

December 2018

Topics for Bachelor Theses at the chair of Prof. Vollmer

The list below gives topic ideas for Bachelor theses. The thesis can be written in German or English. Bachelor theses are typically a literature review of the theoretical and empirical research on the topic.

In case you are interested in writing your thesis on one of the proposed topics please contact the respective PhD student directly via Email. You can also make your own proposition. In the latter case please choose the PhD students working in a closely related field or contact Prof. Vollmer (Sebastian.vollmer@wiwi.uni-goettingen.de) directly.

For Master thesis requests please contact Prof. Vollmer directly.

Lisa Bogler (lisa.bogler@cemis.uni-goettingen.de)

Participatory learning and action

Participatory learning and action (PLA) programmes engage local communities in prioritising problems and developing solutions to address these. Describe the concept behind this approach to development and the success or failure of past PLA programmes. What is the effect of PLA programmes on health and economic outcomes? What are factors that are relevant to the success of PLA?

Influencing hygiene behaviour

Many interventions that aim to improve health require a change in behaviour. What type of health interventions have been successful or unsuccessful in changing hygiene behaviour (e.g. hand washing with soap or open defecation)? What makes these interventions successful? A literature review on this topic could focus on low- and middle-income countries or specify a certain behaviour change.

Teachers' attendance in school

Teachers' absenteeism is a challenge in many low- and middle-income countries. What factors influence whether teachers come to school to teach? What type of interventions have been successful or unsuccessful in reducing rates of teachers' absenteeism?

Christian Bommer (christian.bommer@wiwi.uni-goettingen.de)

Causality and quasi-experiments in public health research

Quasi-experimental methods may help to generate causal estimates if randomized controlled trials are infeasible. Recent studies have therefore advocated for their use in epidemiological and public health research. Students will summarize the debate on causal inference in public health settings and discuss the strength and weakness of quasi-experiments in this context.

The political economy of humanitarian aid

Political and economic bias in developing aid is well-documented. Students will investigate

whether these biases extend to humanitarian aid and discuss in what ways humanitarian aid and developing aid may differ.

The global burden of disease

The definition of fair and balanced public health goals requires a good understanding of the relative suffering caused by different diseases across populations. The “Global Burden of Disease” project attempts to meet this standard by providing transparent epidemiological estimates for a wide range of diseases. Students should critically examine ethical, technical and practical aspects of this project and discuss whether it indeed can contribute to a fair global health agenda. Finally, students should investigate to which extent these estimates are actually able to influence national and multilateral decision makers in practice.

Maja Marcus (maja-emilia.marcus@uni-goettingen.de)

The Rise of Noncommunicable Diseases and Poverty

It is widely known that communicable diseases, such as Malaria or HIV, are often affecting the poor the worst. As noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular diseases, are also on the rise the question can be asked whether income also plays a role for these diseases. Are NCDs diseases of the rich? What are some of the interlinkages of poverty and noncommunicable diseases? What are some of the NCD trends of the past years showing us? Either the macro or micro perspective or both can be examined here.

Fighting Noncommunicable Diseases in LMICS – Food-System Based Taxes

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes, are rapidly increasing in lower-and middle-income countries (LMICs). The rise of these diseases is often contributed to behavioral risk factors, such as unhealthy diets or physical inactivity. Because of that, various countries – such as Mexico – have implemented a tax on sugar sweetened beverages. Other taxes such as a meat tax are also being considered. Choose one food-system based tax. What has been the overall impact of these taxes? Did they reach their goal in lowering the disease burden? What are some of the economic consequences? Are there different effects by socioeconomic status (e.g. to which extend are the poorest affected)

Fighting Noncommunicable Diseases in LMICS – Digital Interventions

In the fight against NCDs, more interventions experiment with digital technologies, such as apps. These can be used as either prevention mechanisms (e.g. by nudging individuals away from behavioural risk factors) or as a coping strategy (e.g. by providing information, peer groups, or other things). Which interventions are already out there and how well do they work? Which impact can be achieved and what are the main limitations of this development?

Nitya Mittal (nitya.mittal@uni-goettingen.de)

Which health information is the most effective?

Many health interventions designed by state or researchers have an information component. This component varies across interventions on many counts, such as kind of information provided, the targeted recipient of the information, the channels through which information is provided and the intensity of information dissemination. The evidence on effectiveness of the information on improving health outcomes is mixed. The student should analyse the literature to draw conclusions about the most effective intervention, which has a potential of replication in different settings, and what are the pitfalls with other interventions (focusing on interventions targeted to improve health outcomes of young children).

Health outcomes – what matters most

While there is an agreement on what factors affect health outcome, there is no consensus on their relative importance. Additionally, it is accepted that these factors are complementary to each other, and focusing on one is not adequate. However, which combinations are best, is not well known. The thesis should answer the above question based on existing literature.

Early childhood intervention and cognitive outcomes

What has been the role of early childhood intervention in improving the cognitive outcomes of children in long run? What type of interventions have worked (for example - nutrition focused, education focused, comprehensive, intensive monitoring etc)? what are the critical factors for success of any early childhood intervention?

Ida G. Monfared (ida.gohardoustmonfared@uni-goettingen.de)

CF 2007, a high profile flawed model

Since the publication of Christakis and Fowler in 2007, their work has received a large amount of appraisals as well as criticism. Despite its flaws, how this work gained such a popularity in the first place? This should be followed by a systematic critical review of arguments against and pro the CF model and their validity. What are recent proposed models that might explain the relationship between network and health behaviour and what is the evidence that they are better than the one proposed by CF?

Why obesity is becoming an epidemic?

Spread of obesity seems to be the consequence of food industrialization. On the social side, however, consumers' behaviour has equally changed. Based on key points of change in food industry alongside literature from changes in public behaviour, a bachelor thesis is expected to gather evidence from developed countries, flagging historic turning points and summarise causal theories proposed in literature. This should be followed by identifying patterns in developing countries where there is a risk for obesity to become an epidemic in the close future.

Success and Failure of Health Policies

To start, a bachelor thesis should review and summarise the health policies that helped to reduce tobacco consumption, their success rate globally and with examples from various countries. Then focusing on recent policies on promoting healthy eating and exercise, the question is that is it plausible to expect the same rate of success for these policies in combating obesity? The argument should be supported by examples and evidence from field experiments.

Anna Reuter (anna.reuter@uni-goettingen.de)

Parental health shocks and children's education

Parental health shocks disturb the household's resource allocation immensely and can thus affect children's school attendance and educational attainment. A bachelor thesis on this topic should analyze how children's education can be and actually is affected with respect to a specific type of health shock and/or study region.

Children's participation in home and market production and the impact on education

Children's contribution to the household's domestic and market production is crucial in many parts of the world. Can this allocation help to afford and foster children's education, or does the time devoted to other tasks hamper educational attainment?

The household's economic burden of mental illness

Mental illnesses constitute a large share of the global Years Lived with Disability (YLD), and can pose considerable direct and indirect costs to the household. A bachelor thesis on this topic should discuss different measures of the economic burden as well as existing evidence, possibly with a specific regional and/or disease focus.

Mental illness and poverty – a vicious cycle?

There is mixed evidence on the association of poverty with mental illness. The question of causality is even more difficult to answer. A bachelor thesis on this topic should discuss how both factors could influence each other and analyze the existing evidence.

Janina Steinert (janina.steinert@uni-goettingen.de)

Impact of Saving Promotion Interventions on Financial Behaviour and Poverty Outcomes in Asia and Southern America

The bachelor thesis should systematically summarise evidence from existing randomised controlled trials on saving promotion interventions. Effectiveness of these programmes should be synthesised narratively and potentially quantitatively in the form of a meta-analysis.

Unintended Consequences: Do Economic Empowerment Interventions Increase the Risk of Domestic Violence?

The bachelor thesis should review research on the impact of economic empowerment programmes such as microcredit or vocational training programmes on women's exposure to intimate partner violence and domestic violence. Experimental and quasi-experimental research from low- and middle-income countries should be considered.

Can Psychological Interventions Improve Economic Outcomes?

The bachelor thesis should review research on the impact of psychological interventions (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness training, role model interventions) on economically relevant outcomes such as savings and investment decisions. Experimental and quasi-experimental research should be considered, including evidence from high-income countries.

Ann-Charline Weber (ann-charline.weber@uni-goettingen.de)

Improving access to basic education in countries of the Global South

In some regions, there is still a substantial number of school-aged children not in school. Many different interventions try to improve access, increasing enrolment and attendance. A bachelor thesis can review existing literature, comparing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different interventions.

Improving learning outcomes in primary schools in countries of the Global South

In several regions, the quality of public basic education is poor and test scores are often low. Many different interventions try to improve learning outcomes, the results are mixed. A bachelor thesis can review existing literature, comparing effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different interventions.

Community involvement in improving basic education

Should communities be involved in the management of schools? And if so, how?

Many interventions try to involve the community in the delivery of public services with the aim to enhance sustainability and need-based allocation of funds. This approach is also used in different interventions targeting basic education. However, evidence about the effectiveness is mixed. A bachelor thesis can review existing literature to answer these questions.