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# Community-Academic partnership to address health disparities: Using the Implementation Framework to examine the social screening process in an early childhood education setting

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**INTRODUCTION:** Community-academic partnerships can address health disparities in the community setting by building interdisciplinary collaborations necessary for tackling difficult problems. Implementation science can support collaborative efforts by promoting the adoption of evidence-based practices and interventions using behavioral change frameworks.

**OBJECTIVES:** To utilize an implementation framework to examine the process for conducting social screening among low-income parents with children at an early childhood education center (ECEC).

**METHODS:** We utilized an implementation science behavioral framework (COM-B model) to identify barriers for both staff and families regarding the ECEC's social screening process. Our study involved a multi-phase study design including longitudinal interviews with organizational leadership as well as focus groups with both staff and families.

**RESULTS:** Organizational participants included program administrators (n=2); staff members (n=10) and parent participants (n=10). Staff members were all women and identified as Latina. Parent participants included nine women and one male; 90% identified as hispanic and 10% identified as caucasian. The initial study was designed to evaluate the fidelity of the strengths and needs assessment (SNA), a comprehensive survey used to identify strengths and challenges of families with the goal of connecting families with community resources. The SNA is developed based on needs identified in the Support Information Checklist, a brief initial social screener. Over the course of the project, the ECEC realized a shift in the project was necessary to optimize the social screening process. As a result, the project changed its focus to evaluation and improvement of the Support Information Checklist (SIC). Focus group questions were designed utilizing the COM-B framework and key themes emerged regarding the content and process of the checklist as well as environmental limitations. A brief thematic analysis was conducted and focus group data was presented back to the ECEC leadership to provide feedback on how to modify the current Support Information Checklist.

**CONCLUSION:** The field of implementation science can provide important frameworks that can serve as starting points for both researchers and community partners to evaluate and improve internal processes. However, it is important to build flexibility into the community-academic partnership given that project priorities may shift given funding limitations, programmatic timelines, and personnel changes.