Neuropsychological Profiles of Mentally-Impaired, Brain-Damaged Individuals Who Have Successfully Appealed Social Security Disability Terminations

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In Social Security disability determinations, disability is established based on the severity of an impairment. However, the Social Security Administration has yet to clearly outline what this severity is for "mental-impaired" individuals with "brain syndromes". The purpose of this investigation was to establish neuropsychological profiles of individuals who, according to strict Social Security review (i.e., hearing), had met this criteria.

Fifteen individuals with documented neurological and psychiatric histories were referred for evaluation after being terminated from the disability rolls. Each case was tried by an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) and the initial termination decision was reversed based on neuropsychological findings (Luria-Nebraska Neuropsychological Battery and the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised).

Results indicate that individuals scored an average of 11.82 t points ($\bar{x}$ = t of 78) above average critical level ($\bar{x}$ = t of 66.18) on the Luria-Nebraska (LNNB). Each of the 14 scales of the battery were above mean critical level (range 67-92). In contrast, the average Wechsler (WAIS-R) Full Scale IQ was 71.4 (range 60-87) with mean Verbal IQ of 73.3 and Performance IQ of 76.5.

Results suggest that individuals exhibited LNNB scores in the brain damage range while WAIS-R scores were in the borderline mental retardation range. Considering that Social Security uses an Full Scale IQ of 69 as cutoff for disability, it would appear that LNNB scores held stronger weight in the ALJ's decision to reverse disability terminations.

While these findings should be considered preliminary due to the small N and lack of adequate controls, they do provide initial emperical neuropsychological evidence of the decision making process in Social Security disability determinations.