

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

## **Chapter 6 of 7**

### **Who Do Social Workers Serve?**

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**March 2006**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 6. Who Do Social Workers Serve? A Demographic Overview of Older Clients .....	1
Summary of the Findings.....	1
Demographics .....	1
<i>Gender</i> .....	1
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i> .....	2
<i>Age</i> .....	3
<i>By Degree and Level of Involvement</i> .....	4
<i>By Setting</i> .....	6
Health Care Coverage .....	7
Presenting Problems.....	8
<i>Severity of Problems</i> .....	9
<i>Multiple Problems</i> .....	9
<i>Problems by Caseload Age</i> .....	10

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Percentages of Clients in Different Age Groups by Practice Area.....	4
Table 2. Percentages of Social Workers Serving Caseloads of 25+% ages 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, and 85+, by Primary Employment Setting.....	6
Table 3. Most Common Source of Client Health Insurance Coverage, by Degree and Practice Area.....	7
Table 4. Health Insurance Coverage by Level of Involvement with Older Adult Clients.....	8
Table 5. Client Health Insurance Coverage by Employment Setting .....	8
Table 6. Most and Least Common Presenting Problems for Older Adult Clients, by Involvement with Older Adults.....	9
Table 7. Presenting Problems by Caseload Age for Practice Area of Aging. ....	10
Table 8. Presenting Problems by Caseload Age: 50% or more Older Adults. ....	11
Table 9. Presenting Problems by Caseload Age: Fewer than half Older Adults .....	11
Table 10. Top Three and Bottom Three Presenting Problems of Older Adults, by Employment Setting .....	12

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Percentages of Social Workers Seeing Predominantly (50% or More) Female Caseloads, by Involvement with Older Clients.....	2
Figure 2. Percentages of Licensed Social Workers Serving Predominantly (50%+) Single Racial/EthnicGroup, by Involvement with Older Adults .....	3
Figure 3. Percentages of Older Adults in Different Age Groups in Social Worker Caseloads .....	4
Figure 4. Percentages of Social Workers Seeing Caseloads Including More than 25% of Adults of Ages 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, and 85+ .....	5
Figure 5. Percentages of Caseload of Older Adults in Different Age Groups, by Urban/Rural Location .....	6

## Chapter 6. Who Do Social Workers Serve? A Demographic Overview of Older Clients

### Summary of the Findings

- Client caseloads of licensed social workers serving some older adults are primarily female and non-Hispanic white.
- Almost three-quarters of social workers in Aging have caseloads that are predominantly female compared with about half of other social workers who serve older adults. Social workers in Aging are also most likely to have non-Hispanic white clients.
- Almost all social workers serving older adults (99%) see some clients who are among the “young old”, ages 55-74, while 59% see clients 85 years of age or older.
- BSWs see a higher percentage of clients over 65 than do MSWs.
- Clients ages 85 years or older are more likely to receive social work services from those in Aging or those carrying caseloads that are more than 50% older adults.
- More than half of licensed social workers’ clients receive health coverage through publicly funded programs (Medicaid, 30%; Medicare (26%).
- Social workers in Aging and those with more than 50% of their caseloads of older adults are most likely to serve clients covered through Medicare (57% and 70% respectively.) Social workers in Aging are most likely to serve clients covered through Medicaid (36%).
- Psychosocial issues, chronic disease, physical disability, mental illness, and grief/bereavement issues are the most common presenting problems reported for older adult clients. The frequency of presenting problems varies with client age, setting, and involvement of social workers in caseloads caring for older adults.
- More than 90% of social workers report that their caseloads include clients with multiple problems, and that problems may be mild, moderate or severe.

### Demographics

#### *Gender*

Fifty-six percent of social workers that serve older adults have caseloads that are more than 50% female, slightly more than social workers overall (49%), but significantly greater than social workers who do not serve older adults (38%)<sup>1</sup>.

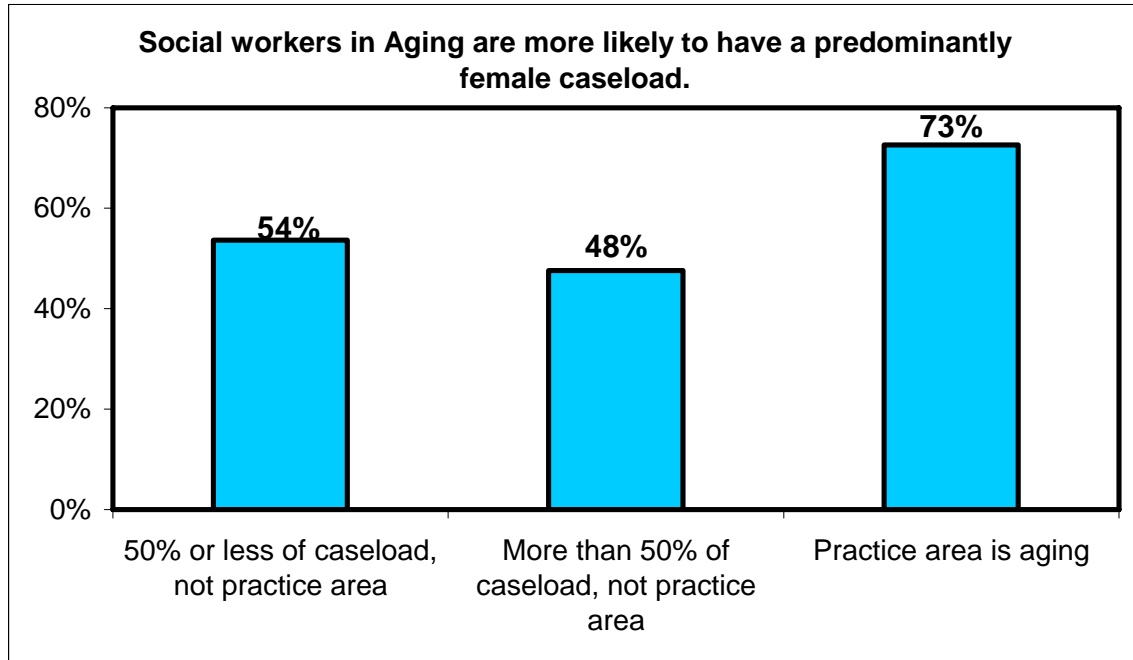
Seventy-three percent of social workers in Aging have caseloads that are predominantly female compared with 52% of social workers not in this practice area (Figure 1). BSWs in Aging are more likely to have caseloads that are predominantly female than MSWs (82% versus 69%). In

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<sup>1</sup>  $p < 0.0005$

contrast, MSWs in other practice areas are more likely have predominantly female caseloads than BSWs (53% versus 43%).

**Figure 1. Percentages of Social Workers Seeing Predominantly (50% or More) Female Caseloads, by Involvement with Older Clients**

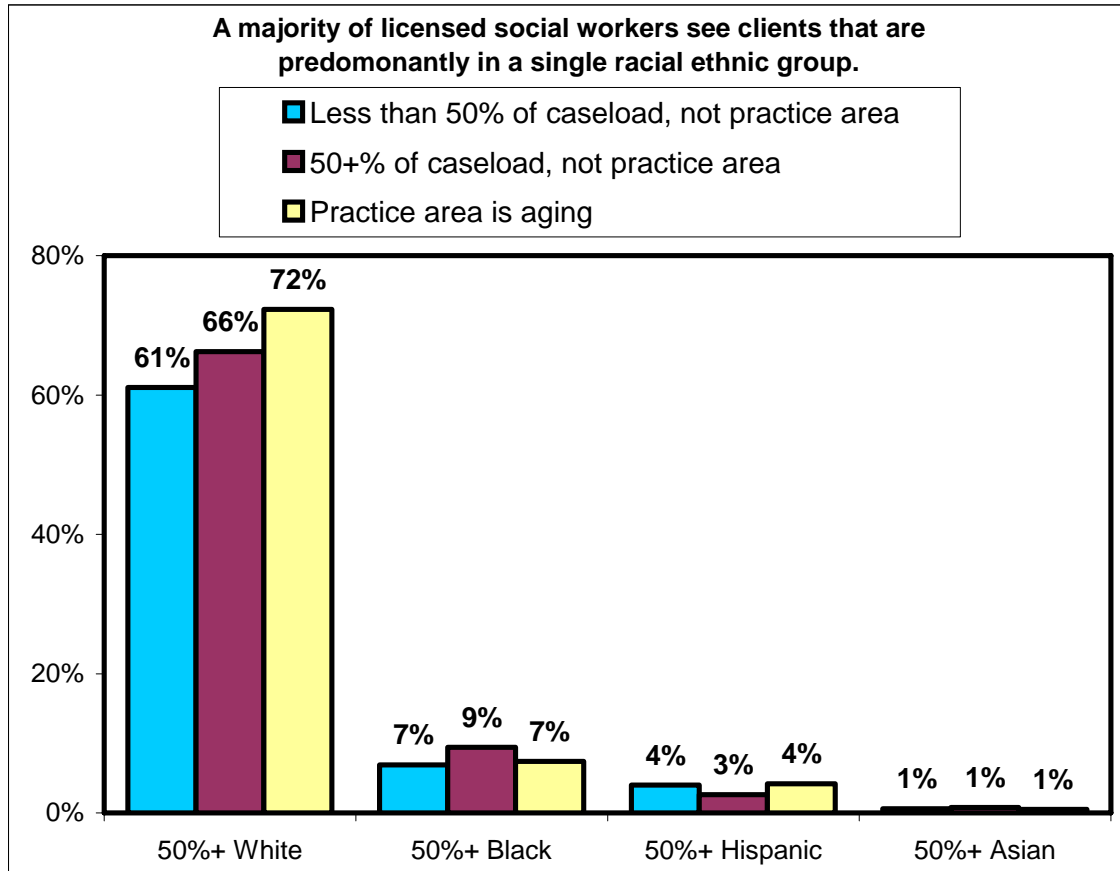


### *Race/Ethnicity*

Almost two-thirds of social workers serving older adults serve caseloads that are predominantly (more than 50%) non-Hispanic white (64%). Social workers in Aging are more likely to have caseloads that are predominantly non-Hispanic white (72%) than those not in Aging (62%).

Few social workers carry caseloads that are predominantly composed of any *single* minority group: Seven percent have caseloads that are predominantly Black/African-American, and 4% have caseloads that are predominantly Hispanic. Less than 1% serves caseloads that are predominantly Asian or Native American.

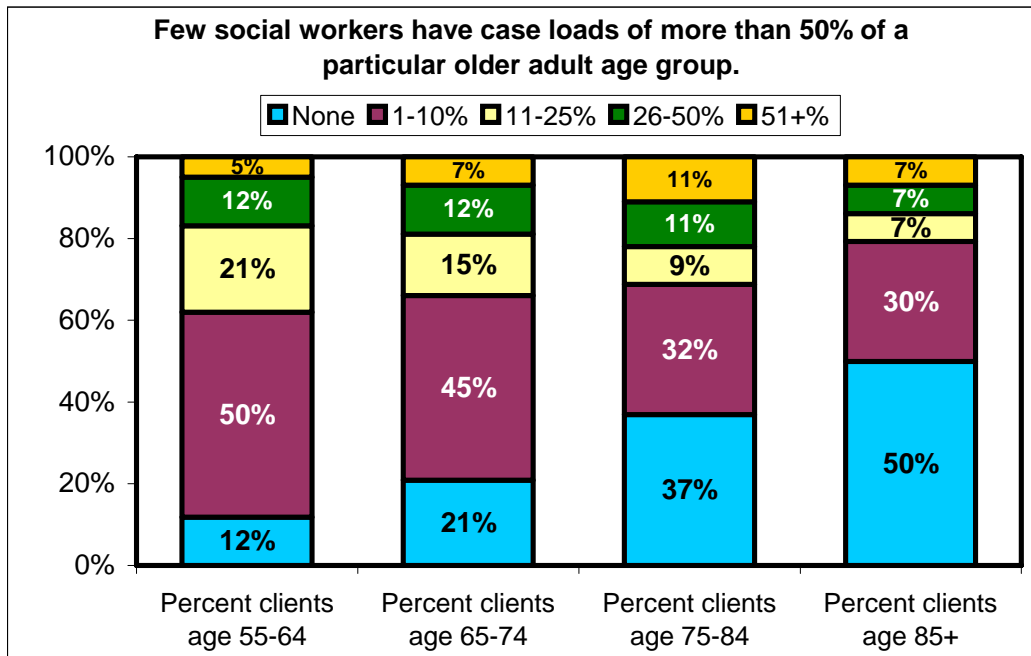
**Figure 2. Percentages of Licensed Social Workers Serving Predominantly (50%+) Single Racial/Ethnic Group, by Involvement with Older Adults**



### Age

Social workers serving older adults are more likely to see the “young old” than clients 85 years of age or older (97% versus 59%). Twenty-six percent reports that they see no clients between the ages of 75 and 84, and 41% serves no clients older than 85 years of age. Four percent report that 75% of their clients are ages 75-84, and 4% report that 75% of their clients are 85 and older.

**Figure 3. Percentages of Older Adults in Different Age Groups in Social Worker Caseloads**



*By Degree and Level of Involvement*

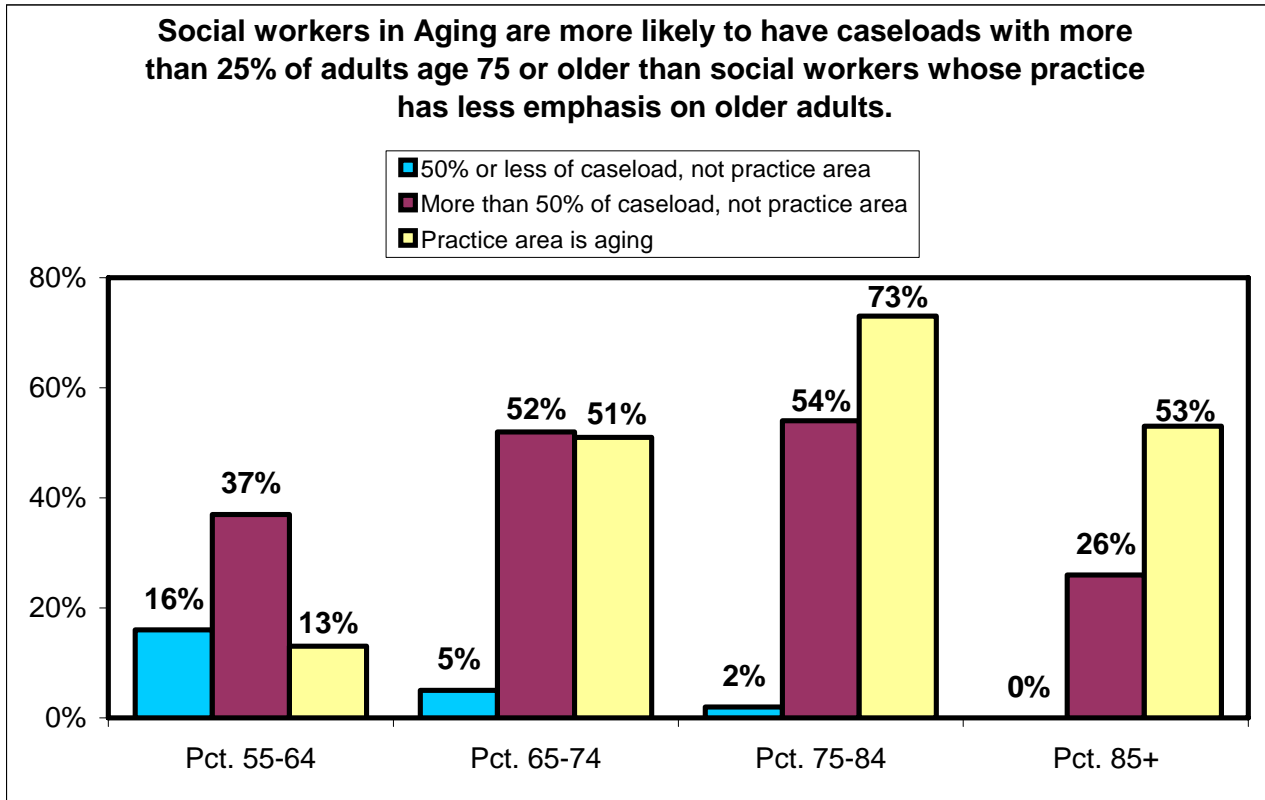
Age distribution within caseloads varies by both degree and level of involvement with older adults. BSWs are more likely than MSWs to serve older adults ages 85 and older (76% versus 55%), and are more likely to carry caseloads that are more than 75% ages 85 and older (9% compared to 3%). There are no significant percentage differences within caseloads by degree for ages 55-84.

Social workers in Aging and those with caseloads more than 50% older adults are more likely to see clients 85 years of age and older, than those with caseloads of 50% or fewer older adults (Table 1).

**Table 1. Percentages of Clients in Different Age Groups by Practice Area**

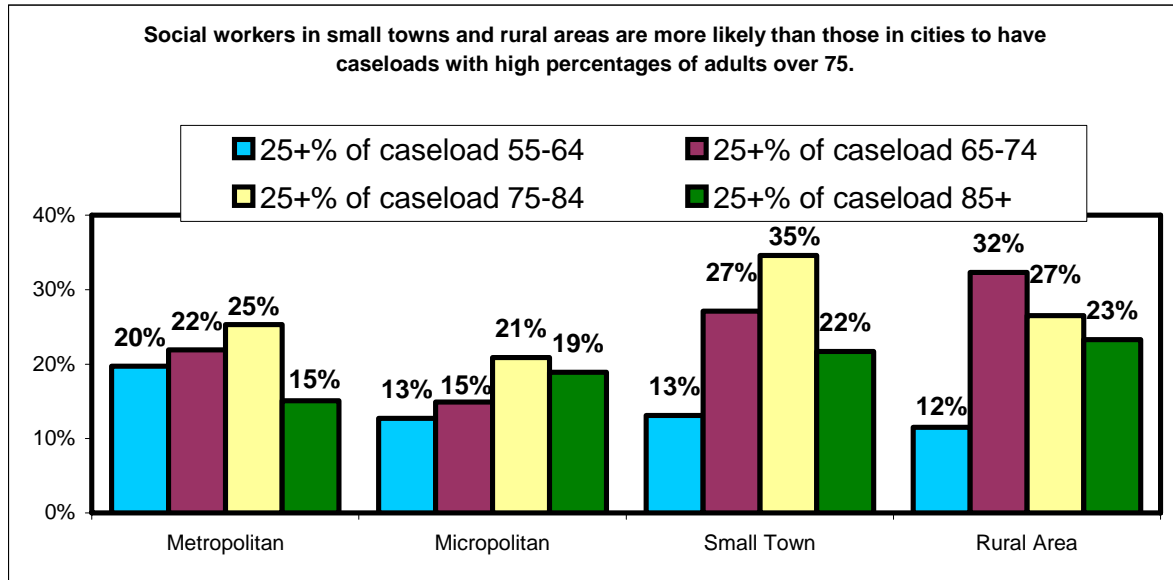
Caseload	Less than 50% of Caseload, Not Practice Area		50+% of Caseload, Not Practice Area		Practice Area is Aging	
	Any	More than 75% of Caseload	Any	More than 75% of Caseload	Any	More than 75% of Caseload
Ages 55-64	98%	1%	98%	2%	91%	1%
Ages 65-74	84%	0%	97%	5%	98%	6%
Ages 75-84	58%	0%	95%	7%	99%	14%
Ages 85+	34%	0%	90%	6%	99%	11%

**Figure 4. Percentages of Social Workers Seeing Caseloads Including More than 25% of Adults of Ages 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, and 85+**



Age distribution with caseloads also varies across urban/rural areas, as shown in Figure 5. The percentage serving a caseload of more than 25% ages 55-64 decreases as the area becomes more rural, while the percent serving a caseload of more than 25% ages 85 and older increases as the area becomes more rural.

**Figure 5. Percentages of Caseload of Older Adults in Different Age Groups, by Urban/Rural Location**



*By Setting*

Table 2 shows that social workers serving older adults in hospital settings serve more clients ages 55-74 than other social workers, while social workers in nursing homes see fewer of this age group. Social workers in social service agencies see fewer clients ages 85 and older than other social workers who serve older adults.

**Table 2. Percentages of Social Workers Serving Caseloads of 25+% ages 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, and 85+, by Primary Employment Setting**

Caseload is more than 25%	Hospital	Home Health	Case Mgmt Agency - Older Adults	Nursing Home	Hospice
Ages 55-64	28%	24%	6%	7%	27%
Ages 65-74	36%	57%	21%	34%	54%
Ages 75-84	34%	69%	24%	75%	66%
Ages 85+	18%	38%	13%	73%	27%

## Health Care Coverage

Overall, social workers who serve older adults are about equally likely to report that the most common source of health coverage for their clients is Medicaid (30%), private insurance (28%) or Medicare (26%). It is important to note that more than half of social workers say that most of their clients receive health coverage through publicly funded programs.

The pattern of coverage for those serving older adults differs from that of social workers who do not see older adults, in that almost twice as many clients are reported to receive Medicaid (59%), followed by private insurance (19%) and Medicare (3%).

Substantial differences in client health coverage appear between MSWs and BSWs in Aging and between MSWs in Aging compared with MSWs in other practice areas (Table 3). More than two-thirds of MSWs in Aging see clients covered through Medicare, and only 1% see clients that have private insurance. In contrast, only one-fourth of clients seen by MSWs not in Aging receive coverage through Medicare, and 35% through private insurance. More than half the clients of BSWs receive coverage through Medicaid regardless of practice area.

**Table 3. Most Common Source of Client Health Insurance Coverage, by Degree and Practice Area**

Insurance Coverage	PA MSW (N=157)	PA BSW (N=58)	NPA MSW (N=1191)	NPA BSW (N=132)
Medicaid	27%	52%	26%	51%
Medicare	67%	38%	19%	32%
Private insurance	1%	0%	35%	5%
Private pay	5%	10%	7%	1%
Not insured	0%	0%	10%	9%
Don't know	1%	0%	4%	2%

As seen in Table 4, clients' health coverage varies by licensed social workers' level of involvement with older adults. Social workers not in the practice area of Aging but carrying caseloads of more than 50% older adults are most likely to see clients covered by Medicare. Those with 50% or fewer older adults in their caseloads are most likely to see patients covered by private insurance.

**Table 4. Health Insurance Coverage by Level of Involvement with Older Adult Clients**

Health Coverage	None	50% or Less of Caseload, Not Practice Area	More Than 50% of Caseload, Not Practice Area	Practice Area is Aging	All Social Workers
Medicaid	59%	31%	17%	36%	41%
Medicare	3%	8%	70%	57%	16%
Private insurance	19%	39%	7%	1%	24%
Private pay	4%	8%	2%	5%	6%
Not insured	6%	11%	3%	0%	7%
Don't know	10%	4%	1%	1%	6%

Table 5 shows differences in health coverage by practice setting.

**Table 5. Client Health Insurance Coverage by Employment Setting**

Health Coverage	Private Practice	Hospital	Home Health Agency	Social Service Agency	Case Mgmt Agency	Nursing Home	Hospice
Medicaid	7%	20%	17%	51%	61%	61%	4%
Medicare	4%	53%	81%	14%	39%	28%	91%
Private insurance	69%	16%	0%	14%	0%	0%	3%
Private pay	17%	0%	3%	4%	0%	11%	0%
Not insured	1%	10%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	2%	2%	0%	6%	0%	0%	1%

### Presenting Problems

Table 6 shows that the most common presenting problems reported for older adult clients are psychosocial issues (98%), mental illness (96%), chronic disease (95%), physical disability (95%), and grief/bereavement issues (95%).

**Table 6. Most and Least Common Presenting Problems for Older Adult Clients, by Involvement with Older Adults**

Involvement with Older Adults	Most likely to see...	Least likely to see...
50% or Less Older Adults	Psychosocial issues Mental illness Physical disabilities	End-of-life/palliative care LTC financing/planning Developmental disabilities
More than 50% Older Adults, Not Specialty	Chronic disease Physical disabilities Acute disease	Abuse/victimization Developmental disabilities Marriage/family counseling
Specialty	Chronic disease Physical disabilities Acute disease	Abuse/victimization Developmental disabilities Marriage/family counseling

MSWs in Aging report significantly more clients with mental illness and psychosocial issues than BSWs<sup>2</sup>, but both groups report fewer clients with these problems than their counterparts not in the practice area.

#### *Severity of Problems*

Social workers were asked about the prevalence of three levels of problem severity within their caseload – mild, moderate, and severe. Ninety-one percent of social workers saw clients with mild problems, while 96% reported some with moderate problems and 90% reported clients with severe problems. Twelve percent reported that more than half of their older adult caseload had mild problems, 36% reported that more than half of their caseload had moderate problems, and 28% reported that more than half of their older adult caseload had severe problems.

The prevalence of moderate and severe problems in the caseload was positively correlated with involvement with older adults, while the prevalence of mild problems peaked and then began to decline among social workers who have caseloads with 26-50% of older adults.

Setting and degree does not appear to be associated with severity of problems, except that social workers in hospices report that a smaller percentage of their caseload has “moderately severe” problems compared to other social workers.

#### *Multiple Problems*

Almost all social workers who work with older adults (99%) report that at least some of their clients present with multiple problems. Seventy-seven percent report that their older adult clients “always” or “almost always” present with multiple problems. The prevalence of multiple problems among the older adult caseload is positively correlated with involvement with older adults. Ninety-three percent of social workers with a practice area in Aging report that their clients always or almost always present with multiple problems, compared to 88% of those with predominantly older adult caseloads, and 72% of those with fewer than half older adult clients.

<sup>2</sup> p < 0.0005

Setting and degree do not seem to be associated with multiple problems among social workers working with older adults.

*Problems by Caseload Age*

The frequency of client problems differs with the age of clients. It is clear that certain problems are more frequent among caseloads that consist primarily of the “young” old and others are more frequent among caseloads that consist primarily of the “oldest” old, but how this breaks out depends upon the social worker’s level of involvement with older clients as shown below. Tables 7, 8 and 9 show frequency of presenting problems correlated with the percentage of client age groups. Shaded black indicates a *positive* correlation (e.g., in the first table, the frequency of mental illness increases as the percentage of the caseload ages 55-64 increases), while shaded gray indicates a *negative* relationship (e.g. in the second table, the frequency of dementia issues decreases as the percentage of the caseload ages 55-64 increases).

**Table 7. Presenting Problems by Caseload Age for Practice Area of Aging.**

	% Age 55-64	% Age 65-74	% Age 75-84	% Age 85+
Disease - chronic				
Physical disability				
Mental illness				
Grief/bereavement				
Financial issues				
Disease - acute				
Caregiver issues (care for elderly)				
Socioeconomic disadvantage				
Dementia issues				
End-of-life/palliative				
Caregiver issues (care by elderly)				
Residential placement/housing				
Substance abuse issues				
LTC financing/planning				
Abuse/victimization				
Developmental disabilities				

**Table 8. Presenting Problems by Caseload Age: 50% or more Older Adults.**

	% Age 55-64	% Age 65-74	% Age 75-84	% Age 85+
Disease - chronic				
Physical disability				
Mental illness				
Grief/bereavement				
Financial issues				
Disease - acute				
Caregiver issues (care for elderly)				
Socioeconomic disadvantage				
Dementia issues				
End-of-life/palliative				
Caregiver issues (care by elderly)				
Residential placement/housing				
Substance abuse issues				
LTC financing/planning				
Abuse/victimization				
Developmental disabilities				
Psychosocial issues				

**Table 9. Presenting Problems by Caseload Age: Fewer than half Older Adults**

Presenting Problem of Clients	% Age 55-64	% Age 65-74	% Age 75-84	% Age 85+
Disease - chronic				
Physical disability				
Mental illness				
Grief/bereavement				
Financial issues				
Disease - acute				
Caregiver issues (care for elderly)				
Socioeconomic disadvantage				
Dementia issues				
End-of-life/palliative				
Caregiver issues (care by elderly)				
Residential placement/housing				
Substance abuse issues				
LTC financing/planning				
Abuse/victimization				
Developmental disabilities				
Psychosocial issues				
Marriage/family counseling				

**Table 10. Top Three and Bottom Three Presenting Problems of Older Adults, by Employment Setting**

Employment Setting	Presenting Problems	
	Top 3	Bottom 3
Hospitals	Chronic disease	Abuse/victimization
	Acute disease	Developmental disabilities
	Physical disability	Marriage/family counseling
Social service agencies	Financial issues	End-of-life/palliative
	Physical disability	Developmental disabilities
	Psychosocial issues	Marriage/family counseling
Nursing homes	Chronic disease	Substance abuse issues
	Physical disability	Developmental disabilities
	Dementia issues	Marriage/family counseling
Hospices	End-of-life/palliative	Substance abuse issues
	Grief/bereavement issues	Abuse/victimization
	Caregiver issues (care for elderly)	Developmental disabilities
Home health agencies	Physical disability	Substance abuse issues
	Chronic disease	Developmental disabilities
	Caregiver issues (care for elderly)	Marriage/family counseling
Case management agencies	Chronic disease	Developmental disabilities
	Physical disability	Substance abuse issues
	Socioeconomic disadvantage	Marriage/family counseling