

Research summary

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Is working in older age good for your health? Results of a review of published research

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About the research

We looked for research which compares the health of people who retire, with those who continue to work in older age.

We used systematic methods, following a series of clear steps, to make sure that we did not only pick out some studies and not others. We analysed the findings of each study and then brought all the results together, to see what they mean overall.

We wanted to know how people's health might be affected by working beyond the current typical retirement age in Europe, so we only looked at studies which included people aged 64 or over.

We excluded studies which only collected data from retired people who were in their 50s or early 60s. This is because these younger people would be expected to be healthier than those who are extending working life.

In order to make sure our findings were up to date we focused on studies which have been published since 2011 (when retirement laws in the UK changed). We only looked at research from other developed countries, to make sure that the research was relevant to people in the UK.

We looked for research findings on any type of health, including physical health and mental health.

Implications

- The results of the review suggest that extending working lives will have different effects on health depending on the pattern of working (full time versus part time), the quality of the job (level of demand, level of control, and level of reward), and whether a worker is male or female.
- Extended working is likely to widen health inequalities between those who are able to choose to retire/reduce to part time working, versus those who have no choice but to continue working full time for financial reasons.
- Extended working beyond current typical retirement age is likely to widen health inequalities between those in good quality jobs versus poor quality jobs.
- Interventions are required to promote healthy extended working, (such as enabling employees to reduce their working hours in older age) and to reduce the risk of potential negative effects on some groups of workers.
- More research is needed regarding the impact of working longer on quality of life.

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Results

We identified 17 relevant studies.

There were five studies from Japan, four from the UK, three from the US, and one each from The Netherlands, Sweden and Australia. Two studies included all countries in Europe.

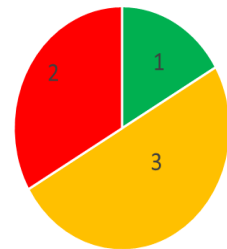
There was no particular pattern in regard to the country of origin for the studies reporting positive, versus neutral, versus adverse effects.

Two studies were published in 2011, one in 2012, one in 2013, one in 2014, two in 2015, two in 2016, three in 2017, four in 2018, and one in 2019.

Only one study evaluated quality of life, with positive effects reported for workers who choose to continue to work, versus negative effects for those who work out of financial necessity.

For **mental health** – one study found a positive effect (by reducing to part-time employment), three studies found a neutral effect, and two studies found adverse effects (one for women in routine/manual jobs and one for workers in poor quality employment).

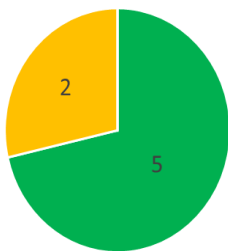
Effect on mental health



■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Adverse

For **overall health** - five studies found a positive effect (three included male workers only, in two the effect was for part time workers only, and in two the effect was for those in professional or medium skilled roles). Two studies found a neutral effect for workers.

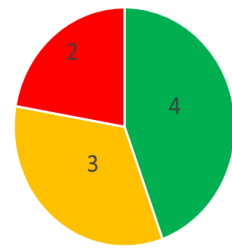
Effect on overall health



■ Positive effect ■ Neutral effect

For **physical health** – four studies found positive effects (one for males, one for those in average reward jobs, two for all workers), four studies found neutral effects (two for females, one for all workers, one for those in good quality jobs). Two studies found adverse effects for those in poor quality/low reward jobs.

Effect on physical health



■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Adverse

Acknowledgement

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