

# MEDIAWATCH

Center for Workforce Studies – SPECIAL EDITION

March – April 2006



## STUDY MAKING NEWS



### STUDY: SOCIAL WORKERS ARE AGING FASTER THAN THEY CAN BE REPLACED

By Erika Cotton  
March 9, 2006

The nation's social workers are aging, according to a study released Wednesday, but low pay, high caseloads and roadblocks to professional development could discourage many from entering the field.

The National Association of Social Workers released the study at the National Press Club.

"There's already a shortage. We just see the shortage growing as we go forward," said Betsy Clark, NASW executive director.

"We talk about the baby boom generation who're about to enter their aging years smarter, richer, more assertive. But they're still going to age and end up with cancer and Alzheimer's. We need an adequately trained work force to meet the needs."

The VA hospitals, she said, employ 4,400 social workers. Several hundred of them will retire in the next five years.

"We aren't ready yet to replace all of the social workers who are going to be leaving," she said. "If we don't have enough social work staff, the children or the elderly fall through the cracks, and we feel that that's crucial."

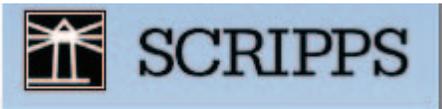
In addition, many are leaving agencies because of restrictive funding, staff cutbacks, low salaries, mountains of paperwork and high caseloads, she added.

"Although most express satisfaction, too many are frustrated with a lack of professional growth, respect and fair compensation," said Tracy Whitaker, director of the NASW Center for Workforce Studies.

The study, the first to ever analyze social workers, should help advocates go to Congress with a proposal on how to best recruit and retain people in the field, Clark said. The problem the industry is facing right now is how to fund incentives like loan forgiveness that would attract more people.

#### Work force facts

- The number of new social workers providing services to older adults is decreasing.
- The supply of licensed social workers does not meet the needs of organizations serving children and families.



**FEWER SOCIAL WORKERS READY TO CARE FOR RISING NUMBER OF ELDERLY**

By Kristin E. Longley  
 March 21, 2006

[Foundation Wire] — As her elderly client lay dying in a semi-conscious state, social worker Susan Fleischer murmured to him as a nurse held the phone to his ear.

For days, family and friends gathered around the man, who was in his 90s, believing he could no longer hear or speak. But Fleischer, a licensed clinical social worker, knew that the man needed encouragement to let go of his life.

What she didn't know until later, was that her client was trying desperately to mouth words to Fleischer, the care manager he had come to know and trust. He died two hours later.

"It still gives me chills when I think about it," said Fleischer, executive director of Rona Bartelstone Care Management and Home Healthcare, headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "We enable senior citizens to end their lives with peace, grace and dignity."

Social workers are constantly behind the scenes of stories like these. Helping the most vulnerable people find access to human services and medical treatment can be heartbreaking but essential work, she said.

But Fleischer is one of a decreasing number of social workers, despite projected increases in the number of people who need their services. A national study released this month by the National Association of Social Workers, shows students aren't willing to break into a profession based in hospitals, shelters and the country's poorest, urban areas.

"These are people on the front lines of human safety," said William Bell, president of Casey Family Programs, a foster care organization. "They see issues like child abuse, a lack of affordable housing, senior citizen neglect and the eroding fabric of the most challenged communities."

There is already a growing shortage of social workers who help the elderly, an alarming trend considering the aging of the baby boomers and the lengthening of the average life span. According to a survey of 10,000 practicing social workers, 12 percent plan to leave their jobs in the next two years.

The number of people over 65 will double to 71.5 million by 2030, and the number of people over 100 will triple, according to Tracy Whitaker, NASW director.

"They need quality care just like every other human being, from the smallest example of smiling and calling the person by their name in a nursing home," Fleischer said. "Seeing the change in their attitude from that small acknowledgment is the best work you can do."

Geriatric social workers are especially adept at coordinating care, such as daily meals, dressing and bathing, for senior citizens whose relatives are living farther away than ever. Even now, the report found, 17 percent of agencies have vacancies and 21 percent said those jobs are hard to fill.

With fewer professionals available to help the elderly gain access to health care and legal help, Fleischer said the nation is facing a crisis.

"The job is a very challenging job because the social worker has to understand not only the emotional and clinical side but the biological side as well," she said. "You're getting to know all sides of who they are."

But that's not the only challenge facing social workers. According to the study, more than half of social workers, especially those working with children and their families, endanger themselves regularly while on the job and many become discouraged with agencies that limit professional growth and don't adequately compensate workers.

And social work students might cringe at learning they'll have to deal with senior citizens, who in the later stages of life can be depressed, lethargic and dependent on others.

Fewer students are graduating with masters or doctoral degrees from the country's 614 accredited programs, Whitaker said. Even fewer take specialized classes in geriatric and child care.

But there is hope for the profession. Whitaker and other social workers believe the key is in awareness and education.

She said the NASW is working to add social work programs to schools around the country. Twenty master's degree programs and 18 bachelor's degree programs are awaiting accreditation.

This story ran in *Kansas City Infazine* and *Axcess News*.



## PROJECTED SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS TO STRAIN SERVICES

By James Ramage  
March 24, 2006

Experts in the social work field say that in the coming years a shortage of social workers is expected, and that could mean a parent has a harder time finding a qualified worker to help his or her child or a family member has a more difficult time finding a cancer support group.

These are just a couple of examples of the impact of such a shortage. While the number of people who will need such social work services is rising, the number of people to provide them is not. And in northwest Louisiana, with large rural sections, fewer social workers will mean it will be harder for people in rural areas to combine different services together that are necessary to meet communities' needs.

The number of social workers has been declining and should continue to, according to a new study by the National Association of Social Workers. The biggest problem is that more social workers are retiring and fewer people are entering the field, according to the association's Center for Workforce Study Director Tracy Whitaker.

Locally, social workers said a general lack of knowledge about what they do, low pay and few options for master's programs are some of the factors that will hurt the field's recruitment and retention efforts. On a state level, last fall's hurricanes scattered many social workers from south Louisiana and forced others to leave the state by closing their agencies, according to Kay Asher, a social worker with Willis-Knighton Health System's Outpatient Rehab Department and regional chair of the association's Louisiana chapter.

Others say there's a great need to inform the public about how broad the social work field is, from helping children in school, to couples with marital issues to family counseling to mental problems.

"I think there are a lot of people who don't have the correct understanding of what social workers can do," said Catherine Credeur, a social worker who works part time at Christus Schumpert's Cancer Treatment Center and part time with Bossier KIDS, a foster care agency.

"If society doesn't understand what we do, or the value for what we do, then the salary level isn't commensurate to our education. This could discourage people from entering the field."

The study mentioned how social workers across the country must shoulder increasing workloads with decreasing support to meet needs is also leading to greater difficulties in filling vacancies, Whitaker reported.

One demographic the study focused on was the surging number and percentage of Americans 60 years of age and older. Social workers help older adults navigate health care and social welfare systems, address challenges that accompany aging and provide resources essential to living, according to the study.

But statistics show that fewer of them will be doing so, as the study points out that younger social workers are working with senior patients less than in the past. Almost 75 percent of social workers provide services to older adults, but study statistics show that more than 25 percent of recent graduates with bachelor's degrees and 33 percent with master's degrees never see older adult clients.

And to make matters worse for the state, getting those degrees can be an issue.

In northwest Louisiana, prospective social workers only can attend Grambling State University's master's program to obtain the proper education credentials, Credeur and Asher said. LSU's main campus in Baton Rouge offered a master's degree program in social work to Shreveport-Bossier residents through satellite classes in LSUS, Asher added, but lack of funding closed the effort.

Social workers help all sectors of society, all ages and incomes, Credeur said. The association claims there are about 6,000 licensed social workers statewide, many in south Louisiana, but the number is expected to shrink further as older social workers retire, Asher said.

"Social workers help people through lots of life transitions that are common occurrences, not just the economically deprived or the elderly," Credeur said. "If we have fewer in the community, that will have a negative impact in the community."

To find out more  
National organization: [www.naswdc.org](http://www.naswdc.org)  
Louisiana chapter: [www.naswla.org](http://www.naswla.org)



**SOCIAL WORKERS DOING THEIR PART FOR THE ELDERLY**

By Randolph F. Snowden  
 March 24, 2006

Since the inception of National Professional Social Work Month in 1984, March has been a month when social workers can join together to promote the profession and advocate for issues that affect social workers and their clients. Social workers are dedicated to helping people of all ages, religions, sexual orientations and nationalities gain access to adequate resources and services. In Napa County, social workers deliver through a variety of different venues, including child welfare, mental health, public assistance, older adult services and substance abuse services. In each of these areas, social workers help people in all stages of life and in a multitude of situations. This year as we celebrate the work of all social workers, we want to focus on a particular issue that affects social workers and their clients — aging.

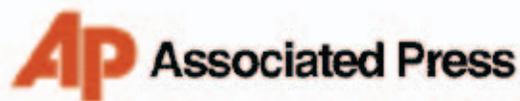
More than 77 million Americans are considered part of the baby boom generation. Adults born between 1946 and 1964 have the distinction of being the largest generation, representing 27 percent of the population. With the aging of baby boomers and the lengthening of life spans, both the number and proportion of older people is rapidly increasing.

The demand for social work will only increase as the needs of this large section of the population increases. The National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies recently completed its first major study of the social work labor force where findings show that the supply of professional social workers may not be sufficient to meet the demands of aging baby boomers.

In Napa County, Social Workers in the Comprehensive Services for Older Adults division of Health and Human Services serve hundreds of vulnerable older adults annually. Services offered include case management, representative payee services, information and referral, protective services, advocacy and counseling. Working with older adults can mean involvement with active, healthy clients as well as those who are ill in settings that range from adult day care centers and nursing homes to hospitals, public agencies and private corporations. Social workers form an important link between seniors and the services designed to help them.

National Social Work Month is the ideal time to highlight the immediate and ongoing need for an investment in the social work labor force. Social workers have the specialized knowledge and expertise to address issues facing older Americans. This year's Social Work Month theme — Life's Journey: Help Starts Here — focuses on how social workers help all people at every stage of life, while promoting dignity for everyone, especially the most vulnerable among us.

**STUDY HIGHLIGHTING THE NEWS**



**SOCIAL WORKERS RETHINK JOB SAFETY  
 A TEXAS SLAYING BRINGS NEW STEPS**

By Liz Austin  
 March 19, 2006

The slaying of Child Protective Services Social Work administrator Sally Blackwell in Texas in March has social workers from all over the county re-evaluating the steps they take to keep themselves safe and their employers examining what they can do to better protect their employees. Blackwell's death has not been directly connected to her job, but relatives said she had mentioned threats in her position as program director, overseeing several offices of caseworkers.

In the Associated Press article, the Center for Workforce Studies research highlights the importance of social worker safety:

“A study released last week by the National Association of Social Workers found 55 percent of 5,000 licensed social workers surveyed said they face personal safety issues on the job. Sixty percent of them said their employers had not adequately addressed their concerns.

“And a 2002 association survey of 800 child welfare specialists found 19 percent had been victims of violence and 63 percent had been threatened at some point in their careers.

“But, it usually takes a tragedy to spur action on the state or federal level,” association spokeswoman Allison Nadelhaft said.

This story ran in the following publications:

*Aberdeen American News* (SD)

*Austin Statesman*

*Belleville News-Democrat* (IL)

*Biloxi Sun Herald* (MS)

*Black Enterprise*

*Boston Globe*

*Bryan-College Station Eagle* (TX)

*Canton Repository* (OH)

*Centre Daily Times* (PA)

*Charleston Gazette* (WV)

*Columbia State* (SC)

*Contra Costa Times* (CA)

*CourtTV*

*Dallas Morning News*

*Denton Record Chronicle* (TX)

*Forbes*

*Fort Dodge Messenger News* (IA)

*Fort Wayne News Sentinel* (IN)

*Fort Worth Star Telegram*

*Grand Rapids Press*

*Guardian Unlimited* (UK)

*Houston Chronicle*

*Kansas City Star*

*KGBT-TV* (Rio Grande Valley, TX)

*KLTV-TV* (Tyler, TX)

*KRIS-TV* (Corpus Christi, TX)

*KTEN-TV* (Ada, OK)

*KVUE-TV* (Austin, TX)

*Lakeland Ledger* (FL)

*Los Angeles Times*

*Lexington Herald* (KY)

*Longview News Journal* (TX)

*Louisiana Times Picayune*

*Minnesota Pioneer Press*

*Modesto Bee* (CA)

*New York Newsday*

*New York Times*

*News 8* (Austin, TX)

*Oregon Live*

*Press of Atlantic City* (NJ)

*San Angelo Standard-Times* (TX)

*San Diego Union Tribune*

*Seattle Post Intelligencer*

*Springfield News-Sun* (OH)

*Washington Post*

*Wichita Eagle*

*Wilmington Star-News* (NC)

### COMMENTARY FROM "SOCIAL WORKERS RETHINK JOB SAFETY"

"Killing in Texas Spotlights Attacks on Social Workers" (news article, March 20) highlights a serious problem: social work can be dangerous. Yet many social service agencies fail to carry out mandatory safety procedures for their staff, and frequently require them to engage in at-risk work practices like making home visits alone and working in isolated settings with no security or safety plan.

This lack of attention to social workers' well-being reflects a general lack of value for a profession that continues to struggle with issues of status and public recognition.

The social work profession's historical mission of commitment to a client's well-being must include a commitment to the safety of its own membership

It is time for the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics, which sets guiding principles and practice standards, to hold employers accountable for providing a safe workplace.

-Jessica Rosenberg, DSW, assistant professor of social work, Long Island University  
*The New York Times*

"The death of a Texas social worker last week has professionals all over the country re-thinking on-the-job safety. Social workers in Washington are hedging their

safety bets on a bill just signed by the Governor that creates anti-stalking protections, and gives professionals injured because of work special benefits. A recent study by the National Association of Social Workers shows over half of social workers say they are concerned by their personal safety because of their job."

-Bev Hermanson, Washington Federation of State Employees  
*International Labor Communications Association Newsletter*



### COURSE TEACHES SAFETY FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES WORKERS

By *The Associated Press*  
April 12, 2006

As a result of the tragic death of Sally Blackwell, Child Protective Services workers were offered a course to learn how to handle confrontations with clients and how to avoid them.

This Associated Press article again referenced the Center for Workforce Studies research as support for the need for safety and training courses for all social workers.

## BRIEFS OF THE STUDY

*Philanthropy News Digest* – March 13, 2006

An impending shortage of social workers threatens future services for all Americans, especially children and older adults, a new report from the National Association of Social Workers finds.

Sponsored by Atlantic Philanthropies, and the John A. Hartford, Annie E. Casey, and Robert Wood Johnson foundations, the report *Assuring the Sufficiency of a Frontline Workforce: A National Study of Licensed Social Workers*, finds that the number of new social workers providing services to older adults is decreasing at a time when the number of older adults who need social work services is projected to increase. Compounding the challenge, the supply of licensed social workers is insufficient to meet the needs of organizations serving children and families.

According to the report, social workers see clients with a broad range of diagnoses, especially chronic medical conditions, psychosocial stressors, acute medical conditions, co-occurring disorders, and physical disabilities. They also are the largest providers of mental health services in the county. However, a steady increase in caseloads, the growing severity of clients' problems, and shrinking resources make meeting clients' needs more difficult than ever. And because more than half of the healthcare social workers work in hospitals in metropolitan areas, providing comprehensive services to people living in rural areas is an additional challenge.

“Social workers are one of the largest and most diverse health professions in the United States,” said NASW executive director Elizabeth Clark, “They have the education and training to look at how all factors in a person’s life – family, work, health and mental health – work together. This study highlights the need to find new and innovative ways for the social work profession to retain the current workforce and recruit new social workers to accommodate the impending demand.”

To read or download the complete report, visit: <http://workforce.socialworkers.org>.

*Kansas City Star* – March 14, 2006

The National Association of Social Workers warns that there’s an impending shortage of social workers, especially for child and older adult services.

Vacancies already are common, and organizations are being forced to use non-trained social workers to perform social work job, the association said a poll of its membership found.

Some caseloads have reached unmanageable levels. About 40 percent of social workers who specialize in health issues have 50 clients or more at a time.

To read details, go online to <http://workforce.socialworkers.org>.

*Ripples – Geriatric Social Work Initiative* – March 31, 2006

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) releases results of a national study of licensed social workers. The findings warn of an impending shortage of social workers that threatens future services for all Americans, especially the most vulnerable among us, children and older adults. Among the key findings:

- The number of new social workers providing services to older adults is decreasing, despite projected increases in the number of older adults who will need social work services.
- The supply of licensed social workers is insufficient to meet the needs of organizations serving children and families.
- Workload expansion plus fewer resources impedes social worker retention.
- Agencies struggle to fill social work vacancies.

For complete information about NASW’s Center for Workforce Studies, which issued the study, and the national survey of licensed social workers in the United States, please visit <http://workforce.socialworkers.org>.

## NEWS BRIEFING

On March 8, 2006, NASW's Center for Workforce Studies held a news briefing at the National Press Club announcing the findings of *Assuring the Sufficiency of a Frontline Workforce: A National Study of Licensed Social Workers*.

Center Director Tracy Whitaker, ACSW described the workforce study findings. William Bell, MSW, president and CEO of Casey Family Programs, highlighted the need for social workers who work with children and families. Linda Harootyan, MSW, deputy director of The Gerontological Society of America, spoke about the challenges social workers face in aging-related practice. Ellen Stovall, president and CEO, of the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, noted the critical role that social workers play with oncology patients.

“If there are to be adequate numbers of social workers to respond to the needs of clients in this decade and beyond, the sufficiency of this frontline workforce must not only be ensured, it must be prioritized.”

-Tracy Whitaker, ACSW

“As a social worker, I realize that I represent a lifeline for vulnerable people, a lifeline that many of them must have in order to survive on a daily basis.”

-William Bell, MSW

“The NASW report highlights the need to find new solutions and innovative ways for the social work profession to retrain its current workforce in aging, provide geriatric training for practicing social workers, and recruit legions of new students to meet the huge demand.”

-Linda Harootyan, MSW

“It's not an exaggeration for me to say that I love the profession and the people who populate it, and you're critically important to those of us who deal with cancer for a good part of our lives.”

-Ellen Stovall

## COMING SOON

In addition to this coverage, there are several other media outlets planning on stories on the study. *Parade Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, *National Public Radio*, *Philanthropy News Digest* and other media outlets have expressed significant interest and will have stories soon. *Social Work Today* plans a feature article about the study to run in the May/June 2006 issue.



## CAREER CENTER: GOOD CAREERS FOR 2006

By Marty Nemko

US News and World Report recently named social work as one of the most promising careers for 2006. “Despite stress and frustration, most social workers like what they do. Social work remains one of the last professions with excellent job security...its hard to foresee conditions under which the need for social workers will decline.”