
Summary and Introduction

In this report, children are defined as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients under age 18. All average SSI payment amounts are based on the amount received in the month of the report, rather than on the amount due in the following month.

In December 2003, almost 960,000 blind and disabled children were receiving SSI payments. They made up 13.9 percent of the more than 6.9 million SSI recipients in December. The December data reflect an increase of almost 45,000 child recipients since June 2003.

To be eligible for SSI payments as a child, an individual must be under age 18 and unmarried and must meet the applicable SSI disability, income, resource, and diagnostic criteria.

The tables present a "snapshot" of selected program and demographic characteristics of children who receive SSI payments. Table 1 is based on 100 percent data. Tables 2–16 are based on 10 percent sample files. The source record for all of the files is the Supplemental Security Record (SSR).

Applications and Awards

In calendar year 2003, the most recent year for which complete data are available, SSA received more than 436,000 SSI applications for children. This represents 20 percent of the more than 2.2 million SSI applications received during that period.

Almost 180,000 children were awarded SSI payments in calendar year 2003. This was nearly 22 percent of the 824,000 persons awarded SSI in that period.

Historically, the percentages of both applications and awards for children have gradually increased. Both rates rose rapidly in the early to mid-1990s, after the *Zebley v. Sullivan* decision. They dropped off somewhat after welfare reform legislation was enacted in 1996, but they now appear to again be representing an increasing share of all applications and awards.

Payments

The average SSI payment to children in December 2003 was \$486. This amount includes federally administered state supplementation, where applicable, but does not include any retroactive payments.

The states with the largest numbers of children receiving SSI were California, New York, Florida, Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, and North Carolina. Together they accounted for 52 percent of all child recipients.

Sixty-two percent of the children received an SSI payment of \$552 in December—the maximum monthly amount of federal SSI payable in 2003 to persons with no countable income.

Demographic Characteristics

Age

In December 2003, 16 percent of the children receiving SSI were younger than 5 years old. The remaining 84 percent were fairly evenly distributed by age.

Sex

Child recipients are more likely to be boys than girls, by about three to two. This is generally the same gender pattern found among adult disabled recipients.

Living Arrangements

More than 80 percent of the children lived with their parent(s). Of those with other living arrangements, 13 percent were identified as living in their own household for purposes of determining payments. For the most part, these children lived with other relatives; in hospitals, nursing homes, residential schools, and foster care; or independently. Less than 2 percent were patients in a medical facility where more than half of the cost of their care is covered by the Medicaid program.

Citizenship

Nearly all (99 percent) of the children were U.S. citizens, either by birth or naturalization.

Diagnosis

Almost 64 percent were disabled because of a mental disorder, and the largest proportion of this group (24 percent) were mentally retarded. The only other sizable diagnostic category was diseases of the nervous system and sense organs (10 percent), which included all of the nearly 6,800 blind children on SSI in December 2003.

The incidence of mental retardation as a primary diagnosis increased with age, from 2 percent of those under age 3 to 36 percent of those aged 13–17. The same pattern appeared among those under age 18 with other mental disorders.

The only diagnostic category with a significant difference between sexes was other mental disorders—46 percent of the males versus 29 percent of the females. There was no substantial variation between sexes in the other diagnostic categories.

Adult Recipients Who First Became Eligible for SSI as Children

In addition to the almost 960,000 recipients who are currently considered as children for program purposes, the SSI rolls in December 2003 included 607,000 adult recipients who first became eligible for SSI payments before age 18. Twenty-six percent of these recipients first became eligible during the 1974–1980 period and thus have been receiving SSI for much of their lives.

Income

About 27 percent had income in December 2003, and most of them had only unearned income. The most frequent types of cash unearned income were Social Security benefits (7 percent) or support payments from an absent parent (12 percent). Another 1 percent were receiving income based on need (most commonly from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or AFDC), and 7 percent had some type of in-kind income that was considered for SSI purposes. About 73 percent of the children had no income reported on their record.

Parents in the Household

Almost two-thirds of the children (64 percent) were living with one parent, and 23 percent lived with two parents. Deeming of income from the parent(s) to the child recipient applies to these children. For the 13 percent with no parent in the household, parent-to-child deeming does not apply, and information about parents is not part of the SSI record.

One-Parent Household

Of the 64 percent of SSI recipient children who lived with only one parent, nearly all (95 percent) lived with their mother. Only 5 percent lived with their father.

For 44 percent of the children in a one-parent household, that parent had no reported income (the SSI payment is not considered as income in this analysis). Over one-third of the children (34 percent) lived with a parent who had earned income, and 25 percent lived with a parent who had unearned income. Mother-headed households showed about the same distribution, but father-headed homes were a little more likely to have some income and earnings and a little less likely to have unearned income.

Even in households with income, the amounts were small. Twenty-three percent of the children were in homes with income under \$200 in December 2003. Only 59 percent of them had income of \$600 or more in that month. Children living with a father were more likely to have higher family income.

Two-Parent Household

The 23 percent of SSI children who lived with two parents were relatively better off economically than those living with only one parent. Sixteen percent of the former had parents with no reported income, compared with 44 percent of those living with one parent. Also, for 63 percent of children in two-parent households, the parents had income of \$1,000 per month or more, compared with 22 percent of children in one-parent households.

Mothers in two-parent households were less likely to have income than were single mothers. Sixty-four percent of mothers in two-parent households had no income, compared with 45 percent of single mothers.

Parental Income

Almost three-fifths of all SSI children (55 percent) lived in a household where the parent(s) received some type of income, which averaged \$1,216 in December. About 37 percent of the children had one or both parents with earnings, averaging \$1,582; 22 percent had some type of unearned income, averaging \$342. The most common type of unearned income was public income-maintenance payments. Such payments include TANF payments, Department of Veterans Affairs payments based on need, and payments from other government programs.

Parent-to-Child Deeming

In households where the parent(s) of SSI children receive income, that income must be considered in determining the child's payment amount. This process is called deeming. Certain types of parental

income are excluded from deeming (see 20 CFR 416.1161(a)). This includes public income-maintenance payments and any parental income used to determine the amount of those payments. In addition, allocations and exclusions reduce the amount used in the child's payment computation.

About 63 percent of the children subject to deeming had one or more parents with reported

income in December. After all exclusions and allocations were applied, deemed income affected the payment of only 33 percent of these children. Children living with two parents (40 percent) were more likely to have their payment affected by deemed income than were children living with one parent (29 percent).