

The Disabled on Public Assistance

by HENRY P. BREHM*

DESPITE THE EXISTENCE of disability benefits under the old-age, survivors, disability, and health insurance (OASDHI) program, the number of persons receiving public assistance under the aid to the permanently and totally disabled (APTD) and aid to the blind (AB) programs has risen in recent years.

Disability benefits under OASDHI are related to extensive earlier work experience and provide protection to insured disabled adults and their dependents. Adult children of retired, disabled, or deceased beneficiaries who were disabled before reaching age 18 can be paid childhood disability benefits. Public assistance payments are available to disabled persons without regard to work experience. Disabled persons with inadequate income may qualify for APTD, AB, or, if minor children are present, for aid to families with dependent children (AFDC).

Of the approximately 1,750,000 adults under age 65 receiving public assistance from the three Federal-State programs in December 1965, some two-thirds were disabled. Although AFDC, unlike APTD and AB, was not designed to provide assistance for the disabled, about one-third of the adults with AFDC payments were receiving assistance as incapacitated parents. Among disabled women under age 45, AFDC payments were received more frequently than payments under APTD and AB, but older women and men in all age groups were predominantly on the APTD or AB rolls (table 1).

Data from the 1966 Social Security Survey of Noninstitutionalized Disabled Adults¹ provide information on the extent of overlap between OASDHI and public assistance payments, as well as the characteristics of the disabled receiving public assistance only.

* Division of Disability Studies, Office of Research and Statistics.

¹ The survey methods, definitions, sample design, and sampling variability are described in the Technical Note in *Reports Nos. 1-9 from the Social Security Survey of the Disabled, 1966*; see also the *Social Security Bulletin*, May 1968, page 22.

According to the survey, 1,268,000 persons reported as disabled were receiving public assistance in 1965 (table 2). Of these recipients, 794,000 were getting payments under APTD or AB and 474,000 received AFDC or other public assistance.

Altogether, 188,000 disabled beneficiaries received public assistance: about two-thirds of them under APTD or AB and one-third under AFDC or other assistance. Of the beneficiaries getting APTD or AB, 86,000 were disabled-worker beneficiaries or childhood-disability beneficiaries, and the others were early-retirement or survivor beneficiaries.

The survey found 1,079,000 disabled public assistance recipients who were not receiving OASDI benefits. Two-thirds of these nonbeneficiaries met the survey definition of severe disability. Comparisons of various characteristics

TABLE 1.—Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients, by type of public assistance, age, and sex: Percentage distribution of disabled adults aged 18-64, spring 1966

Type of public assistance in 1965 and age	Total			Severely disabled		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Total: Number (in thousands).....	1,079	364	715	710	264	446
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
APTD or AB.....	61.7	76.2	54.4	65.9	78.4	58.4
Other ¹	38.3	23.8	45.6	34.1	21.6	41.6
Aged 18-44: Number (in thousands).....	454	137	317	276	82	193
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
APTD or AB.....	39.8	69.1	27.1	44.8	68.1	35.0
Other ¹	60.2	30.9	72.9	55.2	31.9	65.0
Aged 45-54: Number (in thousands).....	282	93	189	159	66	93
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
APTD or AB.....	68.8	70.4	68.1	69.6	70.7	68.8
Other ¹	31.2	29.6	31.9	30.4	29.3	31.2
Aged 55-64: Number (in thousands).....	344	134	209	275	116	159
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
APTD or AB.....	84.9	87.5	83.3	84.8	90.2	80.8
Other ¹	15.1	12.5	16.7	15.2	9.8	19.2

¹ Unduplicated percentage of PA recipients not receiving APTD or AB. About 1 percent reported more than one source of public assistance at some time during 1965.

TABLE 2.—All disabled adults and disabled public assistance recipients aged 18–64 in 1965, by beneficiary status, spring 1966

Beneficiary status	All disabled adults	Disabled PA recipients			
		Total		APTD or AB	Other ¹
		Number	Percent of all disabled		
Total (in thousands).....	17,753	1,268	7	794	474
OASDHI beneficiaries.....	2,505	188	8	127	61
Percent of total.....	14	15	-----	16	13
Disability beneficiaries.....	978	101	10	86	15
Disabled worker.....	842	79	9	65	14
Disabled in childhood.....	136	23	17	21	2
Other beneficiaries.....	1,527	87	6	41	46
Nonbeneficiaries.....	15,248	1,079	7	666	413

¹ Unduplicated count of PA recipients not receiving APTD or AB. About 1 percent reported more than one source of public assistance at some time during 1965.

were made between severely disabled nonbeneficiaries receiving public assistance and all disabled-worker beneficiaries, 90 percent of whom did not receive public assistance (tables 3, 4, and 5).

To receive disability insurance benefits an applicant must be insured under the program and exhibit a degree of impairment that medically equates with an inability to engage in substantial gainful activity. As a group, those on public assistance showed levels of OASDHI coverage much lower than those of disabled-worker beneficiaries. Among the severely disabled receiving only public assistance in 1966, one-fourth had the 20 quarters of coverage generally required for disabled-worker benefits; more than two-fifths had no coverage at all.

The severely disabled who were public assistance recipients were not as functionally limited as the disabled-worker beneficiaries. The public assistance group showed a severe loss in functional capacity or function dependency² less often than the disabled-worker beneficiaries.

The majority of public assistance recipients, including those severely disabled, had never applied for disabled-worker benefits. Most of them did not have the required work experience under OASDHI to be insured for disability. Of the severely disabled who had applied, slightly more

² The functional limitations index combines several measurements of ability to perform normal physical activities and of need for personal care or assistance in activities of daily living. Functional dependency is the need for assistance from others for personal care or mobility.

TABLE 3.—Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients and disabled-worker beneficiaries, by age, sex, and race: Percentage distribution of disabled adults aged 18–64, spring 1966

Race and age.	Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients in 1965						Disabled-worker beneficiaries		
	Total			Severely disabled			Total	Men	Women
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women			
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Total: Number (in thousands).....	1,079	364	715	710	264	446	842	624	217
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18-44.....	42.1	37.6	44.3	38.9	31.1	43.3	10.5	10.1	11.5
45-54.....	26.1	25.5	26.4	22.4	25.0	20.9	26.8	26.3	28.6
55-64.....	31.9	36.8	29.2	38.7	43.9	35.6	62.7	63.6	60.4
White: Number (in thousands).....	661	243	418	391	174	217	720	535	185
Percent.....	61.3	66.8	58.5	55.1	65.9	48.7	85.5	85.7	85.3
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18-44.....	40.7	38.3	42.1	34.3	28.2	39.2	10.1	9.5	11.9
45-54.....	25.3	23.0	26.6	23.3	24.1	22.1	26.2	26.2	25.9
55-64.....	34.0	38.7	31.3	42.5	47.1	38.7	63.6	64.3	61.6
Negro and other: Number (in thousands).....	418	121	297	319	90	228	122	90	32
Percent.....	38.7	33.2	41.5	44.9	34.1	51.1	14.5	14.4	14.7
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18-44.....	44.3	36.4	47.5	44.2	36.7	47.4	11.5	13.3	9.4
45-54.....	27.5	31.4	26.3	21.3	26.7	19.7	30.3	26.7	40.6
55-64.....	28.2	33.1	26.3	34.2	36.7	33.3	58.2	60.0	53.1

had been denied than had been awarded benefits (table 6).

Of the 1,079,000 nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients at all levels of severity of disability, nearly a fourth were disabled in childhood, one-sixth had sufficient quarters of coverage to meet the insured-status provisions for disability benefits in effect in 1966, and three-fifths were disabled as adults but did not meet the insured-status provisions (table 7).

The 255,000 nonbeneficiaries with disabilities that started in childhood pose a different type of problem than do others who receive only public assistance payments. They are comparable to the childhood-disability beneficiaries under OASDHI. Those too disabled to work were unable to earn the quarters of coverage needed for disability-insured status. Those capable of working even though disabled would probably not meet the medical listings. This does not mean they are capable of working at a level of self-support, however, as indicated by their need for public assistance. Close to half the nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients who were disabled in childhood were dependent members of a household and

under age 45. Most of them probably lived with working-age parents and were therefore not eligible for OASDHI benefits.

Among the nonbeneficiaries disabled as adults who did not have insured status, 161,000 were men and 491,000 were women. About 120,000 of the men were receiving APTD or AB, and 40,000 were getting AFDC or other public assistance. Of the women without insured status, 225,000 were on the AFDC or other public assistance rolls, and 250,000-275,000 were receiving APTD or AB.

These assistance recipients obviously were not able to qualify for disability benefits. Liberalizing the insured-status provisions for disability to the fully insured requirement now used for retirement benefits³ and an increased effort to secure applications might result, on the basis of the existing ratio between benefit awards and denials, in about 80,000 more public assistance recipients becoming disabled-worker beneficiaries. These steps would not, however, appreciably reduce the number of disabled persons receiving public assistance.

Analysis of the characteristics of the disabled receiving public assistance indicates that most of them are not eligible to receive disabled-worker benefits because they fall outside the basic concept of a disabled-worker population implicit in the social security program. The program provides insurance benefits for the disabled worker with regular employment before the onset of a health impairment that leaves him unable to work.

Disabled nonbeneficiaries receiving public assistance differ from all disabled-worker beneficiaries in several ways that have a bearing on their potential for receipt of social security benefits. They have had a much weaker attachment to the labor force than beneficiaries, a fact that is readily apparent in a comparison of work histories at the onset of disability. Only 53 percent of the severely disabled on the public assistance rolls were em-

ployed at the onset of their disabilities, but 9 out of 10 disabled-worker beneficiaries had jobs. Some of this difference can be explained by their respective ages at onset of disability. Those in the public assistance group were both younger and disabled earlier than the disabled-worker beneficiaries. These facts notwithstanding, the public assistance recipients were also disabled somewhat longer than the disabled-worker beneficiaries.

TABLE 4.—Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients and disabled-worker beneficiaries: Percentage distribution for selected characteristics of disabled adults aged 18-64, spring 1965

Selected characteristics	Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients in 1965						Disabled-worker beneficiaries		
	Total			Severely disabled			Total	Men	Women
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women			
Number (in thousands).....	1,079	364	715	710	264	446	842	624	217
<i>Quarters of coverage</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No quarters.....	38.1	22.8	45.9	42.5	26.7	51.9	2.4	2.5	2.3
1-5 quarters.....	13.4	10.4	14.9	11.1	9.8	11.8	.2	.2	.2
6-19 quarters.....	22.3	23.3	21.8	22.1	21.2	22.7	3.3	2.9	4.2
20 or more quarters.....	26.3	43.6	17.3	24.3	42.3	13.7	94.0	94.4	93.3
<i>Functional limitations</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No loss.....	18.2	14.6	19.9	13.1	12.7	13.3	4.4	5.3	1.8
Minor or moderate loss.....	41.0	42.5	40.3	37.4	40.0	35.8	32.1	34.1	26.1
Severe loss.....	10.4	9.3	11.0	11.8	10.7	12.4	18.5	17.3	15.1
Functionally dependent.....	29.9	32.5	28.3	37.1	35.8	37.8	46.1	42.8	56.2
Limitation not available.....	.5	.7	.5	.7	.9	.6	.7	.6	.9
<i>Prior employment</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not employed before onset.....	42.1	29.4	48.6	35.8	27.2	40.9	6.0	4.0	11.8
Employed at onset.....	46.1	64.9	36.7	52.8	65.2	45.4	91.3	93.8	84.1
Last employed 2 or more years before onset.....	11.2	5.4	14.1	10.7	7.4	12.8	2.2	1.6	3.8
Employment before onset not available.....	.5	.2	.6	.7	.3	.9	.5	.6	.3
<i>Age at onset</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 18.....	23.7	26.4	22.3	21.0	25.3	18.4	3.9	3.6	4.7
18-34.....	27.3	25.4	28.2	30.4	22.5	35.0	13.6	12.6	16.5
35-54.....	43.0	43.3	42.8	40.9	45.6	38.1	60.2	63.8	58.0
55-64.....	5.9	4.9	6.4	7.6	6.5	8.2	22.2	22.7	20.6
Age at onset not available.....	.1	.8	.2	.2	.2	.3	.2	.3	.2
<i>Duration of disability</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Less than 5 years.....	27.5	20.4	31.9	23.5	13.4	29.5	34.1	34.5	33.7
5-9 years.....	22.5	21.7	22.5	23.5	22.7	24.2	31.0	31.4	30.1
10 or more years.....	47.9	57.0	43.2	51.6	62.8	44.9	34.1	35.6	35.6
Duration not available.....	2.0	.8	2.7	1.3	1.1	1.4	.6	.7	.6
<i>Marital status</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Married.....	35.7	55.3	25.8	32.8	52.9	20.9	71.6	77.3	55.5
Widowed.....	11.0	3.1	15.0	12.7	3.0	18.5	8.3	4.5	19.3
Divorced or separated.....	30.1	12.7	39.0	31.8	15.4	41.5	10.8	9.9	13.5
Never married.....	23.1	28.8	20.2	22.7	28.6	19.2	9.2	8.4	11.7

³ In general, a fully insured person is one who has at least as many quarters of coverage as the number of years elapsing after 1950 (or the year he attained age 21, if later) and up to the year in which he reaches age 65 (62 for women), disability, or death. A worker with 40 quarters of coverage is fully insured for life. To receive disability benefits, a worker must be not only fully insured but must have worked in covered employment for at least 5 of the 10 years before the onset of disability.

TABLE 4.—Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients and disabled-worker beneficiaries: Percentage distribution for selected characteristics of disabled adults aged 18-64, spring 1966—Continued

Selected characteristics	Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients in 1965						Disabled-worker beneficiaries		
	Total			Severely disabled			Total	Men	Women
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women			
<i>Life-cycle status</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Dependent young adult. Head or spouse, no children.....	12.7	17.5	10.2	12.6	14.2	11.7	2.2	2.0	2.8
Married with children.....	29.9	36.1	26.8	33.9	37.8	31.6	54.7	51.1	65.2
Unmarried with children.....	22.8	34.9	16.6	19.4	35.4	9.9	30.8	36.9	13.5
Dependent older adult.....	24.0	1.5	35.4	20.5	.8	32.2	2.5	1.8	4.4
Miscellaneous.....	10.2	9.5	10.5	13.0	11.6	13.8	9.0	7.5	13.4
	.5	.4	.6	.6	.1	.8	.8	.8	.7
<i>Education</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
None.....	9.5	14.9	6.7	11.7	19.4	7.2	3.0	3.6	1.2
Elementary.....	50.5	58.5	60.0	62.6	64.4	61.5	55.6	60.9	40.3
High school.....	26.0	17.5	30.3	23.5	12.9	29.8	33.9	28.9	48.5
College.....	3.8	6.6	2.3	1.2	2.3	.6	7.0	6.3	9.3
Education not available.....	1.3	2.6	.6	1.0	1.1	1.0	.5	.4	.8
<i>Current labor-force status</i>									
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not in labor force.....	76.2	73.2	77.8	87.5	84.9	89.1	92.6	91.0	97.1
Employed full time.....	6.7	4.7	7.7	..	.1	..	1.8	2.0	1.1
Employed part time.....	12.1	12.1	12.1	10.6	10.5	10.6	4.0	5.2	.6
Unemployed.....	4.7	9.7	2.3	1.6	4.0	.1	.8	.9	.6
Labor force status not available.....	.2	.3	.1	.2	.4	.2	.8	.9	.5
<i>Employment at onset of disability</i>									
Number (in thousands).....	498	236	262	374	172	203	769	586	183
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Professional, technical, and managerial.....	4.7	8.1	1.8	1.2	2.1	.2	8.4	8.4	8.3
Clerical and sales.....	3.5	1.2	5.7	2.4	1.5	3.3	10.8	5.1	29.0
Craftsmen and foremen.....	4.4	9.1	.1	5.3	11.4	.2	22.1	28.2	2.4
Operatives.....	27.6	31.0	24.5	27.8	29.6	26.2	31.4	30.6	33.9
Farm managers and laborers.....	9.3	13.6	5.3	9.8	16.9	3.7	5.9	7.3	1.2
Service and private household.....	33.3	9.6	54.7	38.8	9.5	63.6	10.3	6.5	22.5
Laborers.....	11.3	23.7	.1	11.0	24.0	..	8.7	11.3	.5
Employment not available.....	5.9	3.8	7.7	3.7	4.9	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.2

When those on the public assistance rolls do have work histories, the employment most often is in occupations that require less skill and training and usually offers the individual less job security and fewer job opportunities than the employment of disabled-worker beneficiaries.

The public assistance recipients were also not as well-educated as the disabled-worker beneficiaries. Fifty-nine percent of the disabled-worker beneficiaries had no more than an eighth-grade education; and 3 percent had no formal education. Among the severely disabled assistance recipients,

74 percent had no more than an eighth-grade education; 12 percent had no schooling.

When an individual with a low level of education, skill, or training is disabled, even moderately, he may have trouble finding or keeping a job that pays enough to keep him off the assistance rolls. His impairment may not meet the social security standards for inability to engage in substantial gainful activity, yet he may not be able to stay employed. The situation becomes even more complicated if the disabled person is not white or is an unmarried female with minor children.

The data indicate that the nonbeneficiary public

TABLE 5.—Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients and disabled-worker beneficiaries: Median disability unit income and percent in poverty, by sex and marital status of disabled adults aged 18-64, spring 1966

Income status	Nonbeneficiary public assistance recipients in 1965		Disabled-worker beneficiaries
	Total	Severely disabled	
Total:			
Number (in thousands).....	1,068	702	849
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below poverty level.....	80.2	83.6	34.7
Between poverty and low income.....	10.7	8.9	14.7
Above low income level.....	9.0	7.5	50.6
<i>Median income</i>	\$1,347	\$1,195	\$2,836
Married men:			
Number (in thousands).....	267	174	507
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below poverty level.....	68.0	78.9	30.9
Between poverty and low income.....	13.5	6.0	15.0
Above low income level.....	18.5	15.1	54.1
<i>Median income</i>	\$2,270	\$2,059	\$3,469
Married women:			
Number (in thousands).....	106	49	101
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below poverty level.....	68.8	56.0	8.1
Between poverty and low income.....	9.5	20.5	6.9
Above low income level.....	21.7	23.5	85.0
<i>Median income</i>	\$2,899	\$2,668	\$5,620
Nonmarried men:			
Number (in thousands).....	163	124	143
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below poverty level.....	87.5	90.1	45.1
Between poverty and low income.....	6.0	7.9	17.9
Above low income level.....	6.4	2.1	37.1
<i>Median income</i>	\$817	\$830	\$1,599
Nonmarried women:			
Number (in thousands).....	532	354	98
Total percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below poverty level.....	86.5	87.3	65.8
Between poverty and low income.....	10.9	9.1	17.0
Above low income level.....	2.6	3.5	17.2
<i>Median income</i>	\$1,122	\$1,061	\$1,170

TABLE 6.—Severely disabled public assistance recipients aged 18–64 in 1965, by beneficiary status and application for disability benefits, spring 1966

Beneficiary status	Total		Men		Women	
	Number (in thousands)	Percentage distribution	Number (in thousands)	Percentage distribution	Number (in thousands)	Percentage distribution
Total.....	863	100.0	340	100.0	523	100.0
OASDHI beneficiaries.....	153	17.7	75	22.1	77	14.7
Disabled worker.....	72	8.3	52	15.3	20	3.8
Other.....	81	9.4	23	6.8	57	10.9
Nonbeneficiaries.....	710	82.3	264	77.7	446	85.0
Application denied.....	91	10.5	58	17.1	33	6.3
Application disallowed.....	27	3.1	20	5.9	6	1.1
Nonapplicants.....	593	68.7	186	54.7	406	77.6

assistance population is not as well-educated or as functionally limited as the disabled-worker population. They are also younger, more of them are women, more often they belong to races other than white; and they are more often unmarried persons with dependent children. These factors, in combination with the circumstances of labor-force history and identification, add up to a general social problem that does not fit within the present framework of insurance against the economic hazards of disability for an employed population.

The circumstances of being disabled and on public assistance can be seen in several areas. The severely disabled receiving public assistance only had a slightly higher percentage in the labor force in 1966 than did disabled-worker beneficiaries, but they did not show any substantial work involvement. Only 11 percent of these persons were employed, and for them the work was on a part-time basis.

TABLE 7.—Nonbeneficiaries aged 18–64 receiving public assistance in 1965, by disability insured status, spring 1966

Insured status	Total		Men		Women	
	Number (in thousands)	Percentage distribution	Number (in thousands)	Percentage distribution	Number (in thousands)	Percentage distribution
All beneficiaries						
Total.....	1,079	100.0	364	100.0	715	100.0
Disabled in childhood.....	255	23.6	96	26.4	159	22.2
Disability insured ¹	172	15.9	107	29.4	65	9.1
Not disability insured.....	652	60.4	161	44.2	491	68.7
Fully insured.....	189	17.5	61	16.8	128	17.9
Other.....	462	42.8	100	27.5	362	50.6
Severely disabled nonbeneficiaries						
Total.....	710	100.0	264	100.0	446	100.0
Disabled in childhood.....	149	21.0	67	25.4	82	18.4
Disability insured.....	116	16.3	74	28.0	42	9.4
Not disability insured.....	445	62.7	123	46.6	322	72.2
Fully insured.....	134	18.9	43	16.3	91	20.4
Other.....	310	43.7	80	30.3	230	51.6

¹ With at least 5 years of covered employment during the 10 years preceding the alleged year of onset of disability.

Large differences in income were shown for disabled-worker beneficiaries and severely disabled public assistance recipients. Overall, the median income for disabled-worker beneficiaries was more than 100 percent higher than that for severely disabled nonbeneficiaries getting assistance payments; the percentage difference in income varied with marital status and sex. Eighty-four percent of the severely disabled public assistance recipients were poor; an additional 9 percent were near poor. Among the disabled-worker beneficiaries, 35 percent were poor and 15 percent near poor—on the basis of the Social Security Administration poverty and low-income indexes.