

LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS IN HEALTH, 2004

Chapter 6 of 7

Who Do Social Workers Serve?

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For

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

Summary of the Findings

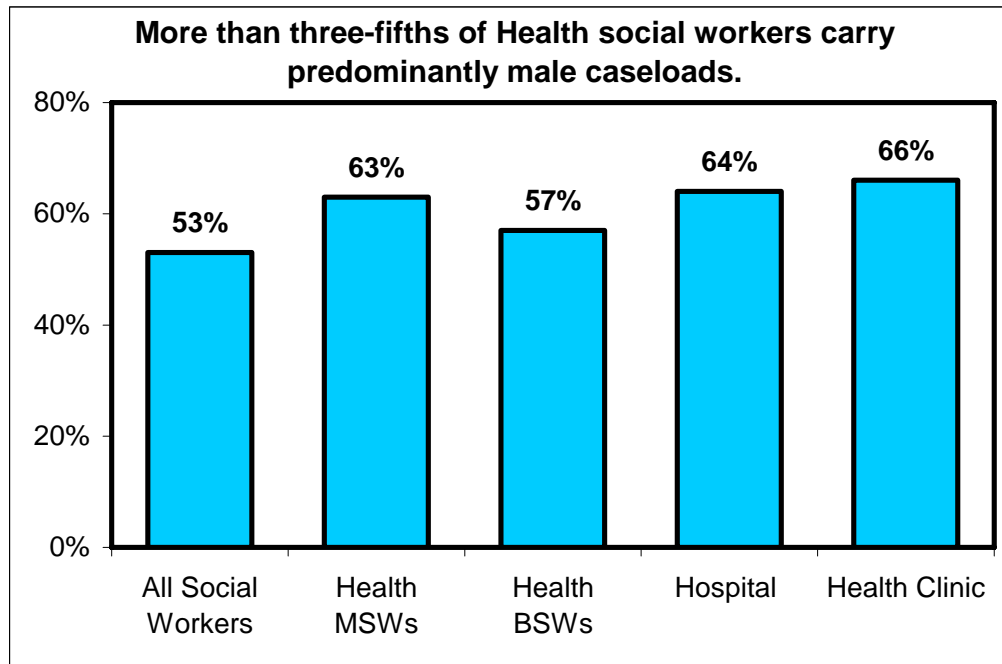
- Health social workers are more likely to carry client caseloads that are predominantly male (62%) than social workers overall (53%).
- These social workers are more likely to serve clients of color than social workers overall (52% versus 43%).
- Health social workers are more likely than social workers overall to serve older adults (56% versus 39%).
- Health BSWs are more likely than MSWs to provide services to older adults.
- Health social workers see clients from all age groups
- Social workers in health clinics have the most diverse case mix, and those in hospices the least.
- Over three quarters of the clients of Health social workers receive health coverage through publicly funded programs. Over half are covered through Medicare (57%), and a quarter are covered through Medicaid (25%). Nine per cent of clients receive coverage through private insurance.
- BSWs are more likely than MSWs to serve clients who receive Medicaid (32% versus 24%).
- Licensed Health social workers see clients with a broad range of diagnoses. Over half see “many clients” with chronic medical conditions (82%), psychosocial stressors (80%), acute medical conditions (73%), co-occurring disorders (63%), and physical disabilities (54%).

Demographics

Gender

Health social workers are more likely to serve caseloads that are predominantly male than social workers overall (62% versus 53%). BSWs are somewhat less likely to serve predominantly male caseloads than MSWs (57% versus 63%). Social workers in health clinics are most likely to have predominantly male caseloads (66%), followed by those in hospitals (64%) and hospices (60%).

Figure 1. Percentages of Social Workers With Predominantly (More Than 50%) Caseloads, by Practice Area, Degree, and Employment Setting



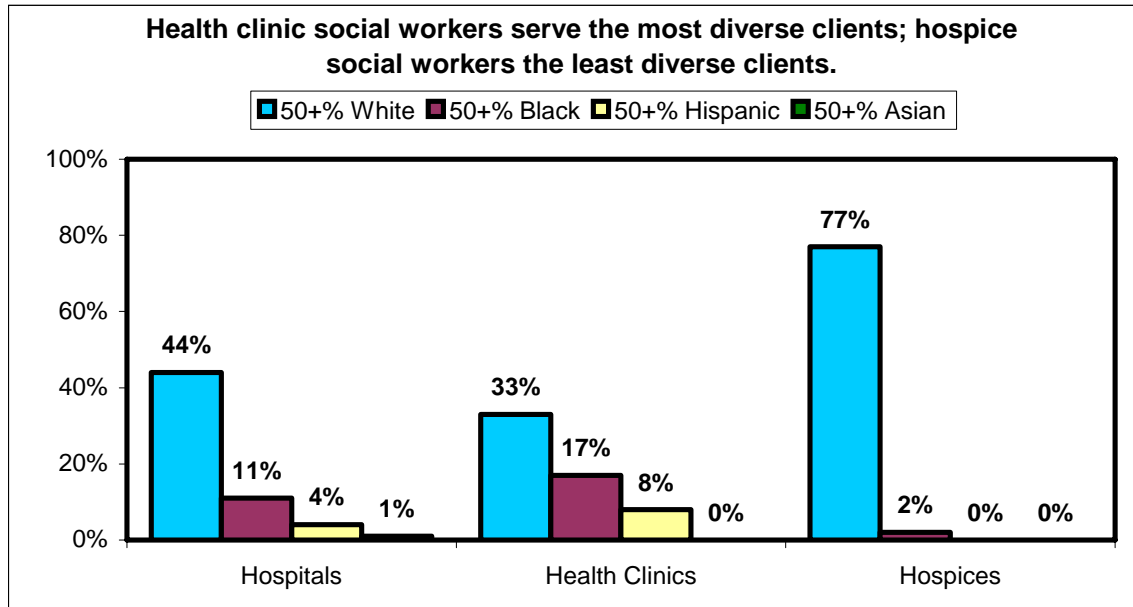
Race/Ethnicity

Caseloads of Health social workers are more diverse than those of licensed social workers overall. Almost half (48%) serve caseloads that are predominantly non-Hispanic white compared to almost three-fifths (57%) of social workers overall.

Few social workers carry caseloads that are predominantly composed of any *single* minority group: Eleven percent have caseloads that are predominantly Black/African-American versus 10% for all social workers, and 5% have caseloads that are predominantly Hispanic/Latino versus 5% for all social workers. Fewer than 1% see caseloads that are predominantly Asian or Native American, consistent with social workers overall.

Figure 2 shows that those in health clinics had the most diverse caseloads, with two-thirds (66%) carrying caseloads that are predominantly clients of color. Those in health clinics are most likely to see caseloads that are predominantly Black/African-American (17%) or Hispanic/Latino (8%). This was followed by hospitals, where 44% of social workers reported that their caseload was predominantly non-Hispanic white, 11% see caseloads that are predominantly Black/African-American, and 4% see caseloads that are predominantly Hispanic. Hospices are the settings with the least diverse client mix, with 77% of social workers reporting that their caseloads are predominantly non-Hispanic white, compared to 44% of hospital social workers. Only 2% of hospice social workers see caseloads that are predominantly Black/African-American, and none see caseloads that are predominantly Hispanic.

Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity of Clients of Health Social Workers, by Employment Setting



Age

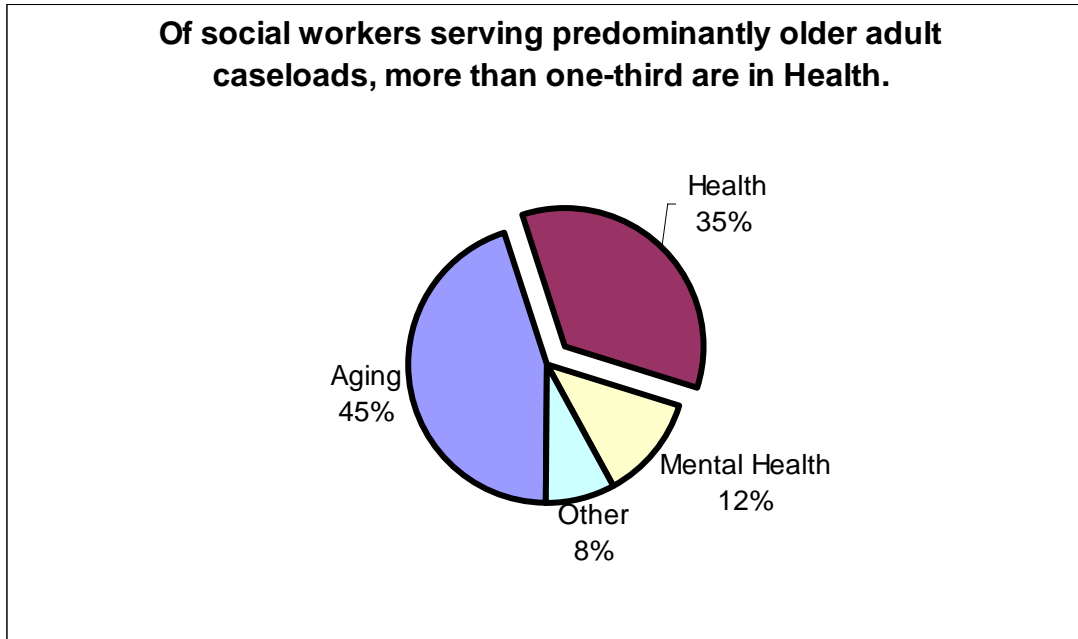
Ninety-four percent of Health social workers see clients from multiple age groups. As shown in Table 1 below, they are more likely than social workers overall to serve adults and older adults, but less likely to serve children and adolescents.

Table 1. Ages of Clients, Health Social Workers and Social Workers Overall

	Serve any...		Serve predominantly...	
	Health	Overall	Health	Overall
Children	50%	61%	6%	15%
Adolescents	67%	76%	2%	24%
Adults 22-54	95%	87%	20%	76%
Older Adults	89%	75%	56%	39%

Health social workers comprise more than one-third of all social workers who serve predominantly older adult caseloads. Although social workers in Aging comprise nearly half of those serving caseloads of more than half older adult clients (45%), the overall numbers of Health social workers are larger (13% versus 9% of all active licensed social workers), making them a key source of social work services to older adults.

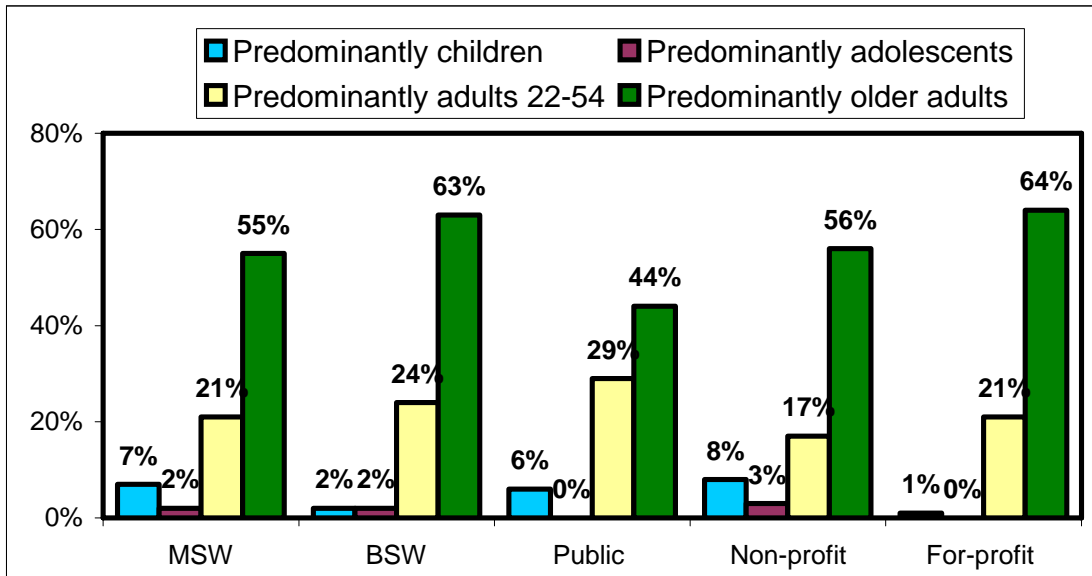
Figure 3. Practice Area of Social Workers Serving Predominantly Older Adult Caseloads.



There was relatively little variation in age of caseload by highest social work degree. However, Figure 4 shows that Health BSWs were more likely than MSWs to report that their caseloads were predominantly older adults (63% versus 55%).

Figure 4 also shows that Health social workers in the non-profit sector were more likely than those in other sectors to serve predominantly child or adolescent caseloads (8% and 3% versus 6% and 0% in the public sector and 0% for both populations in the for-profit sector). In contrast, those in the for-profit sector (who are mostly in hospitals, health clinics, and hospices) were most likely to report that their caseloads were predominantly older adults (64%), followed by those in the non-profit sector (56%) and the public sector (44%).

Figure 4. Age of Clients of Health Social Workers by Degree and Employment Sector



Health social workers in hospitals were most likely to see predominantly child caseloads (8% compared to 0% in health clinics and 3% in hospices). Roughly half of the social workers in hospitals and health clinics reported seeing predominantly older adults (50% and 52%), compared to 87% of those in hospices.

Health Care Coverage

Over four fifths of the clients of Health social workers receive health coverage through publicly funded programs. Medicare is the most common source of health coverage reported for their clients (57%), followed by Medicaid (25%). This reinforces earlier observations that Health social workers are key frontline providers of services to older adults as well as for clients in economically disadvantaged populations. Reimbursement policies in publicly funded healthcare programs will have a considerable impact on social work practice in healthcare as well as access to health care services for clients.

As seen below, an additional 10% of Health social workers report health coverage for clients through private insurance. Seven percent report that their clients are predominantly uninsured, and 1% report that their clients are “private pay”. Another 1% does not know the most common source of health insurance among their clients.

BSWs in Health were more likely than MSWs to report that Medicaid as the most common sources of health coverage among their clients (32% versus 24%).

Figure 5. Predominant Source of Client Health Coverage among Health Social Workers, by Degree

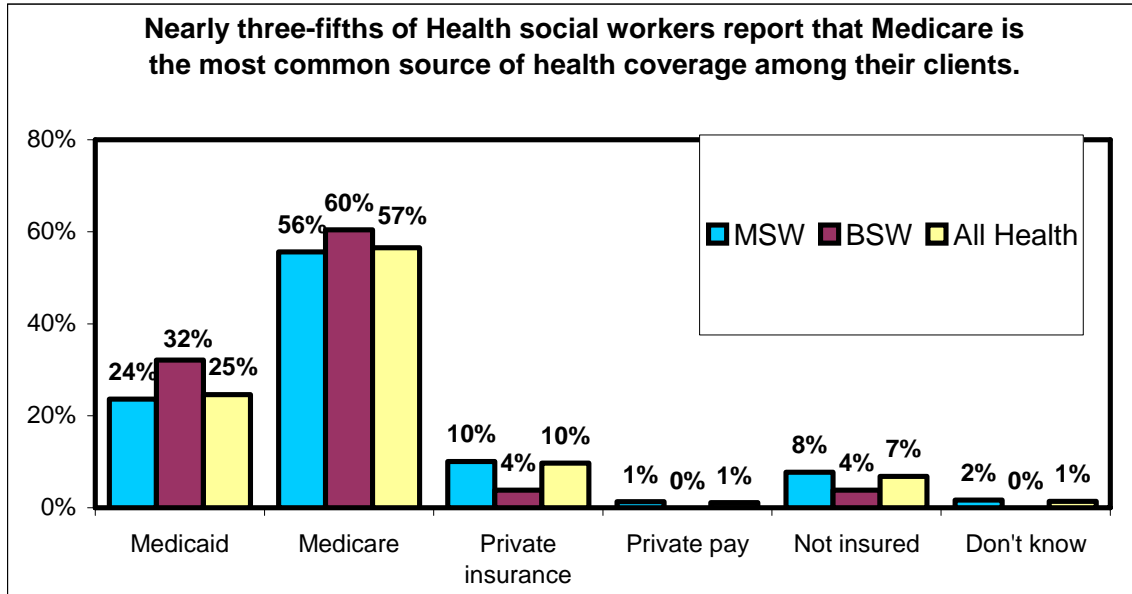
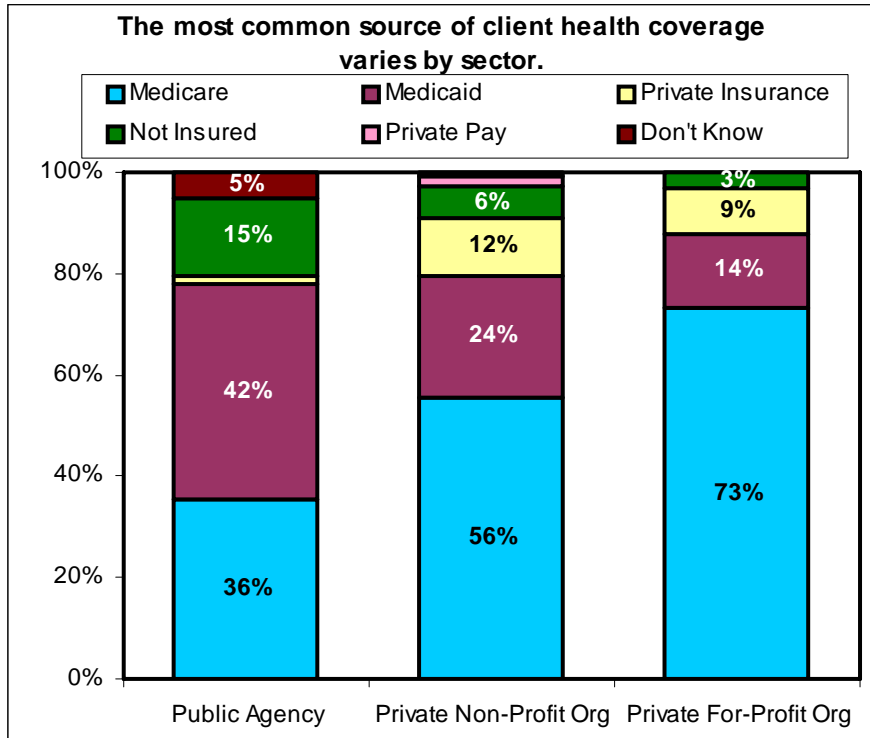


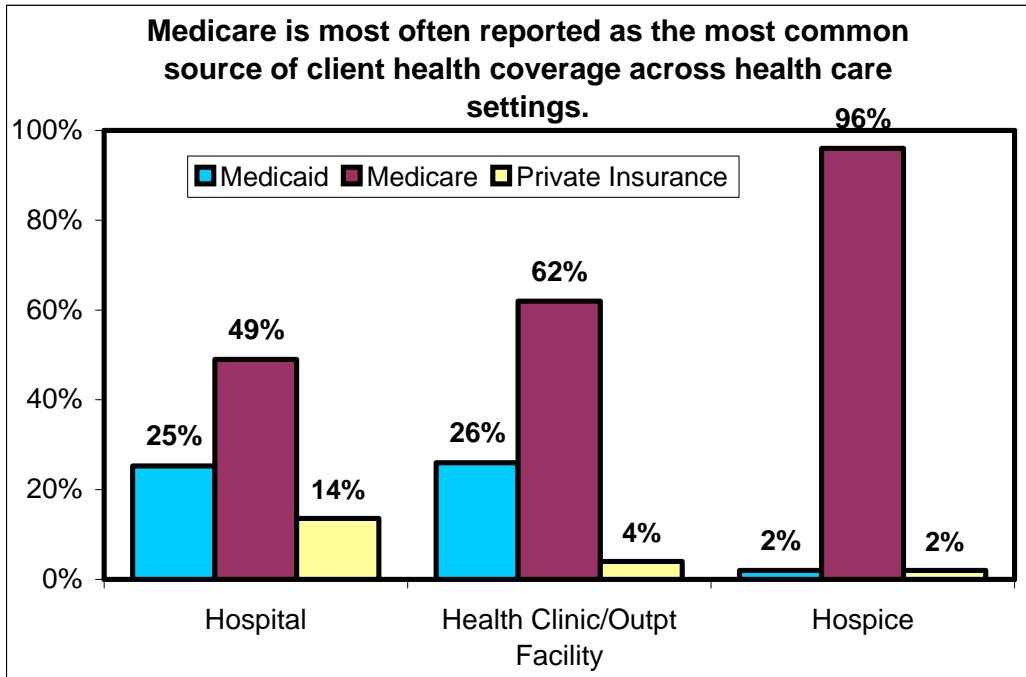
Figure 6 shows that social workers in public sector facilities were more likely to work with primarily Medicaid populations than those in the non-profit or for-profit sectors (42% versus 24% and 14%), while those in for-profit facilities were more likely to work with primarily Medicare populations than those in the public or non-profit sectors (73% versus 56% and 36%). Private insurance was most common in the non-profit sector (12%) compared to the public sector (2%) or for-profit sector (9%).

Figure 6. Most Common Source of Client Health Coverage, by Sector



Medicare is the primary source of health coverage among clients in the most common healthcare settings in which social workers are employed. As seen below, almost all patients in hospices are covered through Medicare (96%). Medicaid is as common a source of health coverage in hospitals as it is in health clinics (25% and 26%), while private insurance was only common in hospitals (14%).

Figure 7. The Most Common Source of Client Health Coverage, by Setting



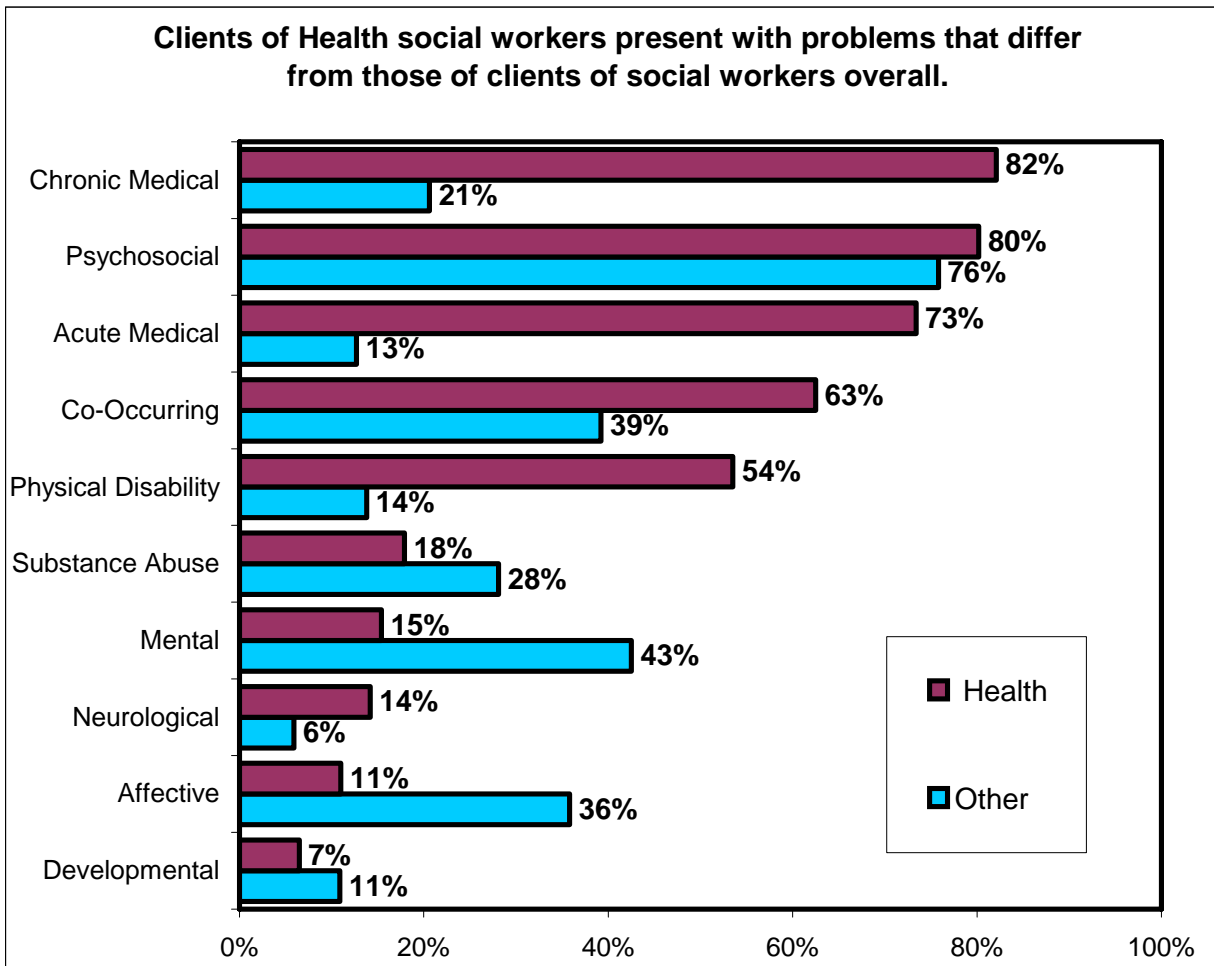
Presenting Problems

Health social workers see patients with a broad range of diagnoses. As would be expected, most see patients with acute medical conditions (98%), chronic medical conditions (100%), physical disabilities (98%), and co-occurring conditions (98%). It is important to also highlight that significant numbers of these social workers also report seeing patients with psychosocial stressors (100%), mental illness (98%), substance abuse conditions (95%), and affective conditions (85%).

High percentages of these social workers serve “many” clients with these conditions, i.e. chronic medical conditions (82%); acute medical conditions (73%); and physical disabilities (54%). Eighty percent serve “many” clients with psychosocial stressors; 18% serve “many” clients with substance abuse conditions; and 15% serve “many” clients with mental illness.

Figure 8 below, demonstrates that the presenting problems in the caseloads of Health social workers differ from those frequently addressed by other practice areas.

Figure 8. Percentages Reporting “Many” Clients With Selected Conditions, Health and Other Social Workers



MSWs serve significantly more clients with psychosocial stressors¹ and co-occurring conditions² than BSWs, but otherwise client conditions do not vary by degree among Health social workers. Although medical conditions (acute, chronic, physical disability) are similarly common across practice settings, other conditions vary by setting as shown in Table 2.

¹ $p < 0.000$

² $p = 0.043$

Table 2. Percentages Reporting Any or “Many” Clients with Types of Conditions, by Employment Setting

Type of Conditions	Any clients with...			Many clients with...		
	Hospital	Health Clinic	Hospice	Hospital	Health Clinic	Hospice
Acute Medical Conditions	99%	98%	98%	81%	61%	81%
Chronic Medical Conditions	100%	98%	100%	81%	91%	83%
Physical Disabilities	99%	96%	98%	51%	51%	54%
Mental Illness	99%	94%	96%	14%	22%	2%
Affective Conditions	89%	87%	77%	8%	15%	8%
Neurological Conditions	91%	85%	94%	14%	8%	16%
Developmental Disabilities	80%	71%	67%	5%	2%	4%
Substance Abuse Conditions	96%	94%	92%	21%	22%	4%
Psychosocial Stressors	100%	98%	100%	79%	78%	88%
Co-Occurring Conditions	99%	94%	96%	63%	71%	60%

There is also variation in the prevalence of common types of conditions by geographic location of practice, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Percentages Reporting “Many” Clients with Types of Conditions, by Geographic Location of Practice

Type of Conditions	Metropolitan Area	Micropolitan Area	Small Town	Rural Area
Acute Medical Conditions	74%	70%	67%	83%
Chronic Medical Conditions	83%	82%	79%	86%
Physical Disabilities	54%	58%	44%	43%
Mental Illness	16%	4%	8%	43%
Affective Conditions	11%	4%	9%	43%
Neurological Conditions	16%	4%	4%	14%
Developmental Disabilities	8%	4%	0%	0%
Substance Abuse Conditions	19%	4%	14%	29%
Psychosocial Stressors	82%	78%	75%	71%
Co-Occurring Conditions	63%	70%	50%	71%