



Economic recessions, working conditions, and later-life cognitive function: Evidence from SHARE and HRS



Dr. Anja Leist, PhD

Research Associate

PEARL Institute for Research on Socio-Economic Inequality (IRSEI)

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Abstract

Fluctuations in the national economy shape labour market opportunities and outcomes, which in turn may influence the accumulation of cognitive reserve. This study examines whether economic recessions experienced in adulthood are associated with later-life cognitive function with two studies, the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) and the U.S. Health and Retirement Study (HRS). Cognitive assessments were linked to complete work histories retrospectively collected and to historical annual data on fluctuations in Gross Domestic Product per capita for each country (Study 1), and to self-reported working status pre-retirement and state-level unemployment rates (Study 2). Controlling for confounders, we assessed whether recessions experienced during early and mid-adulthood (Study 1) and shortly before retirement (Study 2) were associated with cognitive function at later ages. In Study 1, number of recessions at ages 45-49 among men and 25-44 among women were associated with later-life cognitive function, and evidence was found that this association acts via more unfavorable labour market trajectories. In Study 2, longer exposure to recessions pre-retirement was associated with lower cognitive function.

Biosketch

Anja Leist is a research associate at the PEARL Institute for Research on Socio-Economic Inequality (IRSEI) at the University of Luxembourg since April 2014. She holds a PhD in Psychology from the University of Trier, Germany, and received postgraduate training in Social Epidemiology and Population Health at the Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Anja works on social inequalities in health and cognitive function in old age and has published on the topics of life review, technology and aging, life course epidemiology of cognitive function and health, with a particular focus on the interplay of individual and contextual influences across the life course on later-life outcomes. Before working at IRSEI, she held a fellowship under the 'Future Leaders of Ageing Research in Europe' programme coordinated by the European Research Area on Ageing (ERA-AGE 2). Anja is member of the Gerontological Society of America and the World Young Leaders in Dementia Network, among others.



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