

Social Security Beneficiaries and Aged SSI Receipt by State and County, 1970-2018: Description and Dataset

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Key Findings and Policy Implications

This paper describes newly digitized county-level data on OASI and SSI receipt rates for older Americans from the early 1970s to 2018. The data were compiled from historical SSA publications, including *Social Security Beneficiaries by State and County*, *OASDI Beneficiaries by State and County*, and *SSI Recipients by State and County*. The paper finds that:

- Consistent with well-known participation trends (but with a slight undercount in the county data), the average rate of primary OASI beneficiaries increases over time from 7.5 percent of the population in 1970 to 16.2 percent in 2018. The dispersion across counties decreases over time: 9.1 percent participation at the 75th percentile and 5.7 percent at the 25th percentile in 1970 (a ratio of 1.6-to-1); 18.4 percent at the 75th percentile and 13.6 percent at the 25th percentile in 2018 (a ratio of 1.35-to-1).
- The average receipt rate for Survivors Insurance increased from 2.4 percent in 1975 to a peak of 2.8 percent in the early 1990s, then declined to 1.7 percent by 2018. This is driven by a combination of population aging, increasing labor force participation by women, and changing marriage patterns. The dispersion across counties is more stable over time: 2.9 percent participation at the 75th percentile and 1.9 percent at the 25th percentile in 1975 (a ratio of 1.5-to-1); 3.4 percent at the 75th percentile and 2.1 percent at the 25th percentile in the early 1990s (a ratio of 1.6-to-1); and 2.0 percent at the 75th percentile and 1.3 percent at the 25th percentile in 2018 (a ratio of 1.5-to-1).
- The average rate of SSI recipients at older ages decreases over time, from 1.7% of the population in 1975 to 0.2% by 2018. There is a more significant undercount in the county data on SSI that starts out at about 15% and reduces to around 4% by 2018; likely due to some SSI recipients not being assigned to counties. The dispersion in SSI participation across counties is much larger than for OASI: roughly four times higher participation in counties at the 75th percentile as compared with the 25th percentile.

The value of the county-level data to policy-related research is its ability to explore the sources of variation that may result from state-level influences, socioeconomic and demographic factors, labor market considerations and other factors.

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