Author’s response to reviews

Title: Risk-based approach to school entry examinations in Germany – a validation study

Authors:

Amand Führer (amand-gabriel.fuehrer@uk-halle.de)
Andreas Wienke (Andreas.Wienke@uk-halle.de)
Snezhina Wiermann (snezhina.wiermann@yahoo.de)
Christine Gröger (Christine.Groeger@halle.de)
Daniel Tiller (Daniel.Tiller@uk-halle.de)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Sir or Madam

We thank the editors for the opportunity to revise our article and the reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

We revised the manuscript according to the review and had it language-edited. In the process, the suggestions concerning matters of word choice have been adapted. All changes in the manuscript are highlighted in green.

For some of the suggestions with regards to content we would wish to further explain the way we proceeded with the reviewers’ comments:

1. Concerning the chronological relation between U9 and the school entry examination Prof. Zeeb rightly remarked that a minority of children might receive their U9 after the SEE. For those (presumably few) children, a newly developed deficit diagnosed in the SEE for the first time might not signal a lack of preventative care. We certainly agree to that. Since we do not have data to adjust for that bias, we added an explanation to the manuscript that accounts for this limitation.

2. To improve readability and distinguish years from samples sizes, we made sure that information on sample size is always designated by “n=” or an explicit term such as “number of”. We thank Prof. Daseking for this hint.
3. The risk factors included in our analysis (including “more than 3 siblings” and “raised by single mother”) were identified in an earlier work. The process of their identification and the methodology used to derive them from the data is accordingly outlined in an earlier article. We added the reference to this article to highlight that our choice of variables is built on a previous work.

4. We agree that the operationalization of the variable migration background using nationality or country of birth only is not optimal. Still, since mother tongue or language spoken at home are not asked for in the SEE, these information are not available to us. Therefore, we have no other option to derive migration background. We added this explanation for our definition of migration background to the manuscript.

5. We refer to "severe developmental disorders" before the term is defined (under the section “variables”). To avoid misunderstandings, we added a reference to the respective part of the text at the first mention of the term.

6. As suggested, we moved p. 8, Line 6-12 to the discussions section.

7. To better illustrate our suggestion of a stepped approach for school entry examinations we added information to the flow-chart on page 17: It now explicitly states that children who fulfill the criteria for a subsidiary check-up are seen by a public health physician while all other children are seen by medical technical assistants.

8. In two of the suggestions we would like to disagree with Prof. Daseking:
First, we would rather prefer not to perform statistical tests on our sample’s demographic data. Since our analysis is of an exploratory kind and we do not test any predefined hypotheses, according to the recently published recommendations of the American Statistical Association (Wasserstein et al. 2019, The American Statistician 73, 1-19; Amrhein et al. (2019), Nature 567, 305-307) significance tests should be avoided.
Also, according to the structure of other articles published in BMC Pediatrics we are inclined to report on the demographic properties of our sample in the results section.
Secondly, Prof. Daseking advised us to remove the use of "our", "us", and "we" from the manuscript.

Unless the journal’s style guidelines require it, we would prefer not to change the respective sentences to passive voice. For this we have two reasons: First, publication manuals such as the ones issued by the APA or the Chicago Manual of Style clearly prefer the use of active voice. Secondly, our choice of wording also has epistemic reasons: From the epistemological stand that scientists’ subjectivities always influence the work we do, philosophers of science have for long called for more reflexivity and a clearer designation of authors as active subjects in the text (see
e.g. Haraway (1988), Feminist Studies 14(3):575-599). We therefore hold that referring to the authors in the first person when elaborating on methodological decisions is an adequate choice to highlight the actors behind these decisions.

We would therefore prefer to speak of our methodic decisions in the first person, but would certainly be willing to follow the review’s suggestion if the journal’s readership can be expected to be greatly irritated by our choice.

We once again want to thank the reviewers for their commentary and advice and hope we were able to adequately address all their points.

Yours faithfully,

Amand Führer for the authors