Reviewer's report

Title: Overcoming barriers to engaging socioeconomically disadvantaged populations in CVD primary prevention: A qualitative study

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Reviewer: Päivikki Koponen

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General issues: The manuscript gives valuable insight to reaching and involving socio-economically disadvantaged populations in primary prevention. It covers important issues in primary prevention programmes. Recruitment issues have previously received very little attention in programme evaluation. Thus this manuscript gives some innovative ideas for developing future programmes.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The literature review should be more systematic. The authors seem to have missed some important previous work. Previous studies are in the manuscript used as brief references under “relevance of findings”. Other key issues for the background of this study would be: a) what is known about the differences between participants and non-participants in previous studies/screening/health promotion programmes, and b) How are different recruitment strategies reflected in participation rates in previous studies/screening/health promotion programmes? A more systematic review of previous work should be included in the introduction to this study.

2. The setting and the study population need clarification. More details are needed on the number of invited persons, those who were not contacted (e.g. is any information available on the number of undelivered invitation letters?) and those who refused (were refusals recorded during the recruitment process?). Are numbers of males and females in the target population and in the participants available? What is the socio-demographic background of the target population as compared to the recruited persons? Are there any statistics available on the socio-demographic characteristics of the target population?

3. The methods need to be reported in more detail as no general outline for focus groups, or for thematic analysis exist, and there are many ways to carry out these. Was a predetermined list of themes/questions used in the focus groups and how were the discussions organised? What was the role of the researchers during the focus groups and who led the discussions? Was the thematic analysis inductive or was it based on the themes presented by the researches to the participants during the focus group discussions? How were the participants invited to the focus groups - what does purposive sampling mean here? Were the participants dominantly male or female?

4. Strengths and limitations: criteria for qualitative studies should be used here (e.g. credibility, transferability, confirmability of the data).
Minor Essential Revisions

5. Key terms should be defined with references: what is a social marketing campaign, what is meant by a community development approach?

6. Results: A conceptual figure of the results would help the reader to follow the logic of the analysis better than just listing the themes in the text.

Discretionary Revisions

7. The authors should reconsider the title: is the study more focused on recruiting disadvantaged populations to screening, or on engaging them in a primary prevention programme? Could the authors specify more details on the prevention programme: were there any other elements than the screening visits that might have affected the target groups’ views on the importance of participation?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests