

Social Security Disability Determinations:
A Neglected Area for Clinical Neuropsychology

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Although clinical neuropsychology has traditionally focused assessment efforts on medical and educational applications, a long-neglected but important consideration has been the use of neuropsychological techniques for Social Security Disability determination. For example, a review of the last ten years of Psychological Abstracts as well as anecdotal evidence from professional neuropsychologists indicates a paucity of attention and information on the interface between neuropsychology and disability evaluations. The purpose of this presentation is to inform the professional neuropsychologist about this area by providing statistics describing the potential role of the neuropsychologist as well as the criteria used by Social Security in disability determinations.

In 1980, Congress mandated that Social Security review its records for potential fraud. Since then, well over 1/2 million cases have been reviewed with approximately 25% of them being in the "mentally-impaired" category. Of this population, approximately 50% fall in subcategories involving brain dysfunction. Considering that 75% of these cases require at least one consultative examination (e.g., neuropsychological), approximately 30,000 potential evaluations per year for disability exist. Together with an equally large number of initial evaluations (vs. reviews), it appears that disability evaluations represent a growing area for the professional neuropsychologist.

Although Social Security typically requests the WAIS-R and the Bender for disability evaluations, they have accepted and reimbursed for other measures including the LNNB. The disability determination method, which is presented on the attached table, focuses on meeting criteria of severity outlined by the Social Security. Briefly, this entails measurement of deficits in memory, thinking, orientation, affect as well as in daily activities, interests, habits, and interpersonal relations.

THE DISABILITY DECISION FOR MENTALLY IMPAIRED INDIVIDUALS:
A SEQUENTIAL EVALUATION PROCESS

