

LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS SERVING OLDER ADULTS, 2004

Chapter 5 of 7

Work Environment

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**The National Association of Social Workers
Center for Workforce Studies
Washington, DC**

March 2006

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Chapter 5. Work Environment

Summary of the Findings

- Most social workers serving older adults (70%) are satisfied with their compensation packages regardless of level of involvement with older adults.
- Median annual wages of licensed MSWs are \$46,733 and \$33,429 for licensed BSWs. BSWs with caseloads more than 50% older adults earn more than other BSWs serving older adults.
- Licensed MSWs in Aging earn less than MSWs in other practice areas.
- Licensed social workers who serve older adults are significantly less likely to receive benefits than social workers overall. Social workers in Aging and social workers who serve caseloads of more than 50% older adults are more likely to receive benefits than those social workers serving caseloads of 50% or fewer older adults.
- Satisfaction with wages and salaries varies by setting. Social workers employed in hospitals are the most satisfied with wages and benefits. MSWs who serve older adults earn highest wages in private practice and hospitals, and lowest wages in nursing homes. BSWs serving older adults earn highest wages in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices, and lowest in home health agencies.
- Social workers practicing in rural areas are much less likely than other social workers providing services to older adults to work in hospitals or in private practice; they are more likely to work in social service agencies and nursing homes.
- Approximately one-fifth of employed, licensed social workers work in settings where social work positions are frequently open or filled by workers who lack professional social work training.
- Seventeen percent of social workers who work with older adults reported that vacancies in their agency are common and 21% report that vacancies are difficult to fill.
- Twenty-four percent reported that their agency hires non-social workers to fill social work roles, and 16% reported that their agencies outsource social work functions.
- Social workers in Aging are less likely to report vacancies as common or difficult to fill.
- Licensed social workers in social service agencies were most likely to report that vacancies were both common (35%) and difficult to fill (25%). They were also most likely to report outsourcings of social work roles, and highly likely to report use of workers who lack professional social work training.
- Job safety issues are reported by 50% of social workers who work with older adults. Social workers report that seventy percent of these issues are adequately addressed by employers.

- Social workers seeing 50% or fewer older adults in their caseloads most frequently raise safety issues (57%).
- Social workers in Aging are least likely to raise safety issues among those serving older adults (32%).
- Slightly less than half of all social workers are supervised by a social worker. Social workers with caseloads that are 50% or fewer older adults are more likely to be supervised by a social worker (52%) than other social workers serving older adults (52%). This differs little by degree (45% of BSWs and 48% of MSWs).
- Social workers in Aging are more likely to report being the only social worker in their agencies (25%) than other social workers serving any old adults (15%).
- Licensed social workers in Aging work with the fewest other social workers on average, while those who have 50% or fewer older adults in their caseloads work in settings with the most other social workers.

Wages and Benefits

Social workers providing services to older adults and working full-time for a single employer earn a median salary of \$33,429 at the BSW level and \$46,733 at the MSW level. These salaries are higher than the salaries of licensed social workers who do not see older clients (\$32,899 and \$44,219, respectively). MSWs in Aging earn less than MSWs in other practice areas (\$46,894 compared to \$49,500). BSWs in Aging earn \$33,598, compared to \$ 34,597 for BSWs in other practice areas.

As can be seen in Table 1, licensure results in increased wages for social workers overall.

Table 1. Median Annual Salaries of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults in Selected Categories, 2004

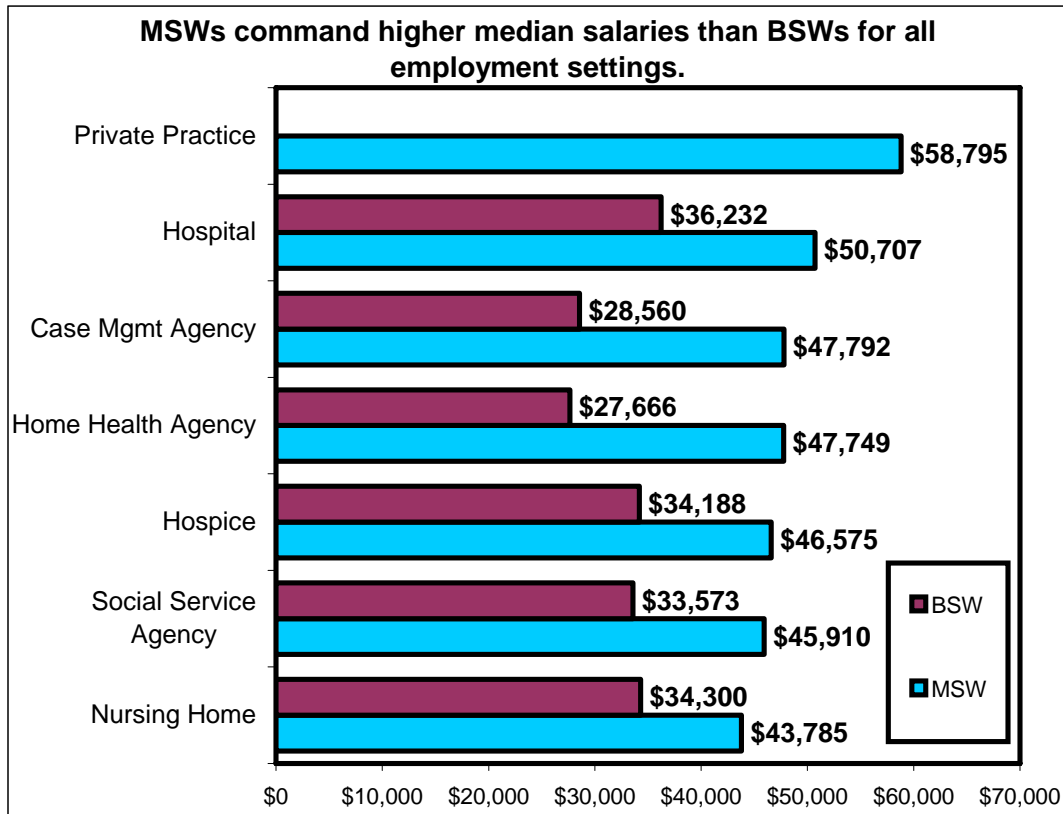
Category of Social Worker	2003 U.S. Employment	Mean Salary	Median Salary
Licensed social worker, BSW	37,400	\$36,822	\$34,487
Licensed social worker, MSW	249,136	\$54,091	\$49,216
Licensed social worker, DSW	6,676	\$84,712	\$64,423
MSW – Practice area is Aging	24,600	\$51,293	\$46,894
BSW – Practice area is Aging	8,400	\$34,564	\$33,958
MSW – Practice area not Aging	161,400	\$55,118	\$49,500
BSW – Practice area not Aging	18,200	\$35,131	\$34,597
Licensed social worker - practice area is Aging	38,400	\$45,113	\$41,211
Licensed social worker - More than half older adults	44,800	\$49,057	\$47,606
Licensed social worker - 50% or less older adults	150,400	\$53,486	\$47,569
Social worker, mental health and substance abuse*	102,110	\$35,860	\$33,650
Social worker, medical and public health*	103,040	\$40,540	\$39,160
Social worker, child, family and school*	252,870	\$37,190	\$34,300

*Source for non-licensed salaries is Bureau of Labor Statistics

Among social workers who serve older adults, median salaries vary dramatically by gender. Male MSWs earn a median of \$55,606 compared to \$48,412 for women. This salary disparity is also true of social workers overall.

Figure 1 shows that MSWs serving older clients earn the highest wages in private practice and hospitals, and the lowest wages in nursing homes. BSWs earn the highest wages in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices, and the lowest in home health agencies. These patterns are largely consistent with those for social workers overall.

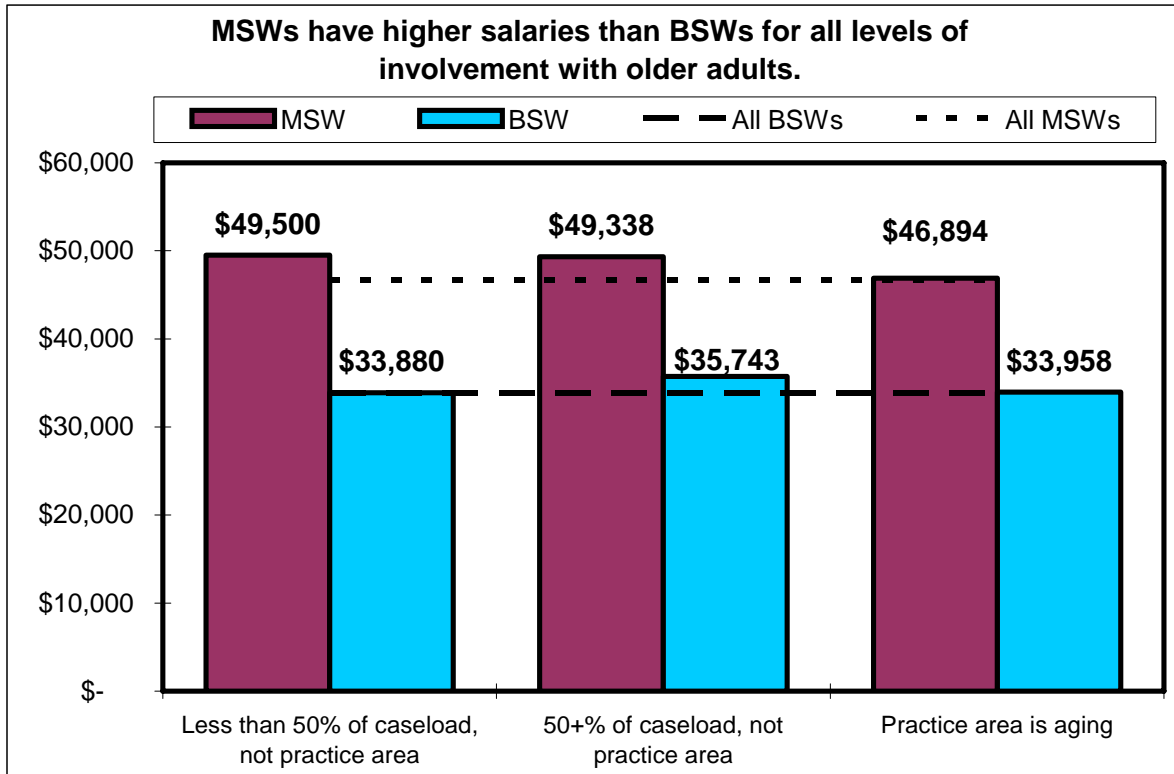
Figure 1. Median Full-Time Salaries of Licenced Social Workers Serving Older Adults by Employment Setting, by Earned Degrees, 2004



Note: Salaries are for those social workers who worked full-time for one employer.

Figure 2 shows that wages of MSWs and BSWs are further influenced by level of involvement with older adults. MSWs in Aging earn less than other MSWs who work with older adults. BSWs with caseloads more than 50% older adults earn more.

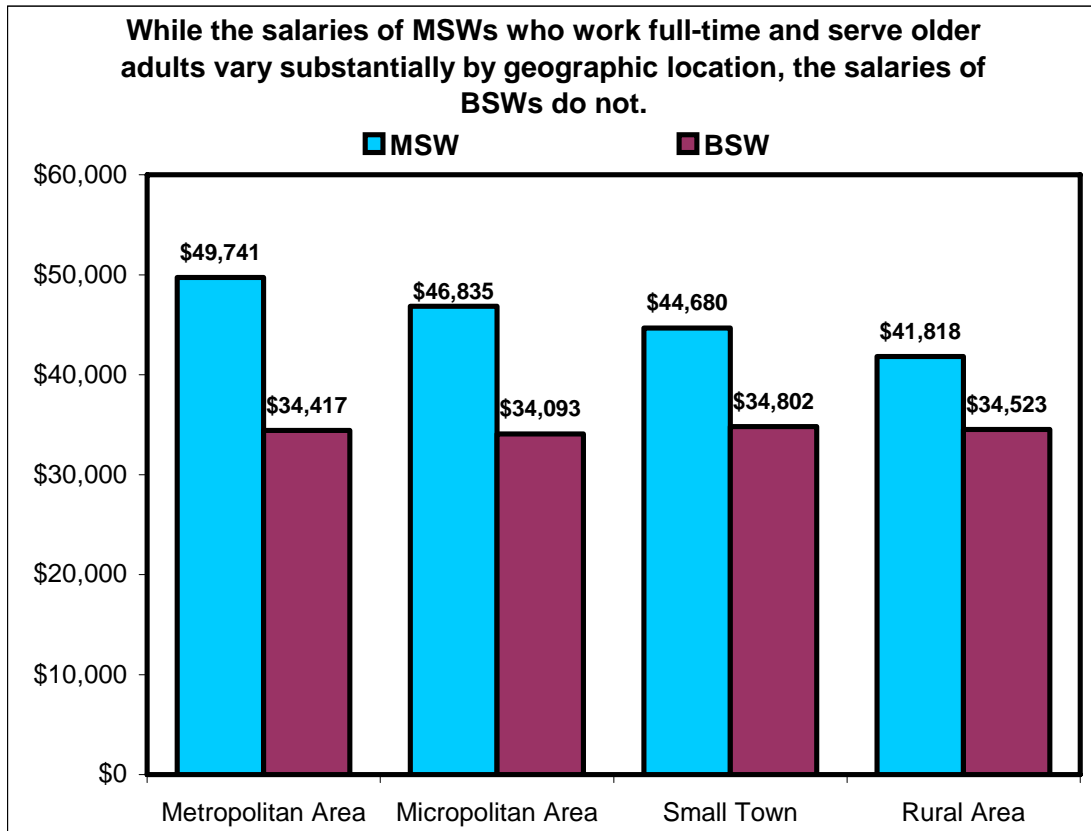
Figure 2. Median Annual Salaries of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults, by Level of Involvement with Older Adults, 2004



Note: Salaries are for those social workers working full-time for one employer.

Figure 3 shows that MSWs salaries vary substantially by rural/urban location, with salaries higher in metropolitan areas and lower in rural areas. BSWs' salaries vary little by urban/rural location.

Figure 3. Median Annual Salaries of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults, by Location

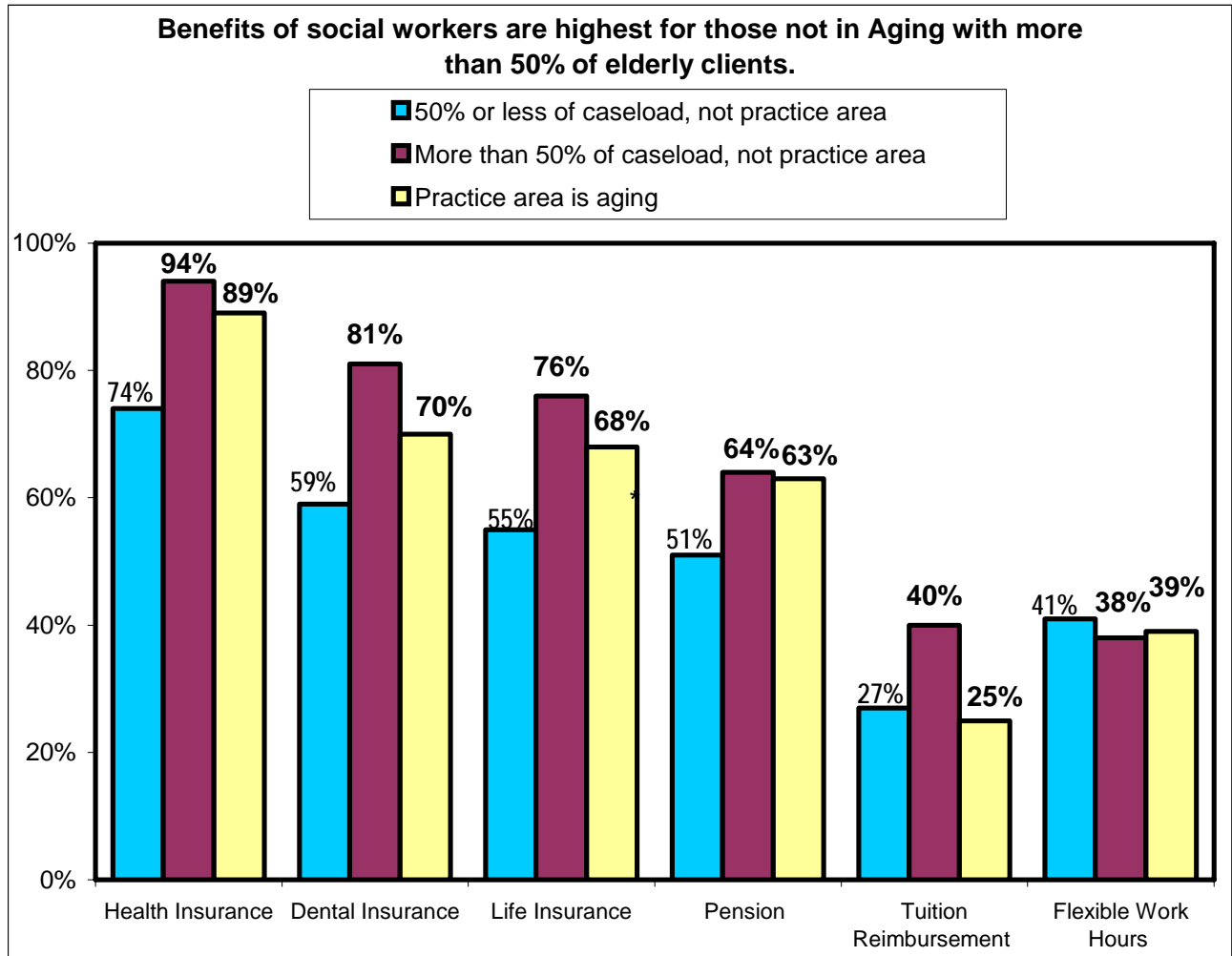


Note: Salaries are for those social workers working full-time for one employer.

Licensed social workers who serve older adults are slightly less likely to receive benefits than licensed social workers overall: health insurance 80% versus 85%, dental insurance 65% versus 69%, and life insurance 63% versus 64%. Of the social workers that see older adults, fifty-six percent have a pension, and 29% report that tuition reimbursement is available. Forty percent say that they have flexible working hours.

As can be seen in Figure 4, further variation in benefits exists by the level of social workers' involvement with older adults. Those who serve primarily older adults, either as a practice area or as a predominant caseload, are more likely to receive every type of benefit than those who serve fewer older adults, with the exception of tuition reimbursement and flexible work hours.

Figure 4. Benefits of Full-Time Social Workers by Involvement with Older Adults



Benefits by Setting

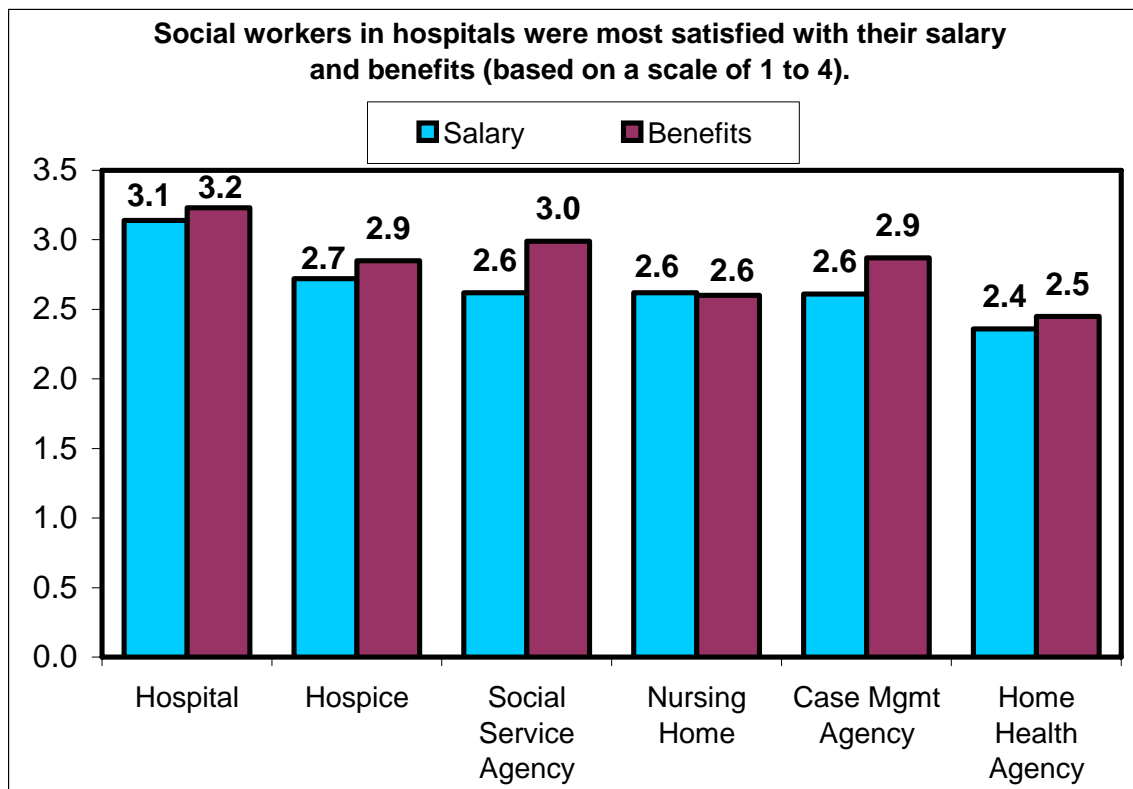
Benefits also vary by setting among social workers who serve older adults. Social workers are most likely to receive health insurance in hospices and hospitals (99% and 98%, respectively), but are least likely to receive this benefit in home health agencies (69%). A similar pattern emerges for dental insurance, which is available to 87% of social workers in hospices and 83% of those in hospitals, but only 63% of those in home health agencies. Life insurance, which is available to 85% of those in hospitals, but only 50% of those in home health agencies. Pensions are most commonly provided in hospitals and social service agencies (78% and 75%, respectively), and least commonly in hospices or nursing homes (46% and 51%, respectively). Tuition reimbursement is available to 47% of hospital social workers, and 35% of hospice social workers, but only to 14% of those in case management agencies. Social service agency social workers are most likely to report that flexible work hours are available (50%), while this is much less common in hospitals and home health (24% and 31%, respectively).

Satisfaction with Wages and Benefits

Seventy percent of full-time social workers who serve the elderly report satisfaction with their salary, and 68% report satisfaction with their benefits. These social workers are not significantly more or less satisfied with salaries than those who do not serve any older adults, although they are less satisfied on average with their benefits. Men who serve older adults are more likely to be satisfied with salary than women (77% versus 69%), and MSWs are more likely to be satisfied with salary than BSWs (73% versus 59%). Satisfaction with salary is lower among social workers who earn lower salaries.

Satisfaction patterns are similar among social workers by level of involvement in serving older adults despite disparities in wages and benefits (Figure 5). Differences do appear by setting, however. Hospital social workers are significantly more satisfied¹ than others with both salary and benefits, while those in social service agencies are significantly less satisfied² with salary. Social workers in home health agencies are significantly less satisfied with both salary and benefits³. Those in nursing homes and private practice are significantly less satisfied with benefits⁴.

Figure 5. Satisfaction with Salary and Fringe Benefits of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults, by Employment Setting



¹ $p < 0.0005$

² $p = 0.004$

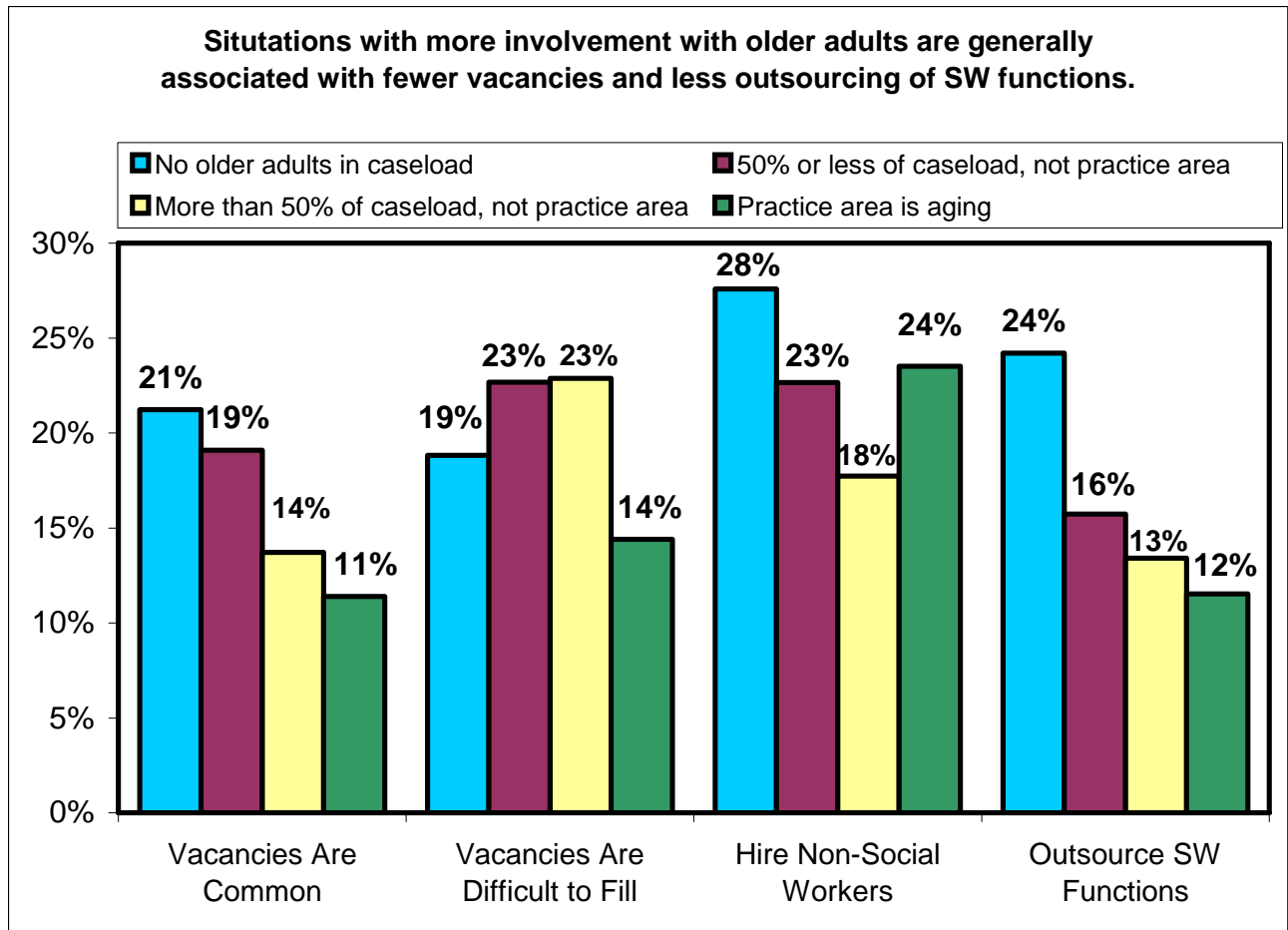
³ $p = 0.015$ for salary; $p = 0.001$ for benefits

⁴ $p < 0.0005$ for both.

Vacancies and Outsourcing of Social Work Roles

Seventeen percent of social workers who work with older adults report that vacancies in their agency are common and 21% report that vacancies are difficult to fill. As seen in Figure 6 reports of vacancies as common decline as involvement with the elderly increases. While 20% of those who see caseloads of fewer than half older adults report that vacancies are common, the numbers fall to 14% for social workers who see caseloads of more than half older adults, and 11% for those in Aging.

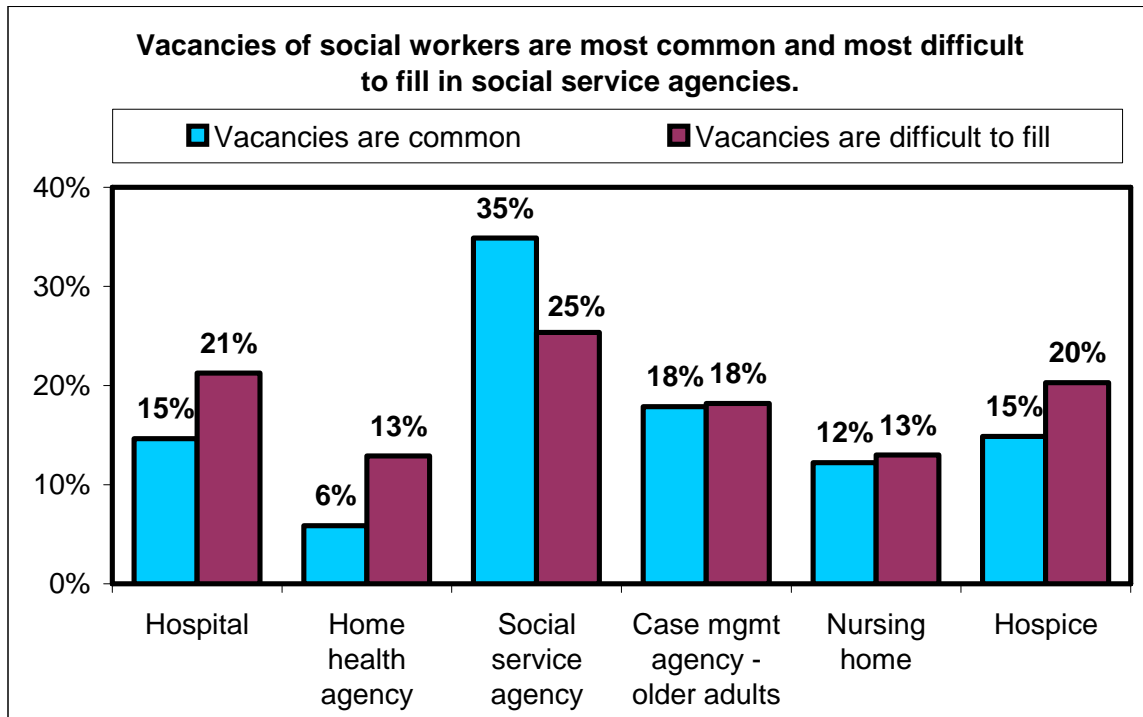
Figure 6. Rating of Extent of Vacancies and Responses to Vacancies, by Level of Involvement with Older Adults



Significant differences do not appear between vacancies reported by BSWs and MSWs. Geographic location of practice has little effect on reports of vacancies, but social workers in rural areas and small towns are much more likely to report that vacancies are difficult to fill (29% and 35%, respectively) compared to those in micropolitan and metropolitan areas (23% and 19%, respectively). Vacancies are most common in public agencies (22%) and less common in private nonprofit and for-profit organizations (14% and 16%, respectively), while there is little difference in terms of vacancies being difficult to fill.

Figure 7 shows that licensed social workers in social service agencies were most likely to report that vacancies were both common (35%) and difficult to fill (25%). Those in home health agencies report the fewest vacancies (6%). Social workers in home health agencies and nursing homes report the least difficulty in filling positions (both 13%). Social workers who report that vacancies are common in their workplace have slightly lower full-time salaries on average than those who do not report common vacancies (median of \$42,054 versus \$45,336).

Figure 7. Rating of Extent of Vacancies and Difficulty Filling Vacancies, by Employment Setting



Outsourcing and hiring non-professional social workers to fill social work jobs was an issue. There is not a large difference between the outsourcing of jobs reported by BSWs and MSWs, although BSWs are slightly more likely than MSWs to work in settings that hire non-social workers to fill social worker roles (26% vs. 21%).

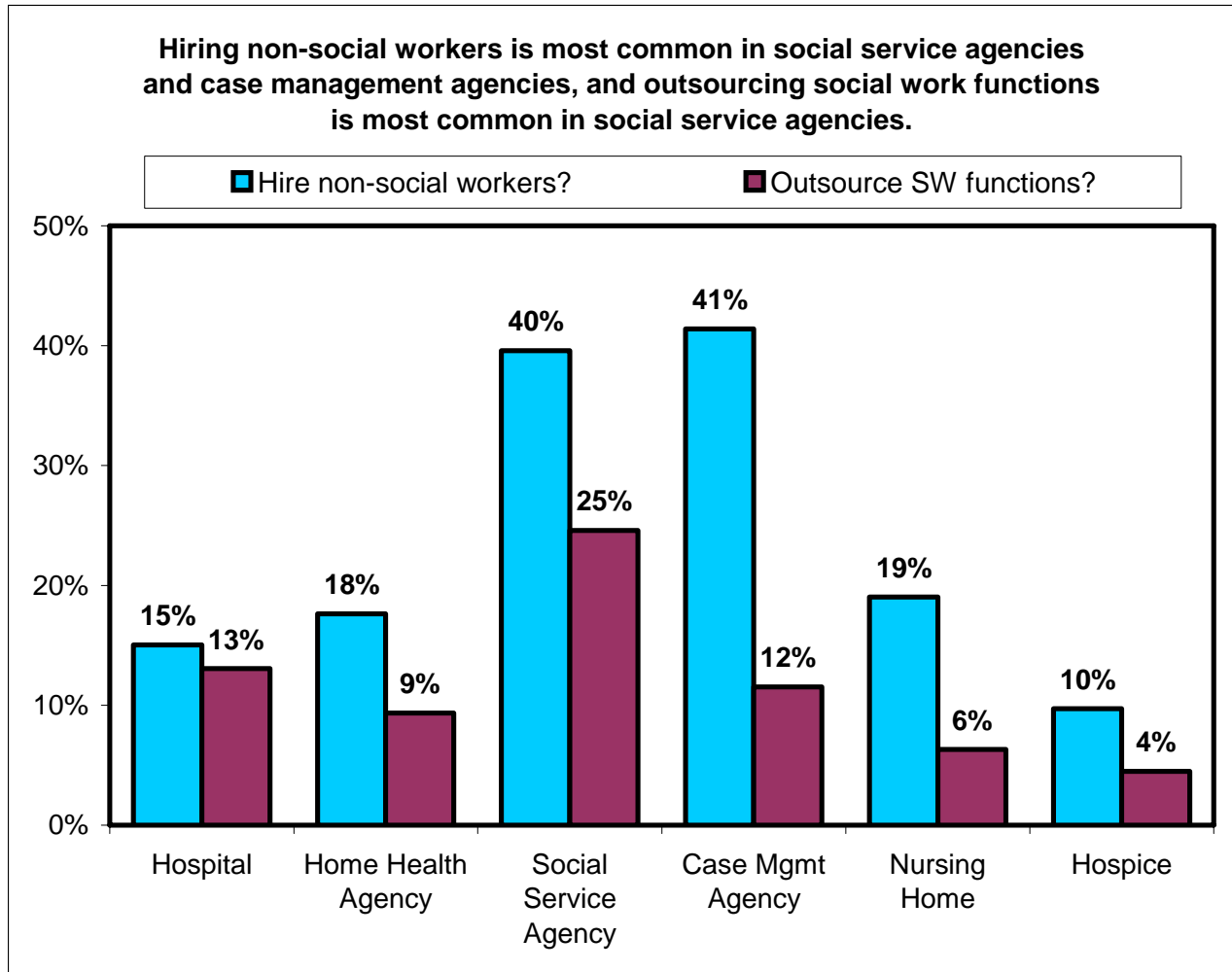
Agencies in rural areas are much more likely to outsource social work functions (29%) compared to those in small towns (11%), micropolitan areas (18%), or metropolitan areas (16%). Social workers practicing in rural and small towns are more likely to report the hiring of non-social workers (33% and 29%) than those in micropolitan and metropolitan areas (21% and 23%).

Public agencies also are most likely to outsource social work functions (26%), compared to private nonprofits (10%) and private for-profits (12%). Public agencies are most likely to hire non-social workers (31%), compared to private non-profit and private for-profit organizations (22% and 21%, respectively).

As can be seen in Figure 8, outsourcing of social work functions is most common in social service agencies (25%) and is least common in hospices (4%). Outsourcing is not related to

average salary. Non-social workers are most commonly recruited to fill social work roles in case management agencies for older adults and social service agencies (41% and 40%, respectively), and least commonly in nursing homes and hospices (6% and 4%).

Figure 8. Rating of Extent of Hiring Non-Social Workers and Outsourcing SW Functions, by Employment Setting



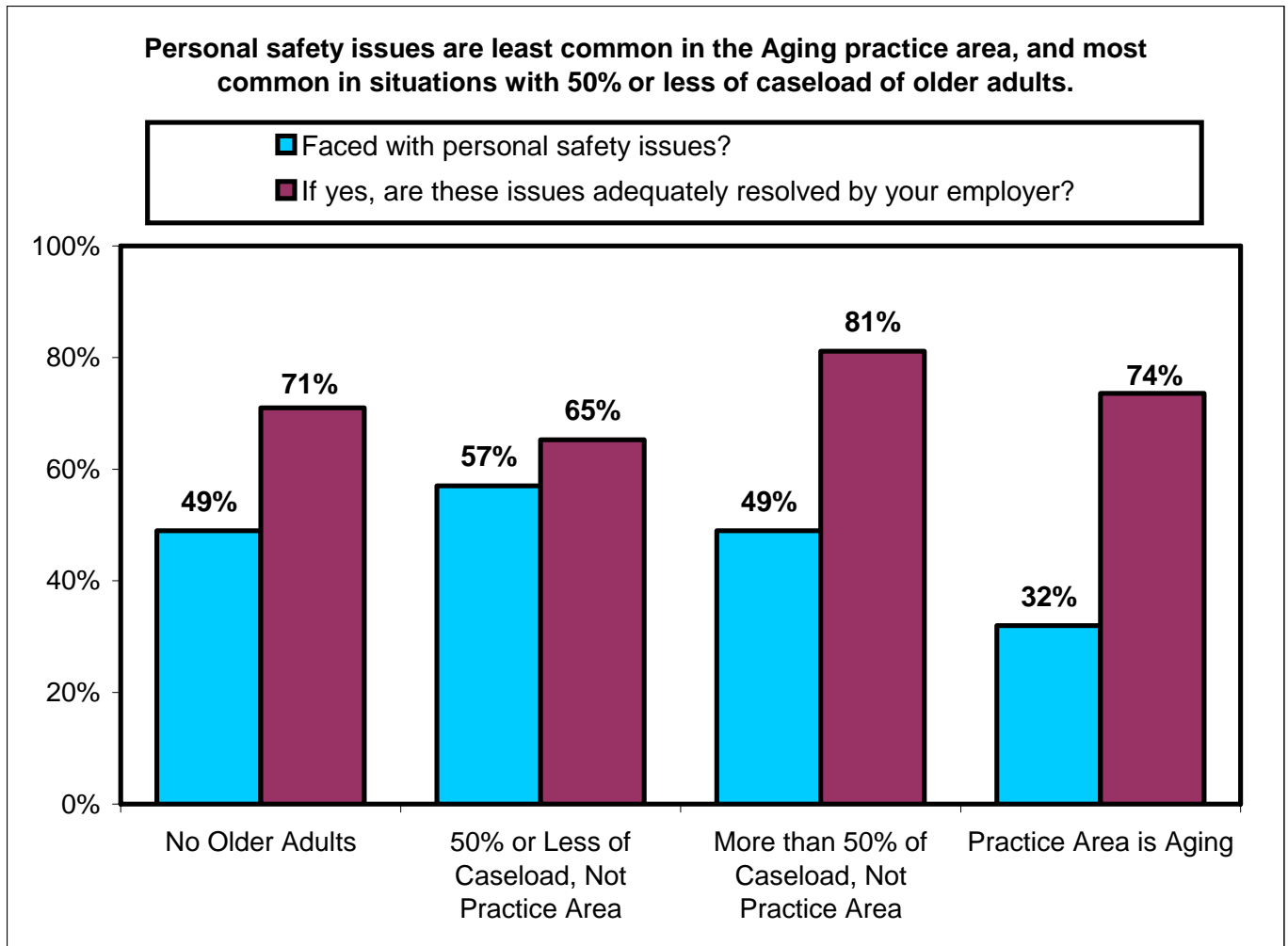
Job Safety

Half of social workers who work with older adults report facing personal safety issues in their primary employment, although 70% of those who report such issues indicate that their employers adequately address these issues. The NASW /CHWS survey did not identify types of safety issues, and future studies would hopefully further examine the range of problems experienced.

Reports of job safety issues do not differ between those who do and do not see older adult clients. There are differences, however, by prevalence of older adult clients in their caseloads (Figure 9). Fifty-seven percent of those who see caseloads of fewer than half with older adults report personal safety issues on the job, compared to only 49% of those who see caseloads more

than half older adults. Those in Aging are least likely to experience personal safety issues (32%). Among those reporting safety issues, those who work with large number of older adults are more likely than those who work with fewer older adults to report that their safety issues are addressed (74% of those in the practice area and 81% of those in other practice areas compared to only 65% of those who see caseloads of less than half of older adults).

Figure 9. Percentages of Licensed Social Workers Serving Older Adults Facing Personal Safety Issues, by Level of Involvement with Older Adults



The prevalence of job safety issues varies by setting. Social workers in hospice and home health programs are most likely to both report that there are safety issues involved in their job (60% and 57%, respectively) and that their issues are adequately addressed (88% and 85%, respectively). Social workers in nursing homes are least likely to report such issues (26%). Those in social service agencies are least likely to report that safety issues are adequately addressed (45%).

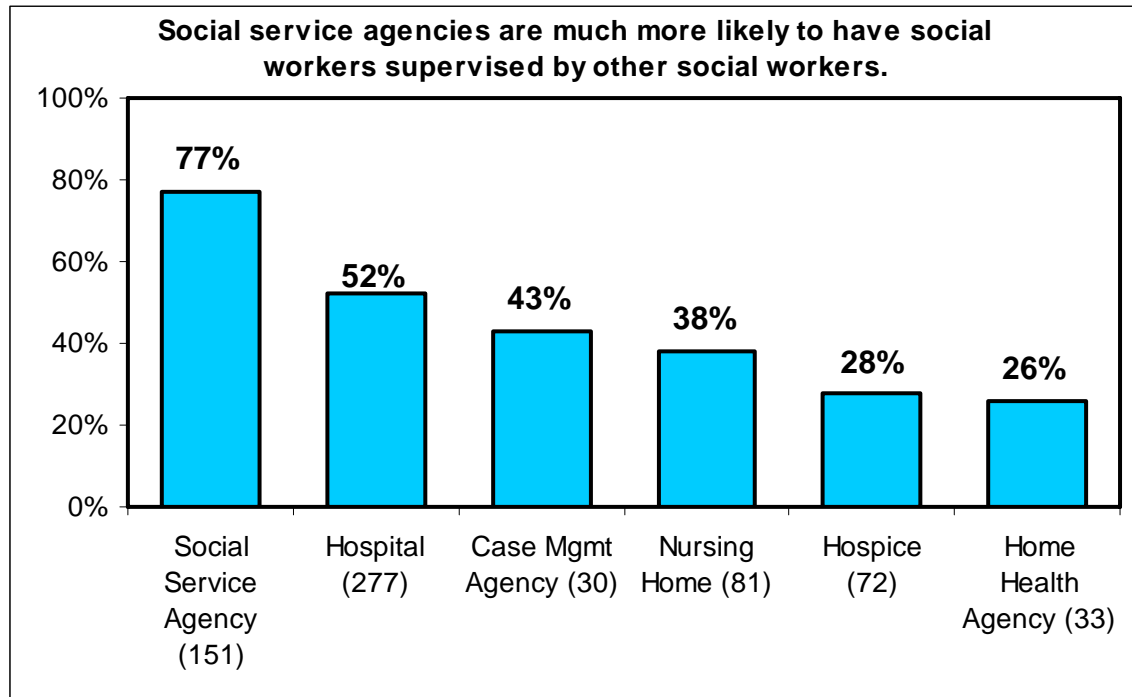
Supervision by Social Workers

Forty-eight percent of social workers who serve older adults are supervised by social workers. Those with caseloads that are less than half of older adults are more likely to be supervised by a

social worker (52%) than social workers in Aging (42%) or who serve more than 50% older adults in their caseloads (40%). This differs little by degree (45% of BSWs and 48% of MSWs).

Figure 10 shows that those in social service agencies are significantly more likely than others to be supervised by a social worker (77%)⁵, while those in hospice and home health settings are least likely to be supervised by a social worker (28% and 26%, respectively)⁶.

Figure 10. Percent of Social Workers Supervised by Other Social Workers, by Employment Setting



Work with Other Professionals

Social workers were asked about connections to social workers and other professionals in the 2004 NASW/CHWS survey to better understand their practice experience. Respondents who provide services to older adults work in organizations with fewer other social workers on staff than those who do not serve older adults. Average reported support and guidance from a supervisor was significantly and positively correlated with the number of other social workers on staff⁷.

As seen in Figure 11, licensed social workers in Aging work with the fewest other social workers on average, while those who have 50% or fewer older adults in their caseloads work in settings with the most other social workers. The number of other social workers identified in the workplace differs little between MSWs and BSWs.

⁵ $p < 0.0005$

⁶ $p < 0.0005$ and $p = 0.003$

⁷ $p = 0.002$

Figure 11. Percentages of Social Workers Working with Other Social Workers, by Level of Involvement with Older Adults

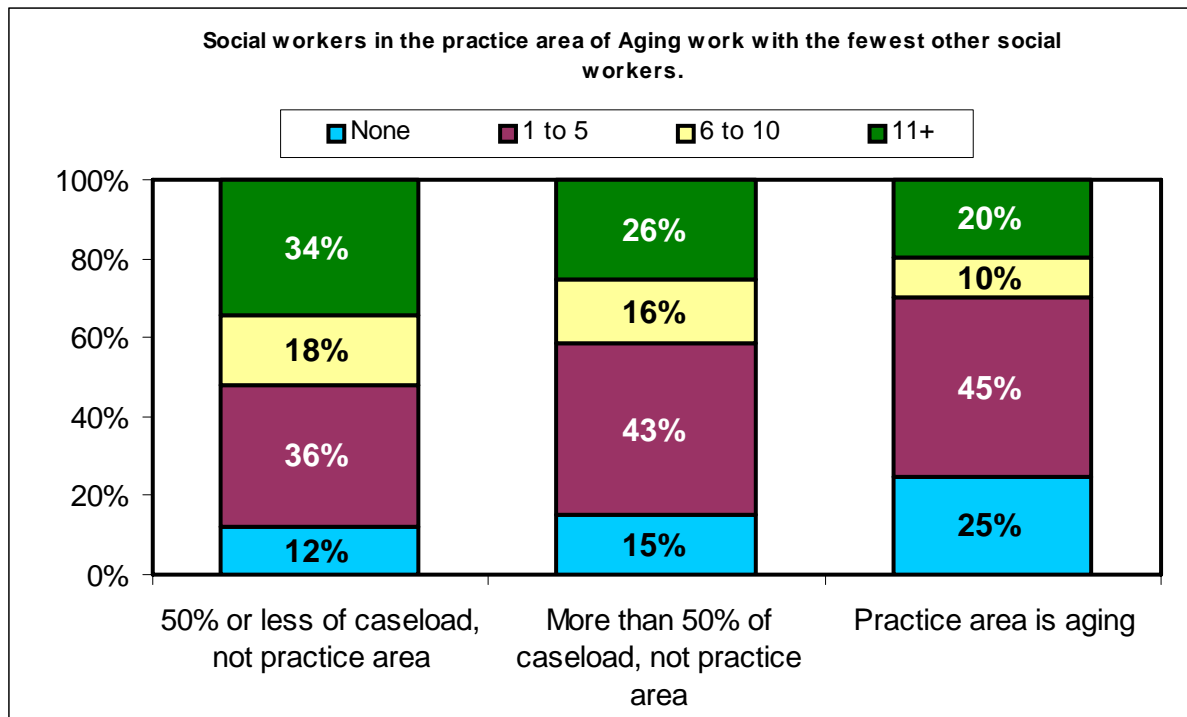
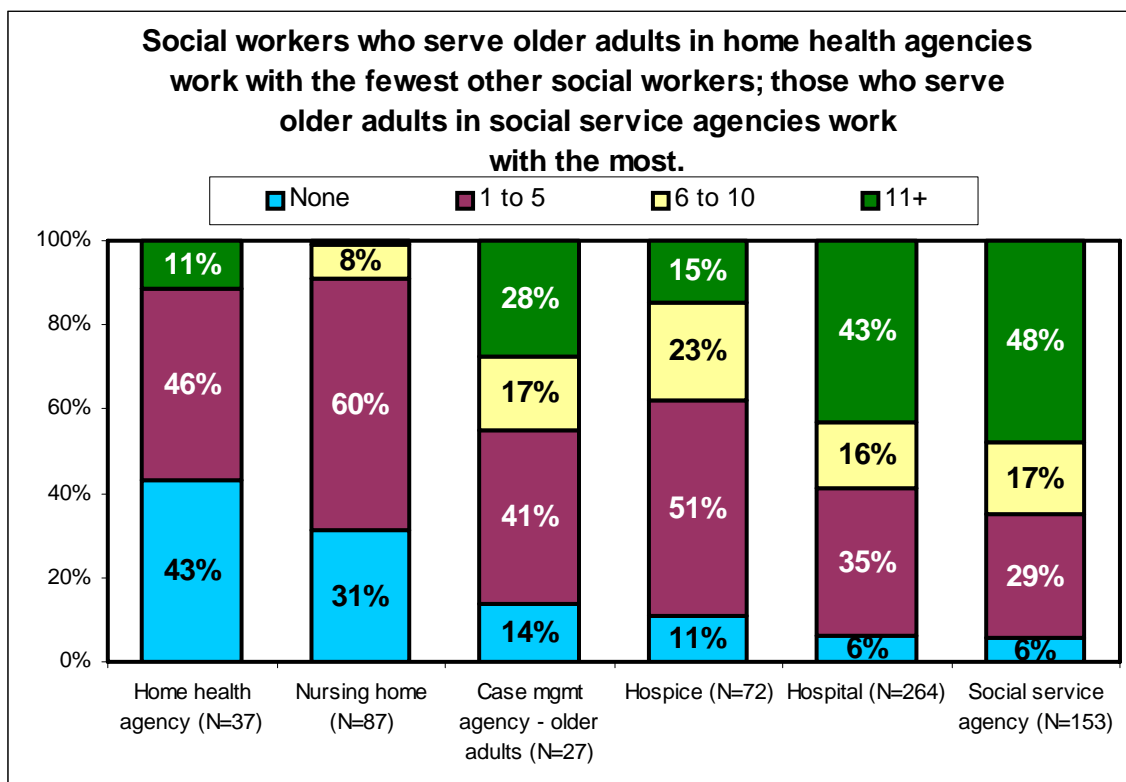


Figure 12 shows that virtually all hospital and social service agency social workers reported having social work colleagues in their job settings (both 94%), while many fewer nursing home and home health agency social workers did (69% and 57%, respectively). Forty-eight percent of social workers in social service agencies reported having 11 or more other social workers at their job site, as did 43% of social workers in hospitals.

Figure 12. Percentages of Social Workers who Worked With Others, by Employment Setting and Number of Co-Workers



Physicians (94%), other social workers (92%), and nurses (86%) are the professionals whom respondents identified that they are most likely to ever work with. The frequency of working with other professionals (never to always) on the behalf of older adults increases proportionate to the number of older adults in the caseload.

Agency Participation in Professional Activities

Table 2 shows that professional development programs (71%) and student internships (66%) are the most common professional activities in organizations where social workers are employed. Participation in professional activities varies by setting. Two-thirds to three-fourths of each type of organizational setting participates in some type of professional development programs.

Table 2. Employer Participation in Professional Activities by Employment Setting

Setting	Demonstration Programs	Clinical Research	Student Internships	Best Practices Training	Program Evaluation Research	Professional Development
Hospital	16%	36%	73%	29%	28%	76%
Home Health Agency	14%	9%	34%	14%	23%	63%
Social Service Agency	17%	6%	76%	44%	31%	75%
Case Mgmt Agency	24%	14%	59%	34%	31%	72%
Nursing Home	18%	3%	53%	24%	15%	69%
Hospice	24%	11%	62%	26%	31%	73%
All	16%	19%	66%	31%	28%	71%

Agency Support and Guidance

Two-thirds of social workers who work with older adults report respect and support for social work services from their agency as well as support and guidance from their supervisor (both 66%). Three-quarters (76%) report that they receive and/or provide assistance with issues of ethical practice. Responses differ by setting, but not by extent of involvement with older adults.

Social workers in case management agencies and home health agencies report the most respect/support for social work services in their agency (4.03 and 3.89 on a five-point scale, respectively), while those in hospitals and hospices report the least (3.61 and 3.51, respectively). Those in social service agencies and case management agencies gave the highest marks for receiving support and guidance from their supervisor (4.03 and 3.93, respectively), while those in hospices and home health agencies reported the least such support (3.50 and 3.48, respectively). These latter agencies are least likely to provide supervision by a social worker, as noted above. Social workers in social service agencies and nursing homes report higher ratings than others for receiving or providing assistance with ethical practice (4.20 and 4.10, respectively), while those in case management agencies report the lowest ratings (4.00).