

# FROM SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION TO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF 2018 SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES





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*A Report to the*

Council on Social Work Education  
and  
National Workforce Initiative Steering Committee

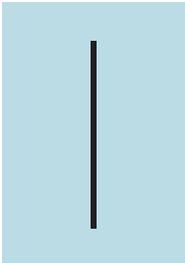
*From*

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# Forward



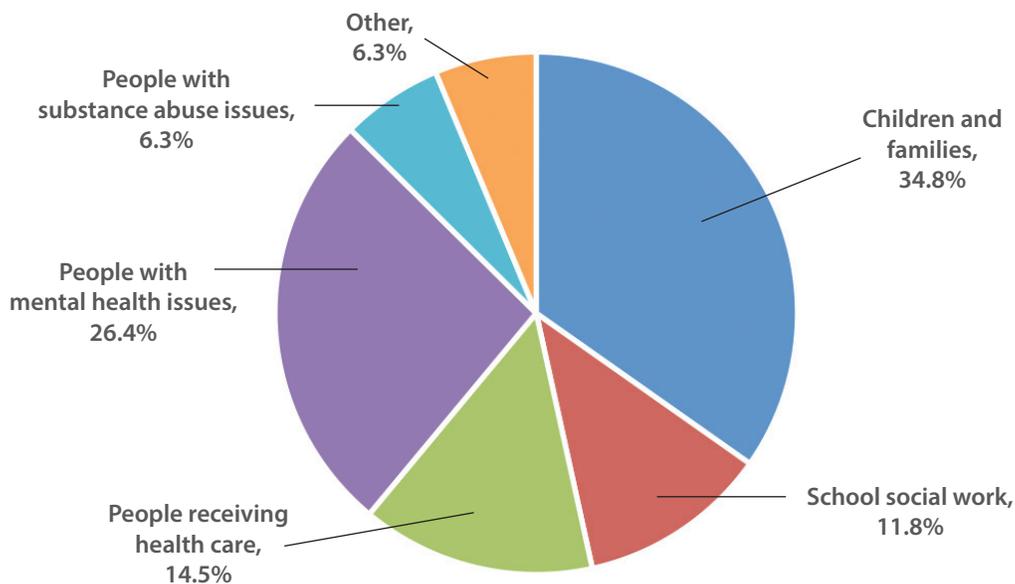
In 2018 the George Washington Health Workforce Institute (GW-HWI), in collaboration with and supported by the social work community, surveyed graduates of MSW and BSW programs across the country for the second year in a row. The purpose of this survey is to better understand the job market for social workers and the demographic background of new social workers, their educational and career pathways, employment outcomes, and job satisfaction. Graduates of more than 100 MSW and BSW programs participated in the 2018 survey. The responses from more than 1,400 MSW and 300 BSW graduates have been weighted to make the results representative of all social work graduates in 2018.

This report presents basic data and key findings from the 2018 survey. A series of briefs presenting results on specific aspects of the 2018 survey will be available in the coming months, including briefs comparing graduates whose education was primarily online to those whose education was in-person, background and outcomes by race and ethnicity of the graduates, and demand indicators for social work jobs by region and concentration.

# Executive Summary: Key Findings

• **Social workers are employed in a wide variety of settings serving clients with diverse needs.** Children and families were the focus of more than a third of MSW graduates; more than a quarter were focused on people with mental health issues (see Figure ES-1). More than 30% work for private not-for-profit organizations, 28% work for health-care organizations, and 17% work for government agencies (see Table ES-1). The skills and competencies of MSWs can be applied in many settings.

Figure ES-1. Groups Served, Main Client Focus of MSWs Working as Social Workers



Note: Percentages are of those who were working in positions as social workers, including positions not requiring a social work degree or license.

**Table ES-1: Employers of MSWs Working as Social Workers**

IN YOUR PRINCIPAL POSITION WHO ARE YOU (OR WILL YOU BE) WORKING FOR?	PERCENTAGE
Private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt or charitable organization	31.1
Health care organizations:	27.9
Outpatient health care services	(16.3)
Hospital inpatient facility	(8.9)
Nursing or residential care facility	(2.7)
State, local or federal government agency	17.4
Educational establishment outside of higher education	7.3
Private, for-profit facility or business	4.6
Private social work practice	4.6
Other	7.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Percentages are of those who were working in positions as social workers, including those not requiring a social work degree or license.

- **Most new MSWs are providing direct services to individuals, families, and groups.** Relatively few (7.8%) are providing indirect social work services, such as public policy (see Table ES-2).

**Table ES-2: Type of Jobs Taken for Those Working as Social Workers**

IN YOUR PRINCIPAL POSITION WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ROLE?	PERCENTAGE (N=1,039)
Direct work with individuals, families, or groups	82.1
Direct work with communities	5.3
Indirect social work <sup>a</sup>	7.8
Social work higher education	1.0
Other social work position	0.6
A position for which you believe a social work education provides relevant preparation	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Percentages are of those who entered positions as social workers, including positions not requiring a social work degree or license.

<sup>a</sup>Indirect social work includes public policy and advocacy; administration, management; planning; program evaluation; research (excluding teaching positions); or environmental health or public health work.

- **More than three-quarters of MSW graduates are entering social work jobs, although not all such jobs require an MSW (see Table ES-3). More than 17% of MSW graduates are going into positions that do not have social work titles but in which they are using their social work education and skills.** This includes positions such as case worker, project manager, and mental health specialist. These individuals are valuable outputs of schools of social work but may not be counted on government and other surveys as social workers. About 6% of MSW graduates indicated they were entering or had entered positions without a social work title and were not using skills/competencies learned in their social work education. These individuals are at least temporarily out of the social work profession.

**Table ES-3: Social Work Content of MSW Postgraduation Jobs**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRINCIPAL POSITION?	PERCENTAGE (N=1,099)
A job that requires a social work degree and/or license	62.3
A job as a social worker not requiring a social work degree or license	14.2
<b>Subtotal: Social Work Jobs</b>	<b>(76.5)</b>
Working not as a social worker but in a job for which you believe a social work education has provided relevant preparation	17.6
A job for which a social work education was not a necessary or relevant preparation	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Percentages are of all those with a job, whether they had searched for it or not.

• **Regardless of setting and employer, MSWs are serving high-need populations.** More than 70% of MSWs in social work positions indicated that most of their clients had mental health disorders; nearly 70% indicated that more than half their clients were on Medicaid and below the federal poverty level. More than a third indicated that a majority of their clients had a substance abuse disorder. Although the elderly and the seriously ill were not foci for many MSWs, more than a quarter indicated that most of their clients were seriously ill, and nearly as many said a majority of their clients needed assistance with activities of daily living.

Finally, more than a third (37.2%) indicated that most of their patients were involved with the child welfare system.

• **Salaries of new MSWs are relatively low for individuals with a master's degree.** The median income was only \$42,500 for new social workers; the median salary was higher (\$47,500) for those going into positions in hospitals, government agencies, and educational institutions. Although most MSWs were satisfied with their new positions (see Table ES-4), more than a quarter (27%) were dissatisfied with their income.

**Table ES-4: MSW Satisfaction With Position and Salary**

	WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH YOUR CURRENT POSITION?	WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH YOUR CURRENT SALARY?
Very satisfied	48.7	26.9
Somewhat satisfied	41.4	46.5
Somewhat dissatisfied	7.8	18.6
Very dissatisfied	2.2	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Percentages are of those who were working in positions as social workers, including positions not requiring a social work degree or license.

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• ***The profession is largely female; there are some differences in practice patterns by race and gender.***

Although the backgrounds and practice patterns of MSW graduates were similar regardless of sex or race/ethnicity, there were some interesting differences:

- African American MSWs were more likely to be part-time students than Whites (28.1% vs 21.9%). Compared to White and Hispanic MSWs, African American MSWs were also more likely to have received their instruction primarily online (12.3% and 16.6% vs 21.9%, respectively).
- White MSWs were more likely to practice in hospitals than African Americans (11.7% vs 1.9%, respectively), whereas African Americans were more likely to be employed by government than Whites (21.3% vs 15.7%)
- African American and Hispanic MSWs were far more likely to practice in large cities than Whites (37.7% and 42.4% vs 17.8%, respectively), whereas Whites were more likely to practice in rural and semirural communities than African Americans or Hispanics (18.9% vs. 13.2% and 4.1%, respectively).
- African American MSWs were more likely to have a practice focus on children and families than Whites (41.9% vs 31.9%, respectively), whereas Whites were more likely to be focused on health care and substance abuse than African Americans (14.6% and 6.6% vs. 9.2% and 2.6%, respectively).
- African American and Hispanic MSWs had slightly higher average incomes than Whites (\$44,500, \$48,750, and \$43,750, respectively).
- Female MSW graduates were more likely to have jobs focused on children and families than males (35.7% vs 26.4%). Males, on the other hand, were more likely to have jobs focused on mental and behavioral illness (37.0% vs 26.5%). Because females make up 90% of the graduates, the majority (85%) of new social workers focused on mental/behavioral health are female.
- Although the mean income for male MSWs was higher than that for female MSWs (\$47,500 vs \$43,750, respectively), the median income was the same at \$42,500.

• ***The majority of BSW graduates have plans to pursue a graduate degree in social work: Almost 95% are either currently enrolled or are planning or expecting to enroll in an MSW program in the future. Only 59% of BSWs have jobs after earning their social work degree, and less than half of this group (46%) are employed in a social work position. The job market for BSWs appears to be limited.***

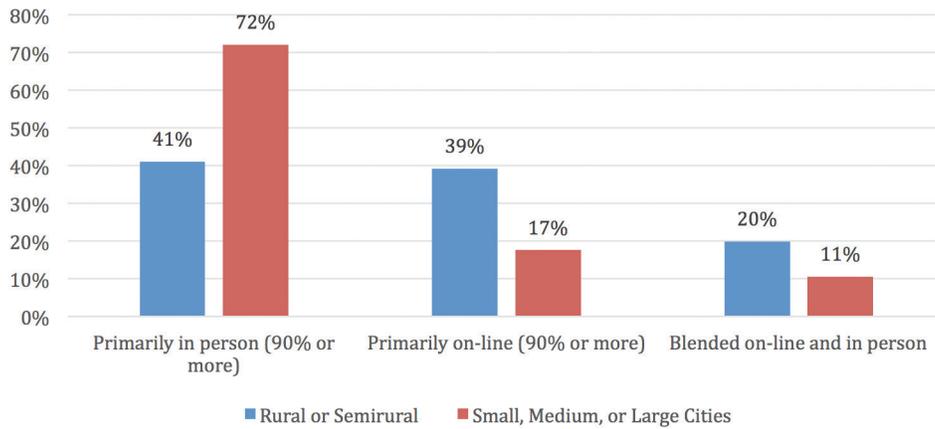
More than half of all BSWs (59.6%) indicated they were already enrolled in an MSW program. Another 18.9% expected to enroll in the next 2 years. Only 5.5% had no plans to enroll.

Nearly half (48%) of BSWs who had searched for a job indicated they had a difficult time finding a satisfactory position. Of the BSWs who searched for a job, 25.6% had not been offered any position at the time of the survey. Of those who had found a job, 30.9% were working in jobs for which a social work education was not required or relevant for the position.

- ***Many new social workers, especially MSWs, have several years of prior work experience and are older than entrants into other professions.*** The mean age of MSW graduates in 2018 was 31.3 years, and 23.6% were 36 years old or older. Nearly a third of new MSWs had worked for 6 or more years prior to entering MSW programs.
- ***Online education offers access to educational opportunities in rural and semirural areas and to African Americans.***

Although 17% of all respondents received their instruction primarily online (defined as 90% or more of their nonclinical instruction), 39% of the MSW graduates from rural and semirural areas received their instruction primarily online. Similarly, 22% of African American graduates received their instruction online compared to 16.6% of the White MSW graduates.

**Figure ES-2: Program Delivery for MSWs in Rural and Semirural Areas Compared to those in Small, Medium and Large Cities**



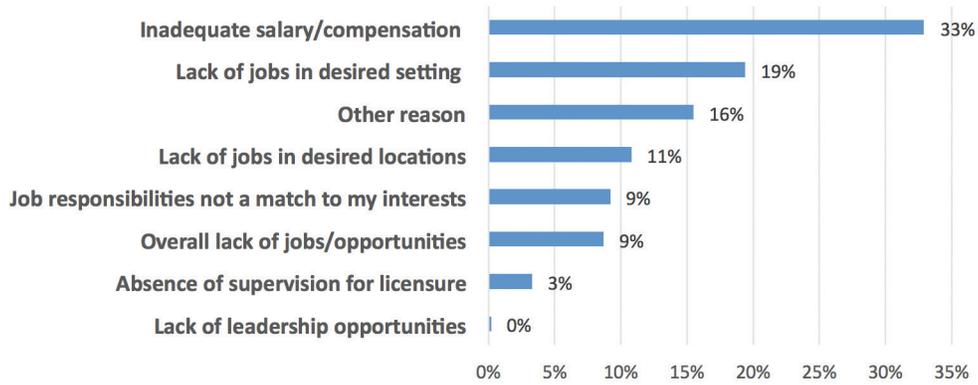
Question asked: "Which best describes the demographics of the principal area in which you are/will be practicing?" Rural or semirural areas="Semirural" or "Rural" area. Small, medium, or large cities="Small city," "Suburb of a large or medium city," "Medium city," or "Large city."

• **The job market for new MSWs is mixed: There are opportunities, but many are not what the new graduates are looking for and the pay is lower than desired.** Nearly 50% of MSWs indicate they had a difficult time finding a satisfactory position (see Figure ES-3). The main reasons cited were inadequate compensation (33%), lack of jobs in desired settings (16%), and lack of jobs in desired locations (11%). Only 9% cited an overall lack of jobs. Similarly, when asked to assess the local and national job markets, only

11.7% and 5.4%, indicated "no," "very few," or "few jobs" were available in local and national job market, respectively; and 38.9% and 54.7 indicated there were "many jobs" in local and national job markets, respectively.

The overall job market appears reasonable for MSWs, with only 11.7% reporting finding no, very few, or few jobs locally. A total of 82.6% of MSWs reported finding some or many jobs in their local areas.

**Figure ES-3: Main Reasons for Difficulty Finding a Satisfactory MSW Position**



Note: Percentages are of those who searched and said they had difficulty finding a job they were satisfied with.

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- *More than one of three jobs taken by new graduates were with organizations with which the graduates had field placements during their social work education.*

- *The majority of new MSWs plan to become licensed clinical social workers.* Four of five MSWs (80.6%) either planned to become licensed clinical social workers within the next 5 years or were already licensed.



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