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Attitudes of Portuguese women concerning breast cancer screening exams - a population-based nationwide cross-sectional study

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Background & Aim: Although breast cancer screening may save some women from breast cancer death, it also has important harms like exposing women to false positive results, overdiagnosis and unnecessary treatment. This study aims to assess which breast cancer related medical tests are deemed necessary by adult Portuguese women.

Method: This is a cross sectional study. 520 Portuguese women were surveyed by computer-assisted telephone interviewing and randomly selected from national landline telephone lists and NUTS II regions. Proportions and prevalence estimates of the Portuguese population were determined for mammography and breast ultrasonography having women answered on whether they consider they should do, the periodicity they should do it and if they use to do it.

Results: 520 women were interviewed; 97.70% (95% CI 94.7 to 99.00) of women aged 50-69 considered they should undergo mammography; 58.4% (95% CI 51.00 to 65.50) of the non-target for screening age group of 18-39 years old having the same opinion. Breast ultrasonography, was referred an intervention they should do by 100.00% of women aged 50-59 years old (N=75), with 79.60% (95% CI 69.70 to 86.80) affirming they usually do it. Obese women were more likely to consider they should undergo mammography. Results were similar when excluding women with personal or familiar history of cancer.

Conclusions: A big proportion of Portuguese women consider they should undergo mammography, even younger women, who are not a target in the National Screening Program and most of them say they usually do it. Ultrasonography, which is not recommended for breast cancer screening is pointed as an intervention they should undergo by an unexpected high number of women. Pondered information of real benefits and harms may help reduce false positives, overdiagnosis and unnecessary therapies.