

Female scientists' expectations of a mentoring program

Findings of a pilot study in the field of university medicine

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Objective

The objective of the study was to expand our knowledge on female scientists' expectations of a mentoring program in order to cater to the individual needs of participants of the program. To do so, differing expectations based on social inequalities were examined. To help structure the different types of expectations, it was furthermore necessary to develop a category system.

Background

Career-related expectations are closely tied to career goals and are characterized by social inequalities and individualized needs.

Although society widely accepts that equal opportunities for women and men have been achieved, there still exist discriminatory structures within science, for example: less support for women by their superiors, the exclusion of women from relevant networks or the responsibilities of women to manage the brunt of the work at home and in the family. Besides the aforementioned structural factors, the career advancement of women is also hindered by an underestimation of their performance.

Mentoring programs were developed with the goal of helping women break such barriers and potential participants often go into such programs with their own set of expectations. In order to provide effective support it is necessary to conduct an examination of the topic "expectations of mentoring program" from a social science-standpoint. So far, in the German-speaking area, there have been only rudimentary attempts at such an undertaking.

Method

The study presented here on the expectations of the mentoring-partnership and of the qualification program is based on letters of motivation and application documents of 24 applicants to the Ina-Pichlmayr-Mentoring for Post-Docs at the Hannover Medical School. The application procedure took place from August to October 2015.

The first step in the analysis involved the development of a category system of expectations according to Mayring with the help of a qualitative content-analysis. Step two involved a statistical analysis of the data.

Table 1: Expectation system

	Career planning in science	Acquisition of competencies		Communication (networking)
		subject-related competencies	non-subject-related competencies	
individual aspects	Guidance with goal-oriented career planning	Substantive planning of projects/ Feedback on drafts and ideas	Compatibility of private life and job	Support, motivation, improvement of self-confidence
	Support with job (re-) entry	Definition of research goals, better implementation	Compatibility of clinical and scientific work	Reflecting on one's own potential
	Support with strategic publication planning	Similar subject-area as mentor	Guidance on conflict resolution	Exchanging experiences with other mentees/ mentors
	Opportunity to take on teaching tasks			
	Support with habilitation			
general aspects	Project funding, acquisition of third-party funding, publication rules	Information on subject-related further education	Work and time management	Importance of non-subject-related networks and networks outside the university
	Deeper understanding of structures, processes, rules of the game in German science and teaching, insight into university politics	Preparation for the medical specialist examination	Leadership competence, project management, development of one's own research group	Development and involvement in informal scientific networks
	Preparation and planning of stays abroad		Youth development	Participation in committees
	Information on application and appointment procedures		Soft skills	

Figure 1: Expectations

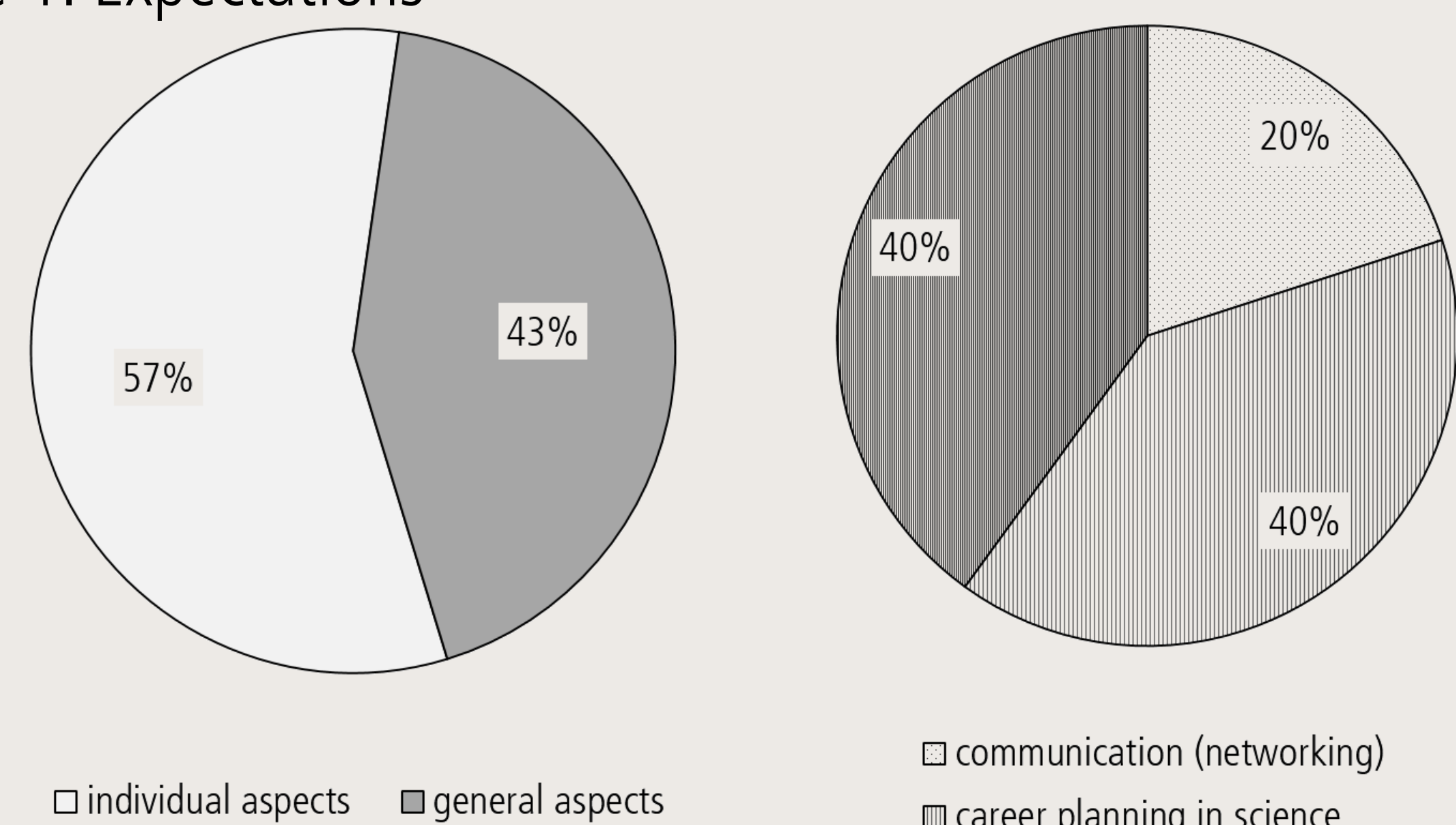
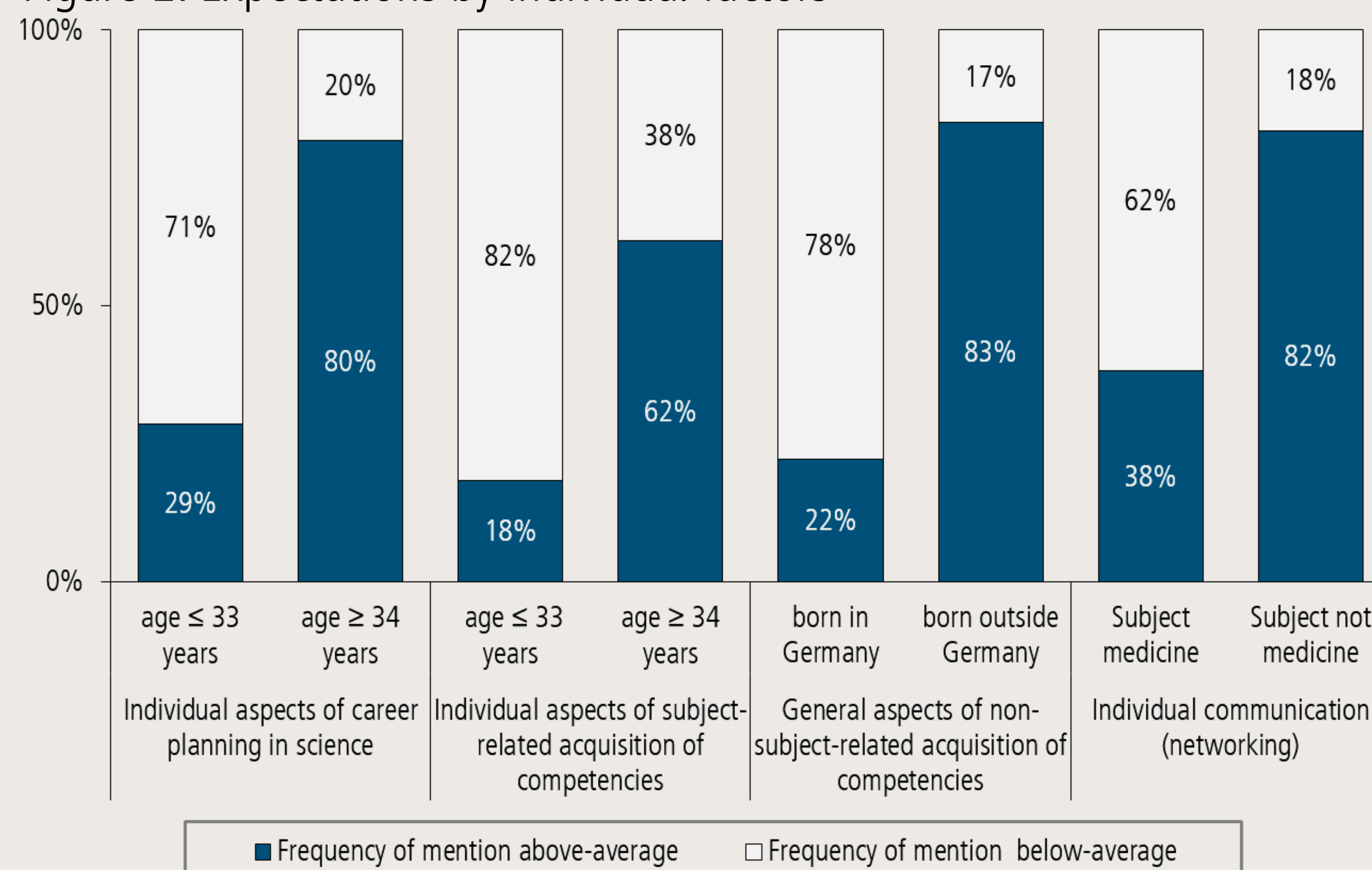


Figure 2: Expectations by individual factors



Results

The expectations-system presented here (see Table 1) characterizes the expectations of the applicants to the mentoring-program and exhibits a two-dimensional structure.

The system differentiates between individual aspects involving the applicant's own current situation and general aspects having to do with the scientific landscape.

The examined applicants place the strongest emphasis on the topics "career planning in science" and the "acquisition of competencies".

Both individual as well as general aspects are important for the applicants (see Figure 1). In the context of the applications, differences in terms of the frequency at which each of the types of expectations are mentioned can be seen (see Figure 2). For example, foreign-born applicants place particular emphasis on "general aspects of the acquisition of competencies" while applicants with backgrounds in subjects other than medicine are particularly interested in the topic of "networking".

Conclusion

Junior researchers in the post-doc phase begin the mentoring-program with expectations in terms of receiving support with career planning, expanding their subject-related and non-subject related competencies and, as well, networking. In the study presented here, the expectations of applicants to the program were structured and a category system was developed based on concrete documents and materials.

Significant differences in terms of expectations were seen dependent on age, country of birth and subject of studies.

The study contributes to a better understanding of the expectations of the target group and offers suggestions for programs for women intended to reduce still existing gender- and social inequalities.

Literature

Neumann, Maria; Meyer, Henriette; Froböse, Claudia; Miemietz, Bärbel (2017): Hoffnungen - Erwartungen - Motive. Wie starten Nachwuchswissenschaftlerinnen in ein Mentoring-Programm? Ergebnisse einer Pilotstudie aus der Hochschulmedizin. In: Onnen, Corinna & Rode-Breyman, Susanne (Hg.): Zum Selbstverständnis der Gender Studies. Methoden - Methodologien - theoretische Diskussionen und empirische Übersetzungen. Verlag Barbara Budrich/Budrich UniPress, S. 133-151.

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