Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

April 2012

Objective

To identify and quantify improper payments related to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients who were married to Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance beneficiaries but did not report their marriages to the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Background

The amount of a recipient's SSI payment is based on many factors, including marital status. For example, when one individual receives SSI payments, the spouse's income is deemed available to meet the recipient's needs. Such income may reduce or eliminate the individual's SSI payments. Generally, SSA relies on SSI recipients to voluntarily report any changes in their marital status or living arrangements.

To view the full report, visit http://oig.ssa.gov/audits-and-investigations/audit-reports/A-01-10-11020

Supplemental Security Income Recipients Who Did Not Report Their Marriage to the Social Security Administration
(A-01-10-11020)

Our Findings

Based on our sample, we estimate that about 900 SSI recipients were overpaid approximately $8.2 million because they did not report their marriages to SSA. By stopping these improper payments, the Agency could save an estimated $3.4 million over the next 12 months.

For example, a South Carolina couple began receiving SSI payments in December 2004. In December 2005, the wife reported that she and her husband were no longer living together—even though they still were. In August 2011, she admitted to SSA that she lied about the separation because she was concerned her husband's income/resources would stop her SSI payments. As a result, SSA assessed a $15,115 overpayment on her record and referred the case to our Office of Investigations for possible fraud.

Our Recommendations

We recommended the Agency review the remaining 3,016 cases from our audit population that will most likely result in overpayments because of unreported marriages.

SSA disagreed with the recommendation. SSA stated that deviating resources to complete these reviews would jeopardize their ability to process claims, provide adequate service to the public, and perform other critical program integrity workloads.

However, our review showed that SSA could identify about $8.2 million in overpayments and that by stopping these improper payments, the Agency could save an estimated $3.4 million over the next 12 months. We further estimated that it would cost SSA about $511,000 to review the remaining cases, which is substantially less than the overpayments and savings they could identify.