

# SSDI and SSI Beneficiaries with Mental Illness Benefit from Evidence-Based Supported Employment

**At-a-Glance:** The goal of this study was to learn if Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries with mental illness benefitted from evidence-based supported employment services as much as non-beneficiaries. Results show that beneficiaries who received this service had better employment outcomes than those who received other vocational services.

## Key Findings

This study showed:

- SSDI and SSI beneficiaries who received evidence-based supported employment services achieved meaningful levels of employment, defined as 20 hours per week of employment.
- Length of employment improved over 10 years, but didn't result in working off of benefits.
- Non-beneficiaries who received this service had similar employment outcomes.

## Putting It into Practice

Providing evidence-based supported employment services early in the service delivery process may improve VR service outcomes for this group.

Providing services early in the illness process, before individuals obtain disability payments, could also prevent long-term disability.

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system has historically provided fewer services to people with psychiatric disabilities than to those in other disability groups. Possible reasons for this could be counselors' unfamiliarity and discomfort with psychiatric disabilities, counselors'

stereotypes of poorer employment outcomes for this population, clients' difficulties in navigating the VR eligibility process, and bureaucratic delays in setting intake appointments.

## More about this Research

People with psychiatric disabilities are the fastest-growing subgroup of SSA disability beneficiaries and have minimal rates of return to competitive employment. Although they typically acquire their disability at a young age and remain on benefits for many years, most have fluctuating levels of impairment that trend toward improvement and functional recovery.

This study examined four randomized controlled trials of evidence-based supported employment for persons with severe mental illness. It compared 546 SSA disability beneficiaries with 131 non-beneficiaries. Three employment measures were examined: job acquisition, weeks worked, and job tenure.

A limitation of this study:

- The randomized controlled trials included in this study focused on persons with severe mental illnesses. The majority of SSDI beneficiaries with psychiatric disabilities are diagnosed with mood disorders. Results of this study may not apply to SSA beneficiaries or to SSDI beneficiaries with less severe disorders.

## Learn More

Access this research by visiting the [Project E3 Research Database](#).

Citation: Bond, G.R., Xie, H., Drake, R.E. (2007). Can SSDI and SSI beneficiaries with mental illness benefit from evidence-based supported employment? *Psychiatric Services*, 58 (11), 1412-1420.

## Questions? Feedback?

Do you have questions or feedback about putting this research into practice? We're waiting to hear from you! Send us your [questions or feedback](#)

## Join Our Conversation

Have you tried any of these practices? Have you had success working with these populations in your area? Tell us more and [join our conversation](#).