

# **LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2004**

## **Chapter 4 of 4**

### **Workplace Issues**

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## Chapter 4. Workplace Issues for Licensed Social Workers

The 2004 survey included several questions designed to elicit insights about the workplace issues of respondents. Some of the highlights from these questions are summarized below.

### Career Plans

Career plans are an important aspect of the supply of any profession. These help to clarify the reasons for outflows of practitioners from the workforce, which generates the need for new professionals to maintain the supply of practitioners and services. Table 1 summarizes the responses to a question on the 2004 survey about “career plans in the next two years.” The table shows that nearly 70 percent of respondents planned to remain in their current position. They also show that some 7.4% indicated they would either retire or stop working, and another 4.7% indicated they would leave social work, but continue working.

**Table 1. Career Plans of Active Licensed Social Workers by Age Group, 2004**

Career Plans in Next Two Years	Age Group						
	25 & Under	26-34	35-44	44-54	55-64	65 & Over	Total
Remain in Current Position	53.8%	58.7%	69.4%	72.6%	75.4%	64.9%	69.8%
Seek New Opportunity/Promotion as SW	50.0%	39.1%	31.1%	26.2%	16.5%	4.6%	26.1%
Increase SW Hours	3.8%	7.3%	9.6%	8.7%	7.1%	3.4%	8.0%
Decrease SW Hours	3.8%	11.6%	8.7%	7.8%	13.2%	16.7%	10.3%
Re-Enter SW	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.6%	0.2%
Leave SW But Continue to Work	3.8%	4.7%	5.7%	4.9%	3.5%	4.0%	4.7%
Retire	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	2.9%	13.7%	33.3%	5.9%
Stop Working	0.0%	2.4%	1.8%	0.7%	0.9%	5.2%	1.5%
Pursue Additional SW Degree	30.8%	13.5%	7.3%	5.5%	1.6%	2.3%	6.3%
Pursue Additional Non-SW Degree	19.2%	10.6%	9.1%	6.8%	3.1%	1.1%	6.8%
Pursue Non-Degree SW Training	23.1%	17.3%	14.2%	15.0%	11.9%	9.2%	14.2%
Other	0.0%	7.1%	7.5%	6.6%	5.4%	2.3%	6.3%
<b>Total N</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>790</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>863</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>3,631</b>

### Career Plans By Gender

Although men and women reported similar career plans over the next two years, women were more likely than men to plan to pursue non-degree training in social work and to increase their social work hours. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to plan to retire (8% of men versus 5% of women).

### *Career Plans By Race/Ethnicity*

There were some striking differences in career plans between non-Hispanic White and minority social workers, particularly Black/African Americans. African Americans were significantly less likely than Whites to say that they planned to remain in their current position (54% compared to 72%), and significantly more likely to say that they planned to seek a new opportunity/promotion (40% compared to 24%) or to leave the field of social work but continue to work (10% compared to 4%). This suggests the need for retention strategies for African American practitioners. Both African American and Hispanic/Latino social workers were more likely than Whites to report plans to pursue an additional social work degree or non-social work degree.

### *Career Plans By Degree*

There were few significant differences in career plans between BSWs and MSWs. BSWs were significantly more likely than MSWs to report that they planned to seek a new opportunity or promotion in the next two years (27% compared to 14%).

## **Workplace Safety**

Table 2 shows the extent of concerns about job safety by survey respondents in different primary employment settings. More than 4 out of 5 of those in criminal justice agencies and psychiatric hospitals reported these concerns, as did more than half of respondents in hospices, behavioral health clinics, group homes for children and adolescents, social service agencies, and schools.

Although 7 out of 10 respondents who indicated concern about job safety reported that their employer adequately addressed these concerns, nearly 30% did not. This is clearly an important issue for follow up in a subsequent study, especially if the safety concerns are related to the physical safety of the social workers.

**Table 2. Extent of Concerns About Job Safety by Licensed Social Workers, by Setting of Primary Employment, 2004**

Setting of Primary Employment	Faced w/ Personal Safety Issues?		Safety Issues Adequately Addressed?	
	% Yes	Total n	No	Yes
Criminal Justice Agency	83.7%	43	23.9%	76.1%
Psychiatric Hospital	81.8%	110	29.4%	70.6%
Hospice	60.7%	61	10.9%	89.1%
Behavioral Health Clinic	59.3%	258	32.9%	67.1%
Group Home - Child/Adolescent	55.3%	38	16.7%	83.3%
Social Service Agency	54.3%	405	41.5%	58.5%
Health Clinic/Outpatient Facility	51.0%	151	29.7%	70.3%
School	50.2%	271	36.4%	63.6%
Case Mgmt Agency - Older Adults	48.4%	31	40.0%	60.0%
Other	47.6%	191	28.3%	71.7%
Home Health Agency	47.6%	21	18.2%	81.8%
Case Mgmt Agency - Other	44.4%	45	18.2%	81.8%
Hospital/Medical Center	43.3%	312	23.0%	77.0%
Other Gov't Agency	40.4%	89	42.2%	57.8%
Group Home - Adult	36.4%	11	0.0%	100.0%
Public Health Agency	36.4%	33	44.4%	55.6%
Nursing Home	28.6%	77	19.2%	80.8%
Private Solo Practice	21.9%	251	17.1%	82.9%
Private Group Practice	18.7%	75	15.0%	85.0%
Employee Assistance Program	16.7%	18	14.3%	85.7%
Higher Education	14.3%	49	25.0%	75.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46.7%</b>	<b>2,540</b>	<b>29.8%</b>	<b>70.2%</b>

### Factors Influencing Employment Decisions

The factors most frequently cited by social workers that would influence them to change their current position were higher salary (73%), lifestyle/family concerns (52%), more interesting work (37%), and stress of the current job (35%). Figure 17 provides a ranked list of reasons for changing the respondents current position.

#### *Factors By Gender*

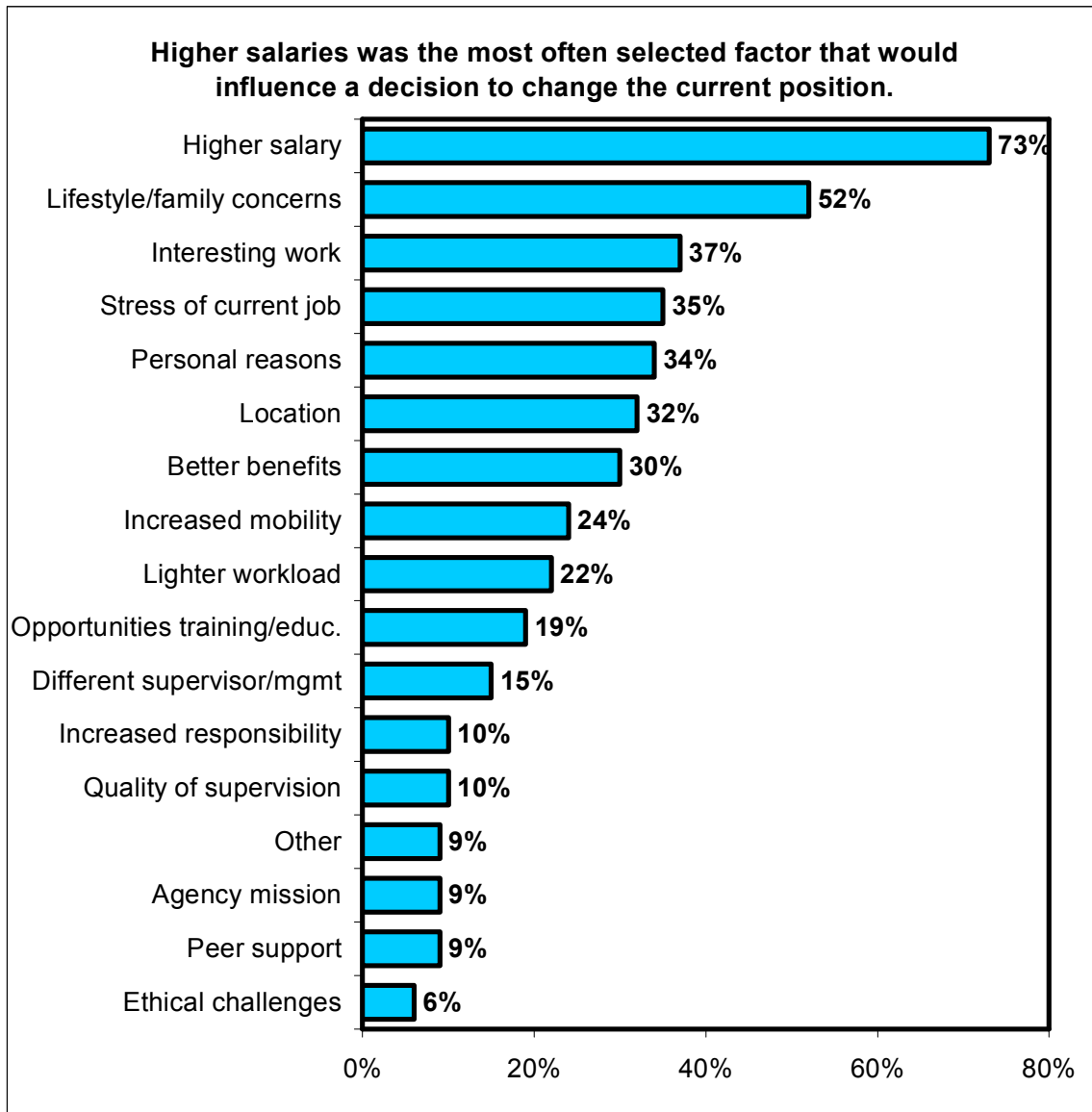
Although there were few gender differences in career plans, there were several significant differences in the factors that would motivate male or female social workers to change positions.

Men were more likely than women to say that they would change positions for more interesting work, increased mobility, location, or agency mission. Women were more likely than men to say that they would change positions due to lifestyle/family concerns, quality of supervision, or stress of current job.

#### *Factors By Race/Ethnicity*

Black/African American social workers were more likely than Whites to cite several important factors in influencing whether they would change position: higher salary (81% compared to 72%), opportunities for education or training (26% compared to 18%), ethical challenges (11% compared to 6%), and increased mobility (26% compared to 18%). Hispanic/Latino and Asian social workers were also significantly more likely than Whites to cite mobility as a potential reason for changing (26% and 22%, respectively).

**Figure 1. Reasons That Would Influence Changing Current Employment Position**



### **Working with Other Social Workers**

Table 3 provides insights about the extent to which licensed social workers may be isolated from other social workers in their employment. It shows that only in schools did substantially fewer than half of respondents report that they were supervised by a social worker. It also shows that fewer than 1 respondent in 5 (19.3%) indicated there were no other social workers employed in their primary work setting.

This suggests that a majority of licensed social workers have contact with other social workers in their work. Additional research would be required to assess the nature and extent of the professional contact that is involved.



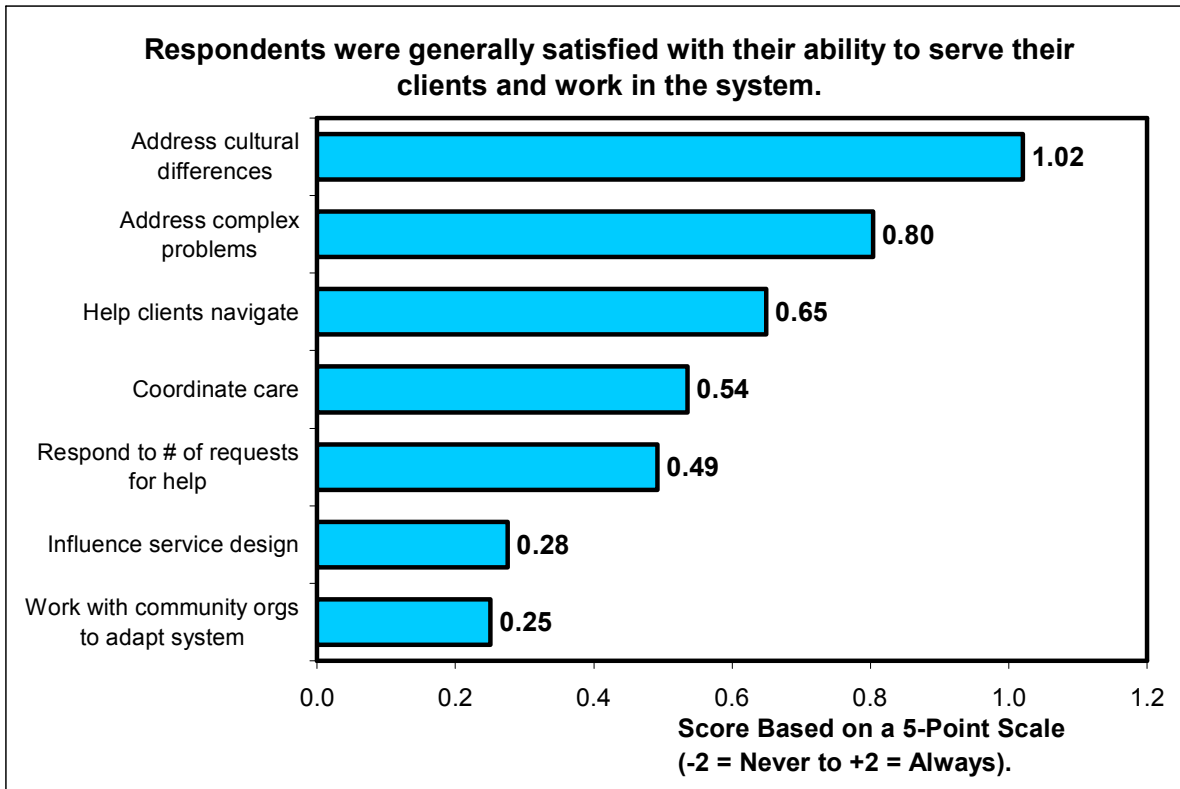
**Table 3. Percentages of Employed Licensed Social Workers Working with Other Social Workers, for Selected Practice Areas**

Practice Area	Percent Supervised by a SW	Number of Other SWs Employed			
		None	1-5	6-10	11+
Mental Health	53.4%	24.0%	33.5%	15.0%	27.5%
Health	42.5%	13.0%	35.0%	17.0%	35.0%
Child Welfare/Family	69.1%	6.5%	24.2%	16.8%	52.4%
Aging	43.5%	23.0%	46.4%	9.9%	20.7%
School	20.3%	29.9%	37.5%	10.7%	21.9%
Adolescents	47.1%	17.2%	39.7%	16.6%	26.5%
Addictions	50.0%	17.1%	46.3%	22.0%	14.6%
Other	47.6%	18.7%	41.2%	12.9%	27.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.9%</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	<b>36.0%</b>	<b>14.6%</b>	<b>30.1%</b>

### **Satisfaction with Work Situations**

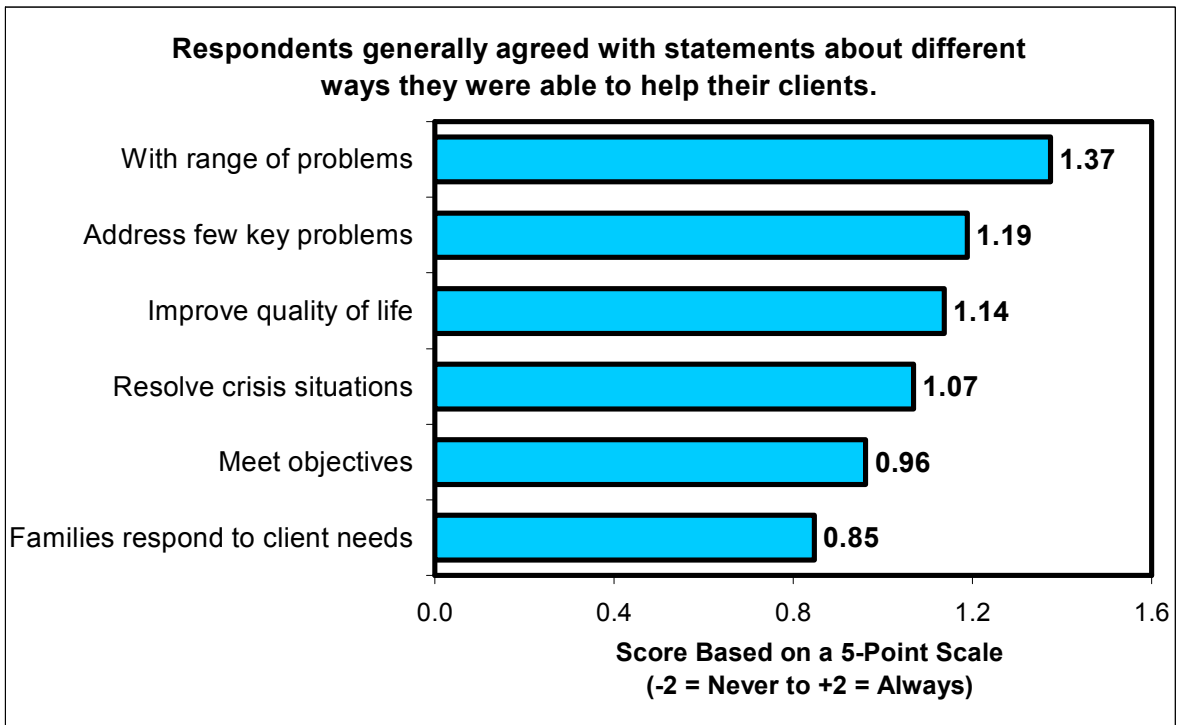
On average, licensed social workers reported that they were satisfied with their ability on a number of different dimensions of social work practice. Figure 2 shows that they were most satisfied with their ability to address cultural differences and address complex problems, and least satisfied with their ability to influence service design and to work with community organizations to adapt the service delivery system.

**Figure 2. Ratings of Agreement of Respondents with Statements About Their Practice Environment**



Social workers were also, on average, positive in their assessments of what they have accomplished with their clients. Figure 3 shows that they were most likely to agree that they helped clients with a range of problems and that they helped clients to address a few key problems, and least likely to agree that they helped client families respond to client needs. Even the lowest average score, however, was close to the equivalent of 4 on a 5-point scale, indicating that social workers were generally satisfied with what their efforts had been able to accomplish.

**Figure 3. Extent of Agreement by Licensed Social Workers With Statements About Their Ability to Help Clients**

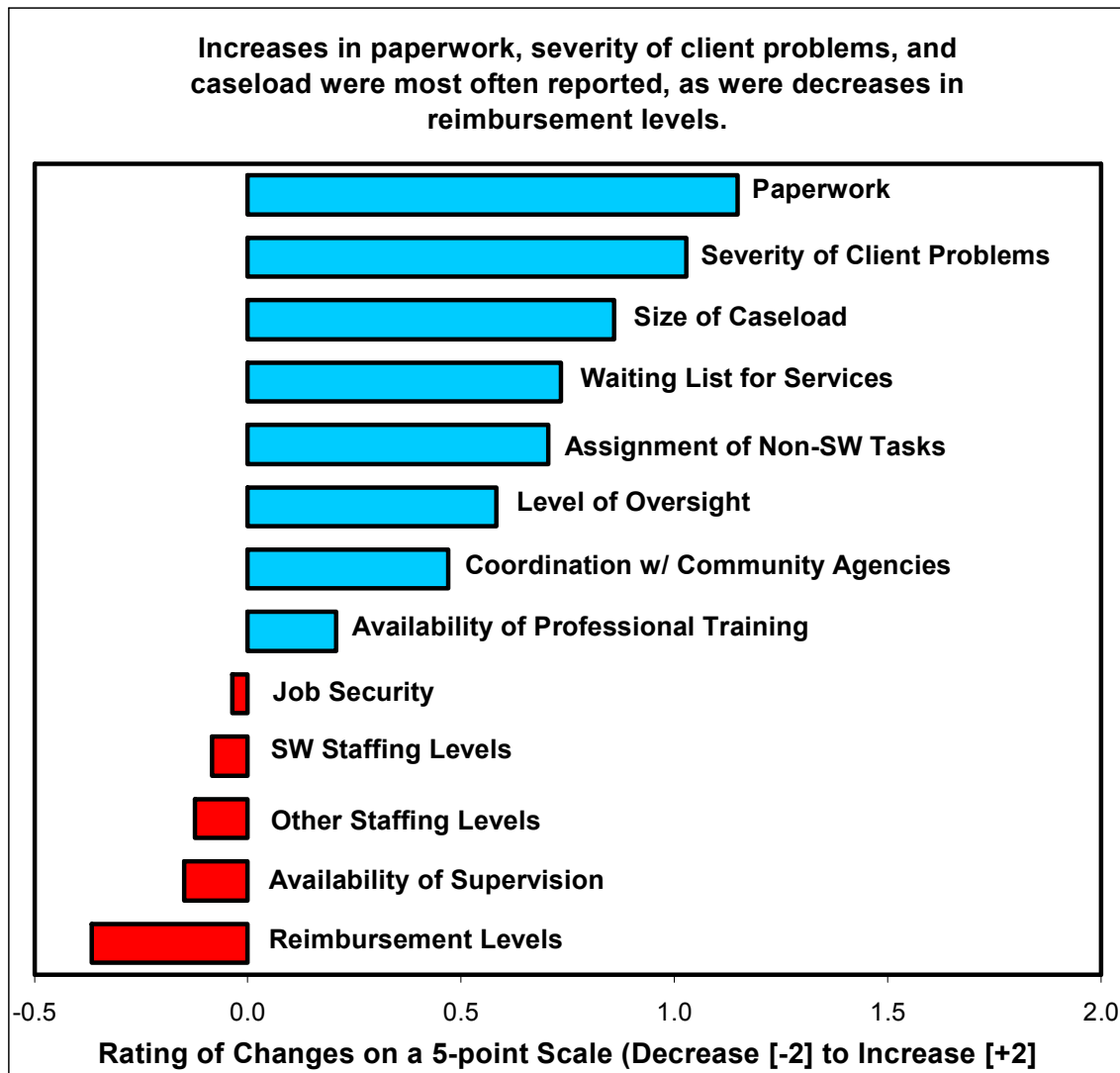


### **Changes in the Workplace**

Although individual responses varied, Figure 4 shows that licensed social workers overall indicated that in the previous two years, they had experienced increases in paperwork, severity of client problems, caseload size, waiting lists for services, assignment of non-social work tasks, level of oversight, coordination with community agencies, and availability of professional training. Most of these can be characterized as barriers to effective practice, except for the latter two, which were also the factors reported to have increased the least.

Social workers also reported that they had experienced decreases in job security, staffing levels (both social worker and other), availability of supervision, and levels of reimbursement, with the greatest decrease indicated for the latter.

**Figure 4. Changes in the Practice of Social Work in the Past Two Years Reported by Licensed Social Workers in 2004**

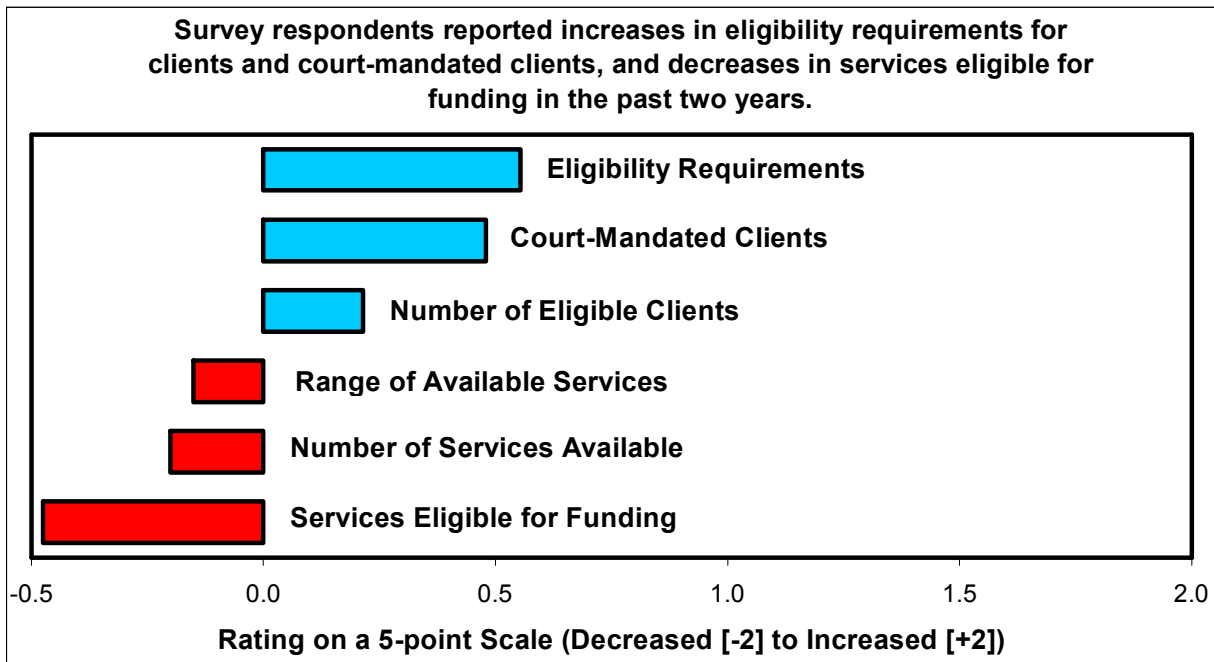


Social workers in all sectors reported increases in demands placed on them. Social workers in private practice were the most moderate in reporting change. Social workers in public agencies generally rated the magnitude of changes as greater than social workers in private-sector/non-profit organizations, and this was particularly pronounced in regard to staffing levels.

### **Changes in the Service Delivery System**

Figure 5 shows that changes in the service delivery system reported by licensed social workers were more moderate than those reported to the practice of social work. The average responses indicated that eligibility requirements had increased, the percent of clients receiving services because it was mandated by the court or a condition of some program increased, and the number of clients eligible for services increased. At the same time, social workers reported that the range and number of services available and the number of services eligible for funding had decreased.

**Figure 5. Changes in the Service Delivery System**



There was considerable variation in responses by sector of employment, with social workers in private practice reporting the greatest decreases in the range and number of services available, the number of services eligible for funding. For social workers in public-sector, the greatest increases were in the number of clients eligible for services and the proportion of court-mandated clients.

## Educational Needs of Practitioners

Table 4 shows the percentages of survey respondents in different practice areas who reported that they were interested in education and training in selected areas of social work. Only 5.9% of respondents indicated that there were no areas of interest, while nearly half (44.9%) indicated an interest in education about clinical practice.

Some noteworthy differences across the practice areas of respondents are highlighted in the table. Those in Mental Health were especially interested in clinical practice and trauma/disaster preparedness. Care management was the most often mentioned topic for respondents in Aging.

**Table 4. Percentages of Social Workers Employed Full Time in Selected Practice Areas Interested in Pursuing Selected Education/Training Topics**

Education/Training Topic	Practice Area of Primary Employment								
	Mental Health	Health	Child Welfare / Family	Aging	School	Adolescent	Addictions	Other	Total
Clinical Practice	58.8%	31.5%	38.5%	27.6%	48.4%	51.0%	45.1%	38.0%	44.9%
Trauma/Disaster Prep	31.7%	30.6%	27.1%	17.8%	27.1%	21.9%	25.6%	27.8%	28.1%
Specialty Practice Area	28.0%	22.5%	27.4%	24.0%	32.0%	31.1%	15.9%	23.2%	26.1%
Best Practices	24.2%	17.3%	28.2%	19.1%	22.7%	20.5%	30.5%	23.5%	23.3%
Program Development	17.4%	17.6%	25.5%	20.4%	19.1%	22.5%	29.3%	23.8%	20.7%
Education Administration	16.7%	17.3%	24.1%	17.8%	16.4%	17.9%	36.6%	22.2%	19.5%
Medication Use	20.4%	18.5%	14.6%	17.3%	23.1%	16.6%	19.5%	18.7%	18.8%
Professional Ethics	18.3%	22.8%	19.2%	19.1%	12.4%	16.6%	15.9%	19.8%	18.7%
Substance Abuse	19.8%	14.5%	20.6%	6.2%	13.8%	23.8%	42.7%	17.0%	18.1%
Cultural Competency	13.3%	19.4%	11.7%	14.7%	11.1%	11.9%	13.4%	18.7%	14.7%
Interdisciplinary Practice	10.6%	16.0%	11.9%	15.6%	10.7%	9.3%	7.3%	13.8%	12.3%
Delivering Rural Services	8.1%	12.0%	15.2%	11.6%	4.9%	9.9%	6.1%	13.5%	10.6%
Paperwork Management	8.8%	6.2%	11.9%	14.7%	7.1%	5.3%	11.0%	7.8%	8.9%
Community Organizing	4.7%	7.1%	13.6%	8.9%	8.9%	6.6%	7.3%	12.8%	8.6%
Other	8.7%	7.7%	5.1%	4.4%	10.7%	8.6%	11.0%	11.5%	8.6%
Care Management	2.7%	13.3%	8.7%	23.1%	3.6%	4.6%	3.7%	9.0%	7.7%
No Further Educ/Training	4.0%	6.8%	5.7%	8.0%	8.0%	6.6%	4.9%	7.0%	5.9%
Telehealth	3.7%	4.9%	1.9%	3.6%	0.9%	1.3%	0.0%	2.8%	3.0%
<b>n</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>2,903</b>

## Comparisons of Selected Social Work Practice Areas (Specialties)

One of the features of the larger study of which this report is a part is the series of detailed reports on four social work practice areas or specialties (older adults, children, health, and mental health). These four reports describe in more detail than presented in this summary/synthesis report the characteristics, work patterns, and attitudes of six different social work practice areas: Aging, Child Welfare/Family, Adolescents, Health, Mental Health, and Addiction.

This section summarizes some of the similarities and differences among these six practice areas of licensed social workers. In addition to providing a summary tabulation of the responses to a number of the questions on the 2004 survey, it also should help readers to determine whether they should consider reading one or more of the more detailed reports.

The discussion that follows is based on Table 5, a four page tabulation of responses to selected survey questions. As is the case in the body of the report, colored shading is used to highlight the practice areas that have the highest (green) and lowest (pink) values on selected characteristics and questions, where the difference is at least 10 percentage points. The text that follows provides interpretations of the data that seem especially important from the perspective of health workforce considerations.

The six practice areas/specialties in Table 5 represent 81% of the respondents to the survey who indicated they were employed either full-time or part-time in social work (question 13). The other 19% of respondents selected some other practice areas from the list in question 19.

### Similarities Across Practice Areas

For many of the questions on the 2004 survey similar response patterns were observed for all six practice areas. This suggests that, although there are some notable differences across practice areas, similarities dominate differences in many topics. Among the important commonalities are:

#### *Demographics*

A “feminization” of licensed social workers appears to be occurring in all the major practice areas. This is a phenomenon that deserves additional review in case it reflects conditions that may also be affecting women in the profession.

#### *Education and Training*

Although the majority of respondents in all six practice areas indicated that they were well prepared for their roles as social workers by their previous training, a significant minority in each practice area reported they were not. Preparation based on post-degree continuing education training was rated higher than social work degree programs.

Differences in opportunities for continuing education/training across practice areas were not noteworthy. Between 11% and 14% reporting “few” or “no” opportunities for continuing education across the six practice areas.

**Table 5. Comparisons of Selected Characteristics of Licensed Social Workers in Several Practice Areas**

	Aging	Child Welfare/ Family	Adolescents	Health	Mental Health	Addiction	All Licensed SWs
<b>1. Demographic Profile of Licensed Social Workers</b>							
% of survey respondents	9%	13%	6%	13%	37%	3%	100%
Gender:							
Female	90%	83%	77%	89%	81%	70%	82%
Male	10%	17%	23%	11%	19%	30%	18%
% Non-Hispanic White	90%	85%	87%	86%	89%	87%	86%
Median Age	49	43	42	48	50.5	47.5	49
Location of practice							
Metropolitan areas	78%	72%	75%	85%	84%	94%	81%
Rural areas	4%	3%	4%	2%	2%	5%	3%
Median years experience in social work	14	9	9.5	15	15	10	13
MSWs	16	11	10	16	15	10	14
BSWs	10	8	10	12.5	N/A	N/A	9
<b>2. Education and Training</b>							
Highest earned social work degree							
MSW	64%	64%	79%	82%	90%	86%	79%
BSW	22%	24%	11%	13%	3%	3%	12%
No social work degree	7%	12%	10%	4%	4%	8%	8%
% reporting they were well prepared by:							
Formal degree program	55%	61%	65%	60%	60%	54%	60%
Post degree program	67%	71%	67%	69%	74%	69%	71%
% reporting "many" opportunities for CE/training	58%	56%	62%	61%	63%	58%	59%
% reporting "few" or "no" opportunities for CE/training	14%	13%	11%	12%	12%	10%	13%
Most common areas for desired training/CE	Clinical pract (27%); Specialty pract area (24%); Care mgmt (22%)	Clinical pract (41%); Specialty pract area (29%); Best pract (27%)	Clinical pract (54%); Specialty pract area (31%); Trauma/ disaster (25%)	Clinical pract (33%); Trauma/ disaster (29%); Specialty pract area (25%)	Clinical pract (59%); Trauma/ disaster (31%); Specialty pract area (29%)	Substance abuse (47%); Clinical practice (46%); Admin (34%)	Clinical pract (46%); Trauma/ disaster prep (27%); Specialty pract area (27%)
<b>3. What Social Workers Do</b>							
One employer, FT	60%	71%	59%	62%	58%	65%	61%
One employer, PT	18%	10%	16%	15%	18%	7%	15%
Multiple employers	22%	19%	25%	23%	24%	28%	24%
Most common role	Direct Svc (88%)	Direct Svc (79%)	Direct Svc (92%)	Direct Svc (92%)	Direct Svc (91%)	Direct Svc (86%)	Direct Svc (87%)
Median hours per week providing direct services to clients	20	20	20	28	20	20.5	20
Median % of total hours spent on direct services to clients	67%	62.5%	68%	75%	75%	60%	68%



**Table 5, continued**

	Aging	Child Welfare/ Family	Adolescents	Health	Mental Health	Addiction	All Licensed SWs
Years with current employer:							
< 1 year	15%	10%	16%	12%	9%	11%	10%
<5 years	51%	52%	<b>62%</b>	50%	<b>45%</b>	62%	47%
16+ years	15%	16%	9%	15%	<b>21%</b>	<b>7%</b>	18%
% carrying caseloads of 50 or more clients	<b>44%</b>	18%	15%	37%	18%	<b>13%</b>	24%
Most common tasks performed	Info/Refer (91%); Scrn/ Assess (88%); Case Mgmt (76%)	Info/Refer (83%); Scrn/ Assess (81%); Crisis Intervene (79%)	Indiv Couns (82%); Info/Refer (81%); Crisis Intervene (79%)	Info/Refer (88%); Scrn/ Assess (85%); Crisis Intervene (76%)	Indiv Couns (78%); Scrn/ Assess (77%); Treatmnt Plan (76%)	Scrn/ Assess (85%); Indiv Couns (80%); Treatmnt Plan (76%)	Info/Refer (83%); Scrn/ Assess (82%); Crisis Intervene (75%)
Top 3 tasks performed more than 50% of the time	Home visits (18%); Individual counseling (17%); Case mgmt (14%)	Case mgmt (14%); Home visits (14%); Supervision of staff (12%)	Indiv couns (25%); Psycho-thrpy (16%); Case mgmt (13%)	Indiv couns (19%); Dischrge plan (17%); Case mgmt (15%)	Psycho-thrpy (49%); Indiv couns (43%); Psycho-ed (8%)	Indiv couns (22%); Psycho-therapy (25%); Case mgmt (14%)	Indiv couns (29%); Psycho-therapy (25%); Case mgmt (12%)
% performing tasks that tend to be:							
Above level of skills/training	<b>27%</b>	28%	<b>38%</b>	32%	36%	31%	34%
Below level of skills/training	<b>19%</b>	14%	9%	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>	12%	13%
<b>4. Where Social Workers Work</b>							
Sector:							
Non-profit sector	<b>25%</b>	32%	38%	<b>57%</b>	32%	45%	37%
Public sector	44%	<b>53%</b>	32%	<b>19%</b>	20%	21%	33%
For-profit sector	<b>28%</b>	<b>6%</b>	13%	24%	11%	25%	14%
Private practice	4%	10%	17%	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>37%</b>	9%	17%
Most common employment setting	Nursing home (29%)	Social Svc Agency (59%)	Private Pract (17%)	Hospital (56%)	Private Pract (39%)	Behav Hlth Clin (23%)	Private Pract (18%)
<b>5. Social Workers' Work Environment</b>							
Median Wage:							
MSWs	\$46.9K	<b>\$44.0K</b>	\$44.8K	<b>\$50.7K</b>	\$50.3K	\$48.0K	\$49.2K
BSWs	\$33.9K	\$33.4K	N/A	<b>\$36.2K</b>	N/A	N/A	\$34.5K
% satisfied with wages	68%	61%	66%	<b>78%</b>	71%	<b>59%</b>	70%
% satisfied with benefits	69%	76%	80%	<b>85%</b>	<b>64%</b>	66%	72%

**Table 5, continued**

	Aging	Child Welfare/ Family	Adolescents	Health	Mental Health	Addiction	All Licensed SWs
Job safety							
Experience safety issues	32%	64%	55%	44%	58%	53%	49%
Employer adequately address issues	74%	58%	70%	84%	68%	64%	69%
Vacancies in agency:							
Are common	11%	40%	18%	13%	20%	24%	20%
Are hard to fill	14%	23%	20%	19%	26%	42%	21%
SW positions are filled with non-SWs	24%	45%	31%	14%	23%	31%	27%
SW functions are outsourced	11%	38%	30%	11%	15%	12%	20%
Supervised by a social worker	42%	69%	52%	42%	55%	49%	49%
Only social worker at primary job	25%	4%	15%	14%	6%	19%	14%
There is respect for social work services in agency	64%	67%	70%	66%	70%	65%	66%
<b>6. Who Do Social Workers Serve</b>							
Caseload >50% male	29%	52%	61%	62%	43%	86%	53%
Caseload >50% non-Hispanic white	72%	48%	50%	48%	66%	51%	57%
Serve clients ages 0-12	8%	69%	48%	50%	42%	15%	61%
Serve clients ages 13-21	12%	65%	94%	67%	66%	54%	76%
Serve clients ages 22-54	54%	59%	35%	95%	84%	89%	87%
Serve clients ages 55+	93%	26%	13%	89%	65%	58%	72%
Predominant health coverage of clients is Medicaid	36%	74%	54%	25%	32%	25%	41%
Predominant health coverage of clients is private insurance	1%	13%	24%	9%	44%	23%	24%
Predominant health coverage of clients is Medicare	57%	2%	3%	57%	7%	1%	16%
Most common client problem	Chronic Med (99%)	Psycho-soc stress (96%)	Psycho-soc stress (97%)	Chronic Med (100%)	Psycho-soc strss (100%)	Subst abuse (100%)	Psycho-soc stress (98%)
2nd most common client problem	Physical disabil (99%)	Mental illness (93%)	Co-occur cond (96%)	Psycho-soc strss (100%)	Mental illness (97%)	Psychosoc stress (99%)	Mental illness (96%)
3rd most common client problem	Mental illness (97%)	Substance abuse (84%)	Mental illness (94%)	Mental illness (98%)	Affective cond (97%)	Mental illness (98%)	Co-occur cond (93%)
<b>7. Perspectives on Practice/Career Plans</b>							
Most frequently reported changes in SW practice in past 2 years							
Increased paperwork	79%	79%	79%	69%	73%	75%	75%
Increased caseload size	66%	69%	68%	71%	65%	67%	68%
Increased severity of client problems	70%	75%	82%	76%	68%	73%	73%
Increased waiting lists for services	60%	62%	57%	62%	57%	52%	60%
Most frequently reported changes in service delievery system							
Increased eligibility requirements for clients	49%	47%	47%	51%	56%	44%	51%
Decreased services eligible for funding	46%	48%	47%	49%	53%	52%	50%

**Table 5, continued**

	Aging	Child Welfare/ Family	Adolescents	Health	Mental Health	Addiction	All Licensed SWs
Satisfaction with skills:							
Helping clients with a range of problems	92%	85%	91%	93%	93%	88%	91%
Improving quality of life for clients	<b>91%</b>	<b>81%</b>	85%	86%	89%	88%	87%
Helping clients address key issues	83%	<b>81%</b>	87%	82%	88%	<b>92%</b>	86%
Satisfaction with resources:							
Agency services	<b>77%</b>	68%	67%	71%	<b>60%</b>	68%	67%
Community resources	<b>72%</b>	53%	59%	64%	<b>48%</b>	<b>48%</b>	57%
Mental health services	56%	47%	62%	<b>43%</b>	<b>72%</b>	56%	59%
Medical care	<b>73%</b>	<b>41%</b>	57%	<b>73%</b>	55%	43%	56%
Medications	65%	<b>37%</b>	58%	55%	<b>69%</b>	47%	57%
Career plans							
Plan to remain in current position	67%	59%	68%	<b>75%</b>	72%	<b>53%</b>	70%
Plan to leave social work practice	4%	8%	2%	5%	4%	6%	5%
Plan to retire	9%	7%	3%	4%	5%	4%	6%
Most common reasons to consider making a job change:							
Higher salary	75%	80%	78%	74%	<b>70%</b>	<b>84%</b>	73%
Lifestyle/ family concerns	53%	49%	48%	53%	<b>55%</b>	<b>43%</b>	52%
More interesting work	38%	40%	32%	40%	35%	39%	37%
Job stress	37%	<b>46%</b>	36%	39%	33%	<b>30%</b>	35%

### *Employment Patterns*

Employment patterns of licensed social workers were similar across all six practice areas. Respondents in Child Welfare/Family were somewhat more likely to work full-time for a single employer, and those in Adolescents were somewhat less likely.

The most frequently mentioned role in all six practice areas was direct service to clients, and the median number of hours in this role was 20. About two-thirds of total hours of licensed social workers were devoted to direct services to clients.

About 10 percent of licensed social workers in all six practice areas had been with their current employer for less than a year, and about half for less than five years. Fewer than one in five had been with their current employer for more than 15 years, with the exception of Mental Health where 21% had been with their employer for more than 15 years.

Individual counseling was on the list of top three tasks performed for more than 50% of the time for all practice areas except Child Welfare/Family; and case management was mentioned on the top three list all practice areas except Mental Health. The patterns on these task lists were generally consistent with the expectations of the authors.

More than one in ten survey respondents reported being asked to perform tasks below their level of skill/training, with the highest percentages in Aging and Health (19% each). In addition, about one in three respondents in each of the six practice areas reported being asked to perform tasks above their level of skill/training, with the highest percentage in Adolescents (38%).

### *Work Environment*

More than two out of three respondents rated their wages/salary as “adequate” or “very adequate.” The percentage was highest for those in Health (78%), and lowest for Addiction (59%).

Approximately two of three respondents in all six practice areas strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “There is respect/support for social work services within my agency.”

### *Social Work Practice/Career Plans*

A majority of respondents reported increased paperwork (75%), caseload size (68%), severity of client problems (73%), and waiting lists for services (60%). Although there were variations across the six practice areas, the differences were not noteworthy.

About half of the respondents also reported changes in the service delivery system, including increasing eligibility requirements for clients and decreasing services eligible for funding. Differences across the six practice areas were not noteworthy.

About 9 of 10 respondents were satisfied with their ability to address their clients’ problems and improve their quality of life. Variations across the six practice areas were not noteworthy.

About 5% of respondents who were employed indicated they planned to leave social work or retire over the next two years. Variations across the six specialties were not noteworthy.

The most often cited factor that would “influence a decision to change your current position” was higher salary (73%). “Lifestyle/family concerns” was the only other factor mentioned by a majority (52%) of the respondents. The differences in these factors across the six practice areas were not noteworthy.

## **Differences Across Practice Areas**

Although there are many similarities among the respondents in different practice areas. There are also many differences. Some of the important ones are highlighted below.

### *Demographics*

The percentage of male respondents was the highest for Addictions (30%) and lowest for Aging (10%). The reason for this difference in career choices is not revealed by the survey responses.

Social workers working in Child Welfare and Adolescents were notably younger than those in other practice areas. The median ages were 43 and 42, respectively.

### *Education and Training*

Respondents in Mental Health and Addiction were more likely than those in other practice areas to have an MSW (90% and 86%, respectively). Those in Child Welfare were most likely to have no social work degree (12%), while those in Health and Mental Health were least likely to have no social work degree (each at 4%).

Respondents in Child Welfare/Family were most likely to have a BSW as their highest social work degree (24%). Those in Mental Health and Addiction were least likely (4% each) to have a BSW.

Clinical practice was the most often cited area in which continuing education/training was desired for all practice areas except Addiction, where it was a close second behind “substance abuse.”

### *Sectors and Settings*

The sectors and settings in which licensed social workers work varied more across the practice areas than did employment patterns. Respondents in Health were most likely to work in the non-profit sector and in hospitals. Those in Child Welfare/Families were most likely to work in the public sector and in social service agencies. More than one in three of those in Mental Health reported that they were in private practice. The largest percentage reporting that they worked in the for-profit sector were in Aging.

### *Work Environment*

Median wages were highest for respondents in the Health practice area (\$50,700), and lowest for Child Welfare/Family (\$44,000). These patterns appear to be related closely to the employment settings of the respondents.

Nearly half (49%) of respondents indicated that they “faced personal safety issues in their primary employment practice”. This percentage was highest for Child Welfare/Family (64%) and lowest for Aging (32%). More than two in three (69%) of respondents indicated that these “safety issues are appropriately addressed by your employer”. This percentage was highest for the Health practice area (84%), and lowest for the Child Welfare/Family practice area (58%). This is clearly an issue that requires further attention in the workplace.

One in five respondents indicated that vacancies in social work positions are “common” (20%) and “difficult to fill” (21%). The highest percentage reporting vacancies are common was for the

Child Welfare/Family practice area (40%), and the lowest was for Aging (10%). The highest percentage reporting vacancies are hard to fill was for the Addiction practice area (42%), and the lowest was for Aging (14%).

The practice of employers “recruiting non-social workers to fill social work vacancies” was most often reported for the Child Welfare/Family practice area (45%). It was least often reported for the Health practice area (14%).

The practice of employers “outsourcing any social work functions” was most often reported for the Child Welfare/Family practice area (38%), and least often reported for the Aging and Health practice areas (11%).

Supervision by a social worker varied from 69% of respondents in the Child Welfare/Family practice area to 42% of respondents in Aging. Twenty-five percent of respondents in Aging reported no other social workers in their primary work setting, while only 4% of respondents in Child Welfare/Family reported no other social workers in their primary work setting.

#### *Clients of Social Workers*

The percentage of respondents who reported that more than 50% of their clients were male varied from 86% for the Addiction practice area to 29% for Aging.

The percentage of respondents who reported that more than 50% of their clients were non-Hispanic White varied from 72% for the Aging practice area to 29% for Health and Child Welfare/Family.

The age distribution of clients generally conformed to prior expectations, with the largest percentage of respondents seeing older adults in the Aging practice area, the largest percentage seeing children ages 0-12 in Child Welfare/Family, and the largest percentage seeing children ages 13-21 in Adolescents.

The largest percentage of respondents reporting Medicaid as their clients’ “most common source of health coverage” was Child Welfare/Family (74%). Private insurance was rated highest by 44% of respondents in the Mental Health practice area. Medicare was rated highest by 57% of respondents in both Aging and Health.

The three most common client conditions varied somewhat across the six practice areas, with only mental illness appearing on all six lists. Of the rest, only psychosocial stress appeared on as many as five of the lists.

#### *Practice/Career Plans*

A majority of respondents were satisfied with their ability to access services for clients. The variations across the six practice areas were generally consistent with the respective missions of the practice areas, e.g., access to medical care was rated highest for the Health practice area.

Seven of ten respondents indicated that they planned to remain in their current position over the next two years. The lowest percentage was for Addiction (53%), and the highest percentage was for Health (75%).

### **Future Supply and Demand for Licensed Social Workers**

Although it is not possible to estimate the future supply of and demand for licensed social workers based solely on the 2004 survey responses, other studies have considered this issue. The

discussion that follows refers to some of the relevant findings and conclusions found both in the 2004 survey responses and in the broader literature.

The 2004 survey responses revealed a number of findings that suggest that the demand for licensed social workers may increase in the future. Many respondents reported increased caseloads in the past two years. There were also reports of increased use of non-social workers to fill vacant social work positions, and increased outsourcing of social work tasks. Depending on how employers of licensed social workers decide to respond to growing demands for services, all of these findings could result in significant increases in the demand for social workers and their services.

Indications from a number of sources outside the 2004 survey also suggest that demand for licensed social workers in the aggregate may increase in the coming decade and beyond. The 2006-07 BLS Occupational Handbook projects that the demand for new social workers will increase by between 18% and 26% by the year 2014 [BLS, 2005]. Much of this increase is attributed to the aging of the population which carries with it increased demand for social work services.

The likely increase in demand for social work services due to the aging of the population was also highlighted in a recent report by the Center for Health Workforce Studies [2005b]. They pointed out that the projected 54% growth in the number of older adults in the U.S. between 2000 and 2020 is likely to be a primary driver of increased demand for social work services in coming decades.

Another source of potential increase in demand was suggested in an article by Dohm [2000]. She reported that social work is one of 20 professions that will be most affected by baby-boomer retirements. She estimated that there will be a need for 54,000 more social workers just to balance out retirements for the period 2003 to 2008. She warned further that the effect of baby-boomer retirements would be even more dramatic in the decade following 2008.

The bottom-line conclusion based on all of these findings is that, even though there exists in the U.S. a well-developed infrastructure of social work education that produces more than 30,000 MSWs and BSWs per year, one cannot be certain that this educational pipeline will continue to meet fully the future demands for new licensed social workers. Even if the education system continues to meet the demands for new licensed social workers in the aggregate, some employment sectors may experience difficulties recruiting and retaining social workers to provide frontline services. This may be a particular issue for some not-for-profit agencies which may already be experiencing a precarious balance between supply and demand for licensed social workers.