

# Care relationships between support staff and adults with a learning disability in social care residential settings in the United Kingdom: a systematic review and narrative synthesis

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## 1. Background

- Over one million adults in the UK have a learning disability.
- Support staff (e.g., support workers, personal assistants) are the main practitioners providing daily care in long term social care residential settings.
- Unlike other professional relationships (e.g., counselling, nursing), little is known about care relationships between support staff and adults with a learning disability in residential settings and what makes them positive.

## 2. Review Questions

- What processes underlie positive care relationships?
- What factors serve as barriers and facilitators?
- What impact do positive care relationships (or lack thereof) have on the lives of staff and the people they support?
- How can care relationships that have been disrupted be restored?
- How are positive care relationships defined?

## 3. Methods

- Inclusion criteria:** a) empirical research and non-empirical reports; b) academic journals and certain forms of grey literature; c) UK based; d) English language; e) from 1980 to 2021 (July); f) within scope.
- Study selection:** 12 databases, five websites, expert contact.
- Data synthesis:** Narratives synthesis framework (Popay et al., 2006).

## 4. Results

### Processes

- Getting to know the person
- Setting boundaries
  - Tuning in
  - Listening
- Being person centred
- Communicating effectively
- Shifting power
- Being proactive

### Barriers

- Staff interactional patterns
- Staff attributions
- Transference
- Misinterpretation of policy
- Difficulty setting boundaries
- Lack of training & supervision
- Organisational features

### Facilitators

- Training
- Communication tools
- Low levels of staff stress
- Right values

### Impact

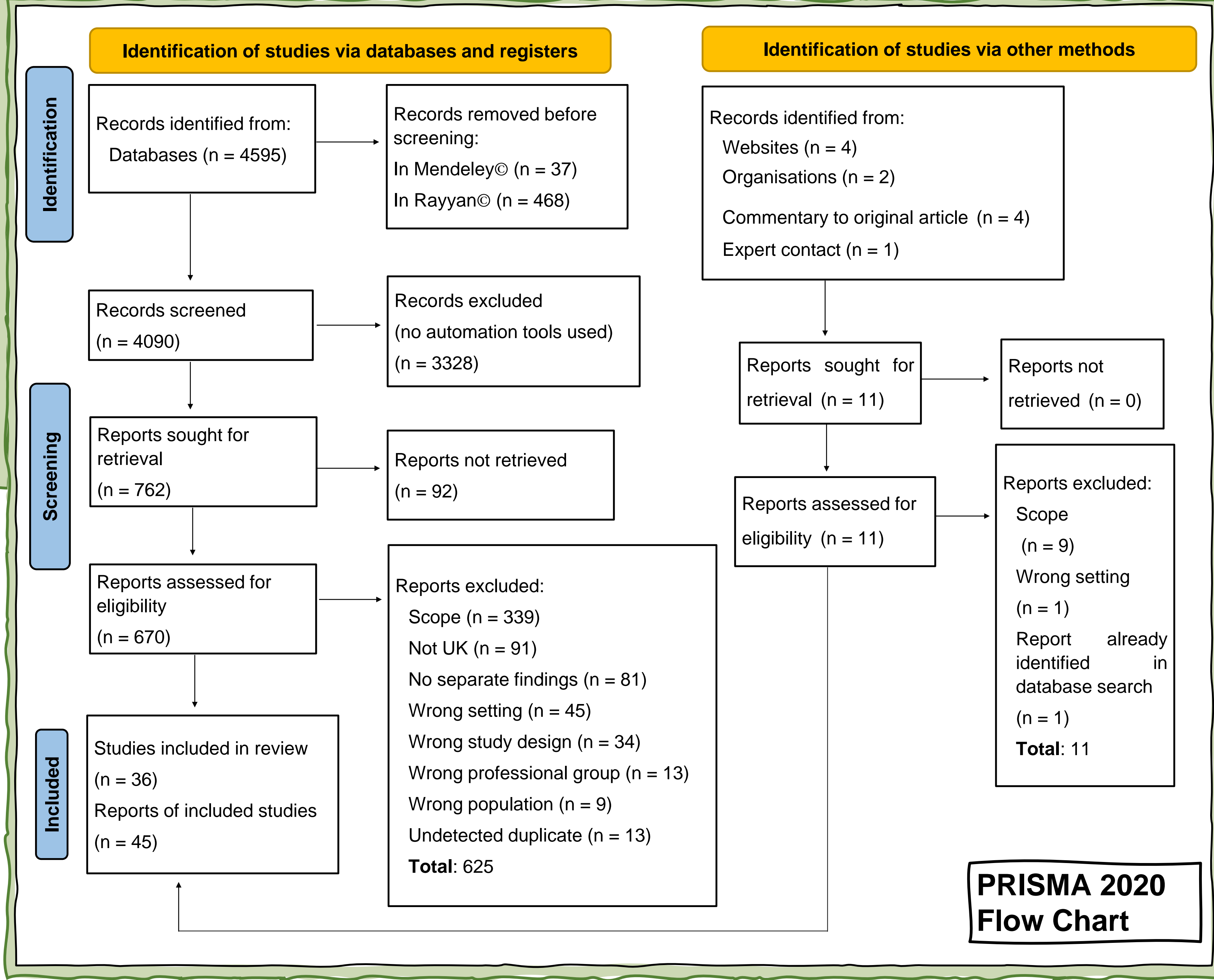
- Effective support
- Improved self-esteem
- Placement breakdown when lacking positive relationships

### Restoration

- External support from systemic therapy
- Active support procedures

### Definitions

- Company
- Friendship
  - Mutual
  - Professional
- Power



## 5. Conclusions

- The review provides a holistic account of the topic furthering our understanding of care relationships.
- Findings can inform direct care practice and serve as a compass for future empirical research.
- Staff dilemma between providing care, managing other duties, and overcoming barriers was highlighted.
- Literature was limited for certain review questions and more extensive for others.
- A few reports addressed care relationships per se with the majority focusing on communication or interactions.
- The voice of adults with a learning disability was limited.

## 6. Future Directions

- Empirical research addressing directly various aspects of care relationships between the populations of interest is needed.
- Staff dilemma in residential settings requires further exploration.
- Research must include more voices of adults with a learning disability reflecting on their relationships with support staff.

