

## Evaluating Clinical Staff Perspectives on Social Needs Screenings Using Self-Determination Theory

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**Background:** Healthcare systems are rapidly integrating Social Needs (SN) screenings to identify unmet needs and connect patients to community resources. Our prior research using the 10-item SINCERE screener indicated that staff engagement in SN screening varies based on their sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as per Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

**Objective:** To evaluate clinical staff views on the implementation of universal and standardized SN screenings and referrals within healthcare settings.

**Methods:** Starting in April 2023, SN screening and community referral protocols were integrated into routine obstetrics care, including staff training and support. An anonymous electronic survey was conducted from October 2023 to February 2024, involving 35 clinical staff members (29 Medical Assistants and 6 Registered Nurses). The survey included 14 Likert-scale items (1 = Not True, 7 = Very True) from validated surveys to measure seven constructs from the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) related to staff engagement. Additionally, three open-ended questions addressed challenges in screening, patient reactions, and suggestions for improvements. **Open-ended responses were thematically coded and linked to quantitative data to profile engagement based on SDT constructs.**

**Results:** Clinical staff perceive significant value in SN screening (Mean: 6.23, SD: 0.91) for patients and themselves. Despite high dedication (5.30, SD: 1.34) and enjoyment (4.86, SD: 1.22) in conducting screenings, the process causes notable tension (5.41, SD: 0.94) due to concerns about patient reactions and sensitive disclosures. Staff feel competent (4.64, SD: 1.48) and believe screening fosters trust and positive interactions (4.30, SD: 1.32) with patients. However, they feel neutral about having autonomy in the screening process (3.69, SD: 2.07).

**Conclusion:** While assessing and addressing SN can enhance patient-staff relationships and satisfaction, associated tension may diminish staff motivation for conducting screenings and connecting patients with services. These findings suggest the need to reduce screening-related tension and enhance communication to foster better staff engagement in SN screening.