Participants’ recruitment: preliminary results of Portuguese National Health Examination Survey

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BACKGROUND

Recruitment of participants in health surveys is recognized as the most challenging step of fieldwork. This work presents preliminary results of recruitment in the first Portuguese National Health Examination Survey (INSEF) comparing participants and non-participants.

INSEF is a cross-sectional prevalence study targeting 4200 individuals aged 25-74 years, living in Portugal for more than 12 months, non-institutionalized and able to follow an interview in Portuguese (eligibility criteria).

The survey encompasses three components:

- Core physical measurements
- Blood collection
- Interview (CAPI)

Fieldwork is performed between February and December 2015 in 49 collection sites. Results regarding the first 9 collection sites are presented.

METHODS

Selected individuals received an invitation letter and later were contacted by phone to schedule the appointment. Individuals were then classified in participants, refusals and unresolved.

Participation rates were calculated according to European Health Examination Survey guidelines (1).

Participation rate = number of participants / number of eligible AND unresolved

Reasons for refusals were recorded and non-participant’s characteristics analyzed. Chi-square and Fisher exact tests were used to compare participants and non-participants regarding age, sex, education level, marital status, smoking, use of medication and of healthcare services.


RESULTS

1467 of the 2161 selected individuals were successfully contacted.

Non participants

49% of the 512 refusals accepted to respond to a short questionnaire for non participants. The main reasons for non participation were due to lack of time (27.6%) and professional reasons (22.4%).

CONCLUSIONS

- To date the planned participation rate of 40% was successfully achieved at national level.
- Results obtained showed the need to implement strategies to engage in participation specific target groups.
- To mitigate selection bias adjustment of sampling weights for non response should be done.
- Adequate strategies to improve response rate and minimize dropouts are essential to avoid recruitment bias.
- A strict control of the contact, cooperation and participation rates in each collection site is essential for the success of the overall recruitment process.

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