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Letter to the Editor

Media recruitment in dementia research in a middle-income country

Sir,

The inclusion of elderly people without dementia is essential for Alzheimer's disease research, both from the perspective of biomarkers development and for the potential therapy's evaluation.[1] Recruitment of individuals in the early stages of the pathological process of Alzheimer's disease is arguably difficult, especially regarding racial and ethnic minority groups.[2] In addition, the factors related to these difficulties are less studied in low and middle-income countries. Among the several recruitment modalities available, digital/social media advertising is thought to be a useful way to recruit elderly people on research.[3] The aim of the study was to analyze the profile of elderly individuals who responded to advertisements for cognition research carried out through digital (social media of the university hospital where it took place- Hospital de Clínicas de Porto Alegre, (www.hcpa.edu.br) and print media in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil between March 2018, and January 2020. The media call referred to a study by the pharmaceutical industry that tested a medication for prodromal and mild Alzheimer's disease; the research was approved by the local Ethic Committee.[4] The message content specifically invites those interested in participating in research who have memory complaints. In addition, a phone number was provided to permit an initial contact with the individuals or their family member/caregiver. In this first telephone contact, few information was obtained, such as age, sex, education, previous diagnosis of dementia and, if was the person interested in the research who was speaking, a validated telephone version of MMSE and TICS scales were performed.[5,6] Five hundred and thirty-three individuals (or their representatives) responded to the media advertising; 327 (61.3%) of these individuals had a previous dementia diagnosis. Of those without a previous dementia diagnosis (N=206), 139 (67.5%) were women. The mean (SD) of age and schooling were 67.9 (9.2) and 11.5 (4) years, respectively. The mean (SD) of MMSE was 23.9 (3.4) and of TICS was 18.5 (3.7) points. Comparing to the data of general population of our region (Rio Grande do Sul state, Southern Brazil), the sex distribution was similar (NS, Chi square), but years of formal education (mean of 5 years) was strikingly different ($p<0.0001$, one-sample t test).[7] The performance of media recruitment for research for older people in developing countries is poorly evaluated and our results show that more educated individuals respond preferentially to these calls, possibly because they have more access to the internet and information.[8] As it is known that schooling (an indirect and suboptimal marker of cognitive reserve) has an important role in the evolution of dementia in Alzheimer's disease, perhaps recruitment by the media is not ideal in low/middle-income countries.[9] We suggest that a formal evaluation of recruitment methods be carried out in developing countries, especially in Latin America and Brazil, which have unique demographic, cultural and educational characteristics.

Simone Mota, Victoria T. Souza, Marcia L. F. Chaves, Raphael M. Castilhos*

Neurology Service, Hospital de Clínicas de Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre, Brazil

***Correspondence to**
Raphael M. Castilhos,
E-mail: rcastilhos@hcpa.edu.br

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