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Citation: Forster, Natalie, Dalkin, Sonia, Hodgson, Philip, Lhussier, Monique and Carr, Susan (2015) Using realist evaluation to explore the impact of Citizens Advice Bureau activities on improving health. In: The State of the Art of Realist Methodologies: Pre-Conference Event, 3 November 2015, Leeds, UK.

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

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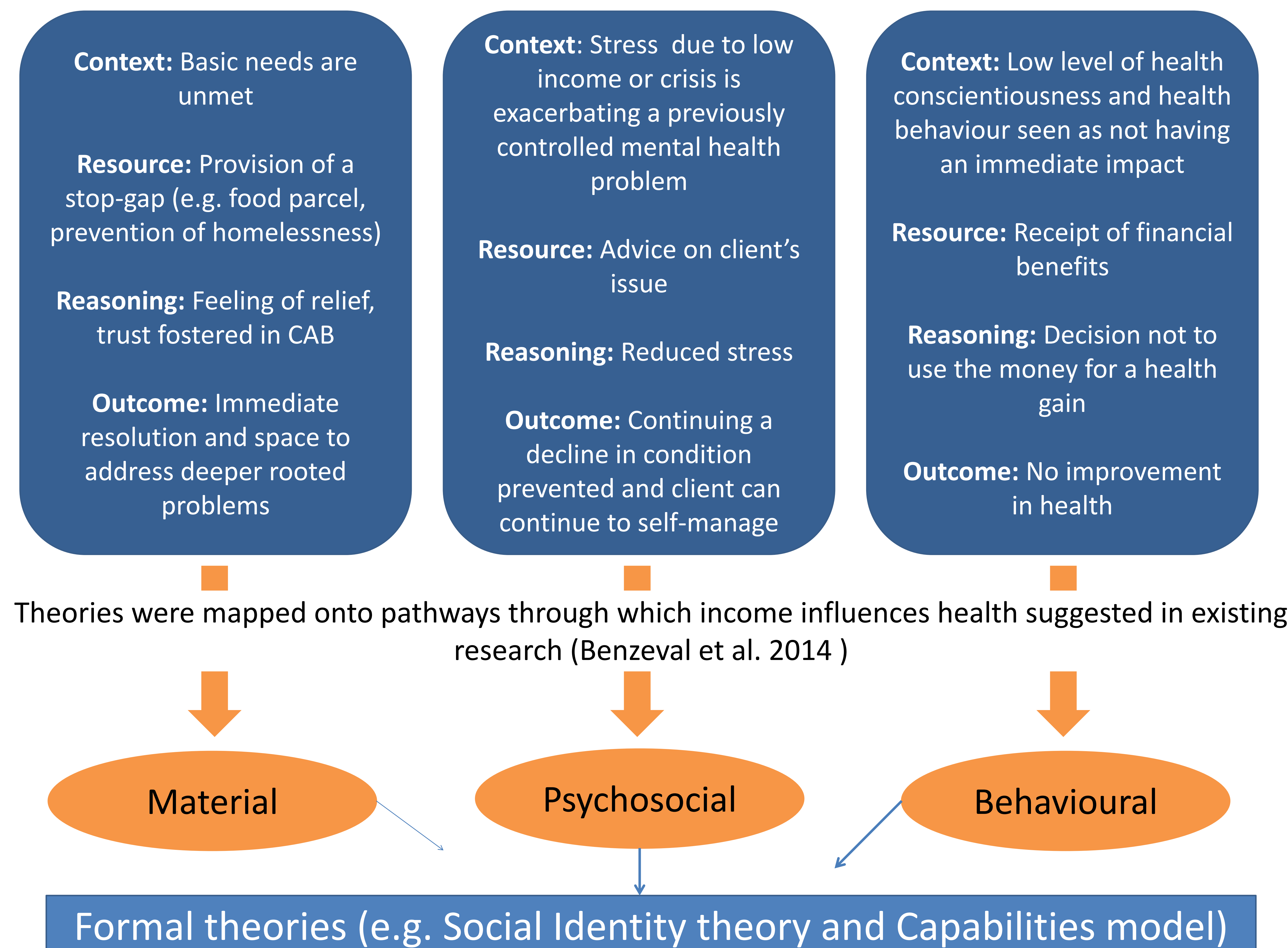
Background: Welfare advice is suggested to improve people’s health through action on the wider determinants of health and reducing stress and anxiety. However, due to the distal nature of health outcomes, and as advice services are highly tailored and nested in a wider system of health provision, evidencing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

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

Structured in 5 phases:

1. Building initial theories through interviews with CAB staff
2. Refining initial theories through engagement with literature
3. Testing these theories through undertaking surveys and interviews with CAB clients and a focus group with CAB staff
4. Developing a data recording template to aid in capturing longer term impacts
5. Verifying findings with wider CAB services

Examples of initial programme theories



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

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.