

[REPORT]

National Association of Social Workers  
2009 COMPENSATION & BENEFITS STUDY

# SUMMARY OF KEY COMPENSATION FINDINGS

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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# INTRODUCTION

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was sponsored and developed by NASW. Data was collected and tabulated by Readex Research, an independent research company.

To broaden representation of the profession, NASW partnered with a number of other social work membership organizations to create an expanded list of U.S. professional social workers for sampling purposes. These partner organizations were:

- Association of Oncology Social Work (AOSW)
- National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO)
- National Network for Social Worker Managers (NNSWM)
- The Rural Social Work Caucus
- Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care (SSWLHC)

The total number of unduplicated individuals among these five lists and the NASW domestic membership was 101,995. The overall sample size of 78,777 consisted of the 73,777 with a valid email address on file and a systematic sample of 5,000 (among the 28,218) who could not be reached via email.

Data collection utilized a mixed mode approach. For those with a valid email address, invitations were sent via email to access a web-based survey. Those without an email address were sent invitations via regular mail, with the option to fill out a provided paper survey or to access the survey online via a provided web site address.

Data were collected between October 1 and November 24, 2009. A total of 23,889 unduplicated usable responses was received, for a 30% response rate. Among these, 22,000 responses were randomly chosen for inclusion in the final tabulation. The data have been weighted to account for disproportional response between the email and regular mail samples. Percentages based on all 22,000 responses are subject to a margin of error of  $\pm 0.6\%$ .

## RESPONDENT STATUS

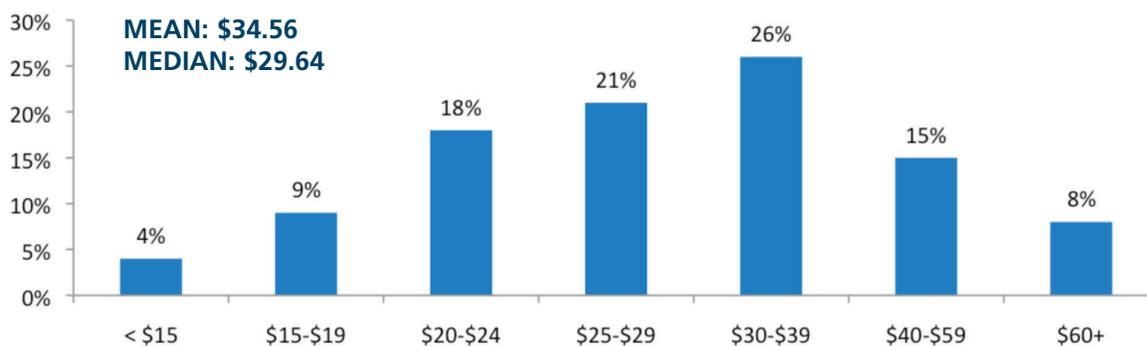
The compensation analysis focuses on the subset of “valid answering practitioners” – that is, U.S.-based respondents confirming paid employment or self-employment on October 1, 2009 in a social work-related position (that is, any position that requires or makes use of one’s education, training, or experience in social work), and reporting regular salary or wages. Percentages based on these 17,851 “valid answering practitioners” are subject to a margin of error of  $\pm 0.6\%$ . Removed are those who did not answer at all, those who provided a report considered to be an outlier (top 1% and bottom 1% of all responses), and those who did not answer in a coherent manner. The tabulated base of the “answering practitioners” is 17,911.

## FINDINGS

There are a variety of payment methods present in the social work field. Most answering practitioners (57%) indicated they are paid an annual salary. However significant minorities indicated payment via an hourly wage (24%) or per diem/fee for service (20%). In order to aggregate responses, all reports were converted to an hourly wage equivalent.

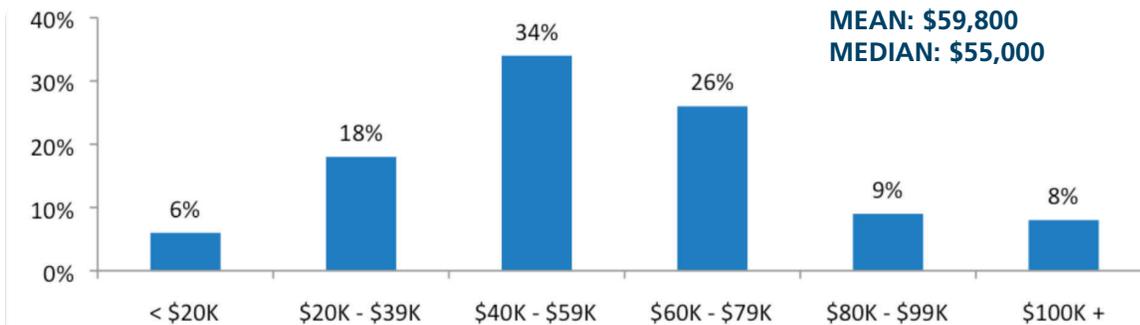
As of October 1, 2009, the median hourly wage for practitioners was \$29.64 per hour. At the categorical extremes, 8% earn \$60.00 per hour or more and 13% earn less than \$20.00 per hour (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. HOURLY WAGE (EQUIVALENT)



If hourly wage is annualized (multiplied by the reported hours worked per week and 52 weeks per year), a Base Pay figure can be calculated. The median Base Pay is \$55,000 per year, with 12% earning \$90,000 per year or more, and 12% earning under \$30,000 (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2. BASE PAY (ANNUALIZED WAGE EQUIVALENT)**



Base: 17,851 valid US-based answering practitioners\*  
\*removed are those not reporting hours worked per week

Base Pay includes only the regular earnings for the position, excluding things like overtime pay, on-call pay, commissions, bonuses, incentive pay, and so on. Respondents were also asked to report the amount earned from these other sources in the twelve months prior to October 1, 2009 as their Other Cash Compensation. Most (82%) had no compensation other than regular wages or salary; 5% reported less than \$1,000 other cash compensation, 8% \$1,000-\$4,999, and 6% \$5,000 or more. Given the low incidence of receiving other cash compensation among this population, the primary focus of analysis for compensation will be Base Pay alone. Of note for Base Pay is the wide range of amounts received by social workers (Table 1).

**TABLE 1. COMPENSATION PERCENTILES**

	Base Pay
10th percentile (10% earn less)	\$28,100
25th percentile (25% earn less)	\$41,000
50th percentile (50% earn less)	\$55,000
75th percentile (75% earn less)	\$71,000
90th percentile (90% earn less)	\$92,000

Helping to account for this range, a number of factors show associations with Base Pay for reporting social work practitioners. The following series of figures demonstrates the relationships between Base Pay and demographic characteristics, social work background, organization type, and individual roles.

Note that all factors are based on respondent self-reports and are thus subject to some variation in how terms were understood. It should also be noted that in this analysis, relationships between individual factors and Base Pay are correlations, which is not the same as causation. Although it can be shown the two are related in some way, it is possible that other factors underlie the relationship and may be the cause of variable compensation rates.

## CORRELATES OF COMPENSATION

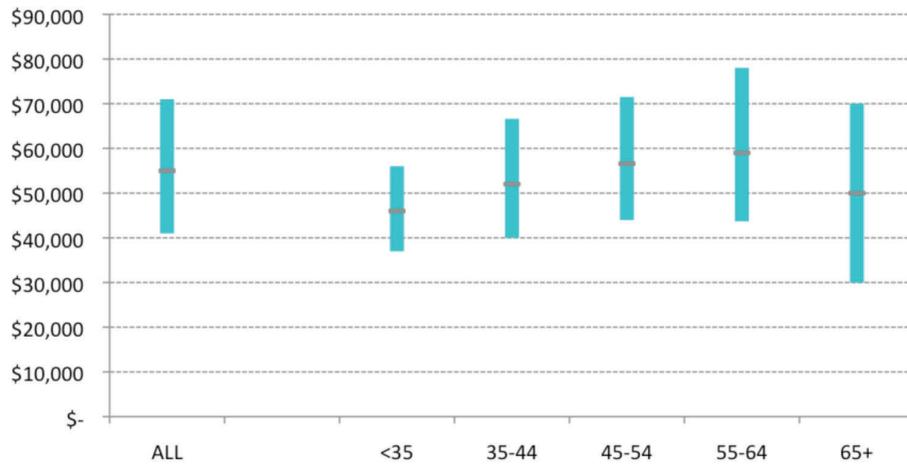
As previously noted, median Base Pay for all reporting social work practitioners as of October 1, 2009 was \$55,000 per year. The median (or 50th percentile) is indicated with a horizontal line. The top and bottom boundaries of each vertical bar indicate the 75th and 25th percentiles, respectively. For all reporting social work practitioners, the range is from \$41,000 (25th) to \$71,000 (75th).

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### AGE

Regarding age, the relationship is as expected, with Base Pay rising from a median of \$46,000 among the youngest age group studied (those under 35) to \$59,000 among those 55 to 64 years of age. The oldest age cohort (65+) shows a decrease in the median, down to \$50,000 (Figure 3). The range of compensation (75th minus 25th percentile) is also greatest among these individuals. This may be an indication of the combination of the types of practitioners included, those at the apex of their careers and earnings and those with decreased responsibilities or workload during a partial retirement period.

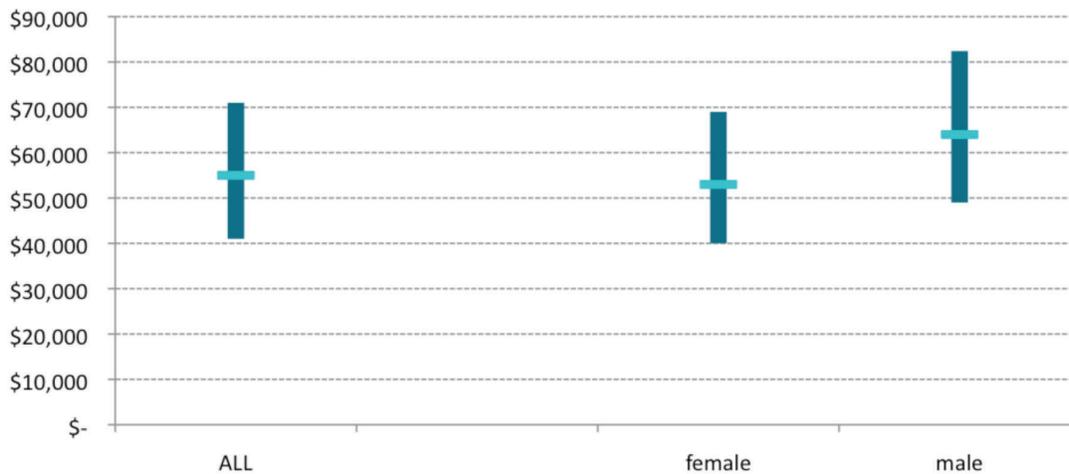
FIGURE 3. BASE PAY BY AGE



## GENDER

Looking at Base Pay by gender, women tend to earn less than men, with medians of \$53,000 and \$64,000, respectively (Figure 4).

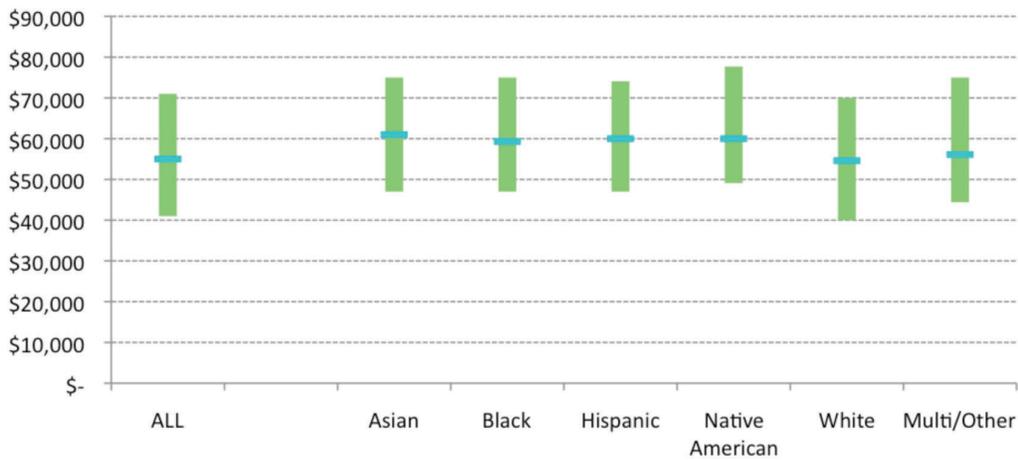
FIGURE 4. BASE PAY BY GENDER



## RACE/ETHNICITY

For the most part, there is little correlation between self-identified race/ethnicity categories and Base Pay. The exception is the lower report for the category White/Caucasian, with a median Base Pay of \$54,600, compared to around \$60,000 for other races/ethnicities (Figure 5).

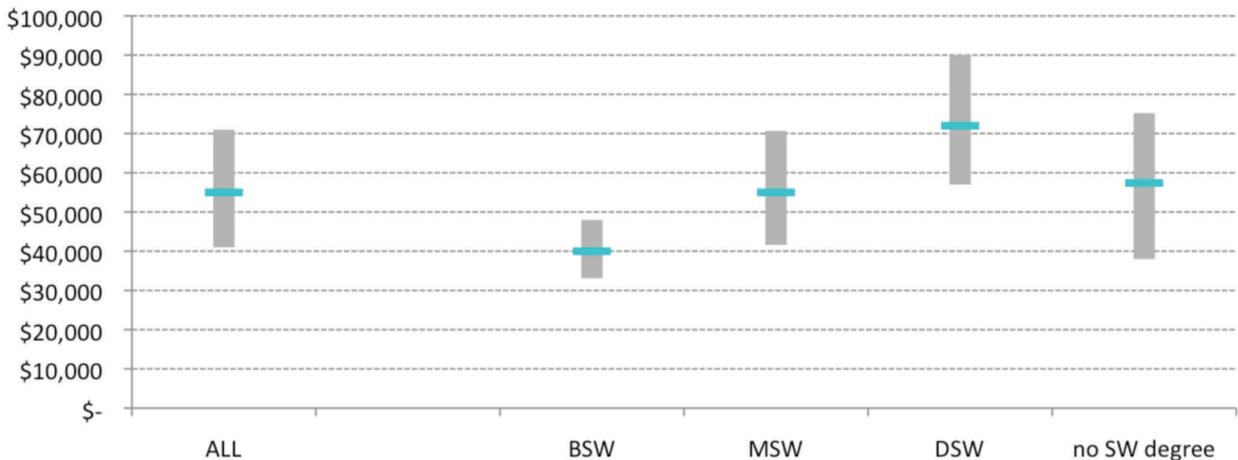
FIGURE 5. BASE PAY BY RACE/ETHNICITY



## EDUCATION

A strong, positive correlation exists between education level and compensation for social work practitioners. Individuals possessing the MSW as their highest degree have a median Base Pay of \$55,000 (the same as that for all practitioners). Earning a DSW/PhD in social work carries a premium of \$17,000 in annual Base Pay. Those who did not progress beyond a BSW typically earn \$15,000 less than their colleagues with an MSW. The few practitioners who do not hold any social work-related degree display the greatest range in compensation and a median of \$57,400 (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. BASE PAY BY HIGHEST SOCIAL WORK DEGREE

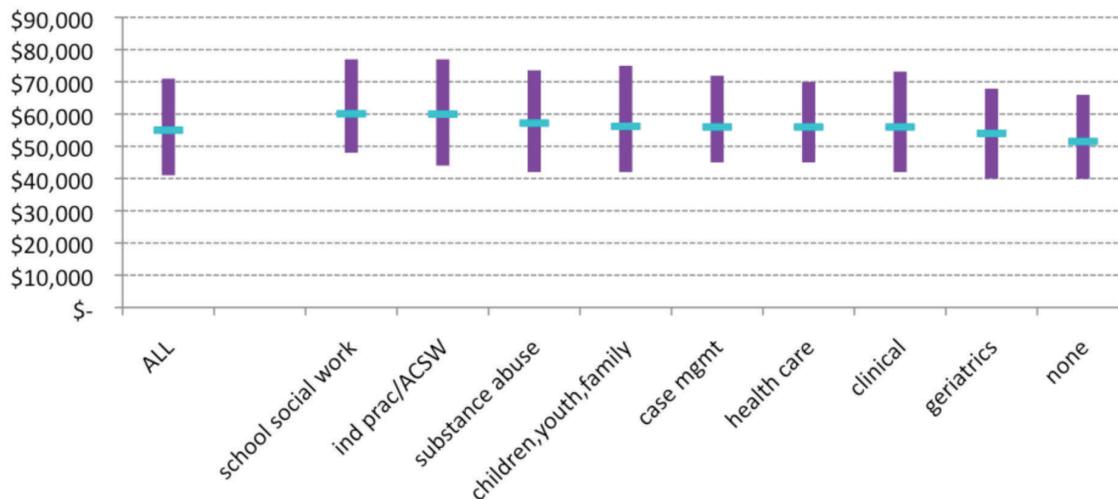


## LICENSES/CERTIFICATIONS

The incidence of holding a social work license has a moderately positive relationship with Base Pay, with a median of \$55,000 compared to \$50,000 for those who do not. Similarly, those who are licensed to provide chemical dependency treatment typically earn slightly more than those who do not (\$58,500 compared to \$55,000).

Holding other types of certification is also related to moderately increased Base Pay. The highest median totals, at approximately \$60,000, are reported for those certified in the areas of school social work and independent practice/ACSW. Those certified in geriatrics tend to earn less (\$54,000) than the median practitioner overall. Those not certified in any other area earn the lowest Base Pay (\$51,500) (Figure 7).

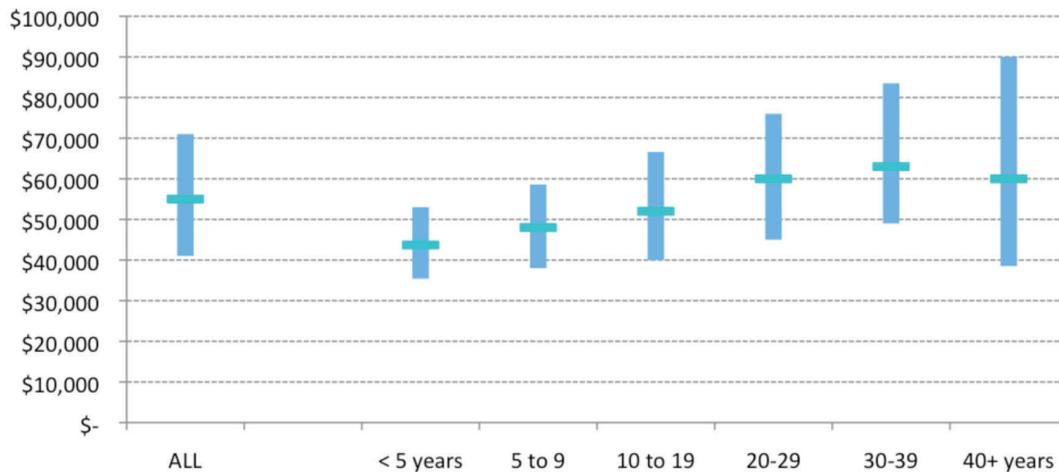
FIGURE 7. BASE PAY BY CERTIFICATION



## EXPERIENCE

Experience in the social work profession shows the expected correlation with Base Pay, rising from a median of \$43,700 for those with less than five years' experience to \$63,000 for those with 30-39 years' experience (Figure 8). Those with 40 years or more experience show a broad range of compensation levels, perhaps reflecting the inclusion of both those at the apex of their careers, as well as those who have reduced responsibilities due to partial retirement.

**FIGURE 8. BASE PAY BY YEARS OF SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE**

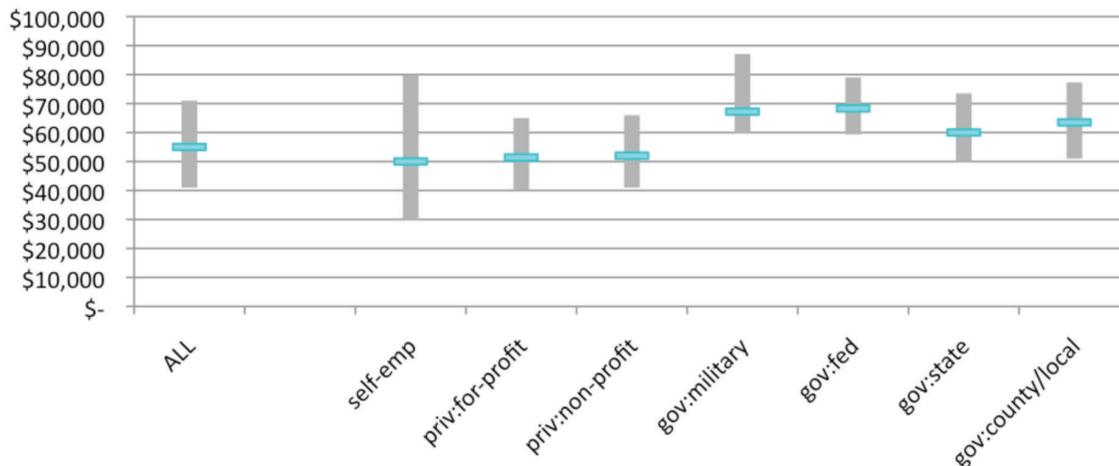


## SECTOR OF EMPLOYMENT

Compensation varies significantly by the sector in which social work practitioners are employed. Generally speaking, those employed by government agencies earn more than those in the private sector.

Medians are highest for those employed by the military and the federal government, around \$68,000 per year. Military employment tends to have the higher ceiling, with the 75th percentile at \$87,100. For those employed in the private sector, there is little difference in compensation rates between those working for non-profits versus for-profit enterprises, with medians of \$52,000 and \$51,400, respectively. Self-employed practitioners show a broad range of Base Pay levels. The 75th percentile earned \$80,000 per year, among the highest for any sector, while the 25th percentile earned \$30,000, the lowest of any sector. However, their median Base Pay of \$50,000 is comparable to that received by other private sector employees (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9. BASE PAY BY SECTOR**

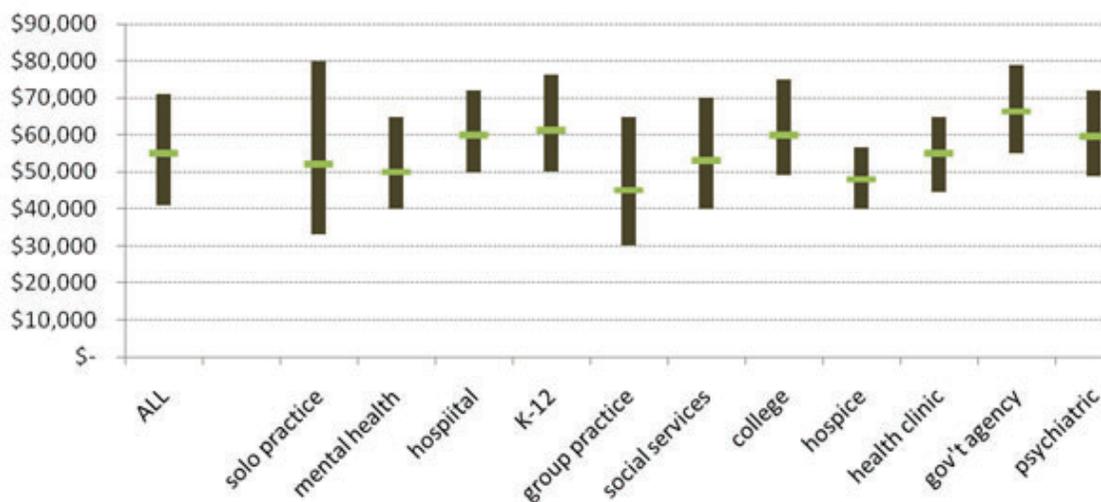


## SETTINGS

For primary setting, respondents were given 31 categories on the survey in which to classify their position. Shown below are the quartiles for the 11 most commonly indicated settings (comprising 80% of all responses). Among these 11 categories, significant variation is noted. Highest median Base Pay levels are experienced by those working in government agencies (\$66,300), K-12 schools (\$61,300), colleges or universities (\$60,000), and hospitals/medical centers (\$60,000). Lowest Base Pay was experienced by those employed in a private group practice (\$45,000) (Figure 10).

Those employed in a solo private practice exhibit similar compensation characteristics to those who previously indicated they are self-employed. That is, a broad range is present, with a high potential ceiling (\$80,000 at the 75th percentile) and relatively low entry-level point (\$33,000 at the 25th percentile). The median of \$52,000 is below, but comparable to, the population of practitioners as a whole (\$55,000).

FIGURE 10. BASE PAY BY SETTING

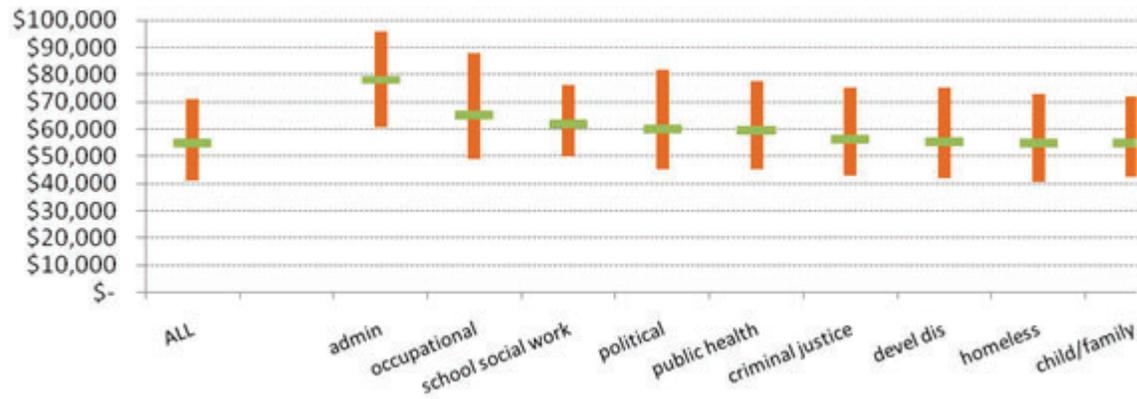


## PRACTICE AREA

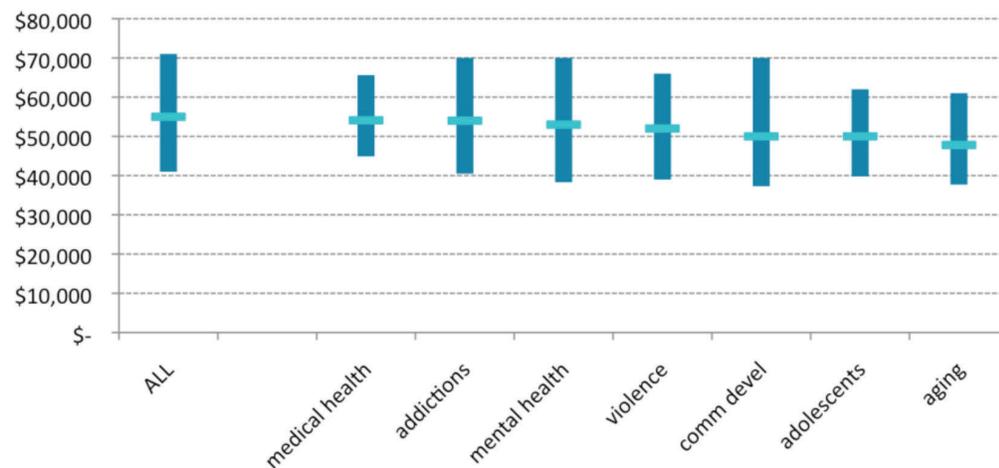
Regarding practice area, 16 categories were offered to respondents in which to classify their social work position. Among these, by far the highest median Base Pay was earned by those in administration (\$78,000). The next best paid practice area, occupational social work, was \$13,000 lower, at a median of \$65,000. Other practice areas with median Base Pay at or above the overall practitioner median of \$55,000 were: school social work, political social work, public health, criminal

justice, developmental disabilities, displaced persons/homeless, and child welfare/family (Figure 11). Each of the other practice areas had a median Base Pay below the overall practitioner median of \$55,000 (Figure 12).

**FIGURE 11. BASE PAY BY PRACTICE AREA**



**FIGURE 12. BASE PAY BY OTHER PRACTICE AREAS**



## LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

As one would expect, there is a strong correlation between Base Pay and responsibility level. At \$90,000, executives earn a high median Base Pay, by social work profession standards. Those at the 75th percentile reported their Base Pay at \$111,800. For the next highest level of responsibility, directors/managers, there is a significant drop in median Base Pay, down to \$66,000. And another drop is experienced for supervisors/coordinators, with median Base Pay at \$57,000. Those not in a supervisory role at all earn the least, a median of \$50,000 (Figure 13).

The other segment analyzed were those indicating their responsibility level was owner or partner. As a group, these individuals encompass a broad range of Base Pay levels. At the 25th percentile, the Base Pay of \$35,000 is the lowest of any segment analyzed. Meanwhile, the 75th percentile of \$84,500 is the highest of any segment except for executives. However, the typical (median) owner or partner reported Base Pay at \$55,000, above the amount reported by those without any supervisory authority, but below that of supervisors/coordinators.

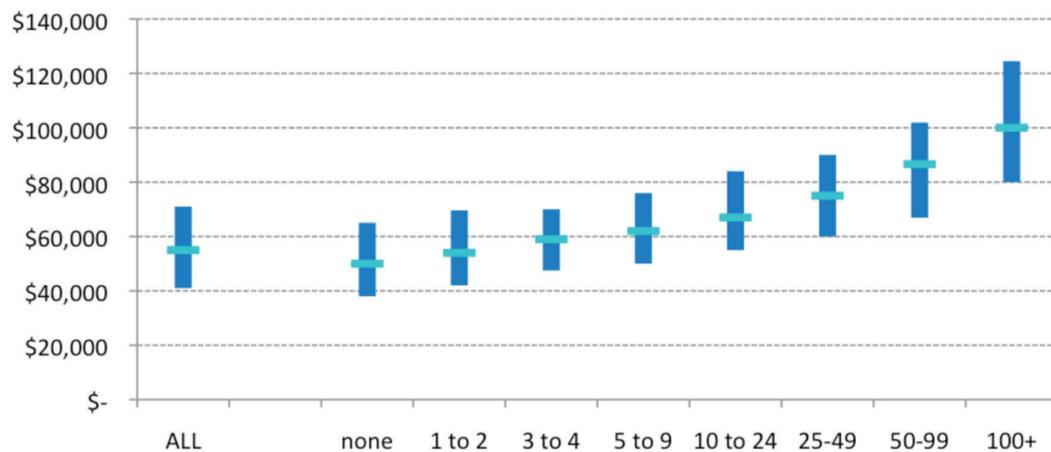
**FIGURE 13. BASE PAY BY RESPONSIBILITY LEVEL**



## NUMBER OF SUPERVISEES

Regarding the number of others supervised, a clear relationship is noted with increasing compensation for the higher number of reports. Those without supervisory authority earned a median of \$50,000. This rises to \$62,000 among those supervising 5-9 employees and \$100,000 among those supervising 100 or more (Figure 14).

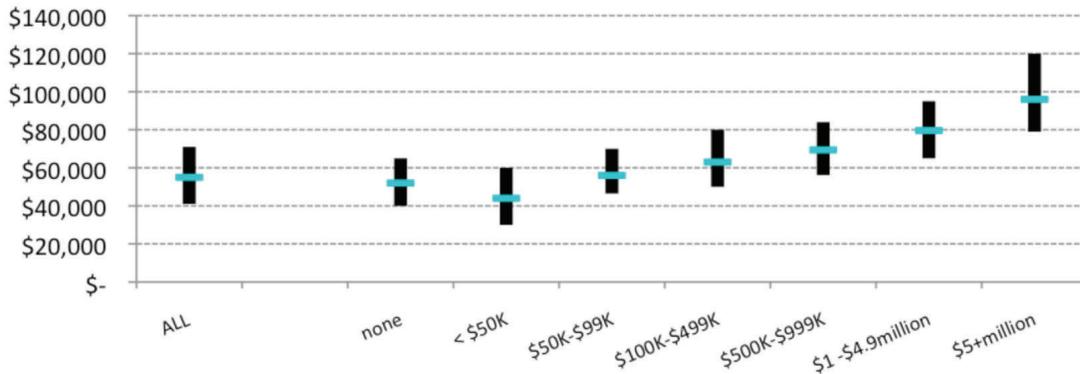
**FIGURE 14. BASE PAY BY NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES SUPERVISED**



## BUDGET AUTHORITY

In a similar manner, Base Pay goes up with increasing budget authority. Those managing a budget of below \$50,000 have a median Base Pay of \$44,000. This increases to \$63,000 for those managing a budget of \$100,000 to \$499,999 and \$96,000 among those managing a budget of \$5 million or more (Figure 15).

FIGURE 15. BASE PAY BY BUDGET AUTHORITY



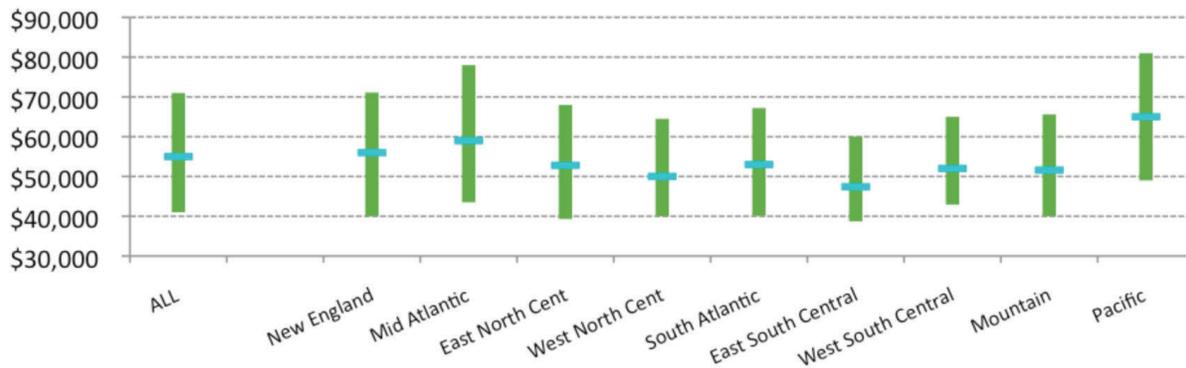
## REGION

Respondents were asked to identify the city, state, and zip code of their work location. For summary purposes, responses were organized by the nine US Census regions in Figure 16.

Standing out as providing the highest Base Pay levels are the Pacific states (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, and Hawaii), with a median of \$65,000. Next highest median pay is received by those in the Middle Atlantic states (New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania), at \$59,000.

Lowest levels of Base Pay are received by social work practitioners in the East South Central states (Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama), with a median of \$47,400.

FIGURE 16. BASE PAY BY CENSUS REGION



By individual state, the highest medians for Base Pay are in:

- District of Columbia (\$74,400)
- California (\$69,300)
- New York (\$62,400)
- Hawaii (\$62,300)
- Nevada (\$61,900)

Four of the top five highest paying metro areas (CBSA) are in California:

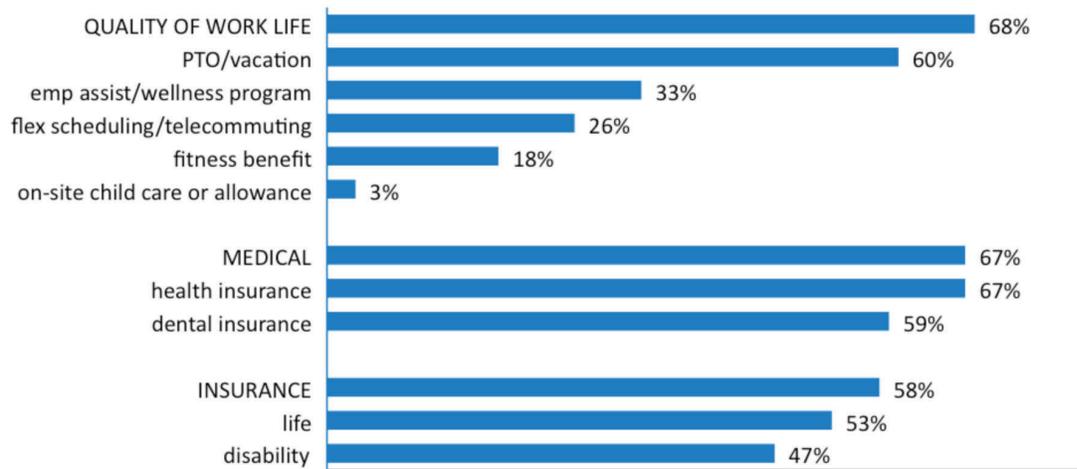
- San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Barbara, CA (\$77,200)
- Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA (\$75,000)
- Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT (\$72,400)
- Sacramento-Arden Arcade-Roseville, CA (\$72,000)
- San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA (\$69,300)

## BENEFITS

A question asked what benefits were offered as part of their social work related employment/self-employment as of October 1, 2009, whether the respondent takes advantage of them or not.

Figure 17 shows that 60% of practitioners report being offered some type of paid time off (PTO or vacation). Other benefits under the “quality of work life” definition are received by about a third of practitioners or fewer. Regarding medical insurance, two-thirds (67%) are offered health insurance and 59% are offered dental insurance. Other insurance options, life and disability, are offered to about half of social work practitioners.

FIGURE 17. BENEFITS OFFERED



## CONCLUSION

This brief summary has only skimmed the surface of data generated by the NASW 2009 Salary Survey. The full report presents explorations of Base Pay by a variety of factors, as well as an in-depth portrait of professionals, their employment situations, and the benefits they receive.



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