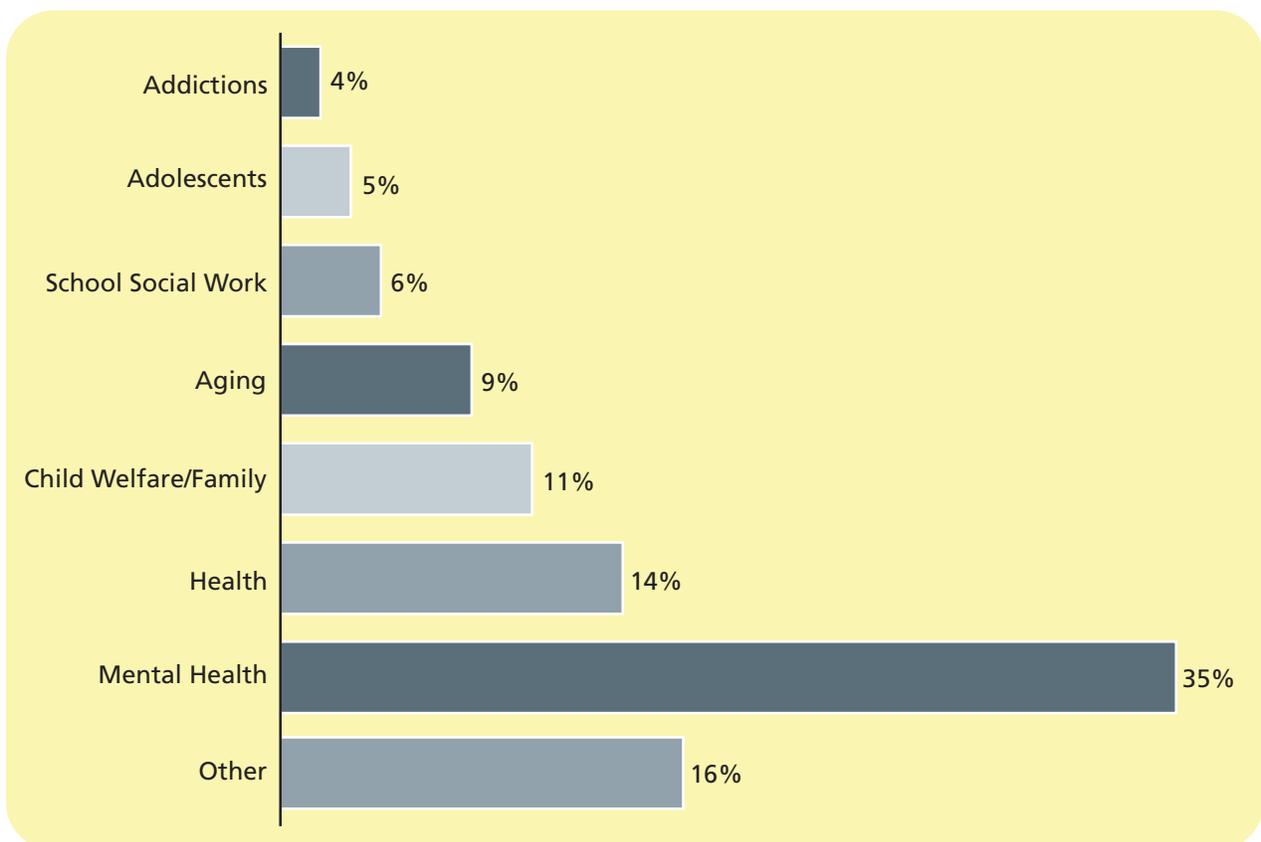
OVERVIEW

The social work workplace has been the topic of various studies (Gibelman & Schervish, 1993, 1997; Gibelman, 2005; Smith, Whitaker & Weismiller, 2006; Whitaker, Weismiller & Clark, 2006). This report highlights the employment characteristics of the 2007 survey participants and explores the safety issues that they encounter in their work environments.

PRIMARY PRACTICE AREAS

Thirty-five percent of study participants identified mental health as their primary practice area; 14 percent of the individuals identified health care; 11 percent identified child welfare/family; nine percent reported aging; six percent reported school social work; five percent identified adolescents; and four percent reported addictions as their primary practice area. Another 16 percent identified a variety of other practice areas, including community development (1%), criminal justice (1%), developmental disabilities (2%), displaced populations (1%), occupational social work (1%), public health (1%), violence (1%) and other (8%) (Figure 1).

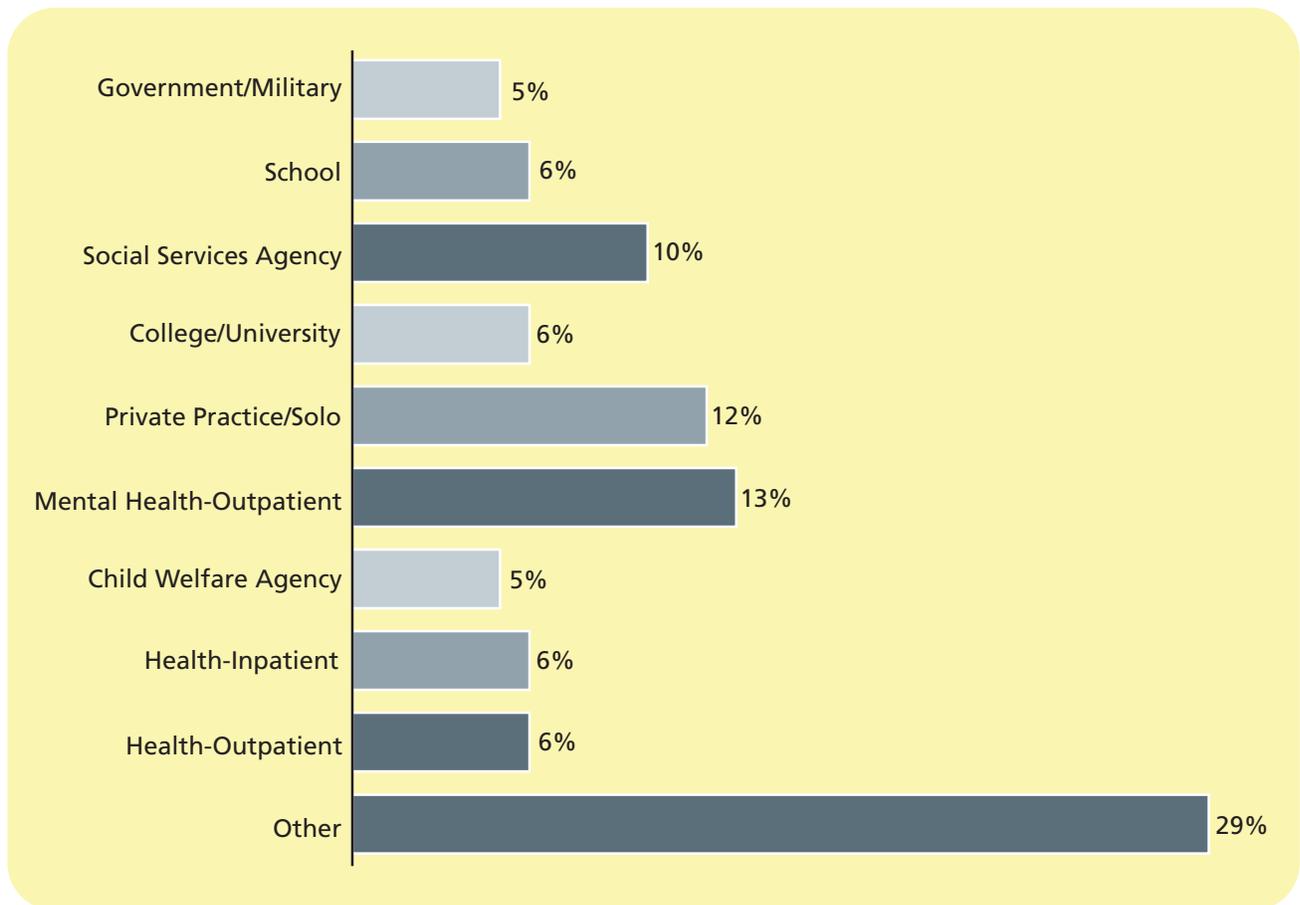
FIGURE 1. PRIMARY SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AREAS



PRACTICE SETTINGS

Of the survey respondents who identified the setting in which they practice social work, 13 percent indicated that they work in a mental health outpatient setting, 12 percent are in independent private practice, and 10 percent are employed with a social services agency (Figure 2). Other social workers work in a school setting (6%), college or university (6%), inpatient health facility (6%), outpatient health facility (6%), government/military agency (5%), or child welfare agency (5%).

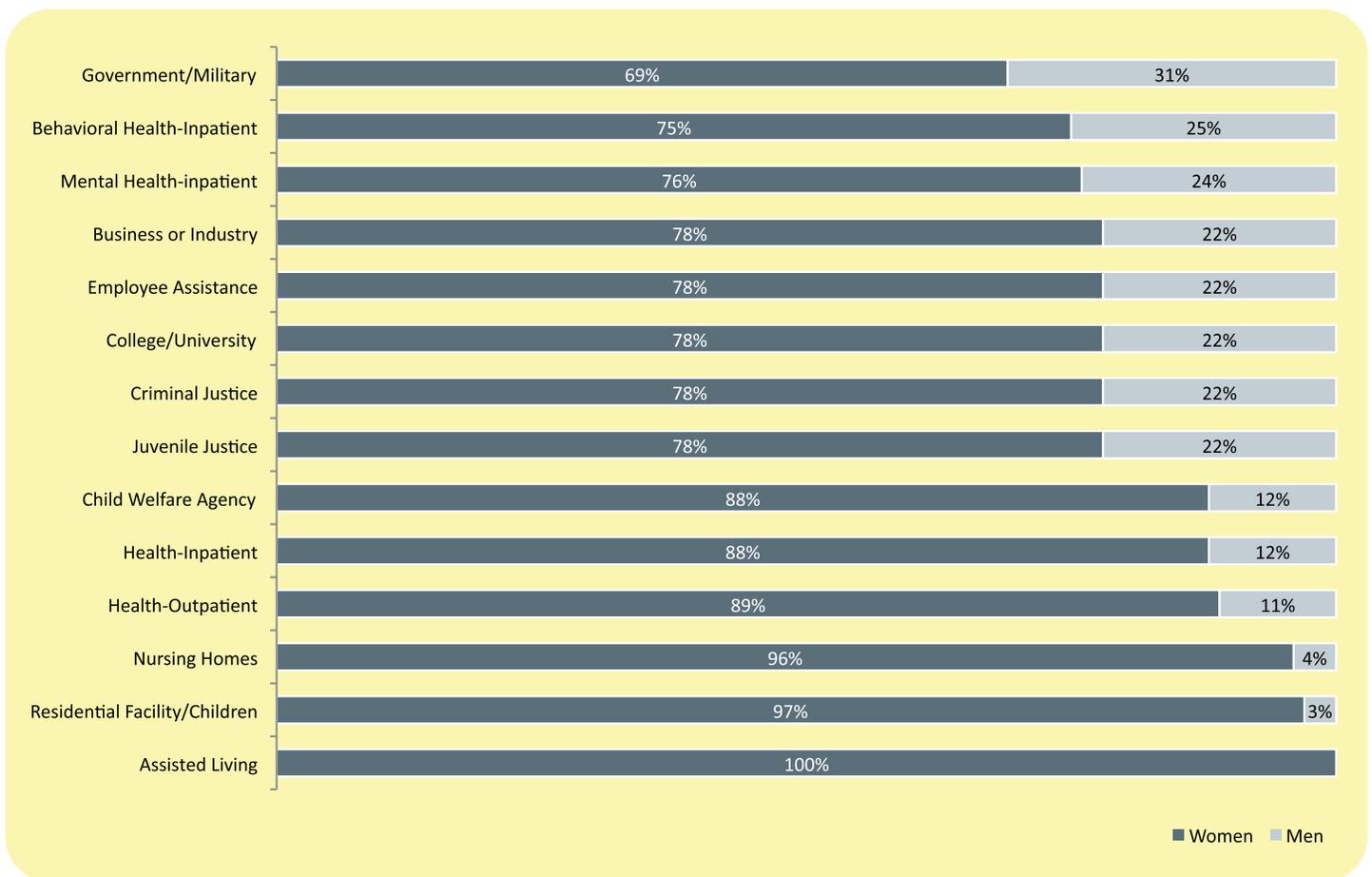
FIGURE 2. SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE SETTINGS



PRACTICE SETTINGS AND GENDER

Although women dominate social work (80% women versus 20% men), there are differences in the proportion of men and women across practice settings. Higher proportions of women are employed in child welfare agencies (88%); residential facilities for children (97%); nursing homes (96%); assisted living facilities (100%); outpatient health settings (89%) and inpatient health settings (88%). Higher proportions of men are found in government agencies/military (31%); behavioral health inpatient settings (25%); mental health inpatient settings (24%); business/industry (22%); criminal justice systems (22%); colleges/universities (22%); and employee assistance programs (22%) (Figure 3).

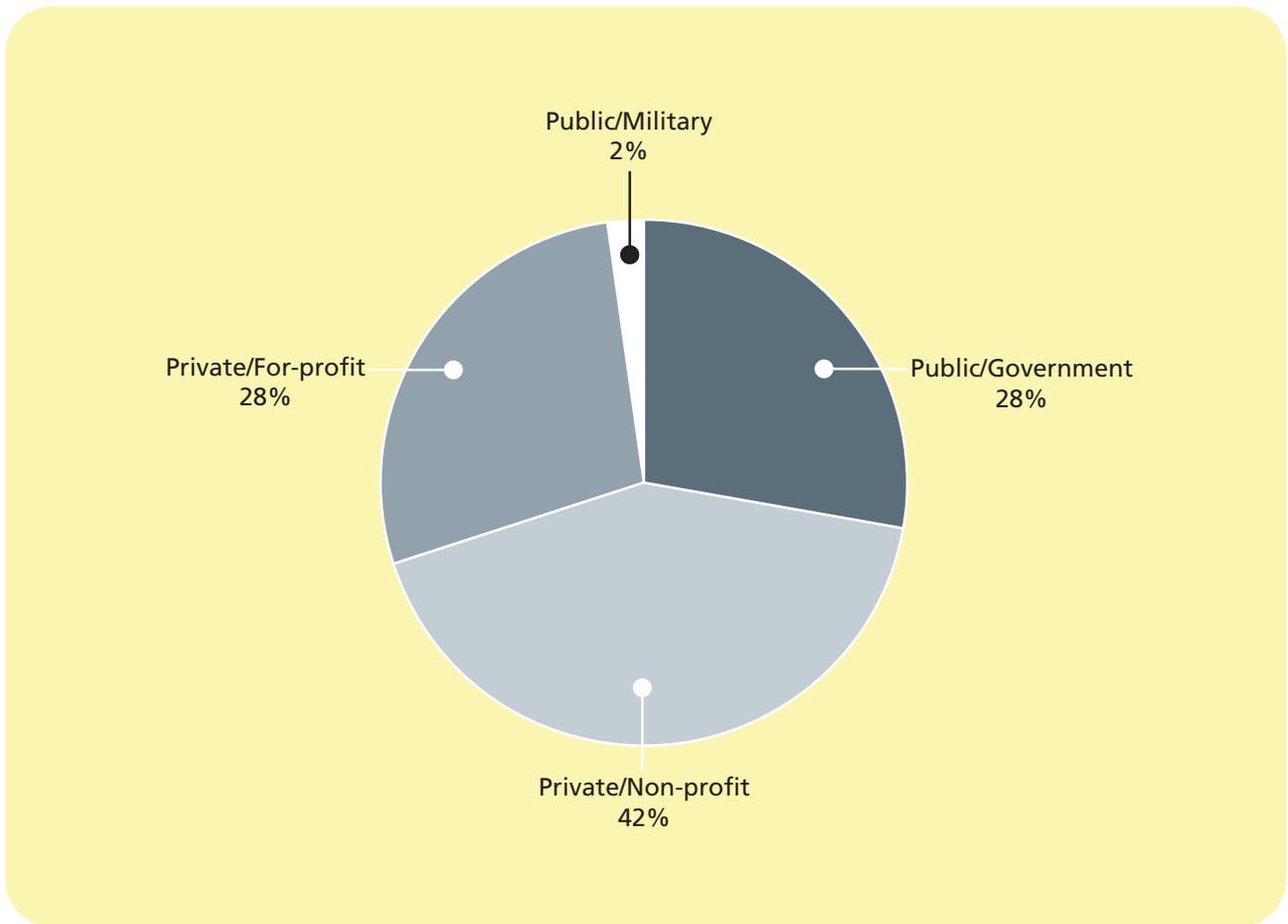
FIGURE 3. PRACTICE SETTINGS AND GENDER



ORGANIZATIONAL SECTORS

The majority (42%) of study participants practice social work with a private/nonprofit organization (Figure 4). Twenty-eight percent of respondents practice either with a private/for-profit or a public/government organization, while only two percent of social work professionals work with the military.

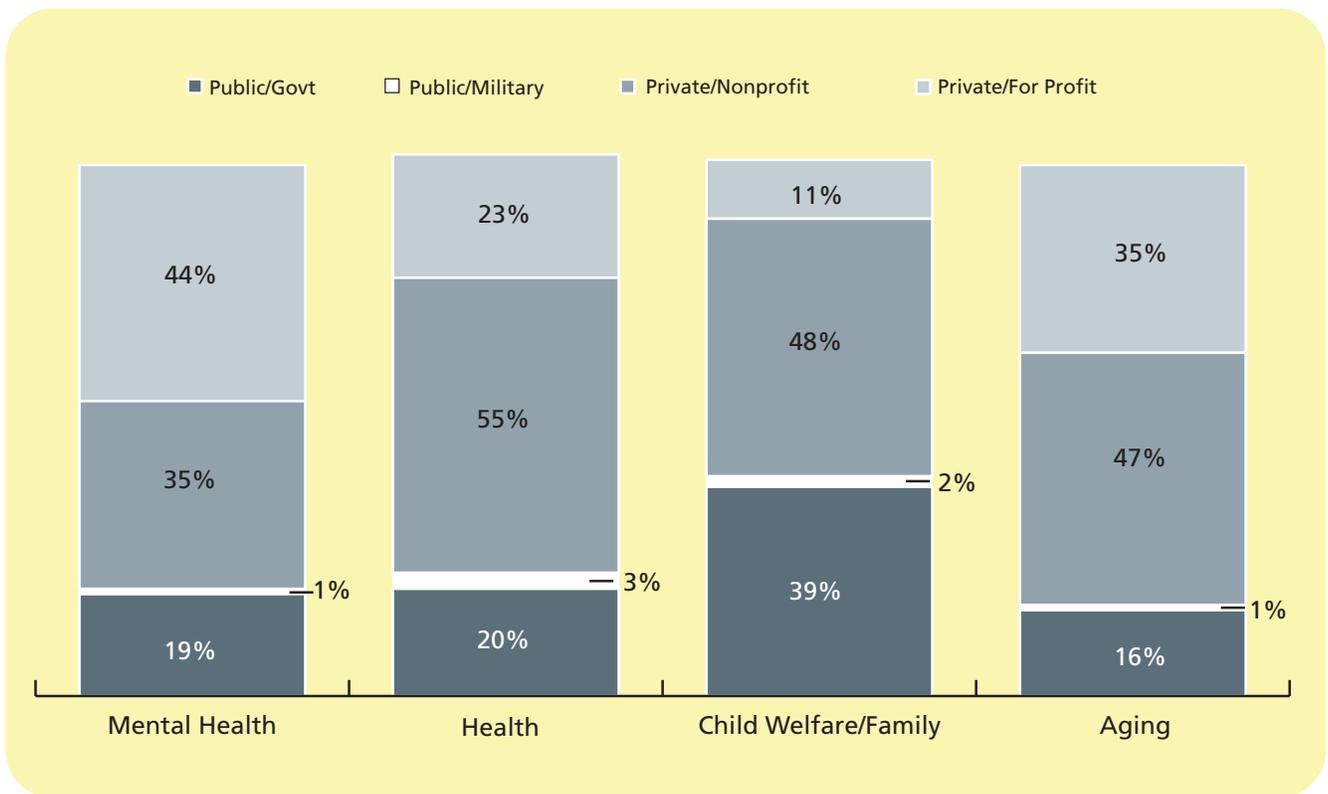
FIGURE 4. ORGANIZATIONAL SECTORS



ORGANIZATIONAL SECTORS AND MAJOR PRACTICE AREAS

Less than one-fourth of all health care social workers (23%), compared to 44 percent of mental health social workers, practice in the private/for-profit sector (Figure 5). The opposite is true for the private/ nonprofit sector, where 55 percent of health care social workers and 35 percent of mental health social workers work. More child welfare/family social workers (39%) are employed in public/ government organizations than social workers from other practice areas. Public/military is the organizational sector that reflects the smallest percentage of social workers employed from all practice areas.

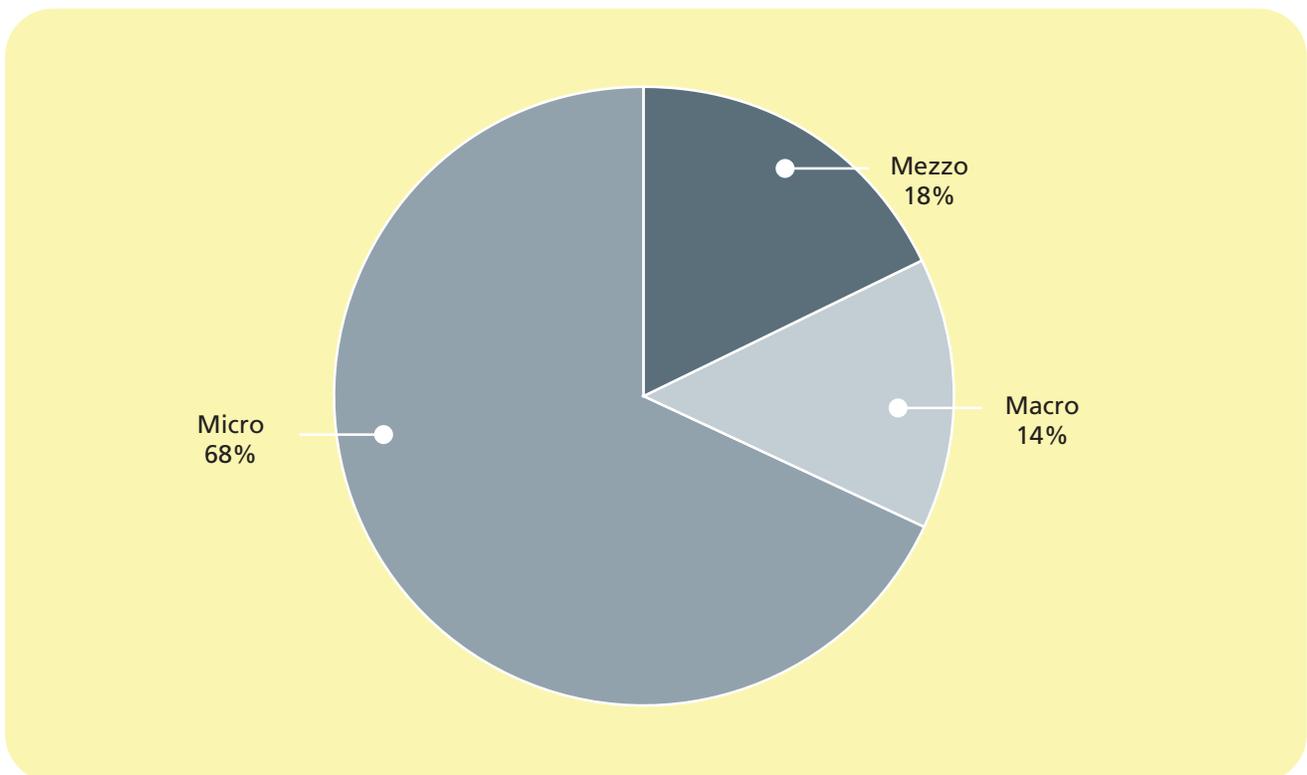
FIGURE 5. SOCIAL WORK ORGANIZATIONAL SECTORS BY PRACTICE AREAS



PRACTICE FOCUS

More than two-thirds (68%) of all social workers describe the focus of their practice as “micro” because they provide direct intervention with individuals or work in a clinical setting (Figure 6). Eighteen percent of study participants describe their social work focus as “mezzo” because they provide intervention to small groups and families, and 14 percent of respondents indicate that their practice focus is “macro” because their interventions are aimed at societal change, policy/planning, and administration.

Figure 6. Social Work Practice Focus

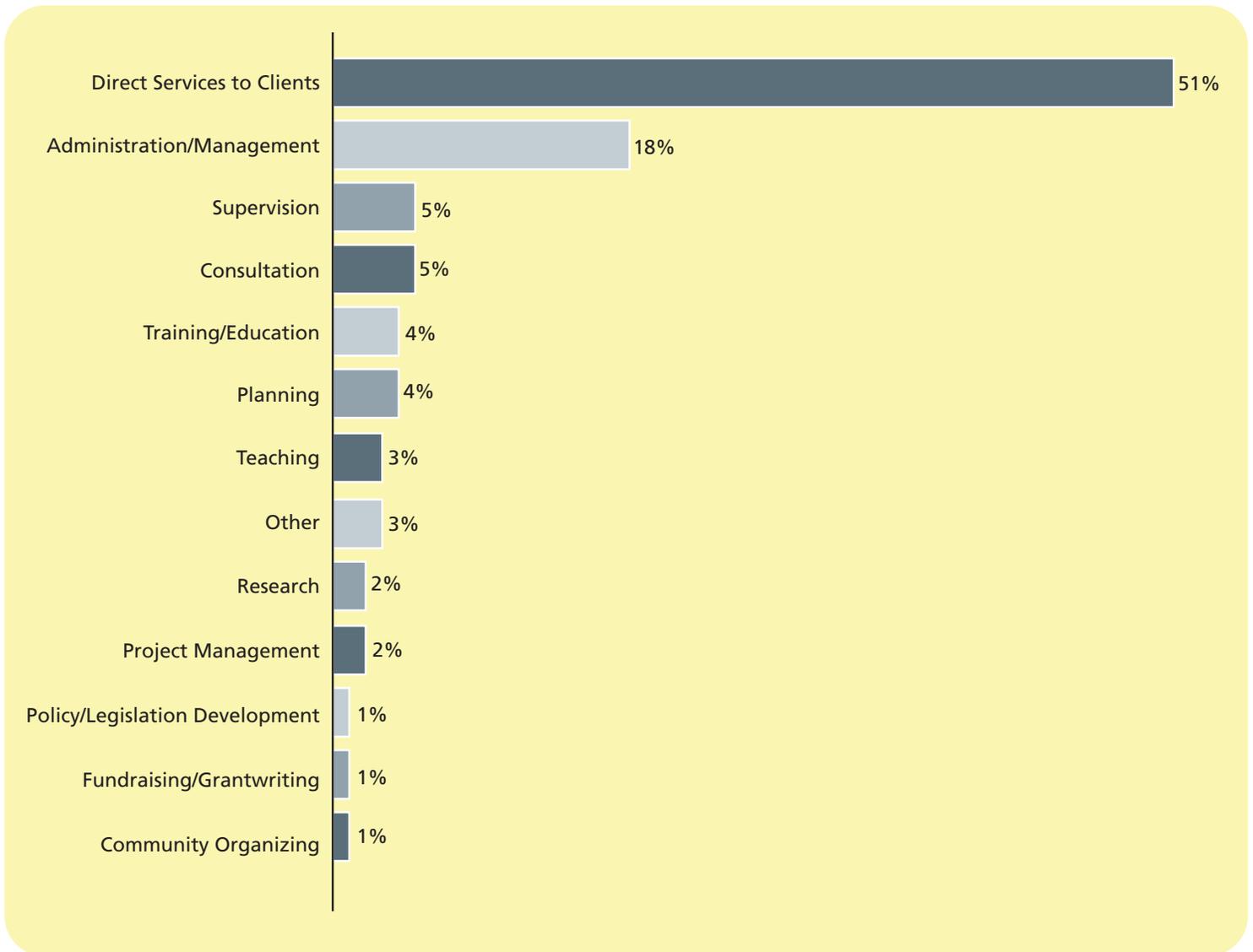


TASKS PERFORMED

When the study participants were asked to identify approximately how much time per week they spend performing different social work tasks in their primary social work employment, many indicated that, on average, they spend 51 percent of their time providing direct services to clients (Figure 7). This is consistent with the number of social workers who describe their social work practice as “micro.” Additionally, respondents stated that they spend an average of 18 percent of time each week

performing administrative and managerial duties. Supervision and consultative services are performed approximately 10 percent of the time during the work week, while only two percent of time each week is dedicated to community organizing and policy/legislative development.

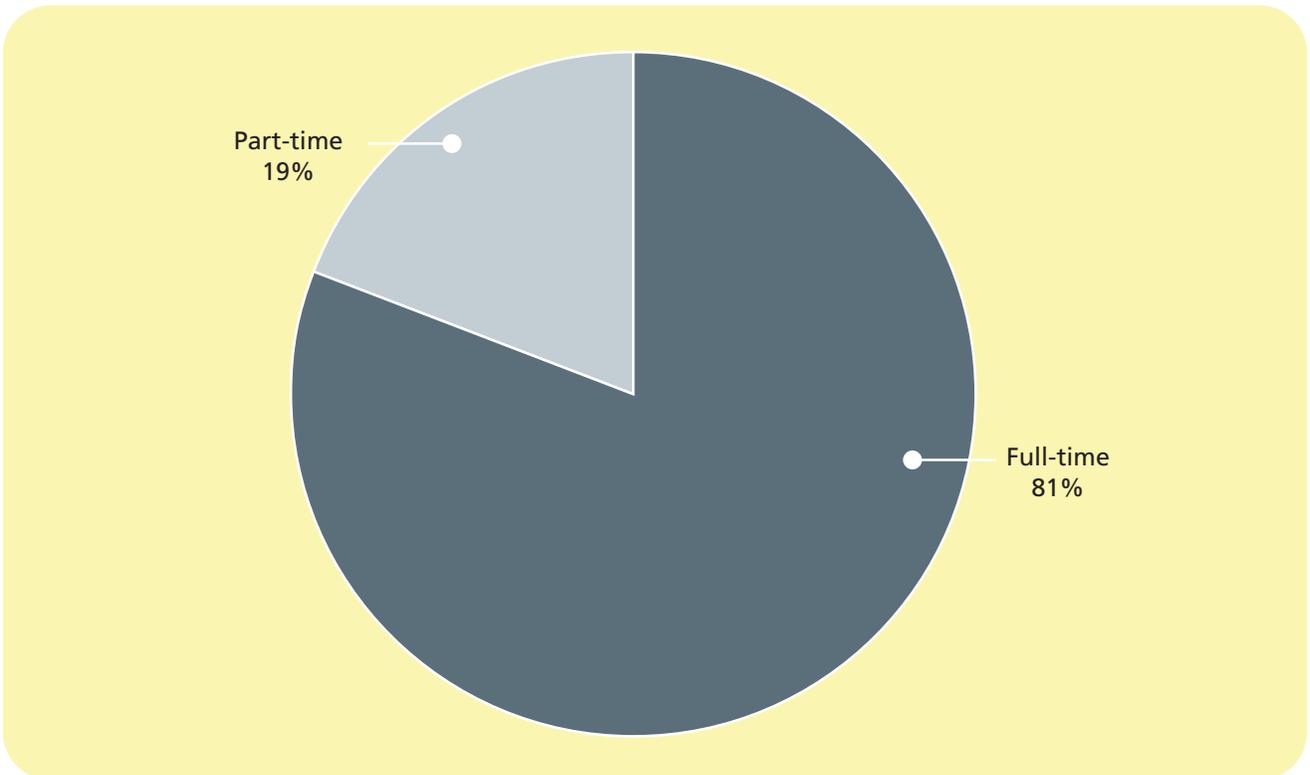
Figure 7. Average Amount of Time Spent Performing Primary Social Work Tasks



EMPLOYMENT STATUS

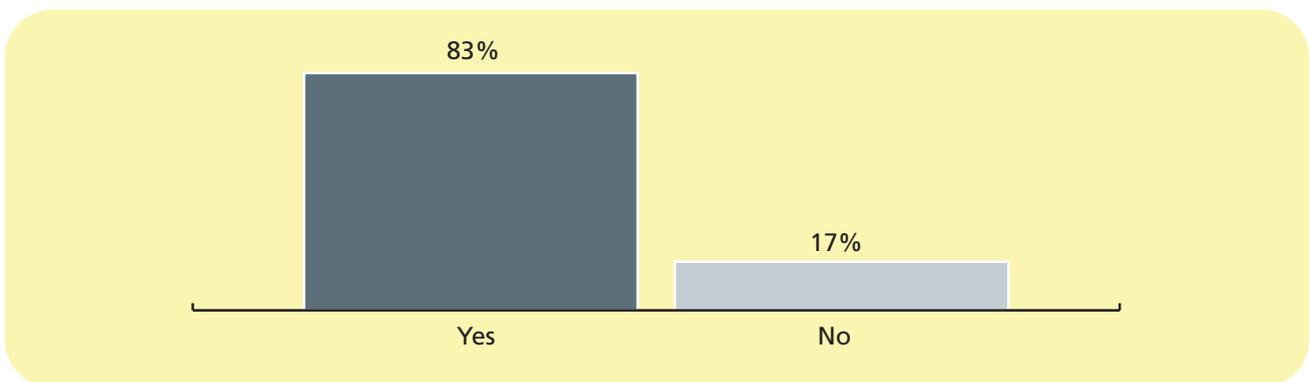
In terms of employment status, 81 percent of all participants are employed in a social work capacity on a full-time basis, while 19 percent are employed only part time (Figure 8). Of the social workers working full time, 18 percent are men and 82 percent are women, compared to the 11 percent male and 89 percent female part-time social workers.

Figure 8. Employment Status



Whether employed on a full- or part-time basis, more than three-fourths of all study participants hold active social work licenses (83%) (Figure 9).

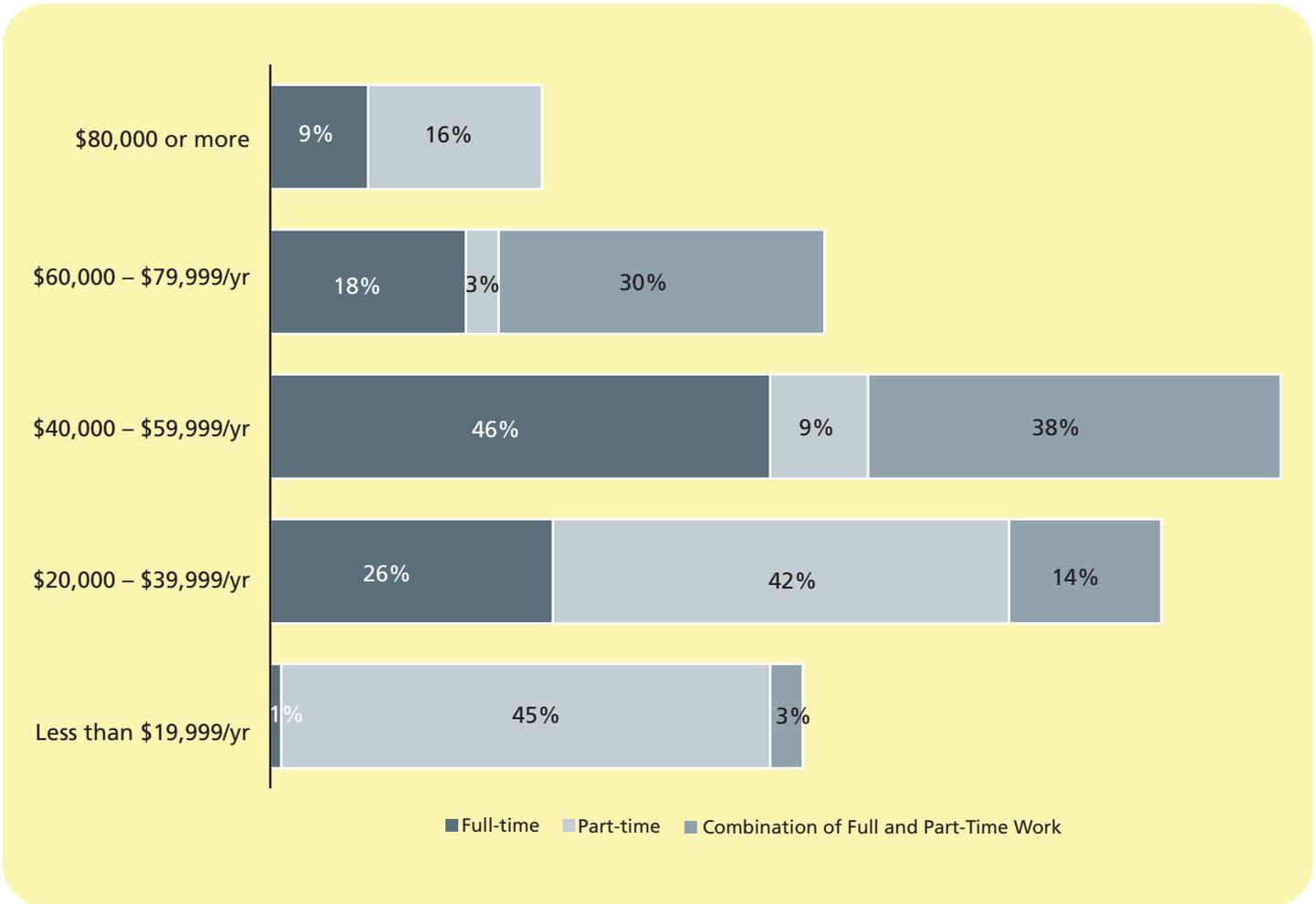
Figure 9. Active Social Work License



SALARY AND EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

The majority of social workers who are employed full time earn between \$20,000 per year and \$59,999 per year (72%), with less than a third of those individuals earning between \$40,000 per year and \$49,999 per year (26%). The largest percentage of respondents who derive income from only part-time social work employment earn less than \$19,000 annually (45%) (Figure 10).

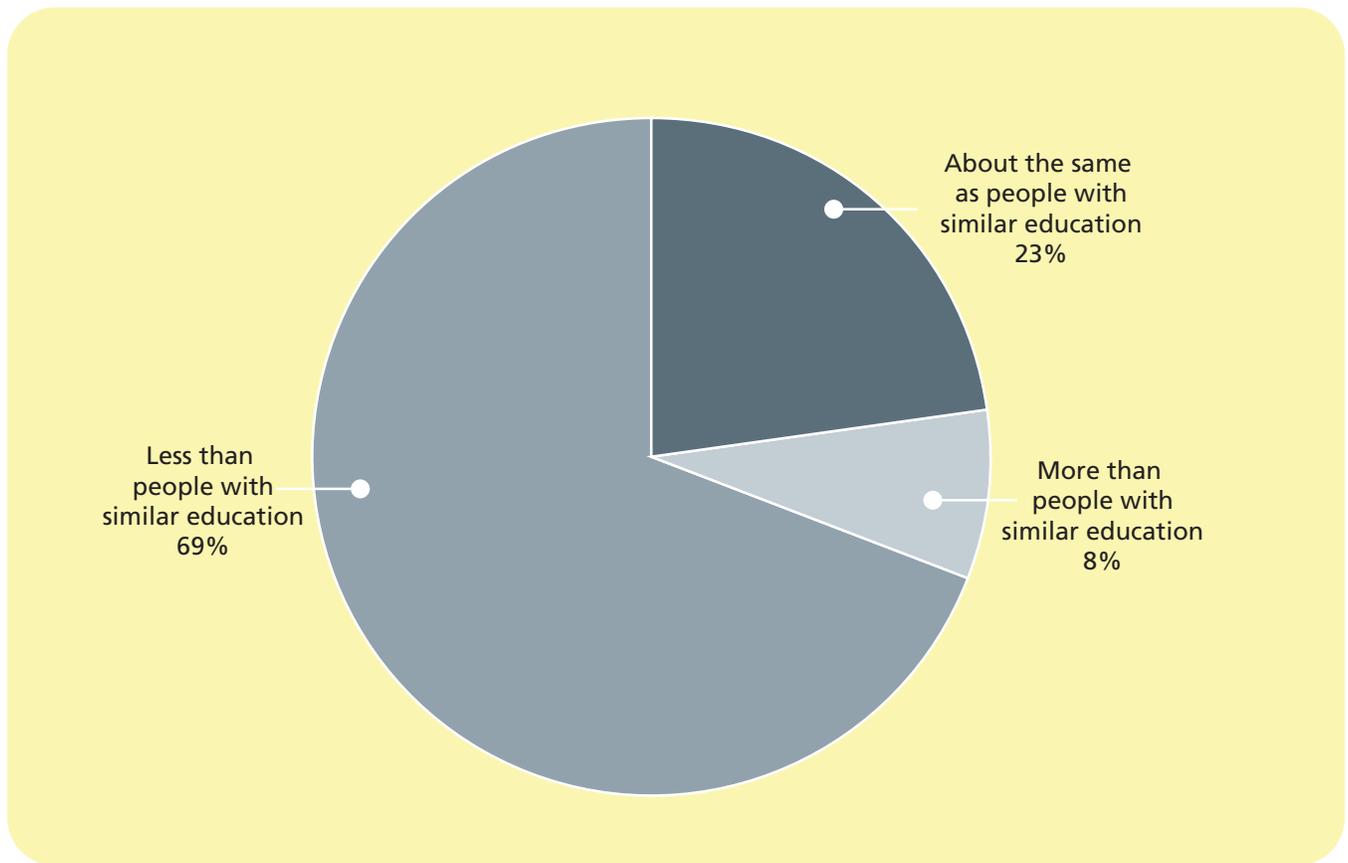
Figure 10. Salary and Employment Status



SALARIES COMPARED TO OTHER PROFESSIONS

When asked how their social work salaries compared with salaries of people who have similar education (e.g., teachers, nurses), more than two-thirds of the study participants (69%) believe that their salaries are lower (Figure 11). Twenty-three percent of respondents think that their salaries are about the same, and eight percent think that their salaries are higher than the salaries of other professionals with similar education.

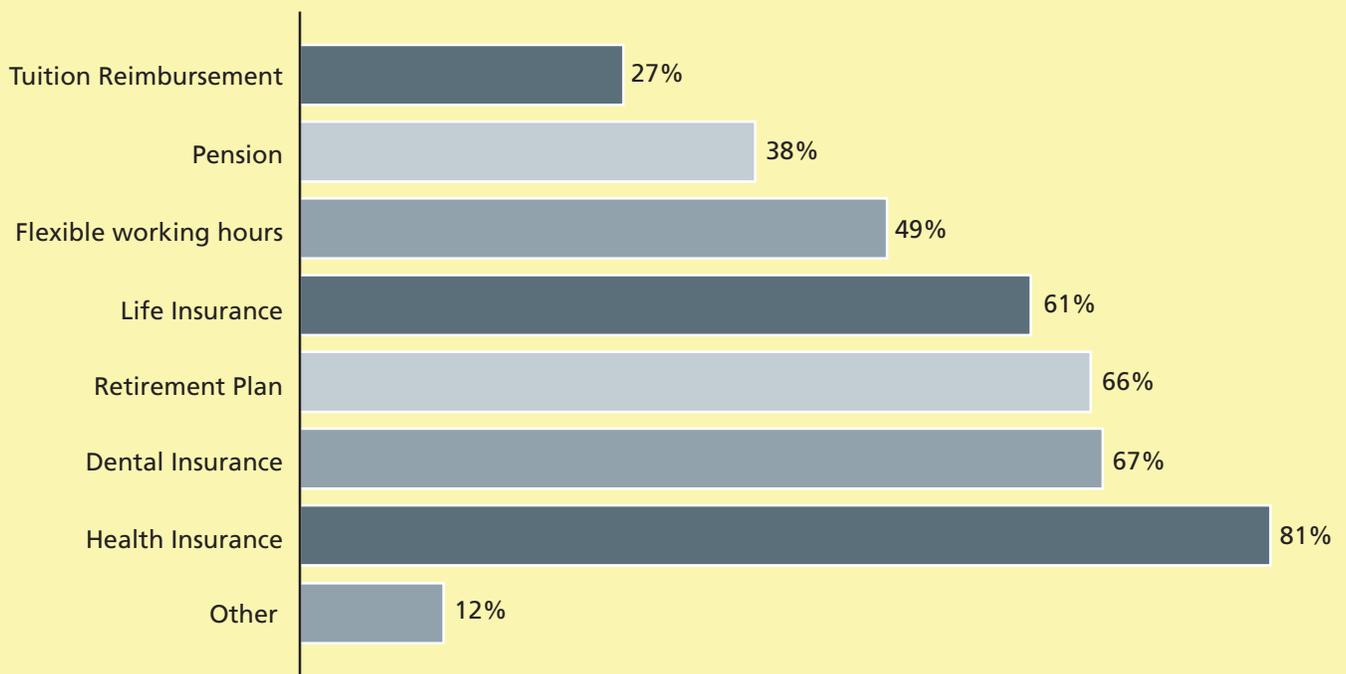
Figure 11. Attitude about Social Work Salary Compared to Other Professionals



EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

In terms of employment benefits, study participants indicated that health insurance (81%), dental insurance (67%), and a retirement plan such as a 401(k) or 403(b) plan (66%) are the top three benefits offered in their employee compensation packages (Figure 12). Additionally, respondents reported receiving life insurance (61%), flexible working hours (49%), pension plans (38%), and tuition reimbursement (27%). Of all those who receive a retirement plan, only 48 percent indicated that their employer provides matching funds. Fifteen percent believe that their employee benefits are more than adequate; nearly 43 percent of social workers reported that their benefits packages are adequate; 17 percent indicated that they are limited; and 25 percent stated that they are very limited.

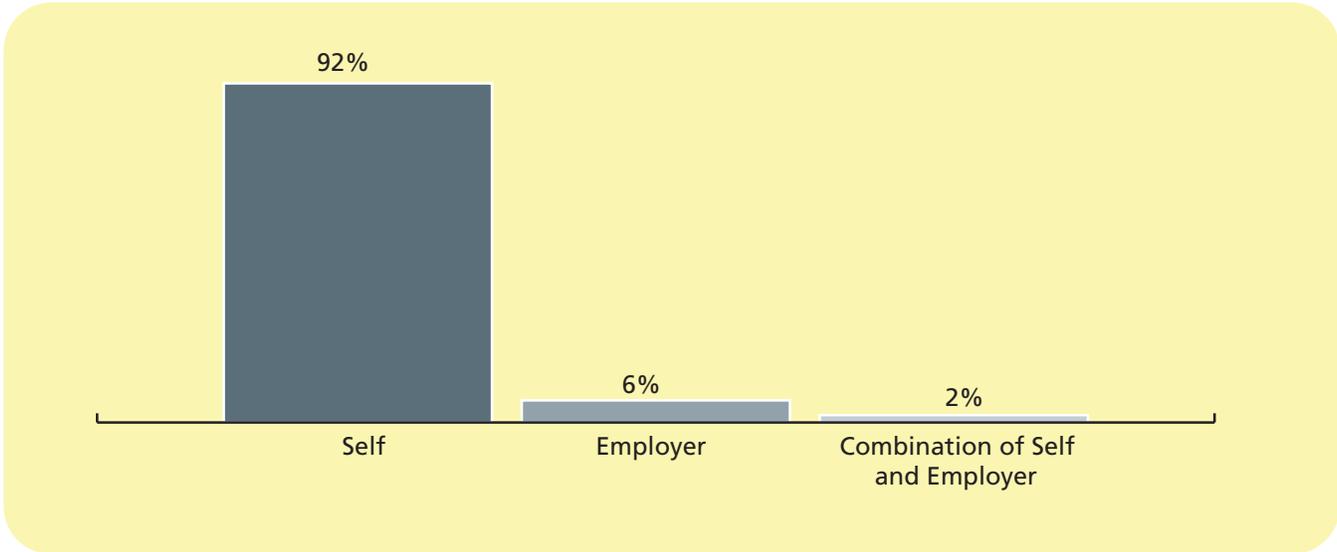
Figure 12. Social Work Employment Benefits Package



PAYMENT OF NASW MEMBERSHIP DUES

Most NASW members pay their own dues. However, almost six percent of respondents stated that their employers pay all of their membership dues and two percent acknowledged that a portion of their NASW dues are paid by their employer (Figure 13).

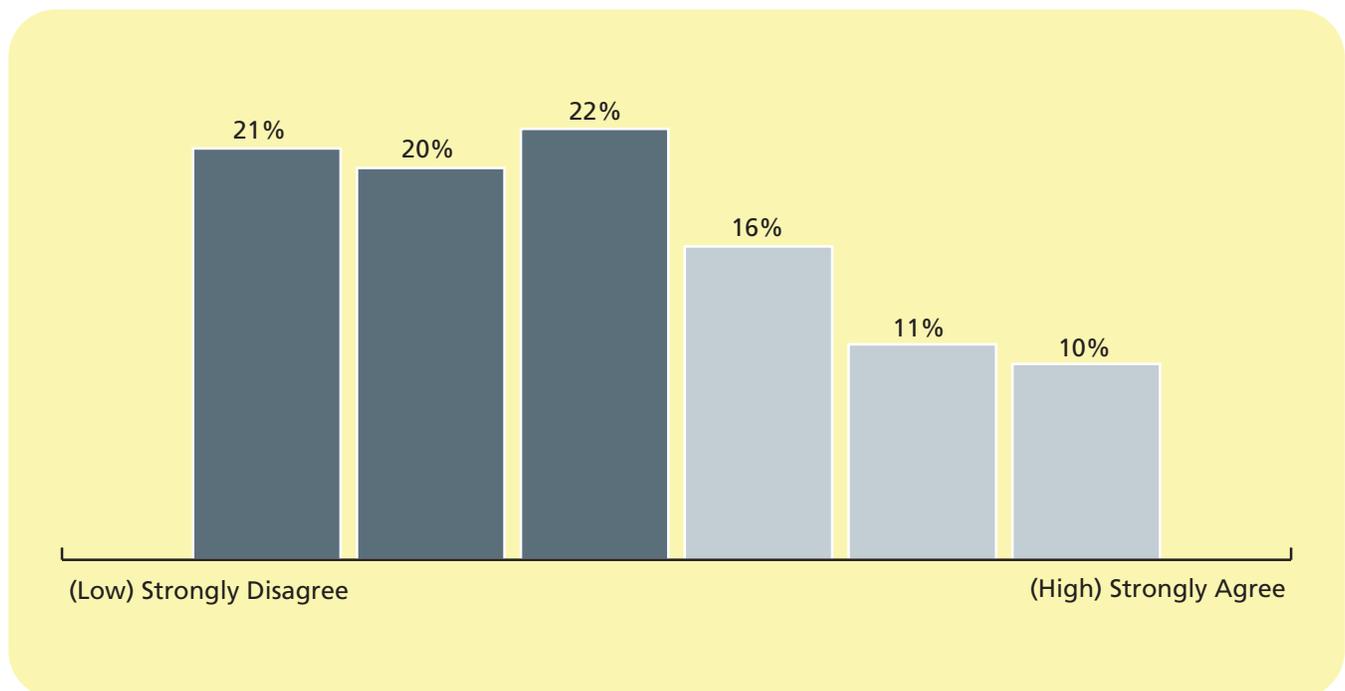
Figure 13. Payment of NASW Membership Dues



NAVIGATING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The study participants were asked to indicate their agreement with statements about their work environments. In addition to feeling valued by and honored to work for their organizations/employers, many agreed that their employers acknowledge their contributions, give them credit for their work, and provide positive performance feedback. Furthermore, social workers largely agreed that their employers encourage their participation in professional development activities, solicit their feedback, offer suggestions for their performance improvement, and assist in the timely resolution of workplace grievances. However, many participants were not pleased with their employers' efforts to reward their work performance. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (63%) stated that their employers do not offer incentives and/or rewards for successful job performance, compared with 37 percent who felt more positive about their employers' incentives and rewards (Figure 14).

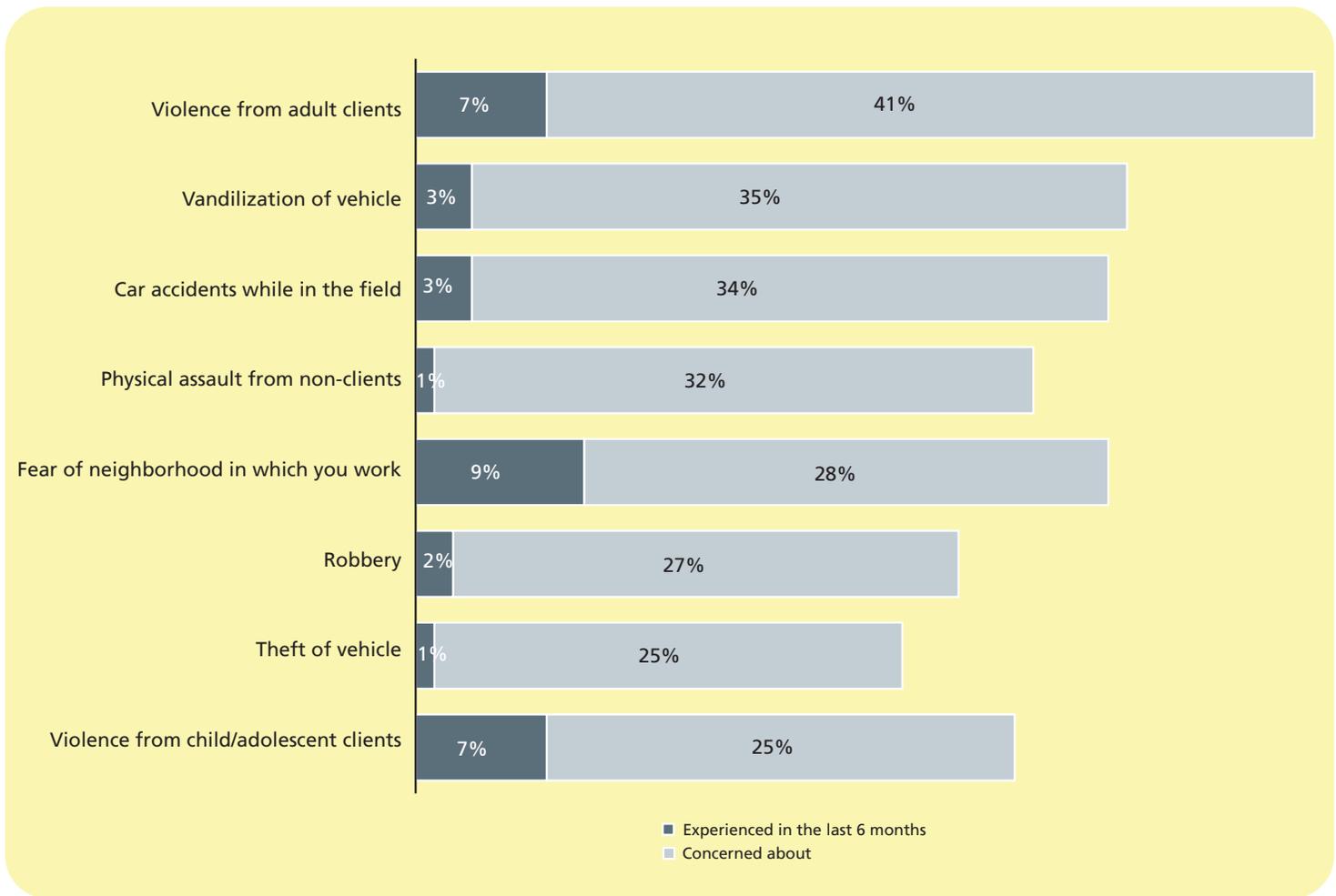
Figure 14. Incentives/Rewards are Offered by Employer



SAFETY

When asked to identify safety issues in their work environments, respondents reported that violence from adult clients (41%), vandalism of their vehicles (35%), car accidents while in the field (34%), physical assault from non-clients (32%), and fear of the neighborhoods in which they work (28%) are major safety concerns (Figure 15). Study participants also indicated that they have been fearful of the neighborhoods in which they work (9%), and experienced violence from child/adolescent clients (7%) and adult clients (7%) within the last six months.

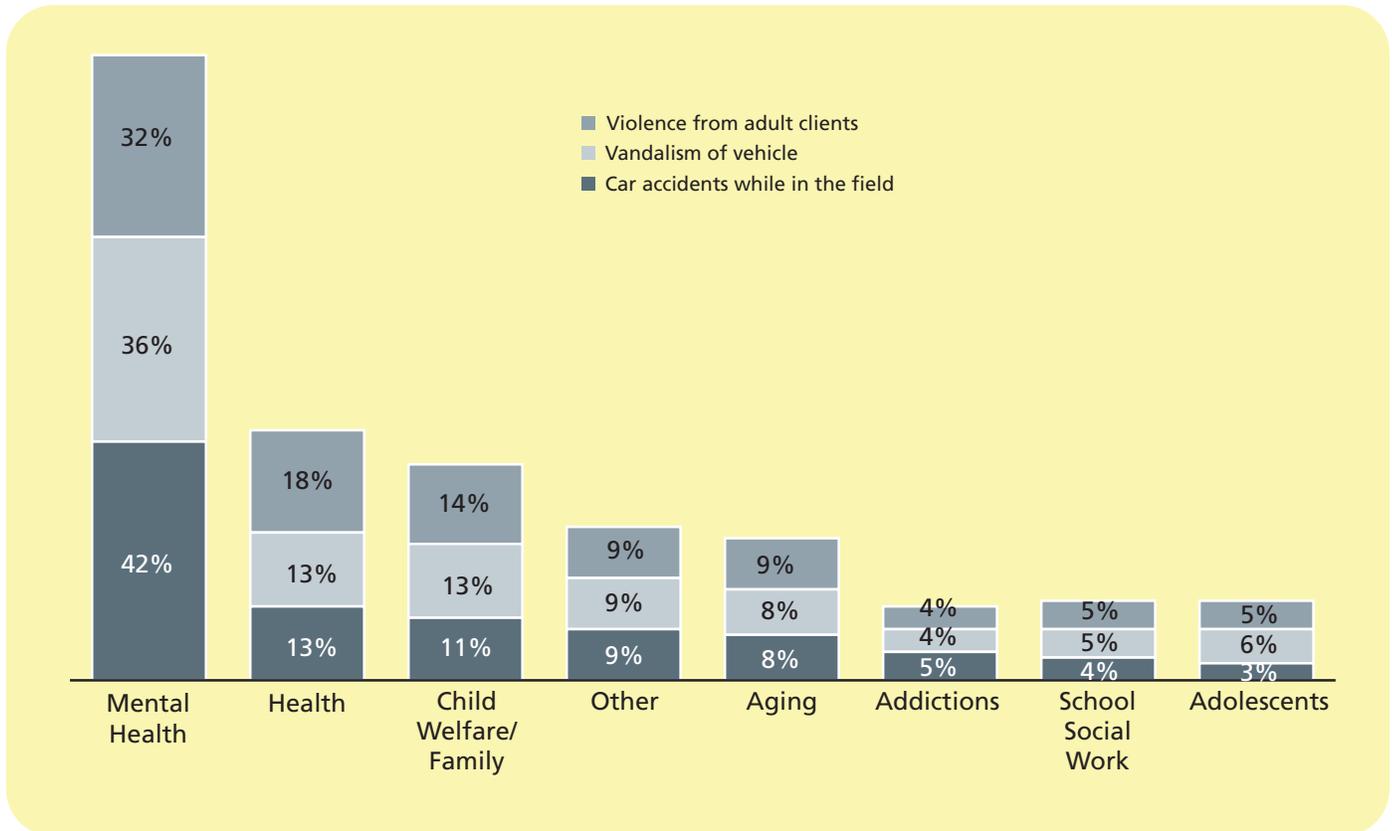
Figure 15. Safety Issues in the Work Environment



SAFETY CONCERNS AND PRIMARY PRACTICE AREAS

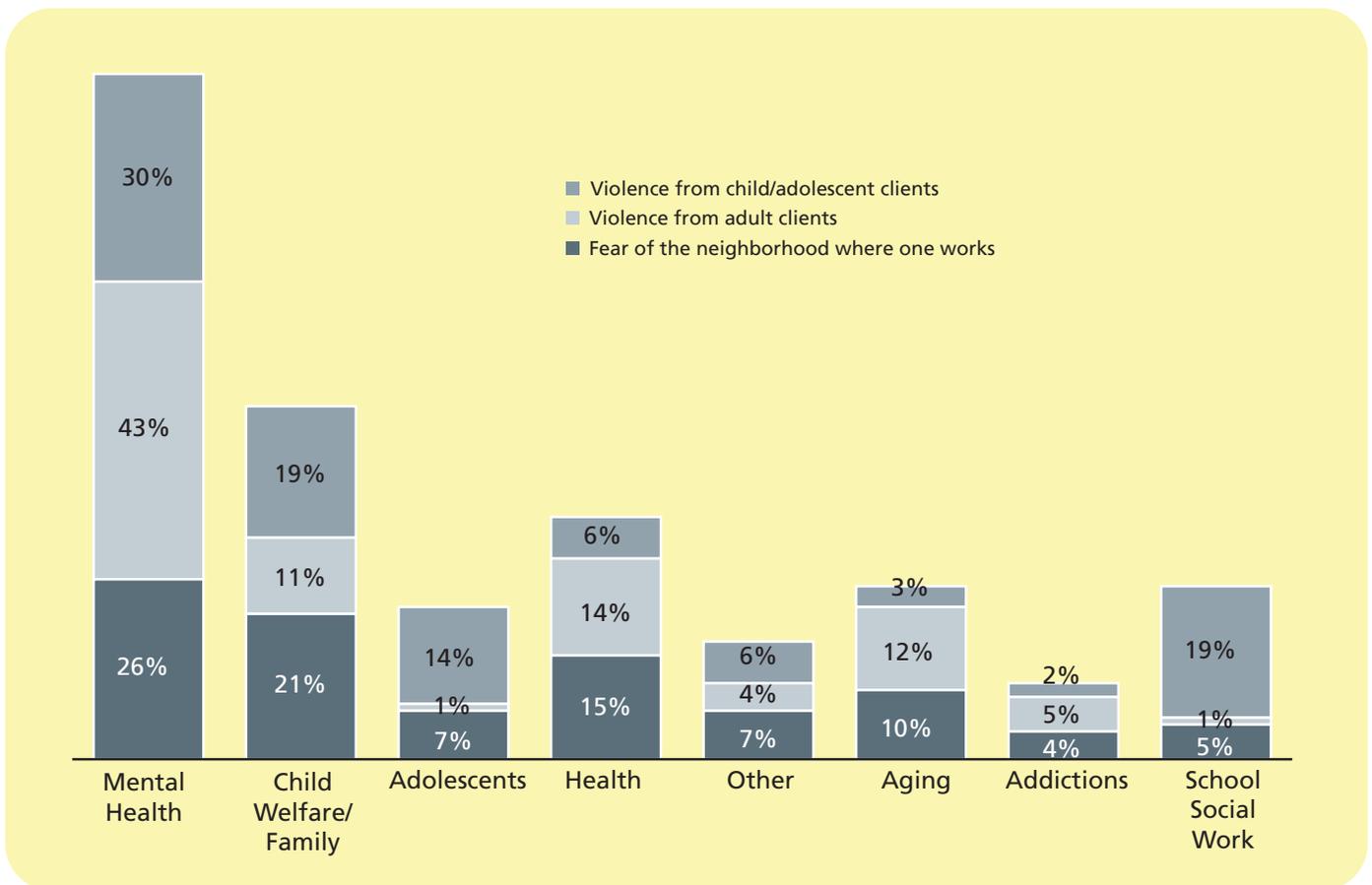
In terms of practice areas, social workers providing services in mental health (42%) and addictions (5%) are more likely to identify violence from adult clients as a predominate safety concern while on the job (Figure 16). Social workers in health (18%), child welfare/family (14%), and aging (9%) report greater concerns regarding car accidents while in the feild, whereas social workers who work with adolescents (6%) report greater concerns regarding their vehicles being vandalized.

Figure 16. Practice Area and Major Safety Concerns



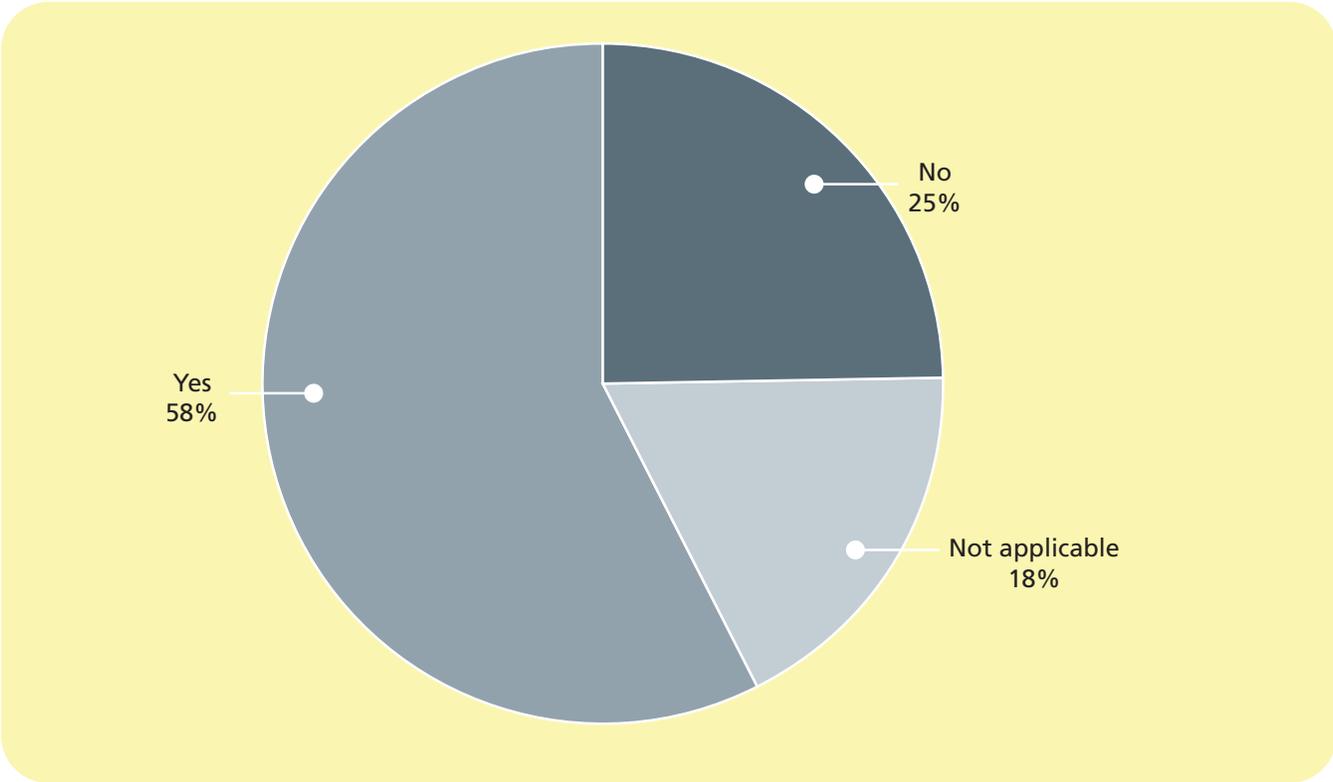
Mental health social workers acknowledged experiencing violence from adult clients (43%), violence from child/adolescent clients (30%), and being fearful of the neighborhoods in which they see clients (26%) within the last six months (Figure 17). Additionally, health care social workers (14%) reported recently experiencing violence from their adult clients, while school social workers (19%), child welfare/family social workers (19%), and social work professionals who work with adolescents (14%) indicated that they have experienced violence from their child/adolescent clients within the last six months.

Figure 17. Practice Area and Safety Issues Experienced in the Last Six Months



A little more than half of the participants (58%) acknowledged that their employers adequately address their work environment safety issues, while 25 percent indicated that their safety concerns are not appropriately addressed (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Safety Issues Addressed by Employers



SUMMARY

Social workers are employed in a variety of practice areas and organizational settings. The majority of the social workers who participated in the survey hold an active social work license and are employed primarily in outpatient mental health and independent private practice settings. Additionally, many of these study participants are employed on a full-time basis and provide direct intervention to individuals and families. On average, social workers earn between \$30,000 per year and \$59,999 per year and receive competitive employee benefits packages that include health and dental insurance and a 401(k) or 403(b) retirement plan.

A growing concern for social workers while on the job is the issue of their safety. Notably, violence from adult clients, vandalization of their vehicles, car accidents, physical assault from non-clients, and fear of the neighborhood in which they see clients are some safety issues social workers—particularly those providing direct services—face in their work environments.

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750 First Street NE, Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20002-4241