



## Who are Social Workers?

# We help.

*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 issues in their everyday lives, deal with their relationships, and solve personal and family problems. Some social workers help clients who face a disability or a life-threatening disease or a 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. Some social workers conduct research, advocate for improved services, engage in systems design or are involved in planning or policy development. Many social workers specialize in serving a particular population or working in a specific setting.*

### **Child, family, and school social workers**

provide social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children and their families and to maximize the well-being of families and the academic functioning of children. They may assist single parents, arrange adoptions, or help find foster homes for neglected, abandoned, or abused children. Some specialize in services for senior citizens. These social workers may run support groups for the children of aging parents; advise elderly people or family members about housing, transportation, long-term care, and other services; and coordinate and monitor these services. Through employee assistance programs, social workers may help people cope with job-related pressures or with personal

problems that affect the quality of their work. 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 students reach their academic and personal potential. In addition, they address problems such as misbehavior, truancy, and teenage pregnancy and advise teachers on how to cope with difficult students. Increasingly, school social workers teach workshops to entire classes.

Child, family, and school social workers may also be known as child welfare social workers, family services social workers, child protective services social workers, occupational social workers, or gerontology social workers. They often work for individual and family services agencies, schools, or State or local governments.

### **Medical and public health social workers**

provide psychosocial support to people, 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—geriatric or organ transplant patients, for example. Medical and public health social workers may work for hospitals, nursing and personal care facilities, individual and family services agencies, or local governments.

**Mental health and substance abuse social workers** assess and treat individuals with mental illness or substance abuse problems, including abuse of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. 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. Mental health and substance abuse social workers are likely to work in hospitals, substance abuse treatment centers, individual and family services agencies, or local governments. These social workers may be known as clinical social workers.

**Administrators, planners and policymakers** Other types of social workers include social work administrators, planners and policymakers, who develop and implement programs to address issues such as child abuse, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, and violence. These workers research and analyze policies, programs, and regulations. They identify social problems and suggest legislative and other solutions. They may help raise funds or write grants to support these programs.

**Training and education** A bachelor's degree is the *minimum* requirement for entry into the occupation, but many positions require an advanced degree. All States and the District of Columbia have some licensure, certification, or registration requirement, but the regulations vary.

Although a bachelor's degree (BSW) is sufficient for entry into the field, an advanced degree has become the standard for many positions. A master's degree in social work (MSW) is typically required for positions in health settings and is required for clinical work as well. Some jobs in public and private agencies also may require an advanced degree, such as a master's degree 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 PhD).

As of 2009, the Council on Social Work Education accredited 468 bachelor's programs and 196 master's programs. The Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education listed 74 doctoral programs in social work (DSW or PhD) in the United States.

**Employment** Social workers held about 642,000 jobs in 2008. About 5 out of 10 jobs were in health care and social assistance industries and 3 out of 10 are employed by State and local government agencies. Although most social workers are employed in cities or suburbs, some work in rural areas. Employment by type of social worker, follows:

Child, family, and school social workers	292,600
Medical and public health social workers	138,700
Mental health and substance abuse social workers	137,300
Social workers, all other	73,400

Employment for social workers is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2018. Job prospects are expected to be favorable, particularly for social workers who specialize in the aging population or work in rural areas.

**Source:**  
 O\*NET—Occupational Outlook Handbook. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2010-2011  
[www.bls.gov/oco/ocos060.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos060.htm)  
[www.bls.gov/k12/help05.htm](http://www.bls.gov/k12/help05.htm)