

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

September 2009



Objective

To determine whether government pension verifications and payment recalculations were completed when auxiliary beneficiaries receiving payments as spouses had their benefit status changed to widow(er)s.

Background

The Social Security Administration (SSA) administers the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program under Title II of the *Social Security Act*. The program provides monthly benefits to retired or disabled workers and their families and to survivors of deceased workers. An individual may be eligible for OASDI benefits under his/her own work history as well as under a spouse's work history.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-13-08-28103.pdf>

Spouses' to Widow(er)s' Benefits When Government Pensions are Involved **(A-13-08-28103)**

Our Findings

SSA did not always verify government pension information, as required by the Agency's policies and procedures. SSA determined GPO was applicable to the OASDI spousal benefits for all 100 widow(er)s selected for review. When these 100 beneficiaries' status changed from spouse to widow(er)s, SSA staff did not verify 15 widow(er)s' government pension information, as required.

In total, we identified 9 individuals with improper payments from the 100 sampled. These 9 payment errors totaled about \$82,000. Estimating our sample results to the population, SSA staff made errors converting about 4,980 spousal benefits to widows resulting in about \$45.5 million in improper payments between January 1985 and August 2008. If these errors are not corrected, we estimate about 4,400 individuals will receive improper payments totaling about \$147.8 million over their remaining expected lifetimes.

Our Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Correct the payment errors we identified where corroborating evidence of government pension information was not obtained as required.
2. Determine whether it would be cost-effective to conduct a clean-up project to identify current widow(er)s whose government pension information was not verified as required by policy, take appropriate action to verify the information, and adjust the OASDI payment amounts as needed.
3. Remind employees to follow policies and procedures to verify government pension information when required to do so.

SSA agreed with the recommendations.