

# **LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS SERVING OLDER ADULTS, 2004**

## **Chapter 2 of 7**

## **Demographics**

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## Chapter 2. Demographics of Social Workers Providing Services to Older Adults

### Summary of the Findings

- Almost three-fourths of licensed social workers provide services to some adults 55 years of age and older (73%).
- Social workers who provide services to older adults are more likely to be women than men (82% versus 18%).
- Ninety percent of social workers in Aging are women.
- Licensed social workers providing services to older adults are less diverse in racial and ethnic background than client populations served or the U.S. civilian labor force.
- As with social workers overall, social workers serving some older adults are older than individuals in other comparable professions and occupations.
- Over 80 percent of these social workers practice in metropolitan areas while only 3 percent practice in rural areas.
- Licensed social workers providing some services to older adults have a median of 14 years experience in the field. MSWs have more experience than BSWs (15 years and 10 years respectively).
- The MSW is the predominant social work degree for licensed social workers serving older adults (80%). Eleven percent of those serving older adults have BSWs and 7 percent have no formal social work degree.
- Social workers who have caseloads of 50 percent or fewer older adults were most likely to have MSWs (84%) and least likely to have BSWs (6%).
- Social workers in Aging are least likely to have MSWs (64%) and most likely to have BSWs (22%) compared with social workers from other practice areas.
- The majority of social workers providing services to older adults believe they were well prepared for social work practice by their formal degree (59%) and post degree training (72%).
- Social workers with caseloads of more than 50 percent older adults felt most prepared by their formal degree program (65%).
- Social workers in Aging were the group most dissatisfied with their formal degree preparation (14%).
- Recent graduates of social work programs are less likely to work with older adults than other licensed social workers serving older clients.
- More than one-quarter of BSWs and one-third of MSWs who received their first social work degree between 2000 and 2004 do not see *any* older adult clients.

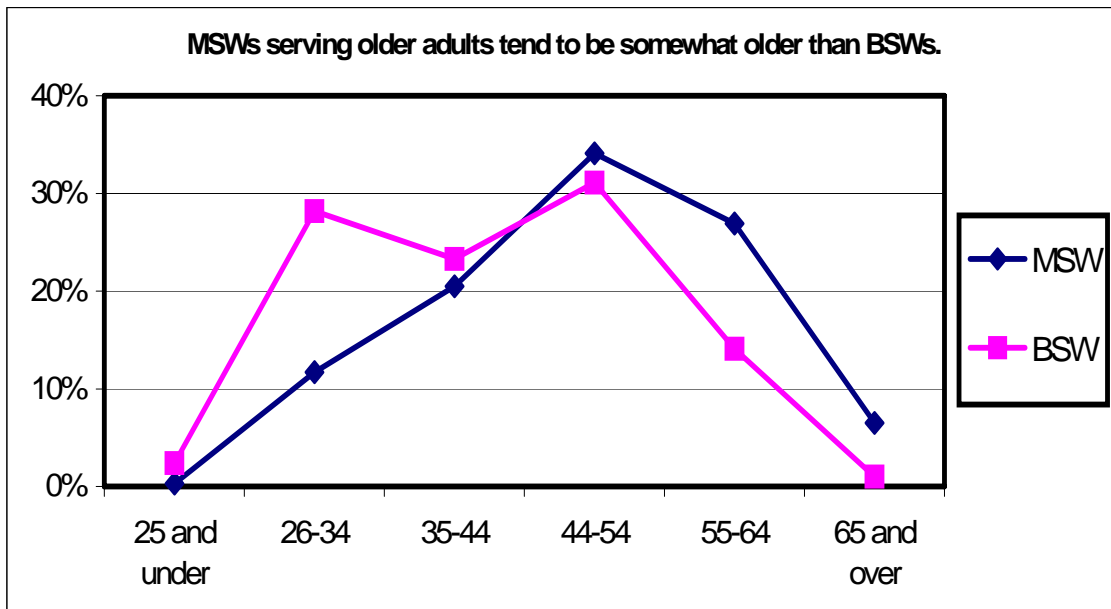
- Social workers serving older adults in rural areas and small towns are much more likely than those in metropolitan or micropolitan areas to have a BSW or no social work degree.
- Sixty percent of social workers serving older adults report many opportunities for continuing education and training in social work.
- Clinical practice (47%), specialty practice training (28%), trauma/disaster preparedness (28%), medication use (20%), and professional ethics (20%) are the educational topics most desired by all social workers providing some services to older adults.
- A substantial majority of social workers are interested in continuing education around geriatric and long-term care issues.
- Approximately 85% of both BSWs and MSWs have participated in some type of continuing education in these areas, and 62% would like additional training.
- Ninety-nine percent of social workers in Aging and social workers with caseloads of more than 50 percent older adults have participated in continuing education programs addressing geriatric and/or long term care issues.
- Social workers in Aging are most likely to desire additional training in these areas (88%).
- Training for new workers (29%), on-the-job training (26%), and distance learning (23%) related to geriatrics/long-term care are reported to be unavailable by a substantial group of both MSWs and BSWs.

## **Demographics**

### *Age*

The median age of social workers serving older adults is 50 years, which is comparable to social workers overall (49 years). MSWs and BSWs who serve older adults have median ages of 50 years and 43 years, respectively. As seen in Figure 1, BSWs have a slightly younger age distribution than MSWs. Median ages do not differ by earned degree among social workers in Aging or in other practice areas.

**Figure 1. Age Distribution of Licensed Social Workers by Highest Social Work Degree**

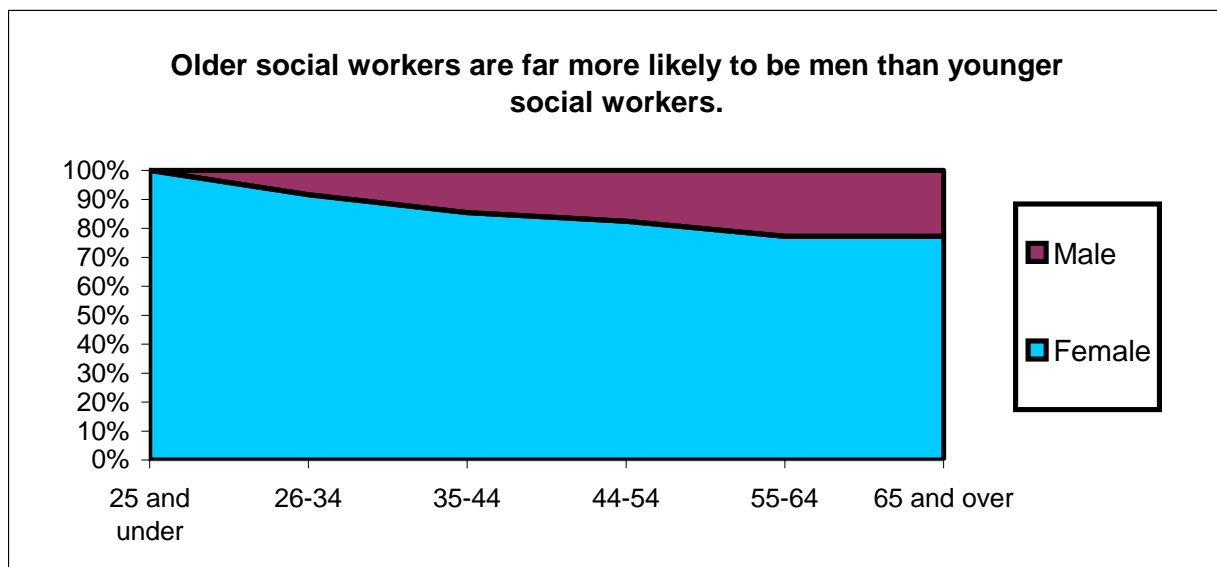


Social workers who serve some older clients are themselves older as a group than social workers who do not serve older adults.

*Gender*

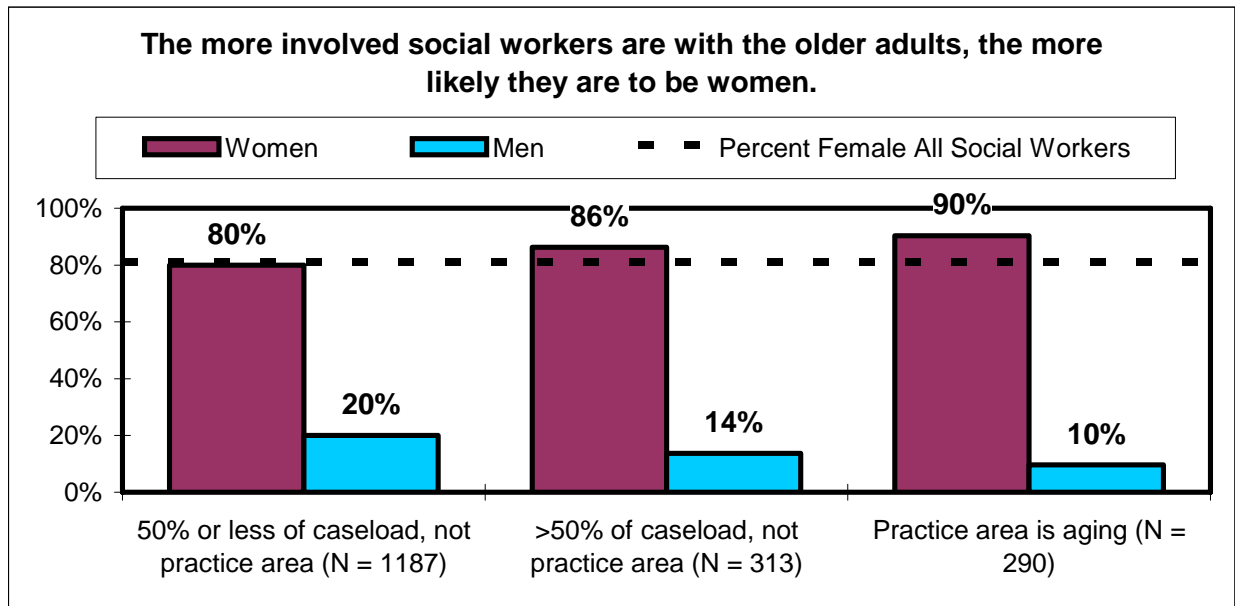
Figure 2 shows that social workers who provide services to older adults are more likely to be women than men (82% compared to 18%). BSWs are more likely to be female than MSWs (93% compared to 81%), which is consistent with patterns in social work overall.

**Figure 2. Gender Mix of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults by Age Group**



Women are even more over-represented in the practice of Aging compared with other practice areas (90% versus 81%). Eighty-nine percent of MSWs in Aging are women as compared with 81 percent in the other practice areas, and 99 percent of BSWs in Aging are female compared with 91 percent in other practice areas (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Gender Mix of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults**

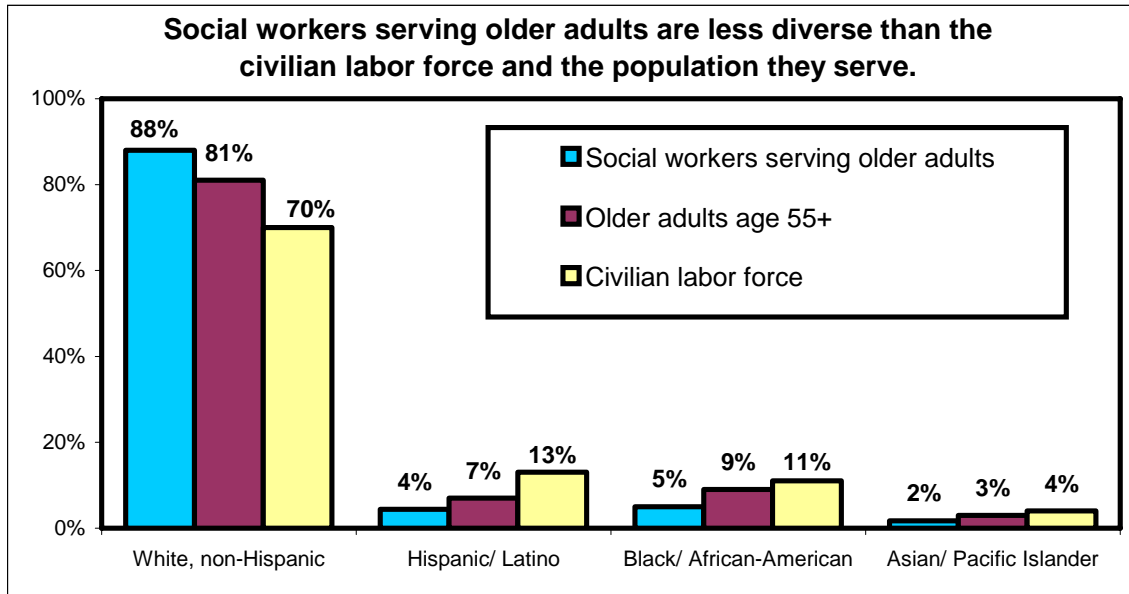


Although social work has always been a female-dominated profession, the larger study suggests that it may become increasingly so. Figure 2 suggests that the number of men in Aging is diminishing among recent entrants.

#### *Race/Ethnicity*

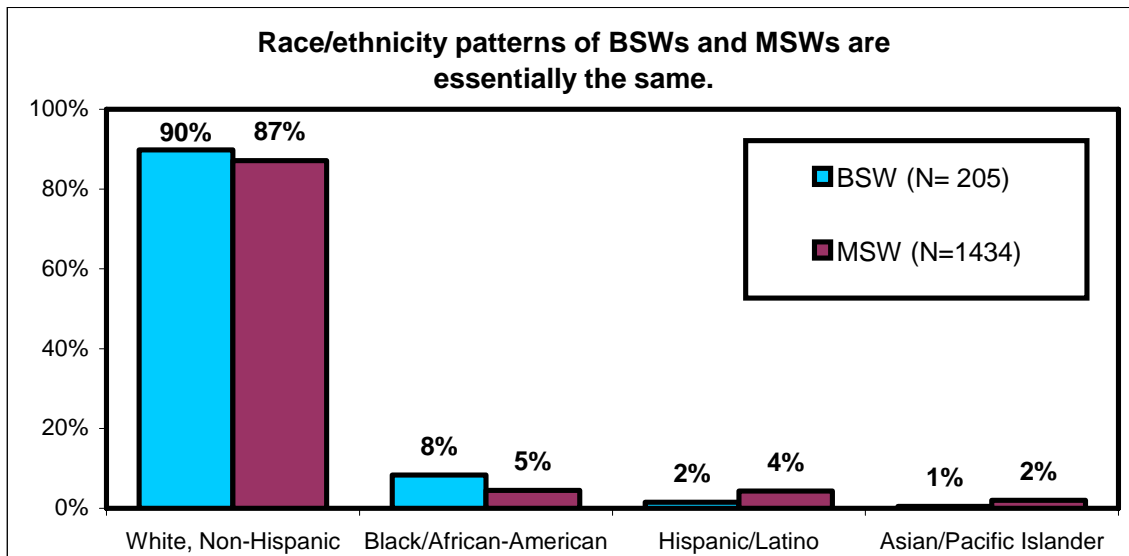
Social workers serving older adults are predominantly non-Hispanic white (88%). As seen in Figure 4, they are less diverse than both the civilian labor force and the client population they serve. These social workers are slightly more likely to be non-Hispanic White and Asian than social workers overall (88% versus 86%; 2% versus 1%), and less likely to be Black/African Americans (5% versus 7%). There is no difference in percentages of Hispanic/Latinos between social workers serving older adults and social workers overall (4%).

**Figure 4. Racial-Ethnic Distribution of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults**



Racial and ethnic background does not vary notably among these social workers by highest earned social work degree (Figure 5), level of involvement with older adults, or practice area. Since the U.S. population generally and the elderly population specifically are projected to be increasingly diverse, recruiting a more representative pool of workers into the profession will be important in order to respond to cultural differences and ensure a sufficient number of social workers to fill positions in the field.

**Figure 5. Race-Ethnic Distribution of Licensed Social Workers with BSWs and MSWs Serving Older Adults**



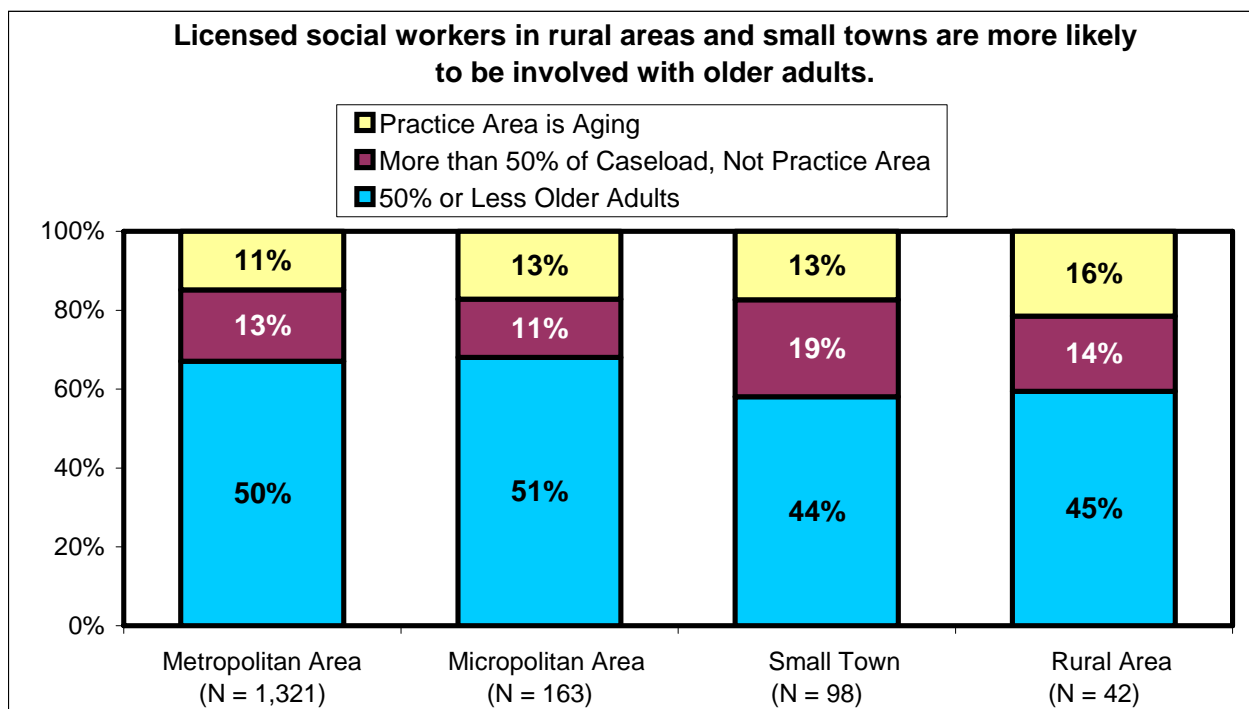
### Geographic Location of Practice

Social workers are most likely to practice in urban areas. More than 90 percent of licensed social workers practice in metropolitan (81%) and micropolitan, areas (10%). Six percent practice in small towns and 3 percent in rural areas. MSWs are more likely than BSWs to practice in metropolitan areas (84% versus 64%). BSWs are more likely than MSWs to practice in micropolitan, small town and rural areas.

MSWs do not differ in geographic location by virtue of their practice area. However, BSWs in Aging are more likely than BSWs in other practice areas to work in metropolitan and micropolitan areas, and less likely to work in small towns or rural areas.

Figure 6 shows the practice areas of licensed social workers in the four geographic areas. Licensed social workers in rural areas and small towns are more likely to be involved with older adults than those in metropolitan and micropolitan areas.

**Figure 6. Involvement of Licensed Social Workers with Older Adults, by Urban/Rural Practice Location**

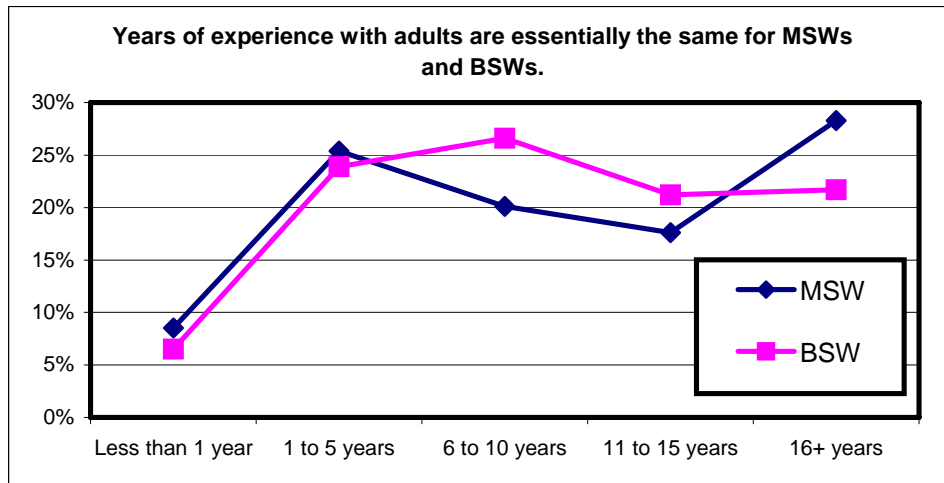


### Years Experience

Licensed social workers who work with older adults have a median of 14 years experience in the field of social work compared to 10 years experience for those social workers not providing services to older adults. MSWs have a median of 15 years experience, compared to 10 years for BSWs. MSWs and BSWs in Aging have a slightly higher median of years experience than those not in the practice area (16 years and 10 years versus 14 years and 9 years).

Significant differences do not exist among social workers by the extent to which they are involved with older clients (Figure 7). Furthermore, the year of entry into practice as a degreed social worker is not significantly correlated with the extent to which social workers are involved with older adults.

**Figure 7. Years Experience of Licensed Social Workers with Older Adults by Earned Degrees**



### Education and Training

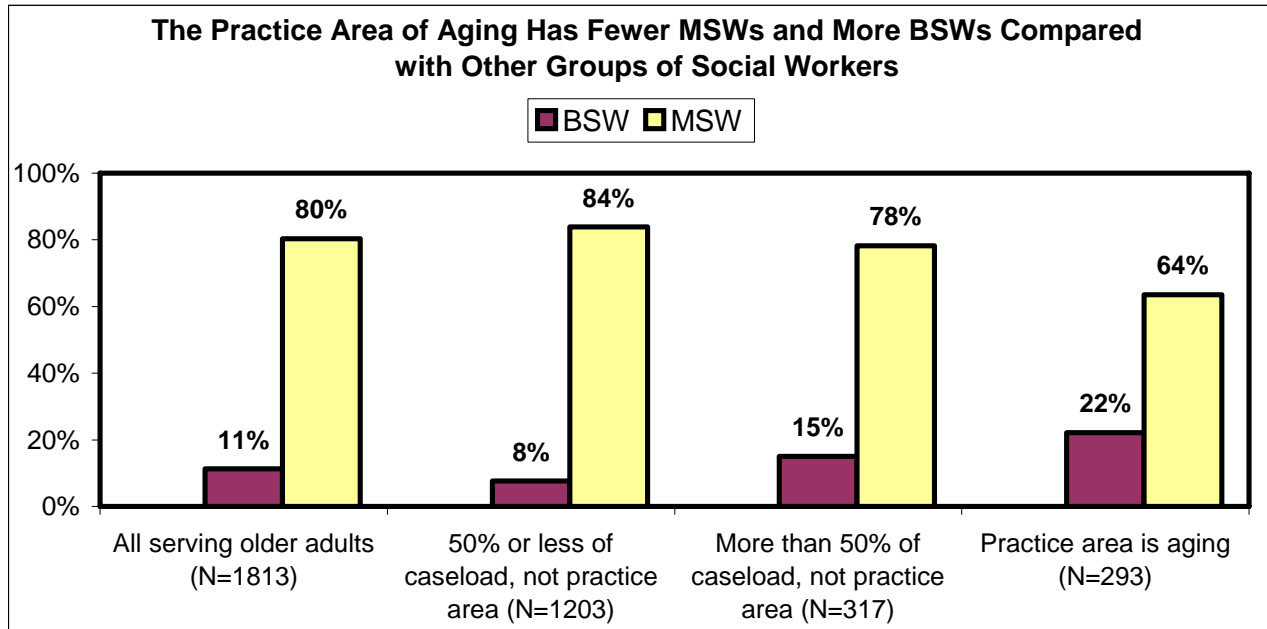
The education and training of licensed social workers is an especially important topic in this study. Initial professional education is an important component of licensure requirements, as is continuing professional education.

#### *Highest Formal Degree*

Figure 8 shows that the MSW is the predominant social work degree for those serving older adults (80%). Eleven percent of social workers serving older adults have BSWs.

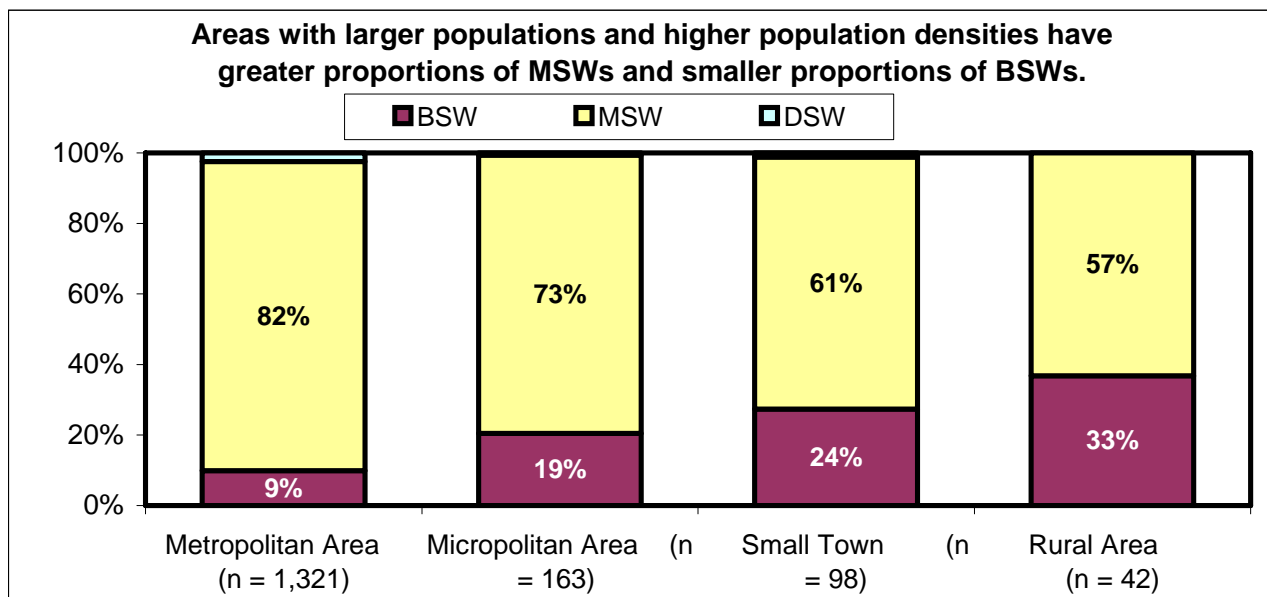
Licensed social workers whose practice area is Aging were least likely to have MSWs (64%), and most likely to have BSWs (22%) compared with all social workers. Social workers who have caseloads of 50 percent or fewer older adults were most likely to have MSWs (84%) and least likely to have BSWs (8%).

**Figure 8. Highest Social Work Degree by Involvement with Older Adults**



Although they comprise only 9 percent of survey respondents, social workers serving older adults in rural areas and small towns are much more likely than those in metropolitan or micropolitan areas to have BSWs or no social work degree (Figure 9).

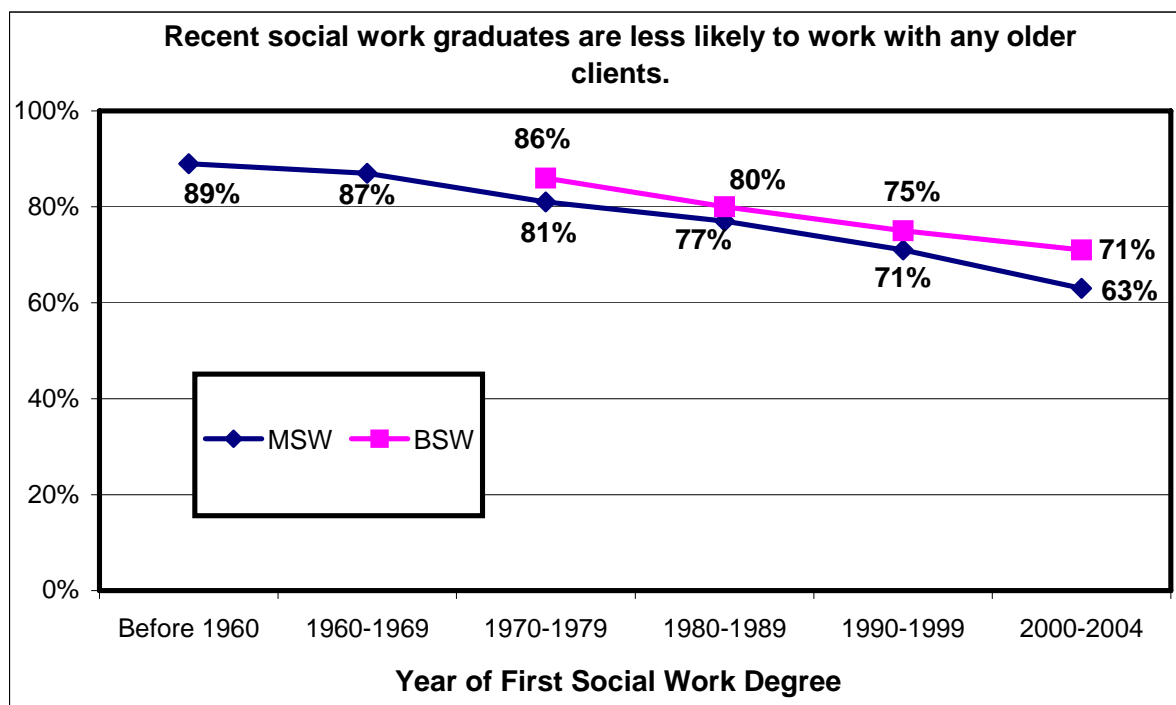
**Figure 9. Highest Social Work Degree of Social Workers Serving Older Adults by Practice Location**



### Graduation Year and Work with Older Adults

Figure 10 shows that recent graduates are less likely to work with older adults. More than one-quarter of BSWs and one-third of MSWs who received their first social work degree between 2000 and 2004 do not see *any* older adult clients. One-fifth of social workers who entered the field in the 1970s, and about one-tenth of MSWs who entered prior to 1960 do not see older adults. Approximately half of the social workers who see older adults graduated in the past fifteen years (1990, 51%).

**Figure 10. Percentages of Licensed Social Workers Working with Older Adults by Year of First Social Work Degree**



### Satisfaction with Education and Training

The majority of social workers providing services to older adults believe they were well prepared for social work practice by their social work degree program (59%) and post-degree training (72%). MSWs are slightly more satisfied than BSWs with their degree program (60% compared to 55%) and continuing education (72% compared to 70%).

Among social workers serving older adults, those whose practice area is Aging are the least satisfied with their degree preparation for their current work, with 14 percent indicating dissatisfaction. In comparison, only 7 percent of those not in Aging who have predominantly older adult caseloads and 10 percent of those who see 50 percent or fewer older adults within their practices reported dissatisfaction. Social workers who have caseloads of 50 percent or fewer older adults were most satisfied with their degree preparation.

*Continuing Education and Training in Social Work*

Ninety-nine percent of social workers seeing older adult clients have participated in training/continuing education (CE) in the past two years.

Three-fifths (60%) of social workers serving older adults report having “many” choices for continuing education programs related to social work practice. Short courses and conferences offering continuing education credits are the most common sources reported. Clinical practice (47%), specialty practice training (28%), trauma/disaster preparedness (28%), medication use (20%), and professional ethics (20%) are the topics most desired for future training.

**Table 1. Types of Continuing Education/Training Programs Attended in the Past Two Years by Degree**

Type of Continuing Education/Training	All Who Serve Older Adults (N=1649)	PA MSW (N=186)	PA BSW (N=65)	NPA MSW (N=1257)	NPA BSW (N=141)
Short Courses or Workshops	82%	80%	77%	83%	81%
Conference CE Programs	79%	73%	83%	80%	82%
Professional Association Programs	33%	35%	34%	35%	21%
On-the-Job Training	33%	33%	28%	33%	43%
Certificate Programs	22%	21%	23%	22%	28%
Courses with Academic Credit	10%	12%	9%	9%	11%
Supervised Practice	32%	21%	2%	37%	14%
Distance Learning	9%	8%	14%	8%	11%

*Continuing Education and Training in Geriatric and Long Term Care Issues*

Eighty-five percent of all social workers providing some services to older adults have participated in some type of geriatric and/or long-term care continuing education. The likelihood of participating in training from any source dramatically increased with the percent of older clients in one’s caseload: 99 percent of social workers both in Aging and not in Aging with caseloads that are more than 50 percent older adults have participated in geriatrics training, as compared with 77 percent of those not in Aging with caseloads of 50 percent or fewer older adults. Eighty-seven percent of BSWs and 84 percent of MSWs participated in geriatric or long-term care education programs. Sources are identified in Table 2.

**Table 2. Sources of Geriatric/Long-Term Care Continuing Education by Degree<sup>6</sup>**

Type of Geriatric Program	All Who Serve Older Adults (N=1649)	MSW		BSW	
		Not Practice Area (N=1257)	Practice Area (N=186)	Not Practice Area (N=141)	Practice Area (N=65)
Seminars/workshops	56%	49%	83%	63%	91%
Interdisciplinary seminars/workshops	52%	46%	77%	57%	83%
Training conferences	49%	41%	81%	56%	86%
On-the-job training	47%	43%	72%	45%	55%
Courses in SW school	41%	38%	51%	43%	54%
Supervised clinical practice	21%	21%	31%	6%	9%
Field placements	17%	15%	33%	11%	15%
Courses - other programs	12%	10%	24%	9%	11%
Certificate programs	9%	6%	27%	11%	23%
Distance learning	4%	3%	7%	6%	14%

As would be expected, the availability of continuing education in geriatrics and long-term care varies by type of offering. A majority of social workers report “some or many” options for continuing education in geriatrics/ long-term care through workshops (67%), conferences (67%), and geriatric courses (54%), but “few or no” options for new worker trainings (60%), distance learning (58%), or on-the-job training (51%). Social workers in Aging and those with caseloads of more than 50 percent older adults NPA are *more* likely to report availability of continuing education and training than those social workers with caseloads of 50 percent or fewer older adults NPA.

The charts that follow provide information on types of training that are reported as “unavailable” by a majority of social workers.

**Table 3. Percentages Reporting “None” or “Few” Options Available in Geriatric/Long-Term Care Training by Involvement with Older Adults and Degree**

Type of Training	All Who Serve Older Adults	MSW		BSW	
		Not Practice Area	Practice Area	Not Practice Area	Practice Area
Geriatric training available for new workers	29%	33%	15%	23%	19%
Geriatric on-the-job training available	26%	30%	11%	17%	17%
Geriatric workshops available	5%	5%	1%	8%	2%
Geriatric courses available	12%	12%	9%	15%	8%
Geriatric training at conferences available	5%	5%	4%	4%	2%
Geriatric distance learning available	23%	23%	26%	25%	19%
Other training available	59%	60%	47%	67%	70%

**Table 4. Percentages Reporting “None” or “Few” Options Available in Geriatric/Long-Term Care Training by Employment Sector**

Type of Training	Public	Private Nonprofit	Private For-Profit	Private Practice
Geriatric training available for new workers	27%	23%	22%	48%
Geriatric on-the-job training available	22%	17%	19%	56%
Geriatric workshops available	8%	4%	5%	3%
Geriatric courses available	17%	10%	12%	7%
Geriatric training at conferences available	7%	3%	5%	4%
Geriatric distance learning available	25%	23%	25%	18%
Other training available	59%	60%	56%	59%

**Table 5. Percentages Reporting “None” or “Few” Options Available in Geriatric/Long-Term Care Training by Location**

Type of Training	Metropolitan	Micropolitan	Small Town	Rural
Geriatric training for new workers	30%	24%	27%	26%
Geriatric on-the-job training	28%	16%	29%	17%
Geriatric workshops	6%	5%	2%	0%
Geriatric courses	11%	15%	13%	18%
Geriatric training at conferences	5%	5%	3%	3%
Geriatric distance learning	24%	24%	19%	27%
Other training	62%	56%	75%	71%

More than three-fifths of social workers who serve older adults would like additional training in geriatrics and long-term care (62%). Social workers in Aging are more likely to desire additional training than those not in the practice area (88% versus 57%).

**Table 6. Interest in Geriatric/Long-Term Care Education**

	MSW	BSW	All
Practice area is Aging	87%	91%	88%
50+% of caseload, not practice area	74%	81%	75%
Less than 50% of caseload, not practice area	51%	47%	51%