

Heterogeneities in older Europeans' cognitive functioning: the interrelationship between working status and social networks and its association with cognitive functioning of older adults.

Thomas Arnhold (arnhold@iiasa.ac.at)^{1 2}
Daniela Weber (weberd@iiasa.ac.at)^{1 2}
Valeria Bordone (valeria.bordone@univie.ac.at)^{1 3}

¹POPJUS Program, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital (IIASA, OeAW, University of Vienna), Laxenburg, Austria

²Health Economics and Policy Division, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna, Austria

³Department of Sociology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

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Background

The preservation of cognitive functioning is a central aspect of older peoples' health and well-being, and, given the increasing share of older adults across Europe, a matter of growing concern. A crucial ingredient for good cognitive functioning at an advanced age is cognitive stimulation through engagement with life, which includes the maintenance of a strong social network and participating in productive activities. Employment stands out as a productive activity that is a central source of cognitive stimulation for many. However, a significant share of Europeans aged 50+ does not work. Research on retirees and older adults with low activity participation suggests that a strong social network can be an important substitute for engaging in productive activities. Similarly, for older non-workers, social networks may be more essential for maintaining good cognitive functioning than for older working individuals.

Objectives

This study aims to further the understanding of the interrelationship between working status and social network resources in shaping good cognitive functioning of individuals aged 50+. Based on the literature, we hypothesise that both employment and social networks positively affect later-life cognitive functioning, but in the absence of one of the two, the other becomes more important.

Data and method

The study draws on data from the sixth Wave of the Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). To test our hypothesis, we utilize a linear multilevel model with episodic memory and verbal fluency indicators as outcome variables representing cognitive functioning.

Preliminary results

Preliminary results indicate negative effects of homemaking and unemployment, as well as a positive effect of social network resources on cognitive functioning. Further, we observe a positive interaction effect of non-employment and social network resources on episodic memory. The results substantiate the importance of social networks for cognitive functioning, particularly for the episodic memory of non-working older adults.