Author's response to reviews

Title: Mental health problems in the 10th grade and non-completion of upper secondary school: the mediating role of grades in a population-based longitudinal study

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editor

Thank you for useful comments to our manuscript.

Below follows a point-by-point response.

Editorial comments:

- The first point by reviewer 1 (i.e., The conclusion as it is written in the Abstract promises more than the paper can deliver. The potential serious problem of reverse causation which is discussed in the last paragraph of the subsection "Methodological Strengths and Limitations" in the Discussion section of the main text of the paper should be acknowledged.) does not seem to be adequately addressed. The language might be moderated to say e.g., the study 'suggests' rather than 'shows'.

Our Response: In addition to the changes we made in the conclusion of the abstract in our revised manuscript, we have now exchanged the word 'shows' with 'suggests'.

- The responses to point 7 by reviewer might be made clearer. Could it be stated in the introduction to the methods that this is a large and comprehensive cross-sectional survey.

This refers to

7) In the second sentence of the method section is discussed that health surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2004, but it is not stated how many waves were conducted.

Our previous response: The health surveys were conducted in the 10th grade in six Norwegian counties in the time period 1999-2004. This may have been unclear in the text, and the sentence is now changed. We have also removed the first cohort from the description of the study, because it is not included in our analysis. The second paragraph (page 5) is now changed: “The Norwegian
Institute of Public Health conducted these comprehensive health surveys in regional cohorts between 2000 and 2004."

Our present response: It may not have been clear that this was a cross-sectional study. We have now added this. In the first sentence in the method, where the study population is described, we have now stated that the “(…) paper is based on a large and comprehensive cross-sectional survey of all 10th graders (age 15–16 years) in six Norwegian counties, which was linked to the high-quality Norwegian registries for education, income and country of birth (of participants and their parents).”.

- The paper should be reviewed carefully again (especially the methods section) for clarity and typos.

Our Response: The paper is carefully reviewed for clarity and typos, especially the methods section.

Best regards,
Åse Sagatun