

The Social Security Administration (SSA) produces the Disability Analysis File (DAF) each year to facilitate research on its disability beneficiaries. The DAF aligns and combines existing SSA administrative data about beneficiaries in Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) into a single source, and constructs unique measures of beneficiary work activity. Virtually all beneficiaries who have received a benefit in at least one month since 1996 are included in the DAF. To make file sizes more manageable, the DAF is broken into multiple components, each with one row per beneficiary and linkable through SSNs. The most recent version of the DAF, DAF14, was released in December 2015, and it contains data through December 2014.

This brief explains how the DAF was particularly useful in an analysis by Ben-Shalom and Stapleton (2012),¹ who sought to better understand the long-term program participation and employment patterns of adult SSI recipients following benefit award.

The Advantages of Using the DAF to Answer the Study Questions

Ben-Shalom and Stapleton sought to fill a gap in published statistics about the extent to which disability beneficiaries forgo their cash benefits because they are working. Other similar statistics focus on a single point in time, but the authors were interested in tracking the experiences of SSI recipients over many years.

The DAF has extensive, easy-to-use documentation. To learn more, see the [Quick Start Guide](#) and [DAF content](#) on the SSA-DAF intranet site.*

To meet their objectives, Ben-Shalom and Stapleton needed to establish first benefit receipt, which required extensive data on DI and SSI benefit status going back many years. They also needed work-related information from the Disability Control File and earnings information from the Master Earnings File. Working with multiple source files—not to mention developing measures related to benefit suspension and termination due to work—posed a daunting task.

Rather than build their data from scratch, the authors turned to the 2008 version of the DAF (then known as the Ticket Research File, or TRF). The DAF structure, with one record per beneficiary and monthly variables on SSI and DI benefit eligibility and payments for all beneficiaries going back to 1994, made it easier to determine payment patterns in, and overlap between, the SSI and DI programs. The authors followed new SSI awardees from as early as 1996 through the end of 2007, providing up to 11 years of longitudinal information. Further, by constructing annual cohorts of new SSI awardees from 1996 through 2006, they were able to track how the experiences of new awardees have changed over time.

How Study Findings Expand the Knowledge Base

The authors' main finding was that work activity looks quite different if you follow beneficiaries over a long period of time compared with the static snapshots we usually take. For instance, SSA's published statistics indicate that 1.9 percent of working-age SSI recipients had their benefits suspended for work in December 2009 under the 1619(b) work-incentive program; this is comparable to statistics from other years. Yet the authors found that by the 11th year after award (2007), 11.9 percent of individuals who were first awarded SSI benefits in 1996 had been in 1619(b) status for at least one month.

*The Quick Start Guide and DAF content are at <http://ordp.ba.ad.ssa.gov/ORDES/content/daf>

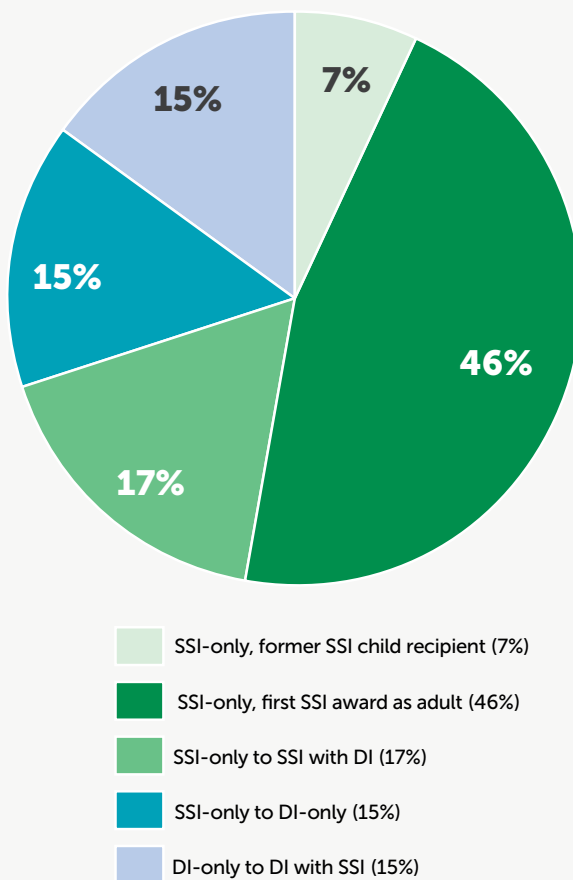
Awardee cohorts are now identified in the Awardee Data Mart (ADM) in each version of the DAF. The ADM allows users to select cohorts based on month or year, and on the date of first benefit payment or first eligibility for benefits.

The historical, monthly benefit data in the DAF also helped the authors to uncover some interesting information about the benefit receipt patterns of SSI recipients. In particular, they identified the extent to which new adult SSI awardees were child SSI recipients and how many new awardees received SSI solely while they were in the five-month DI waiting period after disability onset. The figure shows the breakdown of the 1996 new adult SSI award cohort across these types of patterns. The authors found that for new SSI awardees in 1996:

- One-third of new SSI awardees who were not initially receiving DI did so by the end of 2007.
- About one in eight new SSI awardees, or 15 percent, moved from SSI-only to DI-only benefits. In fact, among those who received DI after SSI, the SSI-only to DI-only pattern holds for just under half of beneficiaries (15 of 32 percent).
- Most new adult SSI awardees did not receive SSI benefits as children, but the share who were former child recipients was higher in later cohorts than in the 1996 cohort (not shown).

The analysis described above was particularly complex because it required longitudinal work and benefit information on both the SSI and DI programs. By using the DAF, the authors achieved their research objectives in a relatively short time.

Sequential Beneficiary Status of 1996 SSI Award Cohort by December 2007



Using the DAF for Your Research Needs

The DAF is available to both SSA and external researchers under a formal agreement with SSA. A good place to start to learn more about its contents is the SSA-DAF intranet page referenced on the first page of this brief.

For more information about data access and documentation, contact ORDES.DAF@ssa.gov.

¹ Ben-Shalom, Yonatan and David C. Stapleton (2012). "Longitudinal Statistics for New Supplemental Security Income Recipients," Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research.