

The Difference between Professions:

An Examination of the Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Licensed Mental Health Counselor

The Chapter has received a number of inquiries related to the differences/similarities between the scopes of practice between the Licensed Clinical Social Worker and the Licensed Mental Health Counselor. In response to the questions surrounding this issue we are providing you with the following comparison of the requirements for licensure as well as the respective scopes of practice for each profession in hopes that it will offer greater clarity.

The scope of practice of the Licensed Clinical Social Worker (as defined in Article 154 of the Education law; Section 7701) encompasses the scope of practice of Licensed Master Social Work and, in addition, includes the *diagnosis* of mental, emotional, behavioral, addictive and developmental disorders and disabilities and of the psychosocial aspects of illness, injury, disability and impairment undertaken within a psychosocial framework; administration and interpretation of tests and measures of psychosocial functioning; *development and implementation of appropriate assessment-based treatment plans*; and the provision of crisis oriented *psychotherapy* and brief, short-term and long-term psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic treatment to individuals, couples, families and groups, habilitation, psychoanalysis and behavior therapy; all undertaken for the purpose of preventing, assessing, treating, ameliorating and resolving psychosocial dysfunction with the goal of maintaining and enhancing the mental, emotional, behavioral, and social functioning and well-being of individuals, couples, families, small groups, organizations, communities and society.

Title Protection of the term “Licensed Clinical Social Worker” is afforded only to individuals who are licensed as such.

Requirements for licensure as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker include the submission of an *application* and fee to the State Education Department, and meeting the requirements for acceptable clinical education and supervised experience. The experience must be completed in a legal manner, which requires licensure and registration as an LMSW in New York. Experience requirements consist of **2000 hours of clinical experience** (defined as the provision of diagnosis, assessment based treatment planning and psychotherapy) over the course of no less than three years (full-time) or a continuous period not to exceed six years (part-time), under the appropriate supervision (provided by an LCSW, Licensed Psychologist or Psychiatrist). Part 52.30 of the Commissioner’s Regulations define acceptable *education* as a master's of social work degree from a program registered by the department, or determined by the department to be the substantial equivalent, that includes completion of a core curriculum which includes at least twelve credit hours of clinical courses, in accordance with the commissioner's regulations. The program must be at least 60 semester hours or the equivalent, including 900 hours of supervised field internship, provided that no more than half of the total semester hours may be advanced standing for social work study at the baccalaureate level.

Applicants must also pass an *examination acceptable to the Department*, be at least twenty-one years of age; be of good moral character as determined by the department; and submit the required fees for an initial license and triennial registration period.

The scope of practice of the Licensed Mental Health Counselor (as defined in Article 163 of the Education Law; Section 8402) includes the *evaluation, assessment*, amelioration, treatment, modification, or adjustment to a disability, problem, or disorder of behavior, character, development, emotion, personality or relationships by the use of verbal or behavioral methods with individuals, couples, families or groups in private practice, group, or organized settings; and

the use of assessment instruments and **mental health counseling and psychotherapy** to identify, evaluate and treat dysfunctions and disorders for purposes of providing appropriate mental health counseling services.

Title Protection of the term “Licensed Mental Health Counselor” is afforded only to individuals who are licensed as such.

Requirements for licensure as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor are as follows...

Applicants must complete and file an **application** with the State Education Department once they have completed their **education** (master’s degree or higher) in counseling from a program registered by the State Education Department or determined by the department to be the substantial equivalent thereof, in accordance with the commissioner's regulations. Section 52.32 of the Commissioner’s Regulations define an acceptable program, as of January 1, 2010, as at least 60 semester hours or the equivalent with the content specified in law, including a supervised internship or practicum of at least one year, defined as at least 600 clock hours. The graduate coursework shall include, but not be limited to, the following areas: human growth and development; social and cultural foundations of counseling; counseling theory and practice and psychopathology; group dynamics; lifestyle and career development; assessment and appraisal of individuals, couples and families and groups; research and program evaluation; professional orientation and ethics; foundations of mental health counseling and consultation; clinical instruction; and completion of a minimum one year supervised internship or practicum in mental health counseling. There are no provisions for advanced standing within the 60-semester hour graduate program leading to licensure.

Applicants must also accrue a minimum of **3,000 hours of post graduate supervised experience** relevant to the practice of mental health counseling satisfactory to the State Department of Education. Typically the experience is completed under a limited permit issued by the Department for practice in an authorized setting under a qualified supervisor, as defined in law and regulation. At least one-half of the required 3,000 supervised hours in the practice of mental health counseling should be face-to-face with clients (“direct”) and the remainder may be “indirect.” Indirect activities would include supervision, record-keeping, professional development, research, and case management. The supervisor must be licensed as an LMHC, LCSW, physician, licensed psychologist, registered professional nurse or nurse practitioner and competent in the practice of mental health counseling, as defined in law. An LMSW may not supervise an LMHC permit holder or student intern.

Applicants must also pass an **examination acceptable to the Department**, be at least 21 years of age, be of good moral character, and submit the required fees for an initial license and triennial registration period.

Major Differences between the LCSW and LMHC Scopes of Practice

The LMHC scope of practice limits performance of some of the tasks that are included in social work and other professional scopes. Such limitations are established either through explicit statutory language or by virtue of the absence of such tasks within the Article 163 scope of practice. Such limitations include: Diagnosis and the treatment of certain serious mental illnesses on a continuous and sustained basis without consultation with a physician.

While LMHC’s are authorized to use symptom classification systems such as the DSM in the course of their work they are not statutorily authorized to render a diagnosis under their scope. An LMHC may not provide treatment of a serious mental illness, as defined in law and regulation, on a continuous and sustained basis without consultation with a physician to

determine whether any medical care is indicated for the illness. The law defines “serious mental illness” as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism. In addition, while the term assessment-based treatment planning is not explicitly included in the scope of the LMHC, the process of providing services includes an appropriate assessment, evaluation and treatment planning by the licensed professional, practicing within his/her scope of practice. The LMHC scope does include assessment, evaluation and treatment for the purpose of providing appropriate mental health counseling services [8402(1)(b) of Ed. Law].

While there are similarities in education and experiential requirements as well as practice, there are key elements of difference in the scopes of practice which distinguishes LCSW practice from that of the LMHC. Similarly, there are differences in the scope of the LMSW and the LCSW, as the LMSW is authorized to assess, evaluate, formulate and implement a plan of action based on client needs and strengths, but may only provide psychotherapy, diagnosis and assessment-based treatment planning, as defined in Education Law, under the supervision of an LCSW, licensed psychologist or psychiatrist.

Registered LMSW, LCSW & LMHC Licenses in New York State

*As of July 2010**

LMSW: 23,943

LCSW: 24,823

LMHC: 4,200

* **Source:** NYS Education Department- Office of the Professions Website (Accessed Oct. 2010)

Social Work License Statistics: www.op.nysed.gov/prof/sw/swcounts.htm

Mental Health Counselor Statistics: www.op.nysed.gov/prof/mhp/mhpcounts.htm

LMHC / LCSW Quick Comparison

<p style="text-align: center;">LCSW Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychotherapy (as defined by Art. 154) • Diagnosis of mental disorders • Assessment based treatment planning • Administration and interpretation of tests • Social work counseling; use of “social work theory, principles and methods” • Treating addictive disorders • Treating Serious Mental Illness 	<p style="text-align: center;">LMHC Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychotherapy (as defined by Art. 163) • Use of classification systems consistent with mental health counseling scope • Evaluation, assessment, use of assessment instruments • Mental health counseling • Treating addictive disorders • Medical consultation required if treating patients with serious mental illness as defined in law on a continuous and sustained basis
<p style="text-align: center;">LCSW Educational/Experience Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters degree of social work (from a registered program) or the equivalent as determined by the department; 	<p style="text-align: center;">LMHC Educational/Experience Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters degree (or higher) in counseling (from a registered program);

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 60 semester hours; no more than half of the hours may be advanced standing for study at the baccalaureate level; • At least twelve credit hours of clinical courses and at least 900 hours of supervised field practicum; • 2000 hours of clinical experience (diagnosis, assessment based treatment planning and psychotherapy); • Supervision of clinical experience; and • Passage of clinical examination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 1 year supervised field practicum; • At least 60 semester hours with defined content and no advanced standing provisions allowed; • 3000 post graduate supervised experience relevant to field of mental health counseling, half of which must be direct (face to face contact); and • Passage of clinical examination.
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