

Non-Employment in NSHD: A Risk Factor for Poor Cognitive Function and Decline?

Alison Sizer, PhD student

Summary

- Men aged 60-64 who had been non-employed for >20 years of their working lives had significantly lower word memory than men non-employed for ≤6 months
- Women aged 60-64 who had been non-employed for >5-10 years of their working lives had significantly higher mental speed than women non-employed for ≤6 months

Introduction

- Research indicates cognitive function is influenced by a range of factors acting across the life course, including employment characteristics
- Although it is widely recognised that unemployment is associated with health and mortality, its association with cognitive function and decline has not been adequately investigated

Data and measures

The MRC National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD) recruited 5362 babies born in a single week in 1946

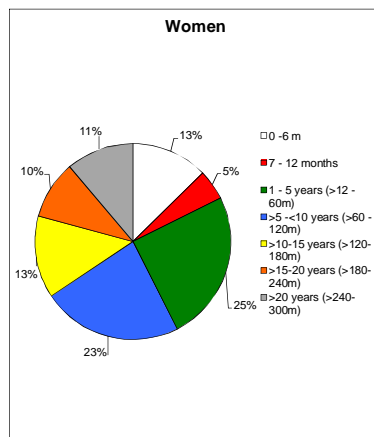
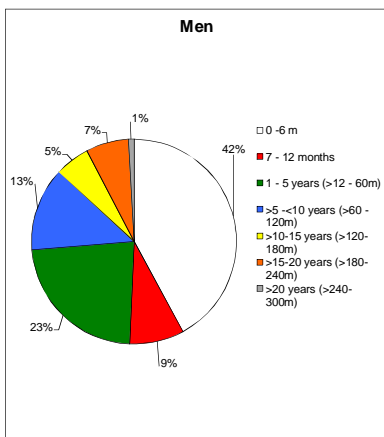
Cognitive outcomes: Scores for word memory and letter search (crossing out Ps and Ws) speed and accuracy at age 43 and 60-64

Non-employment duration: Months of non-employment (from leaving full-time education to age 60-64), categorised into: - 0-6 months; >6-12 months; >1-5 years; >5-10 years; >10-15 years; >15-20 years; >20 years

Control variables: Childhood factors (social class, cognitive ability, adolescent mental health); educational attainment; adult factors (head of household social class, occupational complexity, physical and mental health, smoking, physical exercise, participation in social activities)

Non-employment

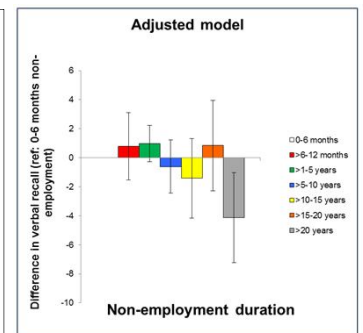
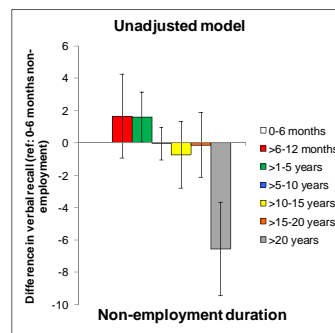
Women experienced longer periods of non-employment than men.



Cognitive function (Age 60-64 years)

Men

- Compared to 0-6 months non-employment, >20 years non-employment was associated with 6.35 fewer words recalled. The control variables only partially accounted for this.



- Compared to 0-6 months non-employment, >20 years non-employment was associated with lower search speed and accuracy. Adjustment for the control variables accounted for these associations

Women

- There was an association between non-employment duration and search speed
- Compared to 0-6 months non-employment, >5-10 years non-employment was associated with 25.61 letters higher search speed
- Adjustment for the control variables did not attenuate the association
- Non-employment duration was not associated with verbal recall or search accuracy in fully adjusted models

