



Opponent's Review of a Dissertation

Cancer screening non-attendance among women: Inequalities, determinants, and barriers

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Form: Dissertation as a set of publications

The presented dissertation addresses a highly topical issue of global importance. In Czechia, the low participation of individuals in preventive health programs is currently also a much-discussed topic, and it is regrettable that this issue did not receive greater attention in previous decades. The Ministry of Health emphasizes the area of prevention, but its role is limited, focusing mainly on awareness-raising. The main actors here are health insurance companies, which have the greatest influence on the scope of preventive programs provided. Unfortunately, the rate of increasing funding for preventive programs does not match the pace of the rising overall healthcare costs. I therefore highly appreciate the author's effort to bring closer many current questions and attempt to find answers to them.

Anna Altová presents a dissertation composed of a collection of published scientific articles, supplemented by an introductory text. This section, which should connect the studied topic with the attached articles (excluding the *Author's Preface*, which I value for giving the work a personal touch) spans 19 pages, including the *Conclusion*, and also two pages containing full-page illustrations and some pages featuring only a few lines of text. The text is written in a highly comprehensible manner and demonstrates the author's ability to communicate key messages to the reader.

Despite the otherwise appropriate structure, I believe this section could have been slightly more extensive to provide a more comprehensive view of the subject before the reader delves into the attached scientific articles. Alternatively, it would have been possible to interconnect the various parts of the text through references directly to the articles, thereby creating a more cohesive whole. For example, I find the lack of an updated overview of screening programs in selected EU/OECD countries problematic. While the author references literature addressing this issue in various countries, some of these works are more than 15 years old, leaving it unclear whether the described situations remain relevant. The information that the European Commission presented new approaches and recommendations for cancer screening in 2022 does not imply uniform application across all countries. Some of these overviews are included in the articles (e.g., the first article, p. 30, Table 5.1), and this table could have been referenced in the introductory section. It would sometimes be appropriate to present certain conclusions to the reader, for example, through various forms of visualization, such as in Chapter 2.3.2 –

Screening barriers and reasons for non-attendance – the inclusion of a diagram summarizing the "typology of barriers and reasons for non-participation" could have enhanced clarity and complemented the text effectively.

In Chapter 3 (*Objectives and Research Questions*), the research questions could have been not only posed but also briefly justified, explaining why the author chose to address them (even though their connection to earlier text can be inferred). Furthermore, it would have been beneficial to clarify to what extent the included articles align with these questions and how the selection of articles and the publication strategy were determined to address the topic comprehensively. This approach would also highlight the uniqueness of the dissertation's methodology and distinguish it from similar works – an aspect not sufficiently emphasized in the dissertation.

Regarding the data and methods used, the author employed available data sources accessible at the time of writing the dissertation. One question arises about the potential use of the *National Registry of Reimbursed Health Services*, managed by the Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic (ÚZIS ČR), which could have provided data from all health insurance companies. However, it is understandable that the registry's rollout with validated data likely coincided with the dissertation's finalization. The author also used qualitative research methods.

The subsequent section introduces the scientific articles included in the dissertation. These represent a systematic selection of subtopics intended to help address the research questions. The dissertation features four articles, two of which were published in journals with impact factors (one in a Q1 journal by JIF and Q2 by AIS rankings, another in a Q4 journal by both rankings) and one article in a journal indexed in the *Web of Science* and *Scopus* databases. The fourth article was submitted to a journal with an impact factor (most recent known rankings: Q2 by JIF, Q3 by AIS) and is noted as under review. According to the subject area board's requirements, evidence of submission to peer review is necessary (*...it must be "under peer review" at the time of the defense, not merely submitted or with the editor...*). Ideally, this evidence should have been appended to the dissertation. However, I trust this is a formal matter, and the confirmation has been provided. In all articles, the student is listed as the first author, contributing at least 50%, thus meeting the subject area board's criteria for submitting a dissertation as a collection of scientific articles. Additionally, the dissertation includes also an extended conference abstract presented at the *European Population Conference 2024*.

The individual articles, presented in Chapters 5–9, are of standard scientific quality. They employ primarily basic demographic and statistical methods (descriptive statistics, standardization, logistic regression) using both quantitative and qualitative data. Since three of the articles underwent peer review in reputable journals, their quality does not warrant further discussion. The final article, still under review, is undoubtedly interesting but reads more like

an exploratory study into potential factors/barriers preventing women from participating in screening programs rather than a definitive investigation that objectively evaluates the issue. My reservations stem primarily from the sample selection process: "*Participants were recruited through posting on social media and in cooperation with an external research agency STEM/MARK.*" This approach does not provide a sufficiently justified basis for even a partially representative sample of respondents, as evidenced by Table 8.1 summarizing respondents' characteristics. The authors of the article acknowledge this limitation (see *Results*, p. 65); respectively the author of the thesis (*Limitations*, p. 76). However, the article does not explore this limitation in detail, and the results are presented as conclusive (e.g., "*we have identified five main themes*"; "*most women knew that screening could be beneficial for them*"). A more reflective presentation, treating the findings as an exploratory "snapshot" of a narrow respondent profile, would have added value to the article.

The findings are then summarized in Chapter 10 (*Conclusion*), where the author revisits the key findings from the published articles to address the four research questions from Chapter 3. The chapter also outlines the main conclusions and provides recommendations for healthcare policy stakeholders in Czechia and suggestions for further research in this area. I appreciate the inclusion of the *Limitations* subsection, which succinctly highlights the potential weaknesses of this type of research.

Despite the above partial criticisms, I believe Anna Altová's dissertation is original in many respects, and the published results contribute not only to the fields of demography and social epidemiology but also to key stakeholders in Czech healthcare. The work is well-structured, and there are no formal shortcomings. The author uses a relatively wide range of data sources and supporting literature from both domestic and international contexts. I am therefore of the opinion that the presented thesis meets the requirements set by the subject area board and thus

I recommend accepting Anna Altová's dissertation for defense.



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