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## **Performance, occupational interests or social environment?**

### **What causes women and men to change their subject in higher education?**

Since choosing a particular subject in higher education has long-lasting consequences, either in terms of study success or as regards labour market rewards, the determinants of fields of study choice have been studied widely. In contrast, factors affecting subject changes after enrolling in higher education are so far an under-explored issue, both in Germany and in other industrialized countries.

In this paper, we therefore analyse the causes of subject changes in German higher education. Building on literature on fields of study choices and higher education dropout, we more specifically investigate whether bad performance, failure to realise one's occupational interests or influences stemming from the social environment, such as parental and peer expectations or social integration, affect subject changes. We derive our hypotheses from an extended rational choice framework, which takes into account the expected costs, benefits and probabilities of success related to the subject currently enrolled in. Moreover, since previous literature on subject choices pointed at strong gender differences, we discuss possible differences between men and women.

Our empirical analysis applies logistic regression models to the first eleven waves of Starting Cohort 5 of the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS). To take gender-differentiated effects into account, we also estimate separate models for men and women.

Preliminary findings indicate that below-average grades and a poor subjective satisfaction with grades increase the probability of subject changes, especially for women. The same applies to a poor realization of occupational interests and a bad social integration with fellow students, while parental and peer expectations can prevent from a subject change. For both, men and women, the probability of subject change decreases when parents and peers evaluate the chosen field of study positively.

**Keywords:** Change of subject; occupational interests; poor grades; social integration; gender