Author's response to reviews

Title: Factors associated with differences in perceived health among German long-term unemployed

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Mr. Silvestre,

We are very grateful for your detailed and helpful e-mail of March 23.

Please find enclosed a revised manuscript of our article, “Factors associated with differences in perceived health among German long-term unemployed”. We hope to have satisfactorily addressed the comments of the reviewers. The resultant changes and additions within the revised version have been inserted in green text.

We have also added our point-by-point responses to the concerns of each reviewer:

Reviewer #1, Alex Burdorf: minor essential revisions were necessary.
Reviewer #2, Mattias Strandh: central and less central comments.

Please find our point-by-point responses and the corresponding changes in the file, “Answers to Reviewers”.

As Mr. Strandh mentioned some major concerns, we want to summarise some of the arguments made in response to his review. In general, we agree with Mr. Strandh’s statement, that our cross-sectional data is inappropriately suited to investigations into the impact of unemployment on perceived health. We regret that our manuscript led to this assumption, as the primary aim of the paper is to describe important factors of subjective health in a subgroup of long-term unemployed persons in Germany. This explorative study on self-rated health has value in that it focuses on a target group which places a heavy burden on the German federal health- and welfare-systems. In our revised manuscript, we have therefore deleted arguments which draw attention away from our main purpose. We have also reframed certain key phrases which express causal relationships. Furthermore, we have stressed the selective character of our sample at several points in the revised text.
After much consideration, we decided not to follow Mr. Strandh’s suggestion that we include a (more qualitative) description of groups identified by LCA. As noted in our responses, while we recognize the validity and appeal associated with such a conclusion, it would necessitate an extensive shift of focus within the existing manuscript and would have a dramatic effect on the paper’s central concept. We have instead attempted to extract the description of the high-risk group, which is important from a public health perspective, from our analysis. We have also underscored the centrality of this description at the beginning of the “Discussion” section.

This article demonstrates a significant association between problematic mental health statuses, setting-specific effects, certain health status and behavior variables and perceived health (SF-12). The preliminary findings suggest the advisability of increasing efforts to develop interventions for unemployed persons at high risk of poor perceived health. It is the belief of the authors that this study contributes to the overall field of public health studies by analyzing a group rarely addressed by health research. The identified discrepancies between our sample population and previous studies of unemployed persons, as well as suggestions of additional health-related variables deriving from the linear regression models employed provide multiple paths forward in shaping future research efforts.

As recommended the (linguistic) proofreading was executed by a professional editing service.

We sincerely believe that our revisions address the recommendations of the reviewers in a straightforward and satisfactory manner, and that the revised manuscript is now suitable for publication in BioMed Central.

With kind regards,

Dr. Heribert Limm