Careers in Social Work

Social work is a profession for those with a strong desire to help improve people's lives. Social workers assist people by helping them cope with and solve issues in their everyday lives, such as family and personal problems and dealing with relationships. Some social workers help clients who face a disability, life-threatening disease, social problem, such as inadequate housing, unemployment, or substance abuse. Social workers also assist families that have serious domestic conflicts, sometimes involving child or spousal abuse. Additionally, they may conduct research, advocate for improved services, or become involved in planning or policy development. Many social workers specialize in serving a particular population or working in a specific setting. Some social workers go into private practice. Most private practitioners are licensed clinical social workers (LCSW) who provide psychotherapy, usually paid for through health insurance or by the client themselves. Private practitioners must have at least a master's degree (MSW) and a period of supervised work experience and be licensed. In all settings, these workers may also be called licensed clinical social workers (LCSW), if they hold the appropriate state mandated license.

Mental health and substance abuse social workers assess and treat individuals with mental illness or substance abuse problems. Such services include individual and group therapy, outreach, crisis intervention, social rehabilitation, and teaching skills needed for everyday living. They also may help plan for supportive services to ease clients' return to the community when leaving in-patient facilities. They may provide services to assist family members of those who suffer from addiction or other mental health issues. These workers may work in outpatient facilities, where clients come in for treatment and then leave, or in inpatient programs, where patients reside at the facility. Some mental health and substance social workers work in employee-assistance programs. In this setting, they may help people cope with job-related pressures or with personal problems that affect the quality of their work. Other social workers work in private practice, where they are employed directly by the client. These social workers may be known as clinical social workers, occupational social workers, or substance abuse social workers.

Child, family, and school social workers provide social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children and their families. Workers in this field assess their client's needs and offer assistance to improve their situation. This often includes coordinating available services to assist a child or family. They may assist single parents in finding day care, arrange adoptions, or help find foster homes for neglected, abandoned, or abused children. These workers may specialize in working with a particular problem, population or setting, such as child protective services, adoption, homelessness, domestic violence, or foster care.

In schools, social workers often serve as the link between students’ families and the school, working with parents, guardians, teachers and other school officials to ensure that students reach their academic and personal potential. They also assist students in dealing with stress or emotional problems. Many school social workers work directly with children with disabilities and their families. In addition, they address problems such as misbehavior, truancy, teenage pregnancy, and drug and alcohol problems and advise teachers on how to cope with difficult students. School social workers may teach workshops to entire classes on topics like conflict resolution.
Child, family, and school social workers may be known as child welfare social workers, family services social workers, or child protective services social workers. These workers often work for individual and family services agencies, schools, or state or local governments.

**Medical and public health social workers** provide psychosocial support to individuals, families, or vulnerable populations so they can cope with chronic, acute, or terminal illnesses, such as Alzheimer's disease, cancer, or AIDS. They also advise family caregivers, counsel patients, and help plan for patients' needs after discharge from hospitals. They may arrange for at-home services, such as meals-on-wheels or home care. Some work on interdisciplinary teams that evaluate certain kinds of patients, such as geriatric or organ transplant patients.

Some specialize in services for senior citizens and their families. These social workers may run support groups for the adult children of aging parents. Also, they may assess, coordinate, and monitor services such as housing, transportation, and long-term care. These workers may be known as gerontological social workers.

Medical and public health social workers may work for hospitals, nursing and personal care facilities, individual and family services agencies, or local governments.

**Education and Training**

A bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) is the most common minimum requirement to qualify for a job as a social worker; however, majors in psychology, sociology, and related fields may qualify for some entry-level jobs, especially in small community agencies. Although a bachelor's degree is sufficient for entry into the field, an advanced degree is required for some positions. A master's degree in social work (MSW) is typically required for positions in health and school settings and is required for clinical work, as well. Some jobs in public and private agencies may require an advanced degree, such as an MSW with a concentration in social services policy or administration. Supervisory, administrative, and staff training positions usually require an advanced degree. College and university teaching positions and most research appointments normally require a doctorate in social work (DSW or Ph.D). For more information on social work education and to find an accredited program, visit:

[http://www.cswe.org/Accreditation.aspx](http://www.cswe.org/Accreditation.aspx)

**Licensure**

All states and the District of Columbia have licensing, certification, or registration requirements regarding social work practice and the use of professional titles. Most states require 2 years or 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience for licensure of clinical social workers (LCSW). Due to some limitations on what settings unlicensed social workers may work and some variation in the requirements to obtain a license, those interested in becoming a social worker should research requirements in their state. For more licensing information, visit:


**Additional Resources**

For more information on employment, job outlook and salary information, visit the following websites:


Additional related websites for Social Work:


**References:**