

Disability Insurance and Aid to the Blind

by PHILIP FROHLICH*

ALTHOUGH it is possible for blind persons in acute financial need to qualify for both aid to the blind (AB) and old-age, survivors, and disability insurance (OASDI) payments, there has been little overlap of the two programs recently among persons receiving such payments. In 1962, the latest year for which data are available, only 1 in 5 blind persons aged 18-64 who started receiving public assistance payments that year was also an OASDI beneficiary.

The most recent survey of AB recipients was conducted in the fall of 1962 by the Welfare Administration's Bureau of Family Services.¹ Data for those recipients who had qualified for payments during the preceding year were later combined by the Social Security Administration with statistics from its earnings and claims records to provide a basis for the present study. As in a similar comparison² of recipients of aid to the permanently and totally disabled (APTD) and OASDI (also based in part on 1962 data from the Welfare Administration), the study is restricted to recipients aged 18-64. This age range was chosen in order to facilitate the comparison with disability insurance beneficiaries.

Table 1 is a distribution of the AB recipients in the study by OASDI beneficiary status; it also shows what type of benefit was being paid in 1962 to the beneficiary recipients and the reason why the nonbeneficiaries were not receiving a benefit. Since the purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between the OASDI and AB programs, the analysis concentrates on comparisons between the beneficiary and nonbeneficiary groups. Those AB recipients whose OASDI status was pending or unknown have been omitted from these comparisons.

*Disability and Family Surveys Branch, Division of Economic and Social Surveys, Office of Research and Statistics.

¹ For a discussion of the findings of the 1962 survey, see Robert H. Mugge, "Recipients of Aid to the Blind," *Welfare in Review*, April 1965, pages 1-12.

² Philip Frohlich and Lawrence D. Haber, "Disability Insurance and Public Assistance: A Study of APTD Recipients," *Social Security Bulletin*, August 1966, pages 3-9.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Recipients receiving both OASDI and AB payments were found to be more urbanized than the blind nonbeneficiaries: 78 percent of the former lived in cities, compared with 63 percent of the latter. The beneficiaries were also older than the nonbeneficiaries (table 2).³ Almost all the disability insurance beneficiaries and two-thirds of the old-age beneficiaries were men, compared with less than half of the nonbeneficiaries.

The differences between AB recipients who were OASDI beneficiaries and those who were nonbeneficiaries in residence, sex, and age undoubtedly reflect differences in opportunities for covered employment. Women are less likely than men and the young less likely than the old to have worked long enough to acquire the insured status required of beneficiaries. Similarly, covered employment has been more readily available in urban than in rural areas. Examination of the data on OASDI status, grouped by type of benefit received or reason for nonreceipt, shows that the groups for whom covered employment was essential (disability insurance beneficiary, old-age beneficiary, and medical denial) had much higher proportions of those who were urban and of men than did the groups that were not covered-

TABLE 1.—OASDI status of persons approved for AB in 1962

OASDI status	AB recipients
Number in sample.....	552
Total percent.....	100
OASDI beneficiaries.....	20
Disability insurance beneficiaries.....	9
Old-age beneficiaries.....	3
Dependents and survivors.....	7
Nonbeneficiaries.....	74
Never applied.....	71
Medical denials.....	1
Technical denials.....	2
Pending and unknown.....	7

³ Welfare agencies award payments to recipients aged 65 and over much more frequently in the aid to the blind program than in aid to the permanently and totally disabled, where most recipients are transferred to old-age assistance at age 65. Thirty-five percent of the persons awarded AB payments in 1962 were aged 65 or older.

TABLE 2.—Residence, sex, and age of persons approved for AB in 1962, by OASDI status

OASDI status	Number in sample	Percent with urban residence	Percent men	Median age
Total.....	552	66	52	51
OASDI beneficiaries.....	108	78	70	55
Disability insurance beneficiaries.....	49	84	94	52
Old-age beneficiaries.....	18	83	67	62
Dependents and survivors.....	41	68	44	54
Nonbeneficiaries.....	408	63	45	49

employment-related (dependent and survivor beneficiaries and those who never applied for benefits).

Compared with the general population of the same age, a much higher percentage of the AB recipients were widowed, divorced, or had never married (table 3). The social and economic handicaps of blindness were probably the most important reasons why many of the recipients either did not marry or did not remain married, but the fact that AB recipients were generally older than the population as a whole also accounted for the higher proportion of widowed and divorced persons among them. The proportion of those who were married was higher among beneficiaries than among nonbeneficiaries, but the proportion of those who had never married was lower. Considerably more beneficiaries than nonbeneficiaries lived in their own homes and correspondingly fewer lived with parents or children (table 4).

TABLE 3.—Marital status of total population aged 18-64 in 1960, and of persons approved for AB in 1962, by OASDI status

Marital status	Total population (in thousands) ¹	AB recipients in sample		
		Total	OASDI beneficiaries	Non-beneficiaries
Total number.....	98,807	552	108	408
Total percent.....	100	100	100	100
Married.....	73	41	52	37
Widowed.....	4	11	12	11
Divorced or separated.....	7	19	18	18
Never married.....	16	28	19	32

¹ Data from Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Detailed Characteristics*, PC(1), table 176.

Few of the AB recipients (8 percent) were confined to their homes, but more than one-half of those who were not confined needed help in getting around outside the home. One out of 4

(26 percent) had received vocational rehabilitation service at some time in his life. No significant differences were found between beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries in mobility, care from others, or the receipt of rehabilitation services, but there was considerable variation in the ages at which they lost their sight. The average beneficiary became blind at age 42, compared with age 31 for the nonbeneficiary (table 5)—further evidence that those in the former group had had greater opportunities for employment than those in the latter.

TABLE 4.—Living arrangements of persons approved for AB in 1962, by OASDI status

Living arrangement	Total	OASDI beneficiaries	Non-beneficiaries
Number in sample.....	552	108	408
Total percent.....	100	100	100
In own home.....	63	76	59
In home of parent or child.....	16	6	20
In home of other relative.....	8	6	8
In home of other person.....	4	4	4
Institution.....	4	2	4
Elsewhere.....	6	7	5

AB recipients were found to have had much less education than persons of the same age in the general population: only 12 percent of them were high school graduates, compared with 40 percent for the Nation as a whole. Though this generally low level of educational attainment undoubtedly contributes to the need for public assistance on the part of the blind, no significant differences were found between beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries.

Twenty-nine percent of the AB recipients had never been employed and an additional 21 percent had earned no quarters of coverage during the

TABLE 5.—Age at loss of sight of persons approved for AB in 1962, by OASDI status

Age	Total	OASDI beneficiaries	Non-beneficiaries
Number in sample.....	552	108	408
Total percent.....	100	100	100
At birth.....	16	11	18
Before 6.....	5	3	6
6-17.....	7	5	8
18-34.....	10	13	10
35-49.....	18	21	17
50-64.....	22	31	19
Not reported.....	22	17	22
Median age.....	36	42	31

TABLE 6.—Employment history and quarters of coverage, 1947-62, of persons approved for AB in 1962, by OASDI status

Employment and number of covered quarters	Total	OASDI beneficiaries	Non-beneficiaries
Number in sample.....	552	1 108	408
Total percent.....	100	100	100
Never employed.....	29	12	34
Employed.....	71	88	66
0 quarters.....	21	10	25
1-10.....	15	7	18
11-19.....	9	12	9
20-39.....	16	39	9
40 or more.....	9	20	5

¹ Includes 41 auxiliary and survivor beneficiaries not drawing benefits on their own earnings record.

15 years preceding the survey (table 6). Though the beneficiaries had a history of more employment than the nonbeneficiaries, 12 percent of them had never worked. These persons were dependent and survivor beneficiaries, since persons drawing disability or old-age benefits necessarily had some employment experience.

The data on earnings, education, and employment suggest how disability, low skill levels, and low socio-economic status reinforce one another. A blind person is less likely than a normally sighted person to acquire an education and develop skills; he is therefore less able to compete economically and less likely to have the necessary wherewithal to prevent or cure disability.

FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Welfare agencies estimate the recipient's total income requirements and compare this amount with his actual income to determine how much assistance he may receive. AB recipients who began receiving an assistance payment in 1962 had mean total requirements of \$88 a month—an average of \$19 a month in other income and an average AB payment of \$64 a month, leaving \$5 as the average unmet need (table 7). When the corresponding figures for beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries are compared, it appears that beneficiary recipients have greater financial needs, on the average, than do other recipients. Table 7 reveals that more than one-half the needs of beneficiaries were met by income other than public assistance, but only one-tenth of nonbeneficiaries' needs were met by funds that did not come from public assistance. This fact suggests

that beneficiaries with low income needs usually would not qualify for assistance; their OASDI benefits and other income would be sufficient for their minimum requirements. It is also evident that beneficiaries receiving aid to the blind have lower-than-average OASDI benefits. The average benefit for all disabled workers in 1962 was \$90, compared with \$60 for AB beneficiary recipients.

The data suggest that, for those blind persons fortunate enough to qualify for benefits, disability insurance usually provides additional income support when needs are small or benefits are large, but that the blind with large financial requirements or low benefits need further income support. The data also show that the majority of AB recipients lacked the work experience and time spent in covered employment that is necessary to qualify for disability benefits.

COMPARISON OF AB AND APTD RECIPIENTS

The only important differences between AB and APTD recipients aged 18-64 were in marital status, mobility, the need for care, and receipt of rehabilitation services. Forty-one percent of the AB recipients and 29 percent of the APTD recipients were married; and 30 percent and 40 percent, respectively, were widowed, separated, or divorced. Those receiving aid to the permanently and totally disabled were about three times as likely to be confined to their homes, and the AB recipients were about three times as likely to need help outside the home. Only 7 percent of the APTD recipients had ever received rehabilitation services, compared with 26 percent of the recipients of aid to the blind (table 8).

TABLE 7.—Mean requirements, income, and unmet need of persons approved for AB in 1962, by OASDI status

Mean amount	Total	OASDI beneficiaries	Non-beneficiaries
Number in sample ¹	535	91	408
Total requirements.....	\$88	\$118	\$81
OASDI benefits.....	10	60	-----
AB.....	64	49	67
Other income.....	9	6	9
Unmet need.....	5	3	5

¹ Excludes 17 beneficiaries omitted because of inconsistencies on receipt of benefit or benefit amount.

TABLE 8.—Selected characteristics of persons approved for APTD and AB in 1962

Characteristic	APTD	AB
Number in sample.....	1,861	552
Percent:		
Married.....	29	41
Widowed.....	18	11
Divorced or separated.....	26	19
Confined to home.....	25	8
Need help outside home.....	18	45
Received rehabilitation services.....	7	26

These comparisons suggest that, in general, blind recipients of public assistance who are under age 65 resemble other disabled persons receiving public assistance but have a somewhat more normal family life and receive somewhat more help from society.

A comparison of the AB and APTD recipient rates since 1950 also suggests that our economic and social system has marshaled more resources to help solve the economic problems of the blind

than those of other disabled persons. The ratio of AB recipients to the total population has declined from 10 per 10,000 aged 18 or over in 1958 to 8 per 10,000 in 1965. This decline has virtually coincided with the rise in disability insurance benefits, which were introduced in mid-1957.

The APTD recipient rate rose steadily from 1 per 1,000 persons aged 18-64 in 1950 to more than 5 per 1,000 in 1965, and the introduction of disability insurance benefits did not alter this trend. Disability insurance would thus appear to be more effective in meeting the needs of the blind than those of other disabled persons; perhaps the criteria for qualification are less stringent for the blind. Regardless of whether disability insurance is the major factor, these figures suggest either that blindness is decreasing or that society is increasingly providing for it in ways other than public assistance to a much greater extent than for other forms of disability.

Notes and Brief Reports

Special Awards to Persons

72 and Over, Oct.-Dec. 1966*

During October-December 1966, the Social Security Administration awarded special benefits to about three-fourths of a million persons aged 72 and over who at the time of award did not qualify for OASDHI monthly cash benefits under the regular or transitional insured-status provisions of the Social Security Act.¹ These benefits were authorized by the Tax Adjustment

*Prepared by William T. Rabin, Division of Statistics, Office of Research and Statistics.

¹For regular insured status, a person must have at least 1 quarter of coverage for each year elapsing after 1950 and before the attainment of age 65 (age 62 for a woman); generally, a minimum of 6 quarters is required. The transitional insured-status provision reduces to 3 quarters the minimum quarter-of-coverage requirement for persons aged 72 and over.

Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-368) and were first payable for October 1966. The purpose of this legislation was to establish for persons aged 72 and over uninsured under the social security program a minimum income of \$35.00 (\$52.50 for a married couple) monthly (except as affected by the receipt of a public assistance payment or government pension). These special beneficiaries are persons without substantial past employment or with past employment in activities not covered under the Social Security Act.

ELIGIBILITY

Any person aged 72 or over is eligible for these special benefits if he meets several additional requirements: (1) residence in one of the 50 States or the District of Columbia; (2) United States citizenship; or (3) continuous residence in the United States for the 5-year period immediately preceding the month in which he files an application for special benefits, if he is an alien lawfully