

Occupational and Medical-Vocational Claims Review Study

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Final Results *(for initial-level cases)*
May 2011



Purpose

- **We are conducting this research to identify the primary occupational, functional, and vocational characteristics of DI and SSI adult applicants whose claims were approved or denied at the initial or hearing levels at step four or five of SSA's sequential evaluation process.**
- **Knowledge of these characteristics will help establish a firm basis for SSA's subsequent OIS research and development activities.**

PRIMARY STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1) What occupations are most commonly cited by disability claimants as work they have performed in the past (i.e., Past Relevant Work)?**
- 2) What occupations are most commonly identified by adjudicators at the initial level and hearings level in step five denials as work in the national economy that a claimant may perform?**
- 3) What functional limitations of claimants are most commonly identified by adjudicators at the initial level and hearings level ?**
- 4) Which medical-vocational rules are most commonly cited by adjudicators at the initial level and hearings level as a basis for allowing or denying benefits?**

METHODOLOGY

- **Randomly selected a nationally representative stratified sample of 5,000 claims decided in fiscal year 2009, consisting of 3,867 initial-level cases and 1,133 hearing-level cases (reflecting the proportion of SSA disability cases decided at each of these two decision levels).**
- **A sample of 5,000 cases is large enough to provide us with a high probability of identifying all occupations that our applicants have engaged in which are substantially represented in the U.S. economy.**

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Limitations in Job Data - PRW

Results showed substantial limitations in the quality of occupational information that SSA obtains from claimants and in the applicability of the DOT taxonomy to our current caseload.

- In about 17% of cases in which a claimant cited work they had performed in the past (and that met our criteria for PRW), we could not clearly identify an applicable DOT job title associated with one or more instance of past work because either the case file contained insufficient information (15.7% of cases) or none of the job titles listed in the DOT matched the claimants' job descriptions (1.4% of cases).
- For an additional 4% of jobs cited by claimants, the job description represented a composite or combination of jobs that could not be clearly associated with a single DOT code/title.

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Limitations in Job Data – Step 4

- In about 11% of cases denied at step 4 (where adjudicators cite the past work a claimant can still perform), we could not clearly assign an applicable DOT job title because:
 - the adjudicator cited a job title that did not clearly associate with one of the claimant’s past jobs (5.4% of cases)
 - the folder did not contain a sufficiently detailed job description to match it with a DOT title (5.2% of cases), or
 - the folder contained an adequate job description, but it did not match a DOT job description (0.5% of cases).
- In an additional 1.2% of step 4 denial cases, the job title cited by the adjudicator represented a composite or combination of jobs that could not be clearly associated with a single DOT code/title.

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Limitations in Job Data – Step 5

For claims denied at step 5, the adjudicator cites jobs that are examples of the type of work a claimant can do. Our study found a substantial number of cases where DDSs cited jobs that might be obsolete. Examples of such jobs cited at step 5 in our study cases include:

- **Addresser (cited in 9.5% of step 5 denial cases)**
- **Tube Operator (1.1%)**
- **Cutter-and-Paster, Press Clippings (0.9%)**
- **Host/Hostess, Head (0.8%)**
- **Magnetic-Tape Winder (0.7%)**

It is doubtful that these jobs, as described in the DOT, currently exist in significant numbers in our economy.

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Past Relevant Work

The DOT job titles most commonly performed by claimants during their past relevant work history:

- **Cashier-Checker (4.2% of cases with PRW)**
- **Nurse Assistant (3.8%)**
- **Fast-Foods Worker (2.7%)**
- **Home Attendant (2.6%)**
- **Cashier II (2.6%)**
- **Laborer, Stores (2.4%)**
- **Material Handler (2.1%)**
- **Packager, Hand (1.9%)**
- **Stock Clerk (1.8%)**
- **Cleaner, Housekeeping (1.8%)**
- **Janitor (1.8%)**

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Past Relevant Work

- We identified 5,274 instances of past relevant jobs associated with our study claimants.
- From these jobs, we identified 1,171 distinct DOT titles, which comprise about 9 percent of the total number of titles listed in the DOT.
- The 50 most frequently cited DOT titles for PRW comprise 45% of all PRW citations in our sample.

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Past Relevant Work

SVP (Specific Vocational Preparation) levels associated with PRW were distributed as follows:

- **SVP 1 – 0.6%** (of all SVP citations for Past Relevant Work)
- **SVP 2 – 21.8%**
- **SVP 3 – 23.7%**
- **SVP 4 – 16.7%**
- **SVP 5 – 7.9%**
- **SVP 6 – 10.0%**
- **SVP 7 – 15.6%**
- **SVP 8 – 3.8%**
- **SVP 9 – 0.0%**

A substantial majority of the jobs held by our claimants have been unskilled (22.4%) and semi-skilled (40.4%) jobs that required a relatively short time, from < 1 to 6 months, to learn.

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Past Relevant Work

Strength levels associated with PRW were distributed as follows:

- **Sedentary – 11.6%** (of all strength citations for PRW)
- **Light – 35.3%**
- **Medium – 39.6%**
- **Heavy – 11.4%**
- **Very Heavy – 2.1%**

Three-quarters of the jobs held by our claimants were associated with light to medium strength requirements.

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Past Relevant Work

The five most frequently identified SVP-Strength combinations for PRW were:

- **SVP 3-Light (10.6% of all SVP-Strength citations for PRW)**
- **SVP 2-Medium (9.5%)**
- **SVP 3-Medium (9.2%)**
- **SVP 2-Light (8.3%)**
- **SVP 4-Medium (7.8%)**

**** These five SVP-Strength combinations comprised nearly half of all such combinations associated with PRW***

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Jobs at Step 4

The DOT job titles most commonly identified by adjudicators in Step 4 denials:

- **Cashier-Checker (3.6% of step 4 title citations)**
- **Cashier II (3.5%)**
- **Fast-Foods Worker (3.2%)**
- **Cleaner, Housekeeping (2.5%)**
- **Home Attendant (1.4%)**
- **Packager, Hand (1.4%)**
- **Kitchen Helper (1.3%)**
- **Laborer, Stores (1.3%)**
- **Guard, Security (1.1%)**
- **Manager, Office (1.1%)**
- **Sales Clerk (1.1%)**
- **Secretary (1.1%)**
- **Waiter/Waitress (1.1%)**

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Jobs at Step 5

The DOT job titles most commonly cited by DDSs in Step 5 denials:

- **Addresser (9.5% of step 5 denial cases)**
- **Cleaner, Housekeeping (5.7%)**
- **Photocopying, Machine Operator (5.3%)**
- **Collator Operator (3.7%)**
- **Surveillance-System Monitor (3.7%)**
- **Table Worker (3.4%)**
- **Packager, Hand (2.7%)**
- **Lens-Block Gauger (2.6%)**
- **Counter Clerk (2.3%)**
- **Assembler, Small Products II (2.2%)**
- **Call-Out Operator (2.2%)**

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Functional Limitations

The twenty most commonly cited functional limitations (1-10):

- **Lift/carry occasionally (76% of all cases)**
- **Lift/carry frequently (76%)**
- **Stand/walk (76%)**
- **Sit (75%)**
- **Climbing ladder/rope (54%)**
- **Climbing ramp/stairs (40%)**
- **Crawling (39%)**
- **Crouching (39%)**
- **Stooping (37%)**
- **Kneeling (35%)**

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Functional Limitations

The twenty most commonly cited functional limitations: (11-20)

- **Maintain attention (30%)**
- **Carry out detailed instructions (29% of all cases)**
- **Balancing (29%)**
- **Understand detailed instructions (28%)**
- **Avoid hazards (28%)**
- **Complete workday (28%)**
- **Respond appropriately to changes (24%)**
- **Interact with public (23%)**
- **Accept instructions from supervisors (19%)**
- **Perform within schedule (15%)**

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Functional Limitations

- **The top 10 functional limitations comprise nearly 56% of all limitations cited in our sample, and the top 20 limitations comprise about 83% of all limitations cited.**
- **Exertional and Postural limitations represent the most prevalent categories of functional limitations cited in our case files, but various categories of mental limitations are also cited relatively frequently.**

INITIAL-LEVEL REVIEW RESULTS

Medical-Vocational Rules

Step 5 decisions are most frequently based on framework application of grid rules with the five most commonly cited as follows (in descending order of prevalence):

Vocational Rule	Residual Functional Capacity	Age	Education	Past Work	Decision
204.00	Heavy	All	All	All	Not Disabled
201.06	Sedentary	Advanced age (Age 55 and over)	High School Graduate or More	Skilled or semiskilled	Disabled
202.21	Light	Younger individual (Under age 50)	High School Graduate or More	Skilled or semiskilled	Not Disabled
202.06	Light	Advanced age	High School Graduate or More	Skilled or semiskilled	Disabled
202.14	Light	Closely approaching advanced age (Age 50-54)	High School Graduate or More	Skilled or semiskilled	Not Disabled

Implications

- **Challenges encountered in this study highlight challenges faced in SSA's occupational assessments:**
 - **Limitations using the DOT**
 - **Limitations in occupational information obtained from claimants**
- **Relatively small number of job titles account for relatively large proportion of work performed by claimants, suggesting that targeted OIS data collection can produce information broadly applicable to SSA claims**
- **Functional limitation data potentially useful in guiding future efforts to develop content model**

Occupational and Medical-Vocational Study Hearing-Level Review

Status

- **Randomly selected a pool of 1,133 hearing-level cases – that does not include cases from the initial-level review**
- **Developed a DCI designed to capture initial- and hearing-level functional and vocational information and a corresponding protocol to instruct reviewers on how to input data**
- **Completed initial Pilot Study of 20 cases per reviewer which lead to substantial revisions in the DCI format**
- **Completed a second Pilot Study of 5 cases per reviewer to test the new DCI**
- **Full study data collection will begin on May 9 and is estimated to last 3 months**

HEARING-LEVEL STUDY CHALLENGES

- **Designing survey questions that would collect both the structured information from the initial folder and the less-structured information from the hearing-level decision**
- **Finding a database expert to manage the data and implement reporting functions and an Access expert to revise the electronic data collection form to better facilitate data entry and minimize reviewer errors.**



Questions/Comments?