Author's response to reviews

Title: Comparing gender awareness in Dutch and Swedish first-year medical students - results from a questionnaire

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear editor,

Concerning manuscript 1205688597581192 entitled “Comparing gender awareness in Dutch and Swedish first-year medical students - results from a questionnaire”.

We were of course delighted to receive the opportunity to revise our manuscript and gladly accept the generous offer to publish in BMC Medical Education. We also are grateful for the comments made by the reviewer and editor and have made revisions according to their suggestions. All changes made according to the comments received are bolded and highlighted in the article manuscript. Please see below for our responses (in italic) to changes suggested in the comments.

We hope that you will find the revised version satisfactory and ready for publication. If any additional problems and/or corrections remain are of course willing to look into to them. Please let us know if that is the case.

Best regards,
Jenny Andersson, PhD student and corresponding author.
Addressing general comments from Journal Editorial Office, BioMed Central

1. Copyediting: Please note that BioMed Central journals are not copyedited prior to publication. We advise you to pay close attention to language during revision of this manuscript.

The reviewers’ opinion of the quality of written English in the manuscript was acceptable. However, during revision attention to language was paid and the following minor changes in language has been made during revision:

“Needs” was changed to “need” in Abstract, Conclusion, first sentence and Conclusions, Second Paragraph, First sentence.
“Practise” was changed to “practice” in Background, Second paragraph, Third sentence.
“Analyses” changed to “Analysis” in Methods, Fourth paragraph.
“Mother’s education” was changed to “Mothers’ education” in Results, Last paragraph, sixth sentence. “Mother’s educational level” was changed to “Mothers’ educational level in Discussion, on Results, last sentence.

2. Box: Unfortunately we cannot incorporate boxes. Please either change the box to a table and update any references to within the text, or include the information within the manuscript text.

The box was changed into a table named Table 1. Due to this, the numbers of Tables previously numbered 1, 2 and 3 were changed to 2, 3 and 4 and all references within the text were updated.

3. Ethics: Experimental research that is reported in the manuscript must have been performed with the approval of an appropriate ethics committee. A statement to this effect must appear in the Methods section of the manuscript, including the name of the body which gave approval, with a reference number where appropriate.

Ethics: The study has ethical approval which is now included in the methods section. Methods, first paragraph, last sentence.

Below we have addressed the reviewer’s and editor’s comments point by point.

Addressing comments of the BMC editor

1. The response rate should appear in the abstract.

The response rate is now included in the abstract.

2. To what extent do you think the differences reflect national differences as opposed to university differences? That is, how do you know the differences cannot be explained by the university the students are from, rather than the country they come from? I suspect you cannot be sure either way. If you agree, I think you should state
that reservation when interpreting the results. You should possibly also alter the title and abstract accordingly also.

This is an important reflection, however, we argue that the differences found in this manuscript reflects differences between countries and that they can be understood by looking at gender relations in society. The large student groups in both countries, belonging to several different classes, speak against our results being an effect of one specific University. Moreover, the students answered the questionnaire during their first days of medical school and before starting medical school they came from all over Sweden and the Netherlands. It is therefore unlikely that the University had yet had effect on their values, attitudes or awareness. Therefore, no changes were made in the title or the abstract. However to make this more clear, the first sentence discussing our results was changed and followed by a reflection on this issue. Discussion, On Results, First paragraph, First and Second sentence.

**Addressing comments of Reviewer 1**

We are happy that the reviewer was so positive towards our manuscript and we appreciated the criticisms, which are addressed below.

**Methods**

1. Why was socioeconomic status not included in the questionnaire?

   We were not sure what socioeconomic status the reviewer meant, the medical students are all students, their country of birth, sexual orientation, civil status and whether they had children or not was included, as well as their previous education (did not fall out as significant). Considering the parents’ the questionnaire contained questions about their country of birth, educational level and working time but not income and occupation. The variables selected were those we considered the most important in relation to gender awareness and stereotypic attitudes. Of course, other variables could be of importance and/or interesting to explore. The questionnaire is still being used and new questions are also added due to our interest and findings, for example the questionnaire now includes a question about whether or not the student have a parent that is a physician.

2. The section on the questionnaire would benefit from more detail on the validation

   We appreciate the curiosity of the reviewer, however we do not fully agree with this comment. The Nijmegen Gender Awareness in Medicine Scale (N-GAMS) was initially elaborated in the Netherlands, this extensive process is described in detail in Verdonk’s article from 2008, which we refer to in our article (11).

   In order to check the N-GAMS scale for our sample we describe how we repeated this process: factor analyses were performed anew, confirming the structure and showing that the new item, that had been added to the scale since the initial validation, loaded as expected. Due to the results from the factor analysis, some items were excluded, this is explained (in Method), the excluded items are shown (Table 1) and we reflect upon this in Discussion (on Method). Factor analysis was then repeated and all factor loadings were then satisfactory (numbers shown in manuscript). We name the method used (exploratory factor analysis) and give the η² scores and Cronbach’s α for all subscales and subscale
correlation. To the best of our knowledge, these are all the details needed. Therefore, no changes have been made in the manuscript considering the description of the validation in the Methods section. We hope this is Ok, if not please specify what is needed.

3. The section on analysis would benefit from a little more detail on the methods used.

   We used ANOVA to compare the N-GAMS scores and analyse interaction since this is the best method to compare multiple groups. In order to explore relationship between variables regression was used, since the outcome variables are interval variables a multiple linear regression analysis was the best choice. To explain the methods used we added these details to the section on analysis. Method, Analysis, First, Second and Third sentence.

Discussion

On Method

4. At the end of the discussion, subsection on method, you should also mention other quantitative approaches that could be used or why they are not appropriate e.g. sample, alternative survey.

   This is a very interesting comment. We had mentioned that qualitative approaches might give further depth to our results. But, of course there are also other possible quantitative approaches. We could have chosen to include a sample of students from all Universities or we could have used other questions or a completely different questionnaire. However, we would prefer to leave that out of the current article.

On Results

5. When discussing the results, you might draw out the issue of giving a politically correct answer a little more

   We elaborated this issue by trying to connect political and social discourses to social norms acting on individuals (as our Swedish medical students) and what is considered politically correct and not in a specific context. See Discussion, On results, second paragraph, last sentence.

6. At the end some of the statements might be formulated into recommendations for further research; at the moment they are presented rather as reflection and observation.

   We tried to meet up to this by adding recommendations for future research. Discussion, Implication for research, last sentence.

Minor issues (not for publication):

Abstract, Background

7. The first sentence is slightly odd. Who has requested it?
We agree, the sentence is odd. To make the abstract more clear, “has been requested” in the first sentence has been changed to “is needed”. Consequently “is needed” in the following sentence has been changed to “is crucial”. See Abstract, Background, first and second sentence.

8. Implementation of gender perspective - do you mean implementation of teaching on gender perspectives. Also, perspectives is better than perspective throughout.

No, with “implementation of gender perspective in medical education” we do not only mean teaching on gender perspectives. We mean including gender perspectives in medical curricula, in course documents and goals as well as in pedagogy and teaching material. We also mean a medical education encouraging medical students’ own reflections to address the importance of attitudes and preconceptions about men and women, patients as well as doctors and other staff. All this is further specified in Introduction and Discussion and therefore we prefer to use this wording, wider and less specified than “teaching on gender perspectives” here. However, we do agree that “perspectives” is better to use than “perspective” and have therefore changed that in: the abstract (Abstract, Background, first sentence) and Background (Background, Second paragraph, Background, Second sentence. Third paragraph, Background, Seventh sentence and Background Fourth paragraph, Second and Fifth sentence).

Background:

9. In the background, in the paragraph beginning Even though the Netherlands, the word short before part-time should be deleted.

The word "short" before part-time was deleted. Background, fifth paragraph, second sentence.

10. The last sentence of the background does not flow naturally from the previous paragraph but seems isolated.

We agree, the aim seem isolated when in fact it is directly linked to the paragraph above. Therefore, the last sentence of the background was changed and added to the preceding paragraph. Background, last sentence.

Discussion:

On method:

11. The paragraph beginning Using a scale - should be singular ie ‘obviously has’. In the next sentence should be 'using such an instrument'. the sentence However, the methods - 'reflection' should be singular. The paragraph should end with a full stop.

"Obviously have” changed to ‘obviously has’. In Discussion, On Method, Third paragraph. First sentence.
“Using such instrument” changed to ‘using such an instrument’. In Discussion, On Method, Third paragraph. Second sentence.

“Reflections” changed to ‘reflection’. In Discussion, On Method, Third paragraph. Fourth sentence.

The full stop most have been lost in submission and is now back, In Discussion, On Method, last sentence.

12. Discussion on results: 'politically correct answer'.

Since we already elaborated this issue in the Discussion on our results (See comment above, #5). No further changes was made.