

Study finds chronic musculoskeletal pain is linked to earlier retirement

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Frequent musculoskeletal pain is linked with an increased risk of exiting work and retiring earlier, according to the new study. Credit: Andrea Piacquadio, Pexels, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

Frequent musculoskeletal pain is linked with an increased risk of exiting

work and retiring earlier, according to a new study published this week in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Nils Niederstrasser of the University of Portsmouth, UK, and colleagues.

Previous studies have shown higher rates of absenteeism, reduced working capacity and reduced income for people with [chronic musculoskeletal pain](#). The prevalence of people living with musculoskeletal pain increases with age, but few studies have specifically focused on the effects of chronic pain on the employment status of older populations.

In the new study, Niederstrasser and colleagues used data on 1,156 individuals aged 50+ living in England and taking part in the English Longitudinal Study of Aging. Over the course of the 14-year data collection period, 1,073 of the individuals retired.

The researchers found that people with more musculoskeletal pain complaints tended to retire earlier compared to pain-free participants (HR = 1.30, CI = 1.12–1.49). Participants suffering from musculoskeletal pain were also 1.25 times more likely to cease work sooner (CI = 1.10–1.43), whether or not they described themselves as retired.

Other factors associated with earlier retirement age included higher work dissatisfaction and higher self-perceived social status. Frequent musculoskeletal pain remained a significant predictor of earlier retirement and risk of work cessation at earlier ages even when controlling for the influence of job satisfaction, [depressive symptoms](#), self-perceived [social status](#), sex, and working conditions.

The authors conclude that pain experiences can lead to poor work outcomes and point out that further research should establish the mechanisms and decision making involved in leaving the workforce for

people with frequent musculoskeletal pain.

The authors add, "It is remarkable that pain predicts earlier retirement and work cessation to a similar extent or even more strongly than other variables, such as [job satisfaction](#) or specific job demands. It shows just how much impact pain can have on all aspects of people's lives."

More information: Musculoskeletal pain affects the age of retirement and the risk of work cessation among older people, *PLoS ONE* (2024). DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0297155](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0297155)

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