

Working-life training and maternity spells are related to slower cognitive decline in later life

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Employment gaps may promote but also reduce cognitive function in older age, as new research from the University of Luxembourg has shown. In particular, some of the findings suggest that leaves reported as unemployment and sickness are associated with higher risk of cognitive impairment indicating that these kinds of employment gaps may decrease cognitive reserve in the long run. Strongest evidence was found for training and maternity spells being related to slower cognitive decline, suggesting beneficial associations of these kinds of leaves on cognitive function.

In this new publication, Dr Anja Leist from the University's Research Unit INSIDE concludes that employment gaps during working life have the potential to increase or decrease cognitive reserve. The examination of how different activities performed during employment gaps are associated with later cognitive function and change has not been systematically investigated until now.

Based on complete work histories and extensive cognitive assessments among respondents to the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) in 13 countries, the research team examined how employment gaps associated with unemployment, sickness, homemaking, training and maternity spells relate to cognitive function and aging-related cognitive decline at older [age](#). These results provide first evidence for possible beneficial effects of cognitively stimulating

activities during employment gaps. In analyses stratified by occupational class, the team found that unemployment and sickness spells were more strongly associated with [cognitive impairment](#) for workers in higher occupations. Further research is needed to examine if these associations are indeed causal.

"For me it was exciting to think of employment gaps as a possibility to increase cognitive reserve during working life. There may be different mechanisms at work, for instance training spells may lead to higher [socioeconomic status](#) later on, whereas maternity spells may reduce the stress of balancing family and work tasks, and we need further research to disentangle these effects. The findings are in line with other studies that suggest that cognitively stimulating activities can indeed increase cognitive reserve and delay [cognitive decline](#) in older age" says Anja Leist who is supported by a postdoctoral research fellowship of the National Research Fund Luxembourg.

More information: "Time away from work predicts later cognitive function: Differences by activity during leave" in the renowned journal *"Annals of Epidemiology"*

Provided by University of Luxembourg

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