

# Implementation of strategies for fostering strengths-based adult social work in the UK: a systematic review of research evidence

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## Background

- A '**strengths-based approach**' focusses on peoples' goals & resources rather than their problems. Social care professionals & organisations are striving to practise in a strengths-based way, especially since the Care Act of 2014. However, challenges remain in implementing strengths-based approaches into practise, and uncertainty remains about their effectiveness.
- This systematic review aimed to summarise research evidence on the effectiveness and the implementation of different strengths-based approaches within adult social work in the UK.

## Methods

- **Searches:** We searched seven databases: MEDLINE ALL, PsycINFO, Social Policy and Practice, HMIC, CINAHL, ASSIA & the Campbell Library. Supplementary web searches were conducted. No date or language limits were used.
- **Eligible studies:** were about adults (≥18 years) being supported or assessed by social workers; or initiatives involving adult social care teams. For the effectiveness question, outcomes could be directly related to individual outcomes or outcomes at the level of families or communities.
- **Quality assessment:** The Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool was chosen to appraise the quality of effectiveness studies, & qualitative implementation studies were assessed using the Wallace criteria.
- **Analysis:** Findings were tabulated & analysed using framework synthesis. Studies that were not synthesised were summarised descriptively.

## Results

- Of 5,030 studies screened, **none met our inclusion criteria for the effectiveness question**. Fifteen qualitative or mixed methods studies met criteria for the implementation question, six were assessed as 'good quality'.
- Seven examined **Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP)**, the remaining eight examined **Local Area Coordination**, **Solution Focused Therapy**, **Family Group Conferencing**, **Asset-based Community Development**, **Strengths-based with Relationship-based Approach**, **Asset-based approaches**, & **Motivational Interviewing**.
- Studies on **Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP)**, were synthesised into four themes of implementation factors (see right). For the remaining studies we provided a summary of findings.

## Discussion

- There is a lack of good quality research evidence evaluating the effectiveness or implementation of strengths-based approaches. The synthesis revealed a wide range of factors that enabled or inhibited successful implementation of **Making Safeguarding Personal**. These may have wider relevance for implementation of other strengths-based models of social work practice.
- **Methodological challenges:** conducting a systematic review of a broad philosophy of professional practice (strengths-based approach) rather than a clearly defined intervention, made searching for & summarising available evidence difficult. While some identified studies explored wider organisational practice, others focussed on a range of named interventions.

**Theme 1: MSP as an intervention** – seen as initially demanding but with long-term advantages.

**Theme 2: Culture & settings** – required broad cultural changes; 'outward facing' & smaller/specialist councils tended to find this easier.

**Theme 3: Individual characteristics** – related to enhancing the knowledge, skills & confidence of practitioner & stakeholders in MSP; & service user willingness to engage.

**Theme 4: Embedding & sustaining MSP** – depended on strong leadership & active engagement at all levels. .