

# Working after infarction, stroke or cancer? Different preferences for men and women

April 3 2017

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Female and male workers over 50 years old respond in different ways to severe health problems. If physically recovered, men tend to work more hours, but women prefer to enjoy more free time. And single men and women risk leaving the labour market more than those in couples.

This was revealed in a study published by the Labour Economics journal by two Italian economists, Francesca Zantomio from Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and Elisabetta Trevisan from the University of Padua. The research covers 16 European countries, and is based on two [longitudinal studies](#), the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, that involved around 130,000 people over 50 observed for over a decade.

According to the scholars, understanding the different reactions and preferences that emerge between men and [women](#) is a key ingredient for planning effective welfare and work integration policies. On average, in fact, the first episode of infarction, stroke or cancer ends up doubling the risk that a 50+ won't work again. However, maintaining employment might be crucial for guaranteeing living standards and economic well-being in years to come.

Hence the necessity for public [policy](#) to find a compromise between incentives to employment and [labour market](#) integration and income support in case employment ends.

"Specific labor market integration policies could be ineffective and

inefficient if planned without taking into account the peculiar necessities and preferences of recipients" explains Francesca Zantomio, professor in the Department of Economics at Ca' Foscari. "The breadwinner in the family, typically male, tends to work more, once recovered from the health shock. Re-training policies and interventions aimed at removing physical barriers to work might credibly support these workers' reintegration in the workplace."

"Women, on the other hand, prefer to enjoy more free time, if the family economic circumstances allow it, as they perceive a shortening in life expectancy," the scholar continues. "Actually, it is the group of more educated women, financially better-off, that are more likely to leave employment, despite being hit by less severe and disabling conditions. In their case, it may be inappropriate to insist on full re-employment. Those who don't have a partner on whom they can rely for practical help, eg. in personal or domestic care, or transport to work, show particular difficulties at remaining active in the labour market, even if, in absence of other family income, they are likely to suffer serious financial consequences."

"Such a multi-faceted scenario would certainly deserve more targeted social and [work](#) policies," concludes the Ca' Foscari economist.

**More information:** Elisabetta Trevisan et al. The impact of acute health shocks on the labour supply of older workers: Evidence from sixteen European countries, *Labour Economics* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.labeco.2016.04.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2016.04.002)

Provided by Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Citation: Working after infarction, stroke or cancer? Different preferences for men and women

(2017, April 3) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-infarction-cancer-men-women.html>

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