



Extended Research Article

Approaches used to prevent and reduce the use of restrictive practices on adults with learning disabilities: a realist review

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Restrictive practices such as restraint, seclusion and long-term segregation are sometimes used by healthcare professionals on people who have a learning disability and may also have autism and mental health problems. This is a human rights issue which needs urgent attention. More evidence is needed to show the best ways to support people with a learning disability, and/or additional needs especially when their communication needs are complex which can activate a behaviour that is perceived as challenging.

In this study, we used a 'realist review' which looks at what works for whom best and why (Pawson R. *Evidence-Based Policy: A Realist Perspective*. London: Sage; 2006). We collected information in three different ways: 53 published papers; 13 workshops with researchers and experts including healthcare professionals, people with lived experience, their carers, advocates and policy-makers; and 4 focus groups with 22 carers and family members of people with lived experience.

We found that restrictive practices often happen when people with a learning disability, who display behaviour that can harm or experience communication difficulties, are often detained in environments that are unsuitable for their needs. Staff are commonly poorly trained and supported, and those who are cared for feel that they are not heard, listened to or involved in care planning and discussions about personal preferences.

Ways to improve this included person-centred care planning, with the individual at the centre communicating and using words which people can understand, keeping stress low for everyone, safe staffing levels and organisations which support the changes needed.

Our recommendations include positive risk-taking, greater involvement for families and carers, face-to-face training for staff and staff feeling safe to challenge when needed. Organisations need to recognise overuse of restrictive practices by clearly stating what they are and using coproduction and leadership within the organisation to implement change.

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