

Employment and Work Expectations of Social Security Disability Beneficiaries

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**Disability Policy Research Forum on
*The Employment and Work Aspirations of People with Disabilities***

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Purpose of the Presentation

- **Describe work activity, expectations, and barriers of beneficiaries of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)**
 - How many are working and what are their characteristics?
 - How many want to work?
 - What are some of their barriers to employment?

Why Is This Interesting?

- **SSA and others invest heavily to promote work among SSI/SSDI participants and others with disabilities**
 - Ticket to Work (TTW), Medicaid Buy-in, SSA and CMS demonstrations, DOL grants
- **Initiatives respond to long-term trends**
 - Declining employment among people with disabilities
 - Growth in the SSI and SSDI rolls
 - Changing demographic patterns
 - Advances in technology and medicine
 - Changing societal views of disability



Why Is This Interesting? (cont'd)

- **At the same time, the intent of SSA disability programs is at odds with work activity**
 - **Must prove inability to work at substantial levels due to a long-term medical condition**
 - **No significant early intervention or temporary support**
 - **A last resort—early/permanent retirement from labor force**
 - **Few ever leave the rolls due to work**
- **Can the recent state and federal efforts be fruitful?**



About the Data

- Findings from a larger effort to evaluate TTW
 - TTW expands the means by which SSI/SSDI beneficiaries can obtain employment-related services
- Data from the 2004 National Beneficiary Survey
 - Phone/in-person interviews with a nationally representative sample of 7,600 SSI and SSDI beneficiaries ages 18 to 64
- Findings reported in two evaluation reports at www.mathematica-mpr.com

Share of Working-Age SSI and SSDI Beneficiaries Who Are Employed

	All	SSDI only	Concurrent (SSI/SSDI)	SSI only
Working at interview	9%	9%	11%	7%
Worked during previous year	13%	13%	17%	11%
Looked for work during past month	6%	4%	8%	8%
Any of the above	18%	16%	23%	17%



Characteristics of the 9 Percent Who Are Working

- **More likely to:**
 - Be under age 40
 - Have experienced onset of disability during childhood
 - Have low levels of SSA benefits (<\$500/month)
 - Be in better physical and mental health
 - Be educated beyond high school
- **Less likely to:**
 - Be SSI-only recipients
 - Require assistance with activities of daily living



Selected Characteristics of Working and All SSI/SSDI Beneficiaries

Characteristic	All Beneficiaries	Working Beneficiaries
Under age 40	22%	41%
Excellent/very good health	10%	28%
Poor/very poor health	43%	17%
Onset of disability in childhood	22%	44%
No difficulty with activities/ instrumental activities of daily living	28%	45%



Job Characteristics of Working Beneficiaries

Average Hours per Week	22
Working Full Time	21%
Average Hourly Wage	\$7
Average Monthly Earnings	\$622
Earning above substantial gainful activity (SGA) level (\$810/month in 2004)	22%
Median Job Duration	≈ 2 years



Working SSI-Only Beneficiaries Were More Likely to:

- **Be working full-time (31 percent)**
- **Have higher average monthly earnings (\$729)**
- **Be working above SGA (36 percent)**

Share of Beneficiaries Who Say They Want to Work

- **40 percent see themselves working in the next five years or say their goals include work/career advancement**
 - **Less common among SSDI-only beneficiaries (35 percent) than others (45 percent)**
- **15 percent see themselves working and earning enough to stop receiving disability benefits within the next five years**



Reasons Beneficiaries Give for Not Working

Reasons for Not Working	All Beneficiaries	TTW Participants
Health prevents work	96%	76%
Discouraged by previous attempts	30%	50%
Inaccessible workplaces	28%	35%
Can't find a job he/she is qualified to do	28%	54%
Employers won't give him/her a chance	18%	42%
Lacks reliable transportation	18%	30%
Can't find a job he/she wants	13%	37%
Doesn't want to lose benefits	11%	19%



Other Challenges to Employment Faced by Working-Age Beneficiaries

- **42 percent do not have a high school diploma**
- **49 percent live in households with income below the federal poverty level**
- **53 percent have been on the disability rolls for 10 or more years**

Efforts to Promote Employment Among Beneficiaries Are Not Futile

- **40 percent of beneficiaries (about 4 million individuals) want to work**
- **18 percent have engaged in recent work or are actively seeking employment**
 - Large differences in work activity exist, depending on beneficiary characteristics



Efforts to Promote Employment Among Beneficiaries Will Be Challenging

- **Recent efforts have met with limited success**
 - Maintaining the status quo may be much more costly
- **Policies must address both financial disincentives and a myriad of employment barriers**
- **Programs must offer options/supports *before* individuals get on the disability rolls**

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