

Association of



Professional
Behavior Analysts

APBA 2009 Professional Employment Survey Results

Background

One of the ways APBA will serve its members and the field of applied behavior analysis is by conducting membership surveys on issues that are important for ABA professionals, the field of applied behavior analysis, employers, consumers, and the larger community. Surveys will collect evidence not otherwise available that will be useful in guiding APBA's services to its members.

APBA recently completed a survey of members concerning various aspects of professional employment, including salaried and self-employment income and benefits. The survey was made available electronically to 5,924 individuals, and 1,239 individuals (20.9%) responded. The instructions directed respondents to answer all questions with reference to the year 2008. The main findings from that survey are described next.

Professional credentials

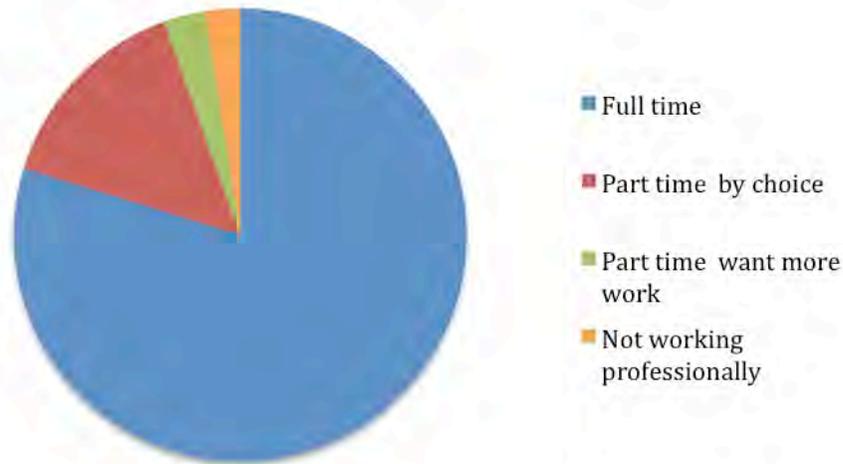
Given the composition of APBA membership, it should not be surprising that 82.7% of respondents were BCBAs, and 17.2% were BCaBAs. Many of these individuals also hold other credentials, including state licenses in psychology (7.2%) and K-12 teaching certificates (16.8%). A number of respondents (172) reported holding a wide variety of other credentials as well.

The fact that BACB certificants also hold other professional credentials is to be expected, particularly in the early years of the BACB credentialing program, given that many individuals enter this field after being exposed to it in the context of their work in related disciplines. We might also expect that the number of BACB-certified practitioners also holding K-12 teaching credentials will increase as many relatively new ABA master's programs in colleges of education begin to produce a steady flow of graduates.

Full time vs. part time

Fig. 1 shows that 80% of respondents reported working full time. Of the remainder, 14.8% indicated that they worked part time by choice, and only 3% worked part time because they could not find additional work. Only 2.5% reported that they were not working professionally at all during 2008.

Fig. 1. Extent of professional work



Of those working part time, Fig. 2 shows that about half are putting in 30-40 hours per week, with 17.1% working 20-30 hours per week and 22.1% working 10-20 hours per week. Only 10.9% work less than 10 hours per week. This breakdown of part-time hours was fairly consistent across BCBAAs and BCaBAs, although BCaBAs tend to work somewhat fewer hours per week than BCBAAs.

Fig. 2. Part time hours



The survey did not define “full time” nor ask the actual hours per week engaged in professional work. Many professionals put in considerably more than 40 hours per week, of course. It should be reassuring that only 3% of respondents cannot find sufficient demand for their services, a limitation that may partly depend on where they live. The fact that only 2.5% of respondents were not professionally employed in some way is also testimony to the demand for ABA services, as well



as to the appeal of professional careers in this field and the relatively young age of ABA professionals.

Type of employment

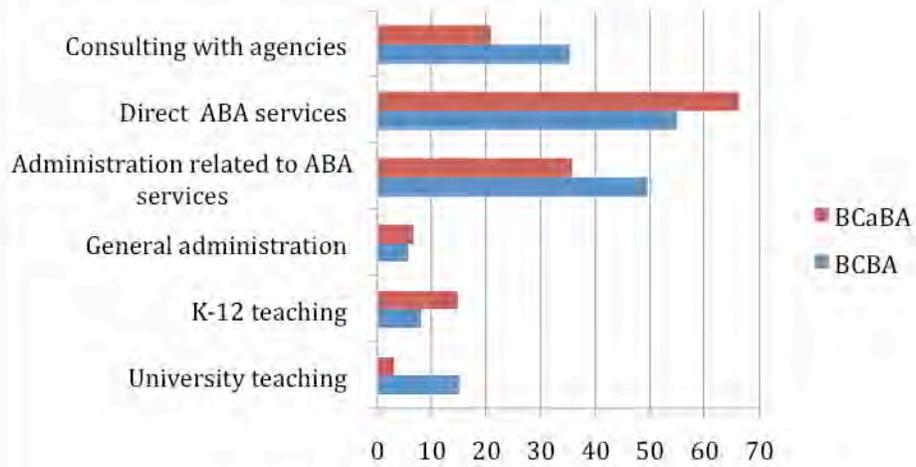
Most respondents reported working for either governmental (28.5%) or non-governmental (34%) agencies. However, 39.3% categorized themselves as self-employed. Only 13.1% work for colleges or universities. These allocations are similar for BCBAs and BCaBAs, except that only 4.1% of BCaBAs declared university employment. Respondents were invited to identify multiple categories because some individuals supplement full time employment with consulting activities.

These data may be especially interesting simply because the circumstances of employment for ABA professionals has never before been assessed. Is it more surprising that more individuals work for non-governmental than governmental agencies, or that employment by governmental agencies is as high as it is? What are the implications of the fact that almost 40% of ABA professionals are self-employed? It will be interesting to monitor this distribution of employment categories through future surveys.

Type of work activities

Another question probed employment circumstances further by asking about the nature of work activities. Fig. 3 shows these data for BCBAs and BCaBAs separately. Direct provision of behavioral services was the most frequently reported activity. Many reported involvement in administration or supervision directly related to ABA services (e.g., program director, shift supervisor, house manager, etc.). Some of both kinds of activities presumably occur in the context of agency consulting, which many respondents also reported. Not surprisingly, BCBAs were more likely to be involved in higher education teaching, and more BCaBAs were involved in K-12 teaching. Administration not directly related to ABA services was the least reported type of work.

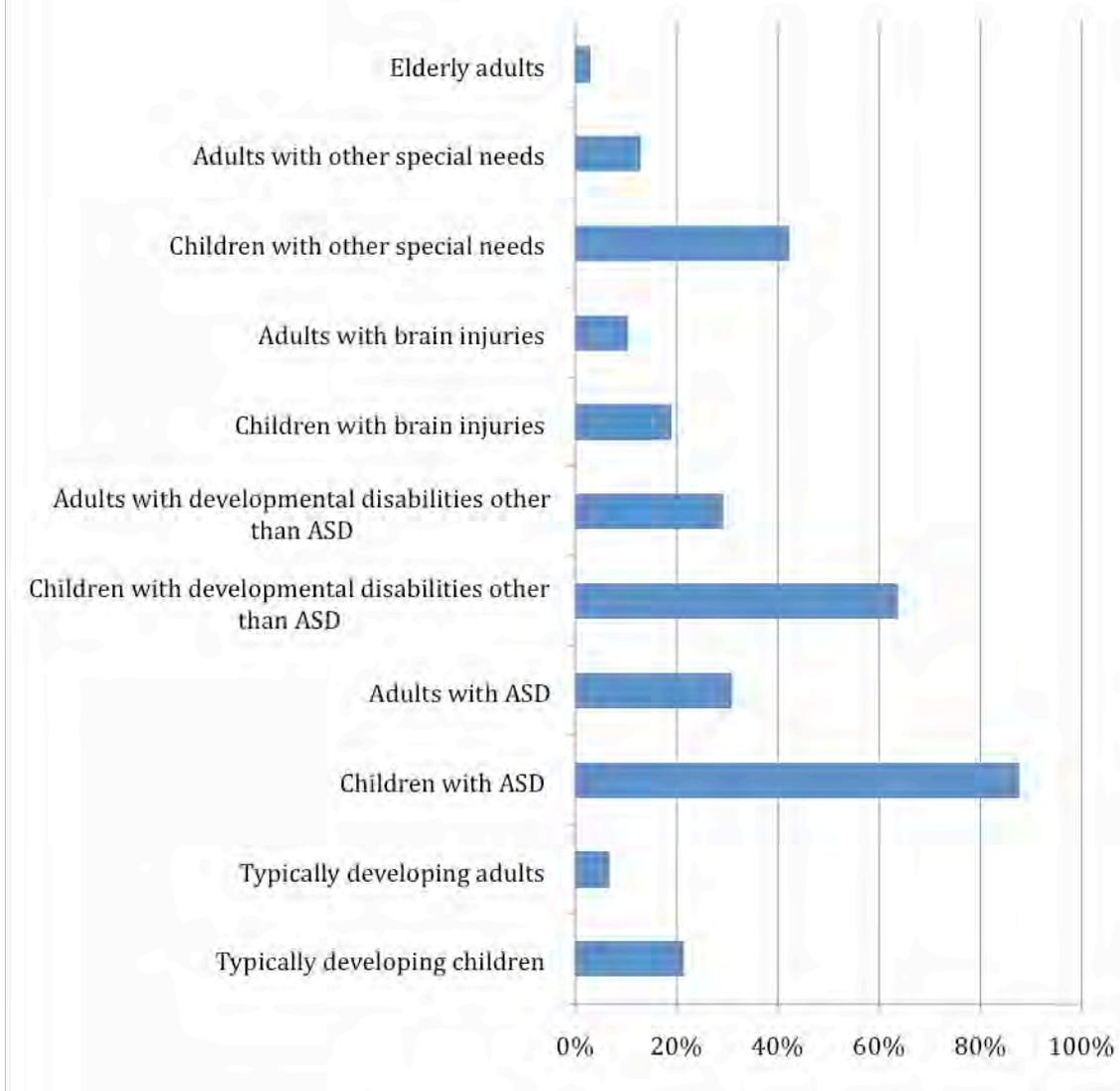
Fig. 3. Nature of professional work



Consumer population

Respondents were asked to indicate the populations with which they worked, and the data are shown in Figure 4.

Fig. 4. Consumer population



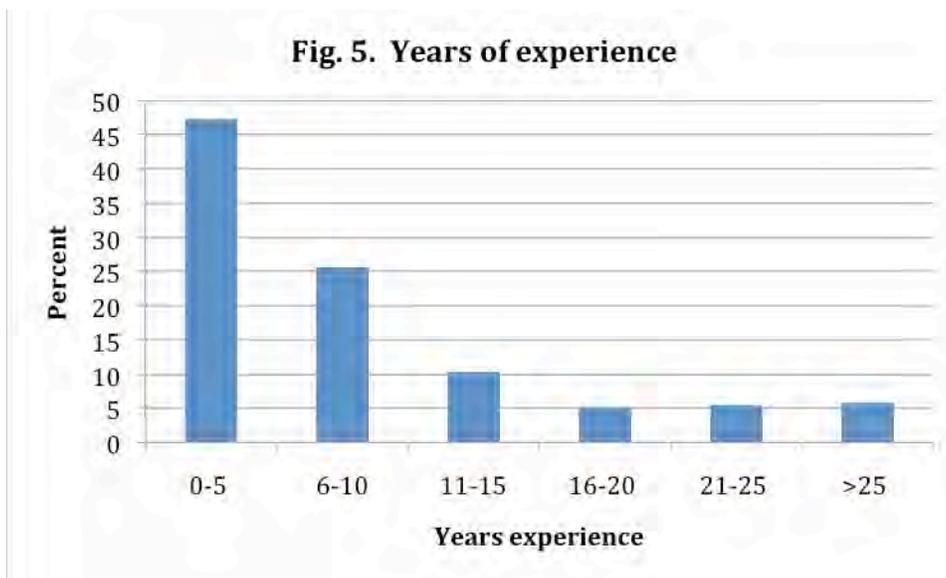
These data reveal that most respondents reported working with children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders, although children with other developmental disabilities was the second most common classification. Adults with ASD and adults with other developmental disabilities were each reported as recipients of services by about 30% of respondents. Children and adults with brain injuries were less often reported as consumers. There were many children with other special needs not fitting in these other categories who were served as well. Elderly adults were least often reported. Differences between BCBA's and BCaBA's across these population categories were generally minor.

Although most respondents reported working with children and adults with ASD, it is notable that the consumer populations served by ABA professionals are

nevertheless quite diverse. This diversity has implications for researchers, textbook authors, and instructors.

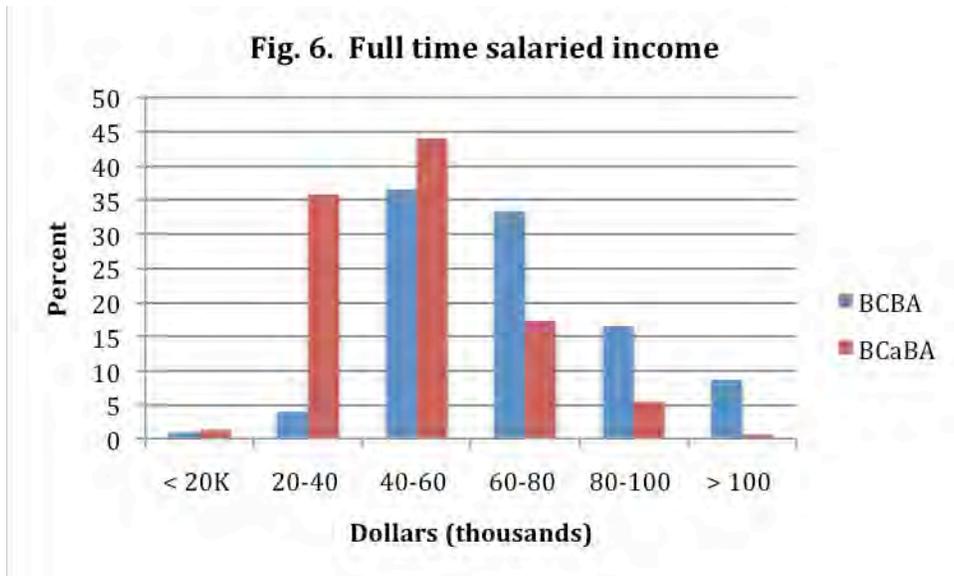
Experience

What kind of experience do ABA professionals offer these consumer populations? The data in Figure 5 suggest that the ABA community remains relatively young. Close to half of the respondents reported less than five years of experience. Although the field of applied behavior analysis has many decades behind it, the BACB credentialing program is only about ten years old, and many of its approved course sequences and practicum programs are still fairly new.



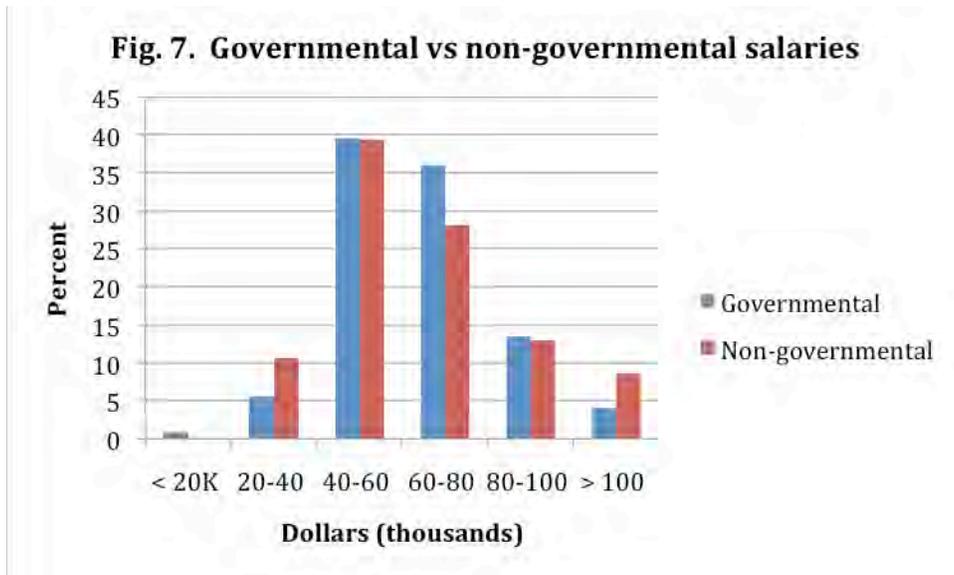
Full-time salaried income

Figure 6 shows the distribution of reported salaried income for BCBA and BCaBA respondents who were full-time salaried employees in 2008. Although respondents reported salaries in \$5,000 increments, this display in \$20,000 increments provides a more easily interpreted picture of salaried incomes. There are many factors that determine individual salaries, and survey data of this sort should be used only as a general guide by employers and employees.



The data for BCBAs are skewed toward the upper end of the distribution, with a quarter of BCBA respondents reporting salaries over \$80,000. In contrast, more than a third of BCaBAs reported salaries below \$40,000. These differences in the distributions are understandable, given differences in educational background and credentialed competencies. Overall, these salaried income data suggest a strong demand for the services of ABA professionals.

Figure 7 addresses the question of how salaries differ across governmental and non-governmental agencies. The data show full time salaries for all respondents. These data do not show notable differences across the two categories of agencies.



Employee benefits

Employee salaries are typically supplemented by a variety of benefits that often have monetary value. Respondents indicated which of the listed types of benefits they received. Figure 8 shows the data for all respondents, and Figure 9 contrasts responses from employees of governmental and non-governmental agencies.

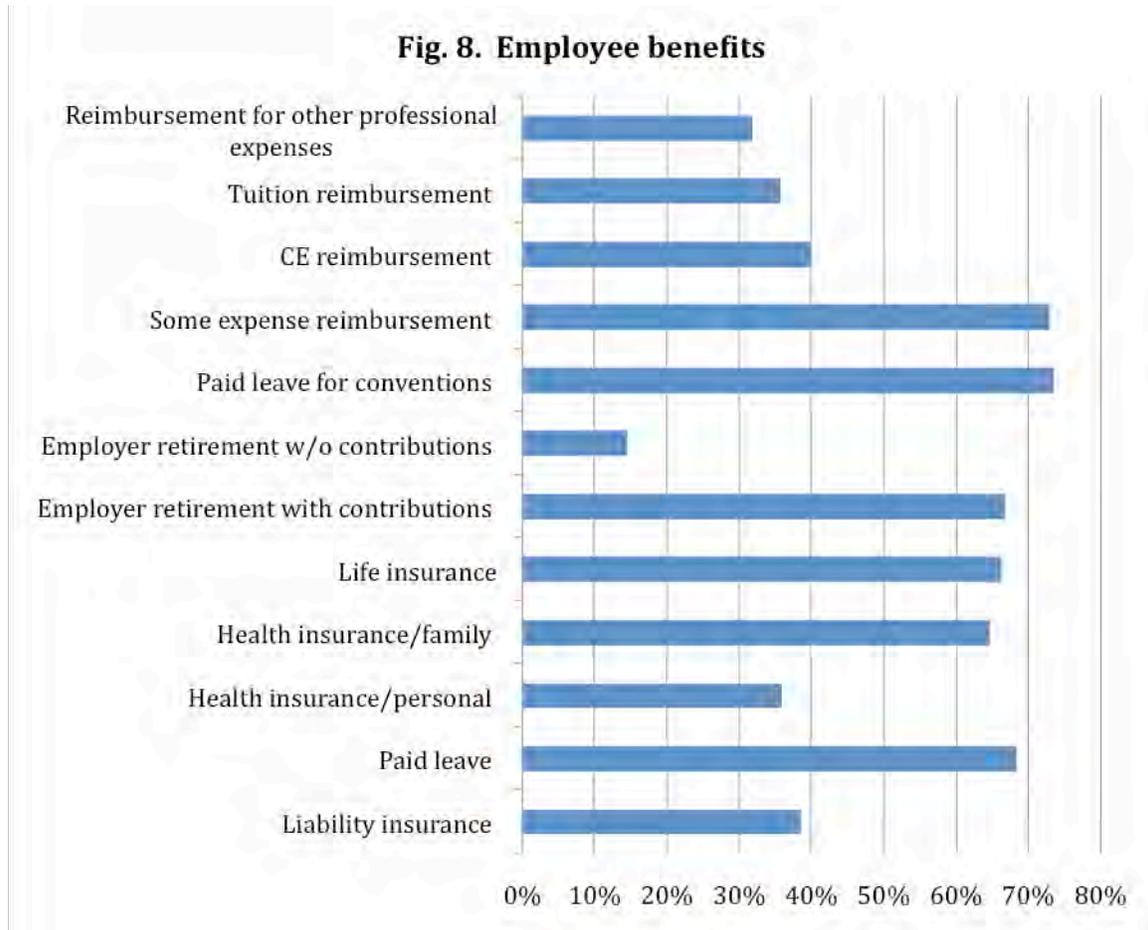
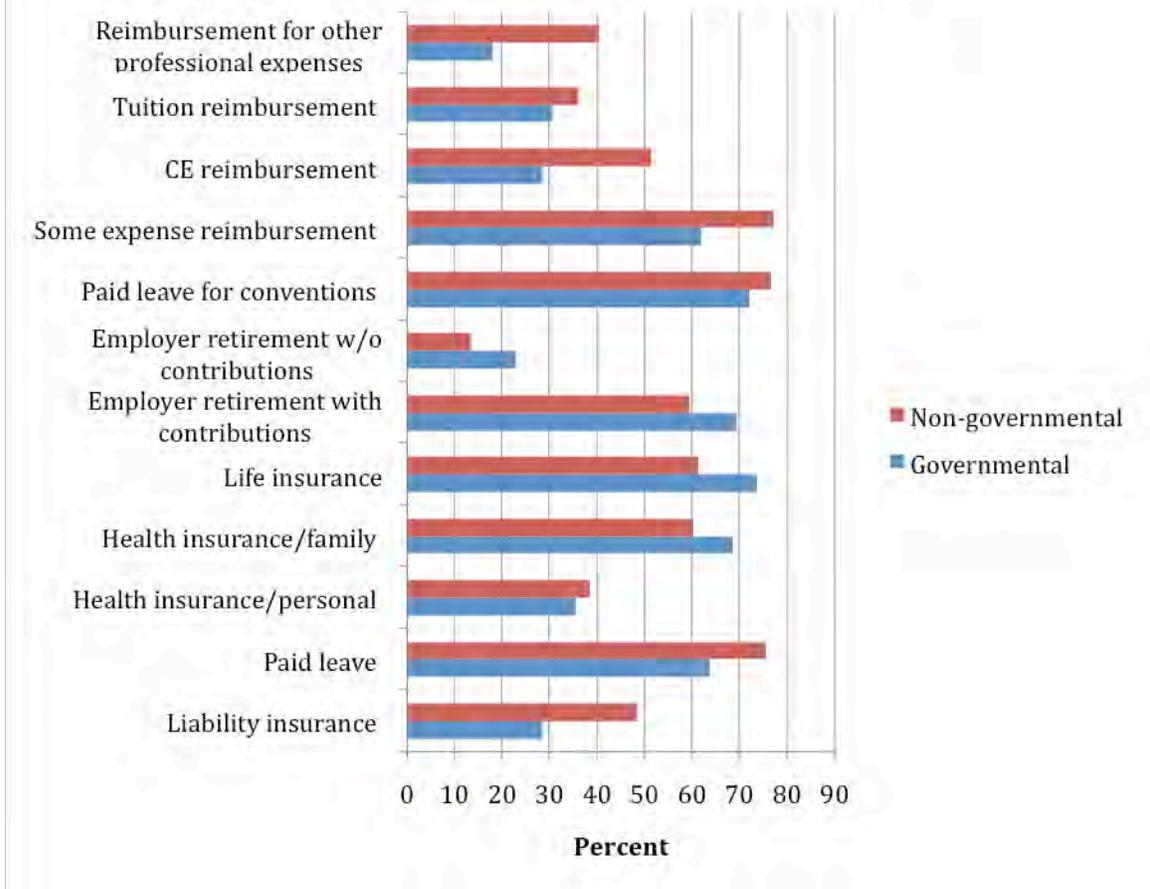


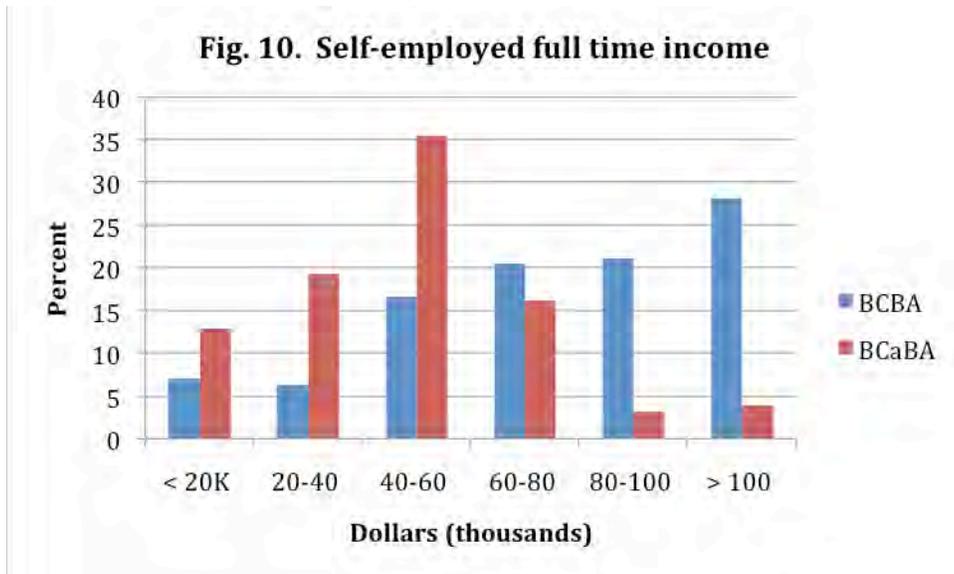
Fig. 9. Governmental vs non-governmental benefits



Although there are some reported differences between governmental versus non-governmental agencies in benefits offered to employees, the differences do not seem to favor one type of employer over the other. In general, the data in Figures 8 and 9 further support the picture of strong demand for the services of credentialed ABA professionals. Employers generally seem to provide reasonable levels of support for employees’ professional and personal needs, although there remains plenty of room for improvement. BCaBAs reported slightly less benefit support than BCBA in some categories.

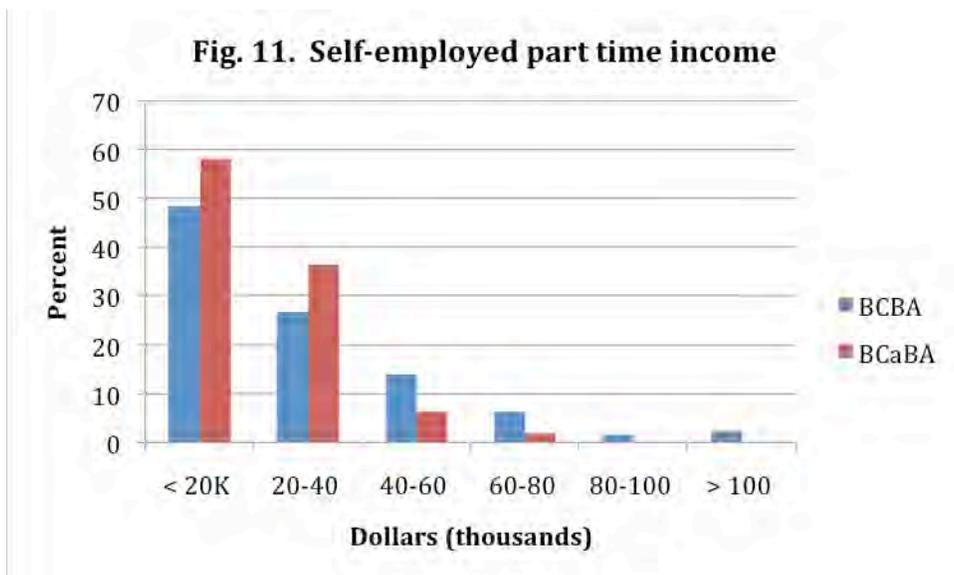
Self-employed income

Figure 10 shows the reported income separately for BCBA and BCaBA respondents who were self-employed full time during 2008.



A comparison of these full-time self-employment data with the full-time salary data from Figure 6 reveals that BCBAs who are self-employed are more likely to report higher income than BCBAs who are salaried, although this assessment does not consider the value of employee benefits. On the other hand, BCaBAs report higher incomes as salaried employees.

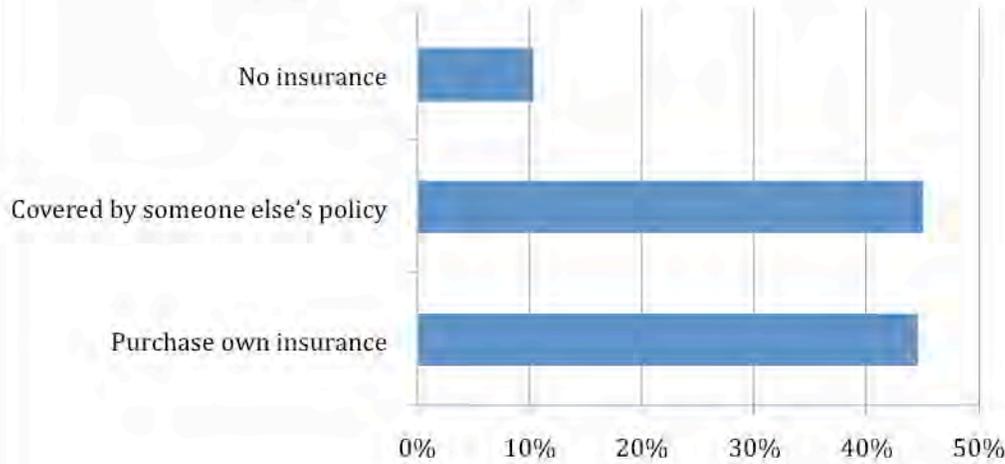
To complete the picture of self-employment, Figure 11 shows income data for the 17.8% of respondents who were self-employed part time during 2008.



Self-employed health insurance status

Professionals who are self-employed must address their own needs for health insurance. Self-employed respondents reported the status of their health insurance coverage (Fig. 12).

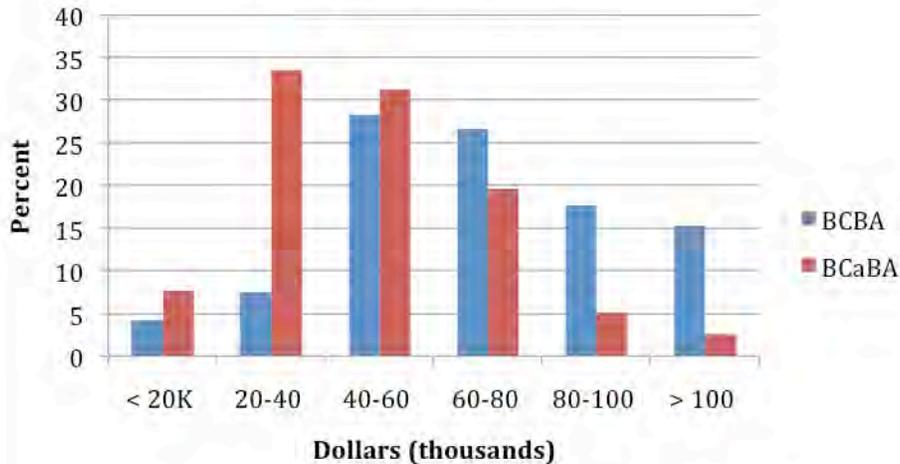
Fig. 12. Self-employed health insurance status



Total income

Of course, many ABA professionals may derive income from both salaried employment and supplemental self-employment. Figure 13 shows responses to a question regarding total income for 2008. These data show the same relationship between BCBA and BCaBA income as Fig. 6 showed regarding full time salaries.

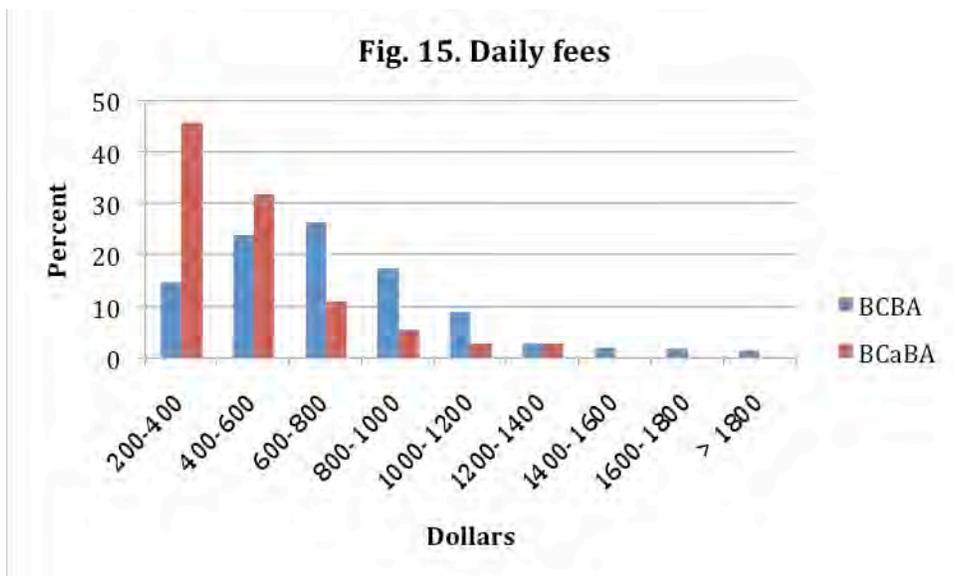
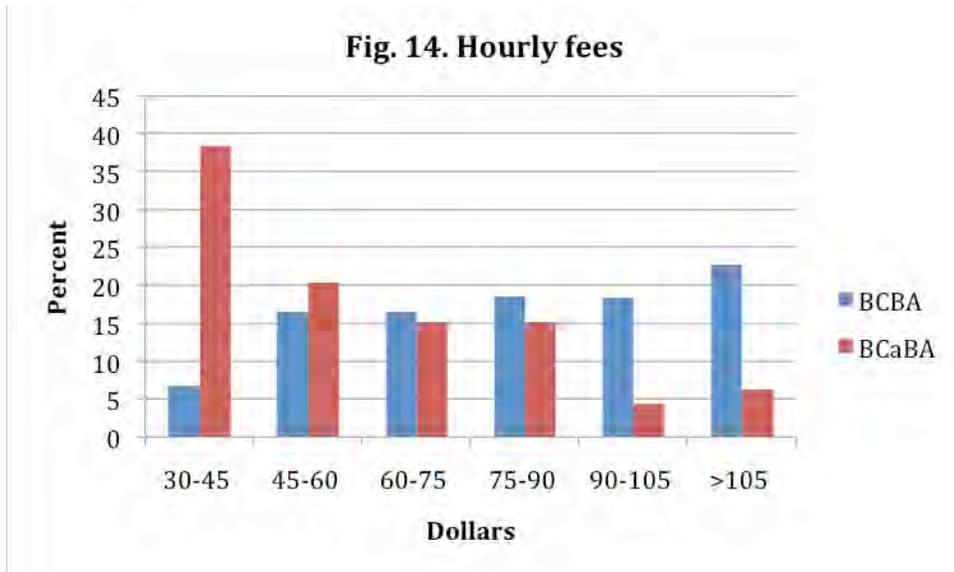
Fig. 13. Total income



Hourly and daily fees

Self-employment income is largely based on fees charged on an hourly or daily basis for professional services. Figures 14 and 15 show the rates charged by BCBA and BCaBA for their services. Both data sets show that BCBA tend to report higher fees than BCaBA. The hourly fees charged by BCBA tend to be

fairly evenly distributed across fees of \$45 to over \$105. However, the distribution of daily fees charged by BCBA's peaks at \$600-\$800.



Experience in relation to income and fees

There are many factors influencing the income earned by ABA professionals and the fees they charge for their services. The amount of experience each practitioner brings to their services is certainly one such variable. Individuals who have only recently graduated from school and earned their BACB or BCaBA credential are only beginning to build their post-graduate repertoire and their reputation in the local and regional community. Those who have been practicing

for some years presumably have certain strengths and advantages over their more junior colleagues in developing their careers.

Figure 16 examines the role of experience by showing the total income reported in 2008 for all respondents who had 0-5, 11-15, or 20-25 years of experience. Not surprisingly, the data show that individuals with greater experience tended to earn somewhat more than individuals with less experience. This relationship was most pronounced with individuals with the least experience.

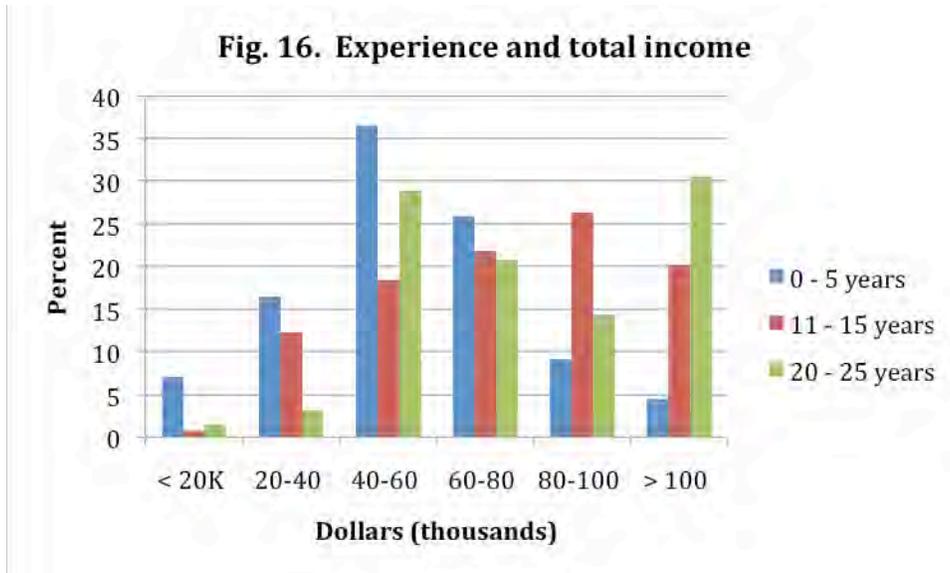


Figure 17 shows the relationship between these same three classes of experience and hourly fees charged for services. The hourly fees reported by individuals with the least experience seem relatively consistent across the range of charges. The rates set by individuals with 11-15 years of experience tend to be slightly higher than for the less experienced class. Individuals with 20-25 years of experience tend to report hourly fees somewhat higher than the other two classes. There is considerable overlap across experience classes.

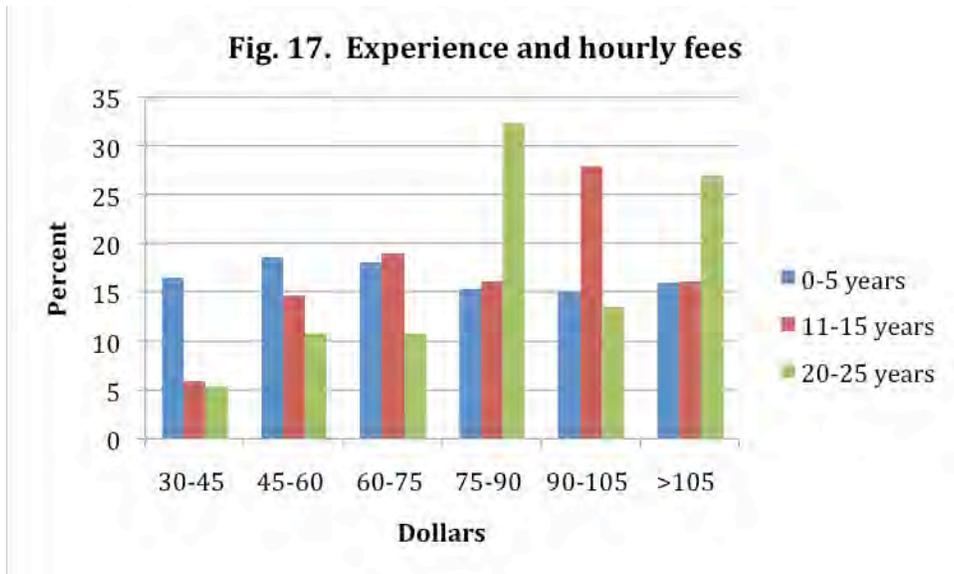
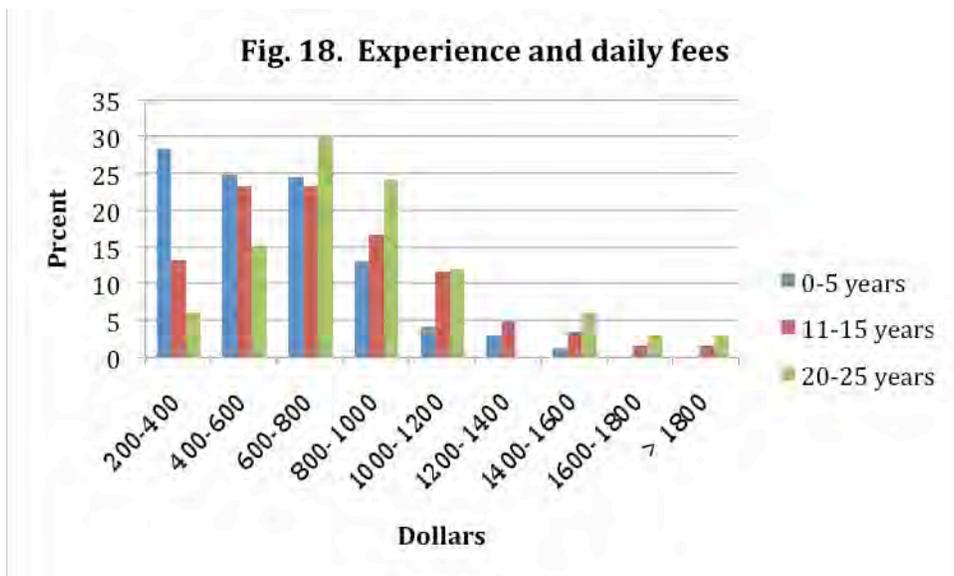


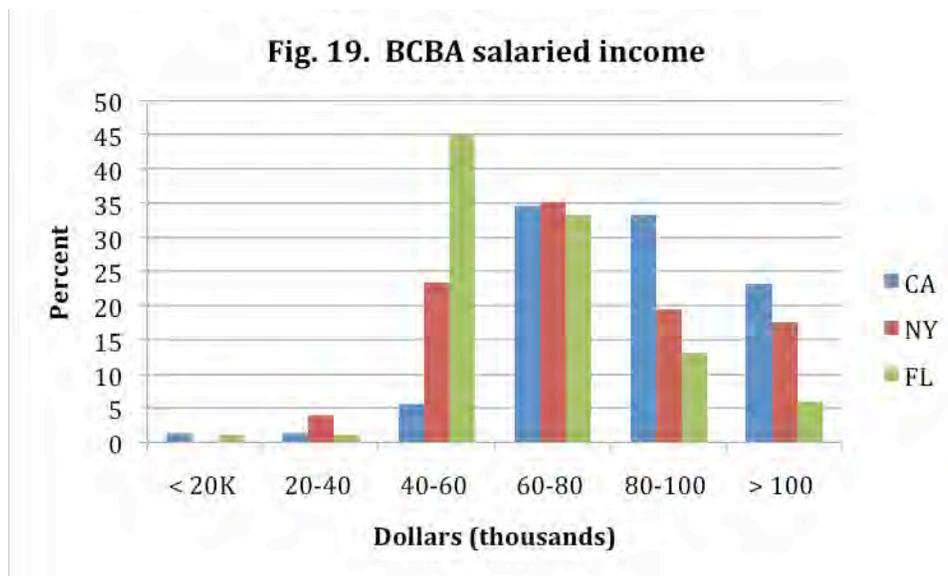
Figure 18 shows the relationship between these same three classes of experience and daily fees charged for services. These data indicate that individuals with more experience generally tend to charge somewhat higher daily consulting fees, although there is again considerable overlap in fees across experience classes.



Regional variations

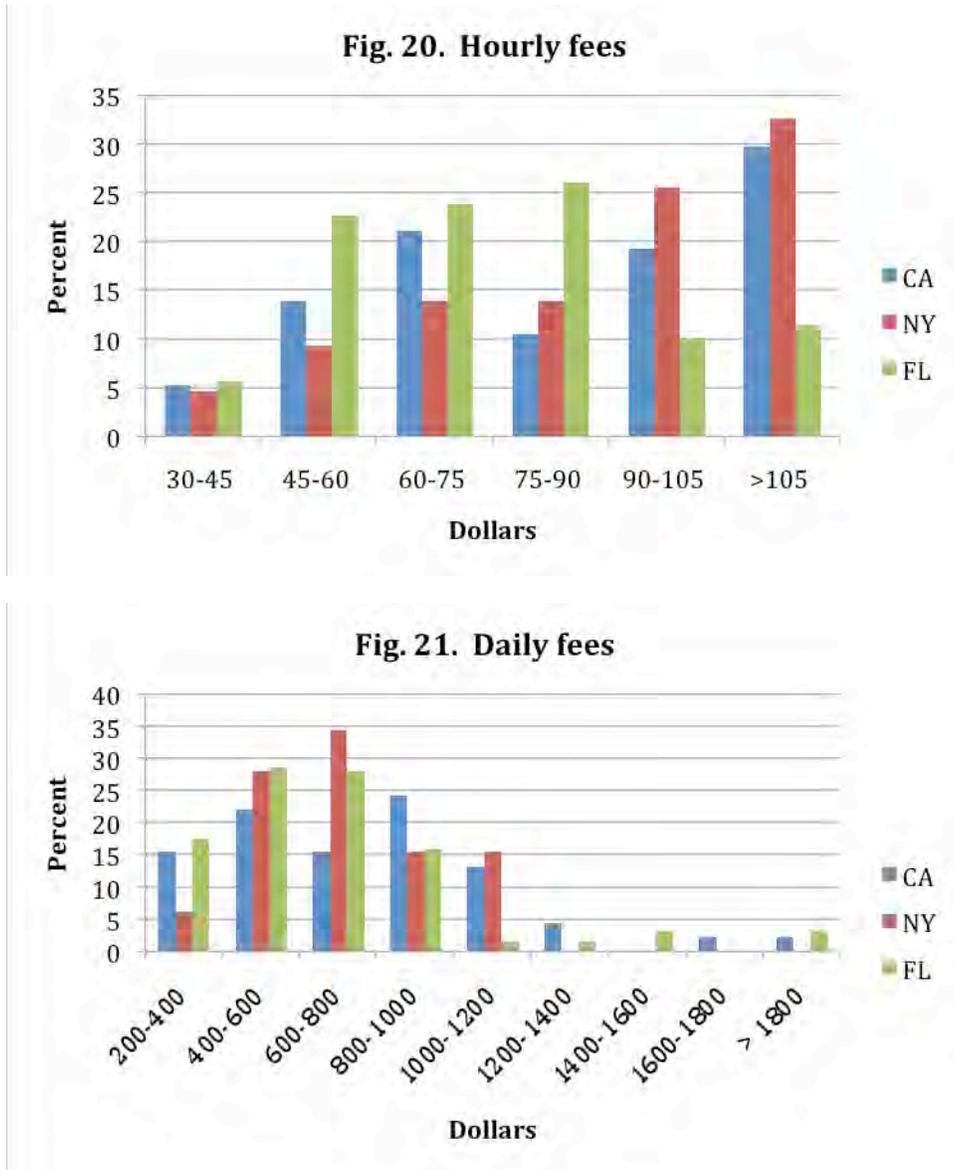
Another influence on employment data concerns the region of the country or the particular state in which professionals work. Unfortunately, analysis of variations in income and fees across geographical regions of the United States is limited by the fact that many states are not adequately represented the survey sample. The more populous states tend to have more credentialed ABA professionals, but factors other than population density contribute to the distribution of BACB certificants. For example, states that have multiple college or university ABA training programs tend to have more ABA professionals.

In order to assess possible regional variations in income and fees, data were compared for BCBA respondents in three geographically dispersed states having relatively large numbers of credentialed ABA practitioners: New York, Florida, and California. (BCaBA respondents were omitted from this analysis because they are unevenly distributed across these three states.)



The data in Fig. 19 show that reported full time salaries for BCBA's were generally highest in California and lowest in Florida. The differences, reflecting salaries paid by both governmental and non-governmental agencies, are monetarily significant and suggest that regional variations in salary should be considered by employers and employees.

Figures 20 and 21 show hourly and daily fees reported by respondents in California, New York, and Florida.



The hourly fees reported (Fig. 20) indicate that respondents in California and New York tend to set higher rates than in Florida. This difference may be due to the fact that Florida has proportionally more BCaBAs than the other two states, which could affect the fees charged by BCaBAs. Daily fees reported by respondents in these three states (Fig. 21) do not show clear or consistent differences.

The differences in salaries versus fees across these three states presumably reflects a number of factors. The salaried income data suggest that salaries paid by governmental and non-governmental agencies may reflect state and regional financial variables (e.g., cost of living; available funding for ABA services) more



clearly than do consulting fees. Although fees charged may be influenced by reimbursement policies in each state, they are also set by individual practitioners based on more idiosyncratic considerations.

Summary of survey findings

This first APBA survey of professional employment reveals many interesting findings that should be useful to ABA professionals, employers, policy makers, and others. Overall, the data show a young profession whose practitioners are in great demand by a diverse user community. Eighty percent of respondents are employed full time and another 14.8% are employed part time by choice. Only 3% cannot find all the work that they want. Respondents are employed by different types of agencies in varied roles working on behalf of a wide variety of consumers, although the autism community is especially prominent.

As the employment numbers should suggest, ABA professionals are as a group economically successful, earning salaries and self-employment income that compare favorably with many fields outside of the helping professions. This assessment is supported by reported employee benefits that suggest that employers understand their importance to retaining good employees in a competitive employment marketplace.

The reported salary and self-employment income data, as well as reported hourly and daily consulting fees charged by practitioners, should be considered only a general guide for any individual circumstances. There are many factors that influence particular salaries or fees. Years of experience and geographical location are only two that were considered in this report.