

Working women healthier even after retirement age

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Credit: Max Planck Society

In a new study, Jennifer Caputo, research scientist at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, found that women who worked consistently during their prime midlife working years had better physical

health than non-working women later in life. Working women were also less depressed over the next decades as they entered old age, and even lived longer shows the study recently published in the journal *Demography*.

Jennifer Caputo and her coauthors analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Women in the US. The survey began in 1967 with about 5,100 [women](#) aged 30-44, and followed them until they were 66-80 years old in 2003. Their analyses showed that women who regularly worked for pay during the first 20 years of the study reported fewer [physical health](#) limitations and symptoms of depression as they aged over the next 16 years than women who didn't work for pay, including housewives. They also had more than 25 percent [lower risk](#) of having died by 2012.

Bad experiences at work—still healthier than non-workers

Consistently [negative experiences](#) with work did appear to take a toll on women's [health](#) later on. Those who perceived discrimination at work, didn't particularly like their jobs, and said they did not feel committed to their work had poorer physical and mental health as they aged. However, women with these experiences were still healthier in late life than non-workers.

This is also during a historical period that the gender composition of the labor force was rapidly changing. Caputo comments, "Many women in this study went to work in low-status or traditionally male-dominated fields. It is perhaps especially telling that despite these less equitable conditions, they were healthier later in life than women who didn't work outside the home."

Women's health benefited by being employed

The authors also found that taking into account income, occupational class, and hours worked did not fully explain why working women were healthier and lived longer than non-working women.

"Our findings support the conclusion that women's health is benefited by being employed, regardless of their [economic situation](#) and even if they don't always have the best working experiences," says Caputo. She adds: "For the first time we were able to show a positive long-term relationship between working at midlife and health over many following years, even past the age of retirement."

More information: Jennifer Caputo et al, Midlife Work and Women's Long-Term Health and Mortality, *Demography* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s13524-019-00839-6](#)

Provided by Max Planck Society

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