

Social Research Call

Social-HEROES: Health and Education Research Opportunities Empower Students and tackle inequities



Acronym: Social-HEROES

Project leader: Rafaela Rosário

Host organisation: University of Minho

Main purpose of the project: To promote social and educational equity among preschool-aged children by improving the health of disadvantaged individuals and narrowing the health gap.

Design/methodology/approach: A cluster-randomized trial involving 478 children (10 preschools) aged 3-6 years will be conducted, with preschools randomized into intervention and control groups. The co-design of the program includes a systems thinking approach. Data collection at baseline and follow-up (6 months) will include sociodemographics, health literacy, dietary intake, 24h movement-behavior, anthropometrics, and blood pressure.

Potential results: Increased involvement from children, practitioners, and policymakers will foster inclusive community initiatives. Enhanced health literacy among children, families, and preschool teachers will help navigate health challenges and promote community well-being. Additionally, a reduction in overweight and high blood pressure among children, will contribute to improve overall health outcomes over time.

Social relevance of the research: Social-HEROES moves away from traditional health education interventions that assume rational decision-making and individual autonomy. Instead, it advocates for comprehensive, socially-driven strategies using systems thinking principles. Engaging closely with stakeholders and children as genuine partners ensures effective, sustainable efforts to reduce health disparities across socioeconomic statuses.

Originality/value of the project: The project involves establishing participatory innovation labs, adapting relevant theories and frameworks—such as the systems thinking approach—to the local context, and utilizing quantitative methods to generate new data. It addresses the dual social challenge of advancing social and educational equity while mitigating non-communicable disease risks among children.