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Using realist evaluation to explore the health impact of Citizens Advice Bureau activities

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Background: Welfare advice is suggested to improve people’s health through action on the wider determinants of health and reducing stress and anxiety. However, due to the distal nature of health outcomes, and as advice services are highly tailored and nested in a wider system of health provision, evidencing the potential health impact of advice services has proven difficult.

The intervention: Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB) provide ‘independent, impartial, confidential and free advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities’, including, but not limited to, advice on debt, benefits, employment, housing and discrimination.

The evaluation focuses on 3 projects which provide intensive support for clients with complex needs:

- ❖ A young person’s project targeting individuals between 16 and 25 and their family members
- ❖ A mental health project targeting people with severe and enduring mental health issues
- ❖ A project for people referred by GP practice staff targeting people who have difficulty leaving their home

Methods

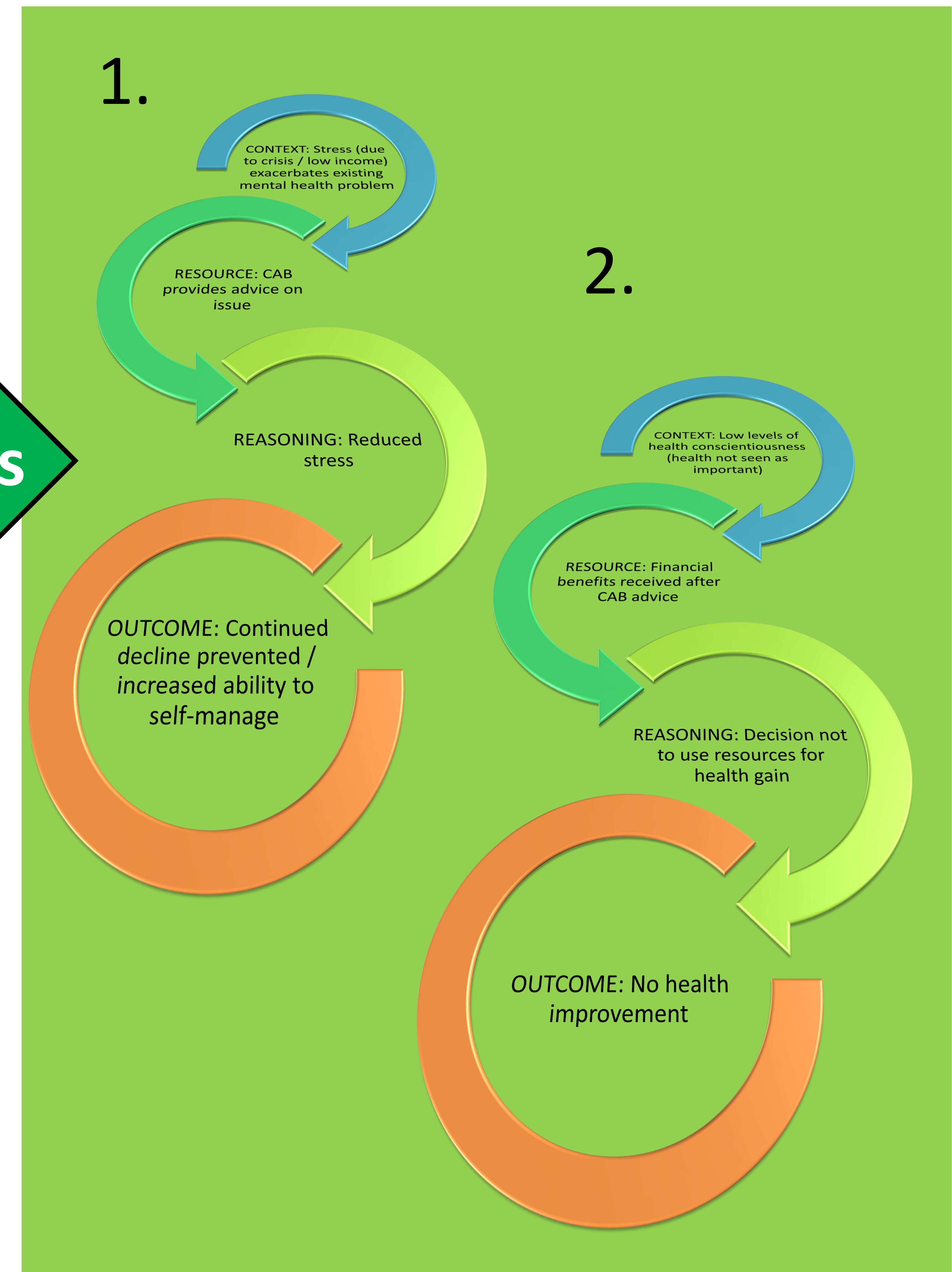
Methods: Realist evaluation

exploring how, for whom and in what circumstances Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) interventions improve people’s health.

Development of programme theories which are tested using qualitative and quantitative data aim to find:

- What are the health **outcomes** (positive, negative and/or unintended) for CAB clients?
- What are the **mechanisms** (including **resource** and **reasoning**) by which these outcomes are achieved?
- What are the facilitative **contexts** that allow mechanisms to ‘fire’

Examples



Reference: Benzeval M, Bond L, Campbell M, Egan M, Lorenc T, Petticrew M, Popham F. (2014) How does money influence health? York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.