

Read Me File

***Exmouth* Training Ship Boys Record Books and Admission and Discharge Register (1876-1923)**

Authors

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Brief description of the dataset

The dataset was collected to analyse changes in the growth pattern of children across the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Importantly for studying child growth, the ship recorded the heights and weights of the boys at admission to and discharge from the ship providing longitudinal measures of growth for a very large number of boys (c. 9,000 records). Longitudinal measures allow us to directly observe children's growth rather than inferring growth by comparing the differences in height between different children at different ages. See the 'Weaknesses of the Data' section below for a detailed description of some of the shortcomings of this dataset.

Background on the *Exmouth*

The training ship *Exmouth* was the successor training ship of the *Goliath* and entered service as a training ship in 1876. The *Exmouth* training ship was managed by the Metropolitan Asylums' Board for training boys for the merchant marine or navy who were under the care of the parishes and poor law unions of London. Thus, the vast majority of boys on the *Exmouth* were from London. The *Exmouth* was moored in the river Thames, near Grays, Essex. It remained in service until 1939 when the boys were moved on shore and the ship was requisitioned for other tasks.

Sources

London Metropolitan Archives, London, Training Ship *Exmouth*, Boys Record Books, MS MAB/2512.

London Metropolitan Archives, London, Training Ship *Exmouth*, Admission and Discharge Register, MS MAB/2498-2499.

Weaknesses of the Data

The greatest weakness with the *Exmouth* data is that there were minimum height requirements that varied with age on the ship. These were not completely binding as many children shorter than the requirement were admitted. However, there is substantial evidence in the Admission and Discharge Register that boys were regularly rejected from the ship for

being too short. Initially, we had believed that the height requirements only became binding in the twentieth century, but we later found evidence that a minimum height requirement was in place from the very early days of the ship (at least from 1880 onwards). Previous historical studies have either used quantile bend estimators (QBE) or truncated maximum likelihood estimators (MLE) to adjust the height distributions for left truncation. However, as I argue in Schneider (2018), both of these estimators assume that the underlying height distribution at each age is normal. For the ages covered in the ship (11-17), we would not expect the height distribution of boys to be normal because of variations in the timing of the pubertal growth spurt across children. Thus, strictly speaking, one should not use QBE or MLE to adjust the distributions. In addition, it is unclear how the truncation in admission height would affect the longitudinal growth of the boys. These issues are discussed in much greater detail in Schneider (2018).

Organisation of the files

The *Exmouth* dataset is divided into two datafiles based on the records from which they are drawn. The boys records (`exmouth_boys_records.dta`) contain information on over 11,000 boys admitted to the *Exmouth* and contain information about their name, age and anthropometric measures among other things. These are a near complete record of boys admitted up to 1920. The admission and discharge register (`exmouth_ad_dis.dta`) was recorded for boys admitted to the *Exmouth* between 1895 and 1909 and contains additional personal information about the boys such as their education history, orphan status and information about their nearest living relative. Both datasets have detailed data description files that include detailed explanations of the transcription process, variable naming conventions, variable definitions and limitations of the data that should be taken into account in further analysis.

In theory it should be possible to link the two datasets using the variable `id`. However, the `ids` recorded in the admission and discharge register do not always line up with the boys record books and many records in the admission and discharge register had missing `ids` in the original documents. Thus, to link the two documents, one should really use a combination of `id`, name and admission date to ensure correct linkages across the two sources.

Contents of Deposit

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| 1. <code>exmouth_boys_records.dta</code> | Data on boys admitted to the <i>Exmouth</i> training ship between 1876 and 1920. This file contains each boy's age and anthropometric measures but has limited information about their personal characteristics. |
| 2. <code>exmouth_boys_records_data_description.pdf</code> | Data description and variable list describing the dataset, transcription and verification process and variables for <code>exmouth_personal_records.dta</code> |
| 3. <code>exmouth_ad_dis.dta</code> | Data on boys admitted to the <i>Exmouth</i> training ship between 1895 and 1909. This file contains more personal characteristics about a subset of boys admitted during the year mentioned. There is |

information about their schooling history, orphan status and nearest relatives.

4. exmouth_ad_dis_data_description.pdf

Data description and variable list describing the dataset, transcription and verification process and variables for exmouth_ad_dis.dta

References

Schneider, E. B. (2018). Sample Selection Biases and the Historical Growth Pattern of Children. *LSE Economic History Working Paper*, 1–31.
<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/87075>.