



May 15, 2024

Migration and Health Inequalities

## Unveiling the Impact of Job Loss on the Health of Immigrants

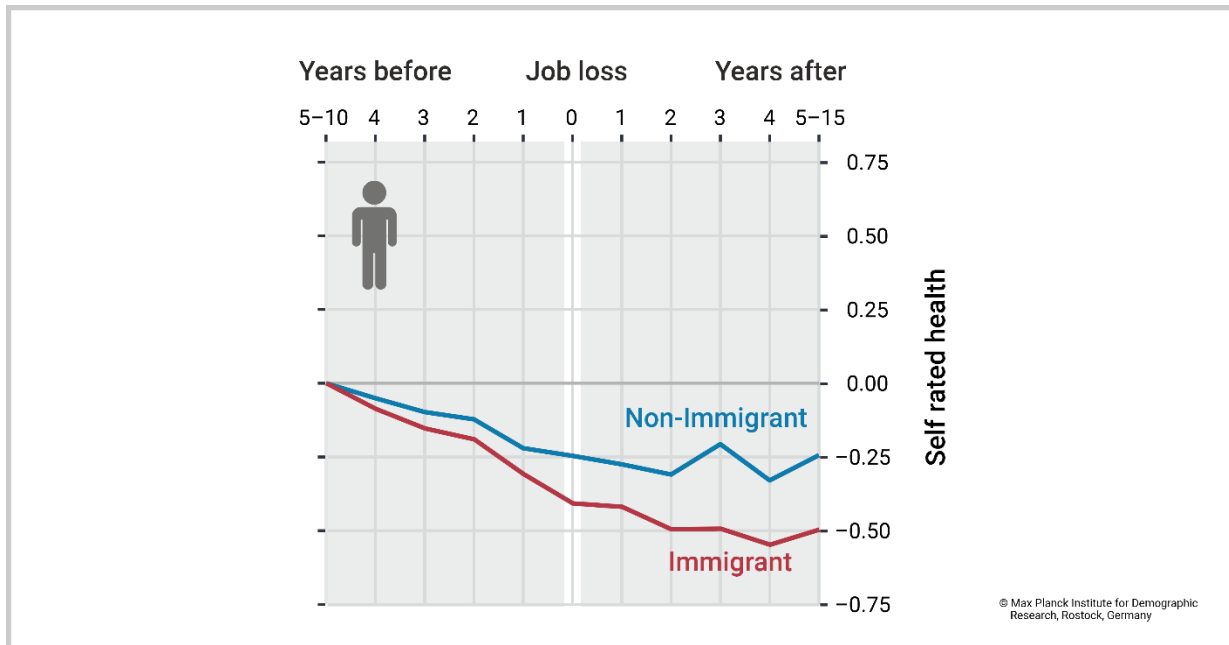
*This recent study by Silvia Loi and colleagues examines how life events like job loss and divorce affect the health of immigrants using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel. They find that immigrants experience more rapid declines in health as they age. Moreover, they find that job loss has a stronger and more long-lasting impact on the health of immigrants, especially men.*

**Rostock, Germany.** Major life events have a strong impact on a person's health. Losing jobs and divorcing are extremely stressful life events that have long-lasting consequences on health and well-being. Some groups are better able to cope with such crises because they have a solid set of social and economic resources to help them overcome life's challenges. Immigrants often have a much weaker set of these support structures, and may face more challenging consequences.

In a recent [study](#), Silvia Loi, Peng Li, and Mikko Myrskylä from the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (MPIDR) examined how health declines following a divorce or job loss in individuals with and without a migration background. "Losing a job or experiencing divorce always has a negative impact on an individual's health, however this impact is not the same across different populations. In this study we tested the hypothesis that negative events have a much more serious impact on the health of immigrants, compared to the German-born population, and that these effects last for a much longer time," explains author Silvia Loi.

### Initial health advantage for immigrants is reversed at older ages

Data for the study came from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), focused on the time period from 1984 to 2017, and analyzed participants' self-assessment of their health, and self-perceived general well-being. "We show that individuals who immigrate to Germany are healthier than the German-born population at young ages. However, this advantage diminishes with age, and as they grow older, the health of immigrants significantly worsens compared to that of the German-born population. Moreover, this stronger decline in health observed for immigrants is much worse when they experience detrimental events in life, such as divorce and job loss," explains the researcher.



**Job loss and health decline of immigrant men in Germany. © MPIDR**

## Male immigrants disproportionately affected by life's hardship

The results of the study confirm the hypothesis that negative life events have a much greater impact on the health of migrants than non-migrants. "We found that job loss has a longer-lasting and more severe impact on health, especially for male immigrants. For women, the differences in health effects between migrant and non-migrant women are not as significant. Moreover, if immigrants were already divorced before a job loss, the consequences on health are stronger, compared to non-immigrants," says Loi.

These results shed light on the reason behind immigrants' health deterioration as they age, revealing that they face a dual disadvantage throughout their lives. Immigrants are more prone than non-immigrants to experience negative life events like unemployment, and these events typically exert a more pronounced effect on their health than those born in Germany. "Our findings point to the need of considering adverse events as intertwined when doing research on immigrant health," says Silvia Loi. "In fact, considering events independently assumes that individual characteristics and circumstances occur in a vacuum and do not influence one another, which poses a set of serious limitations in explaining the complexity of the social world."

## More research is needed

"The study provides crucial insights, but also underscores the need for a deeper exploration of the mechanisms driving the unhealthy aging of immigrants," Silvia Loi explains. In the future, research should focus on the role of other potential explanatory factors: How and why people immigrated, what type of job do they have, what is the role of family - these are all factors that influence the



individual health trajectory of immigrants and that were not examined. The current study is a starting point for further research that will be carried out by the newly established Research Group on Migration and Health Inequalities, led by Silvia Loi. The research group is funded by a Starting Grant from the European Research Council (ERC). For her project, Loi received approximately 1.5 million euros to study "Immigrant-Native Health Disparities in Ageing Societies".

## About the MPIDR

The Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (MPIDR) in Rostock investigates the structure and dynamics of populations. The Institute's researchers explore issues of political relevance, such as demographic change, aging, fertility, and the redistribution of work over the life course, as well as digitization and the use of new data sources for the estimation of migration flows. The MPIDR is one of the largest demographic research bodies in Europe and is a worldwide leader in the study of populations. The Institute is part of the Max Planck Society, the internationally renowned German research organization.

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