

Postponed retirement slows cognitive decline

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Postponing retirement is protective against cognitive decline. The beneficial effect is related to a slowed rate of cognitive decline rather than a boost in cognitive function. That is what a recent study by MPIDR researcher Angelo Lorenti and colleagues found by analyzing data from the U.S. Health and Retirement Study.

Participating in the labor market until the age of 67 slows [cognitive decline](#) and is protective against cognitive impairment, such as that caused by Alzheimer's. This protective effect appears to hold regardless of gender and educational or occupational attainment. These findings were recently published in the journal *SSM Population Health*.

The team of researchers with Jo Mhairi Hale, Maarten J. Bijlsma, and Angelo Lorenti, all affiliated with the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (MPIDR) in Rostock, Germany, used data from the Health and Retirement Study on more than 20,000 US-Americans ages 55 to 75 who participated in the labor market at some point between 1996 and 2014.

There are modifiable life-course predictors of cognitive function

With population aging there is a growing concern about increasing prevalence in Alzheimer's disease. As there is no cure for Alzheimer's, it is important to understand the influences on cognitive function over one's [life span](#), paying particular attention to modifiable risk factors.

"In this study, we approach retirement and cognitive function from the perspective that they both come near the end of a long path of life," says Angelo Lorenti. "It begins with one's social origins in ethnicity, gender, and early-life social and economic status, goes on with educational and occupational attainment and health behaviors, and goes all the way up to more proximate factors such as partnership status and mental and physical health. All these kinds of factors accumulate and interact over a lifetime to affect both cognitive function and age at retirement."

What are the health consequences of postponing retirement?

"We investigated how [demographic change](#) interacts with social and [labor market](#) dynamics," says Angelo Lorenti. In many countries governments have enacted policies to increase the statutory retirement age. That is why it is relevant to understand if retiring at older ages may have health consequences, particularly on cognitive function. "Our study suggests that there may be a fortuitous unintended consequence of postponed retirement," says Lorenti.

More information: Jo Mhairi Hale et al, Does postponing retirement affect cognitive function? A counterfactual experiment to disentangle life course risk factors, *SSM - Population Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100855](#)

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