

Non-employment in older age is associated with feeling isolated and under-utilised

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Credit: University of Glasgow

Compared to those who work, and in contrast to many popular perceptions, older people who are retired, home-makers, unemployed, or not working because of sickness or disability are more likely to feel that their status results in poorer social and mental engagement and lower self-esteem, according to a new study.

The research published today, from the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, explored attitudes towards

employment and non-employment in over 1,500 men and women aged 55 to 70 and living in the West of Scotland.

The study found associations were particularly marked among unemployed and sick or disabled respondents, who also felt that their status was a source of worry and prevented them from feeling in control.

Lead author Dr Elise Whitley said: "There are many individual and societal benefits to extending working lives and the success of future pension systems may be highly reliant on increases in the older workforce and retirement ages. However, recent trends have been towards earlier exits from the workplace, not always through choice.

"As well as economic benefits, being employed has other advantages including social contact, daily structure, social identity, status, and regular activity and we wanted to understand whether these factors play a role in explaining known associations between not working and poor physical and mental [health](#).

"Older people who are not working represent a [high risk group](#) and, while re-employment may not always be possible, interventions that decrease loneliness, social isolation and boredom, and improve self-esteem offer valuable opportunities to improve health outcomes and promote successful aging.

"For example, programmes promoting volunteering and community involvement, or widening access to public transport could help to reduce the negative impact not being in employment on the health of older adults."

Co-author Dr Frank Popham said: "By comparing people changing over time from employment to non-employment, our analysis strengthens the evidence of negative social impacts of certain types of non-

employment."

The paper, 'Leaving the labour market later in life. How does it impact on mechanisms for health?', is published in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

More information: Whitley E, Popham F Leaving the labour market later in life: how does it impact on mechanisms for health? *Occup Environ Med*, 21 August 2017. [DOI: 10.1136/oemed-2016-104258](https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2016-104258)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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