

Careers in Social Work

Social work is a profession in which practitioners work directly with individuals, families, and groups helping people cope, change, and solve problems in all facets of their daily living. Social workers may also provide mental, behavioral, and emotional counseling and therapy. Social workers work with community stakeholders, organizations, neighborhoods and communities, and in activities such as community organization and development, policy and legislative advocacy. They are employed in a wide variety of agencies, positions, and areas of service, such as mental health, aging services, domestic violence, child welfare, school social work, healthcare services, geriatric social work, and substance abuse treatment and prevention. In addition, social workers often manage human services agencies or may establish their own private practice. The uniqueness of social work as a profession includes the emphasis on the person-in-environment, identification with the most marginalized and oppressed of society, and commitment to core values of social work—social and economic justice, respect for the worth of others, cultural diversity, and the principle of self-determination for individuals, families, and groups.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by the year 2000 there will be more than half a million social workers in the United States. Preparation for social work can occur on the undergraduate and/or graduate level, with licensure eligibility at both levels. Bachelor-level (BSW) social workers often work as direct-service case managers in social service agencies. Master's level (MSW) social workers are eligible for state licensure at an advanced clinical level, following a supervised clinical internship at 3000 hours in most states. Median pay for social workers is about \$42,500 per year (2010), generally higher than other counseling and mental health therapists. The top 10% of social workers earn over \$70,000 per year, while social work managers and similar administrative positions may exceed \$100,000 per year. The job outlook for social workers shows about 650,500 positions nationally for social workers in 2010. The profession is also growing 25% faster than the national average, given the expected increase in health-related social work and other social services in the coming decades. Growth in areas of mental health and substance abuse is expected to grow by 31 percent, much faster than the average for all occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).