Abstract

The paper introduces a variant of chain-referral sampling: respondent-driven sampling (RDS). This sampling method shows that methods based on network analysis can be combined with the statistical validity of standard probability sampling methods. In this sense, RDS appears to be a mathematical improvement of snowball sampling oriented to the study of hidden populations. However, we try to prove its validity with populations that are not within a sampling frame but can nonetheless be contacted without difficulty. The basics of RDS are explained through our research on young people (aged 14 to 25) who go clubbing, consume alcohol and other drugs, and have sex. Fieldwork was carried out between May and July 2007 in three Spanish regions: Baleares, Galicia and Comunidad Valenciana. The presentation of the study shows the utility of this type of sampling when the population is accessible but there is a difficulty deriving from the lack of a sampling frame. However, the sample obtained is not a random representative one in statistical terms of the target population. It must be acknowledged that the final sample is representative of a “pseudo-population” that approximates to the target population but is not identical to it.

Keywords

Respondent-driven sampling, sampling technique, alcohol consumption, recreational drugs.