

Report Supplementary Materials 2 (17-99-85-supp2)

Definition of terms used in the realist methodology

The below is extracted and adapted from a publication of our realist literature review from this study, which is currently in press.¹

Programme Theory: The often-hidden assumptions about how an intervention works that are contained within the literature on the intervention, for example, the assumptions of programme designers. These are first identified from the literature as a series of ‘if...then...’ statements, or explanatory accounts (EAs), that are theories about what creates change. These might later be tested, developed, or overturned by primary research findings.

Context: Situations and settings that ‘trigger’ particular mechanisms. For example, Waldron et. al (2020) identify three significant contexts (pre-existing relationship; difficulty with decision; health system support) for Shared Decision Making and identify these as impacting on all mechanisms.² Their example highlights the practical limitations of available literature, albeit with stakeholder discussion.

Mechanism: Resources and relationships that produce a particular effect. There are likely to be multiple, sometimes competing mechanisms within a single intervention. No single study can identify all mechanisms or all aspects of a mechanism. **Outcomes:** Effects of a mechanism that can be immediate or longer-term, of varying depth or duration, and impact on social groups. They might also be conceptualised as a single outcome of a programme theory or understood in terms of multiple, fluctuating outcomes.

References

1. Adams M, Sanford N, Hartley J, et al. Strengthening Open Disclosure After Incidents in Maternity Care: a realist synthesis of international research evidence. *BMC Health Services Research* (in press) 2022.
2. Waldron T, Carr T, McMullen L, et al. Development of a program theory for shared decision-making: a realist synthesis. *BMC Health Services Research* 2020; **20**(1): 59.