

Educational Programs for Informal Cancer Caregivers: A Meta-Analysis and Realist Review

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BACKGROUND

- **Unpaid caregivers are essential to cancer care**, providing medical, practical, and emotional support as more care shifts to outpatient and home settings
 - **Caregiver burden is substantial**, with many caregivers reporting feeling unprepared, unsupported, and overwhelmed
 - Although the range of available caregiver interventions has been well-documented, **their effectiveness remains poorly understood**
 - **Current evidence focuses on whether interventions work, but not why they work**, highlighting the need to understand the mechanisms and contextual factors that influence outcomes
- ❖ **Study Aim:** To conduct a realist review of randomized controlled trials of educational interventions for cancer caregivers to (1) evaluate their outcomes and (2) understand how and in what circumstances interventions work

METHODS

- **Design:** Literature review, meta-analysis, and realist review of cancer caregiver educational interventions was conducted
- **Literature Review:** guided by the framework described by Joanna Briggs Institute (2024)
 - **Search:** Medical librarian searched six databases covering the period Jan 2000-June 2025
 - **Keywords included:** *cancer, caregivers, education, training, and intervention programs*
 - **Inclusion Criteria:** randomized controlled trials (RCTs) evaluating educational interventions for adult informal cancer caregivers
- **Quality Appraisal:** Risk of bias assessed using the Cochrane RoB tool
- **Meta-analysis:** Random-effects models used to pool caregiver outcomes
- **Realist Analysis:** Developed Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configurations to explain intervention effectiveness
 - **Framework:** Guided by an Initial Programme Theory informed by Social Cognitive Theory, Adult Learning Theory, the Stress Process Model, and Role Theory

RESULTS

- **Included Studies:** 25 RCTs met eligibility criteria

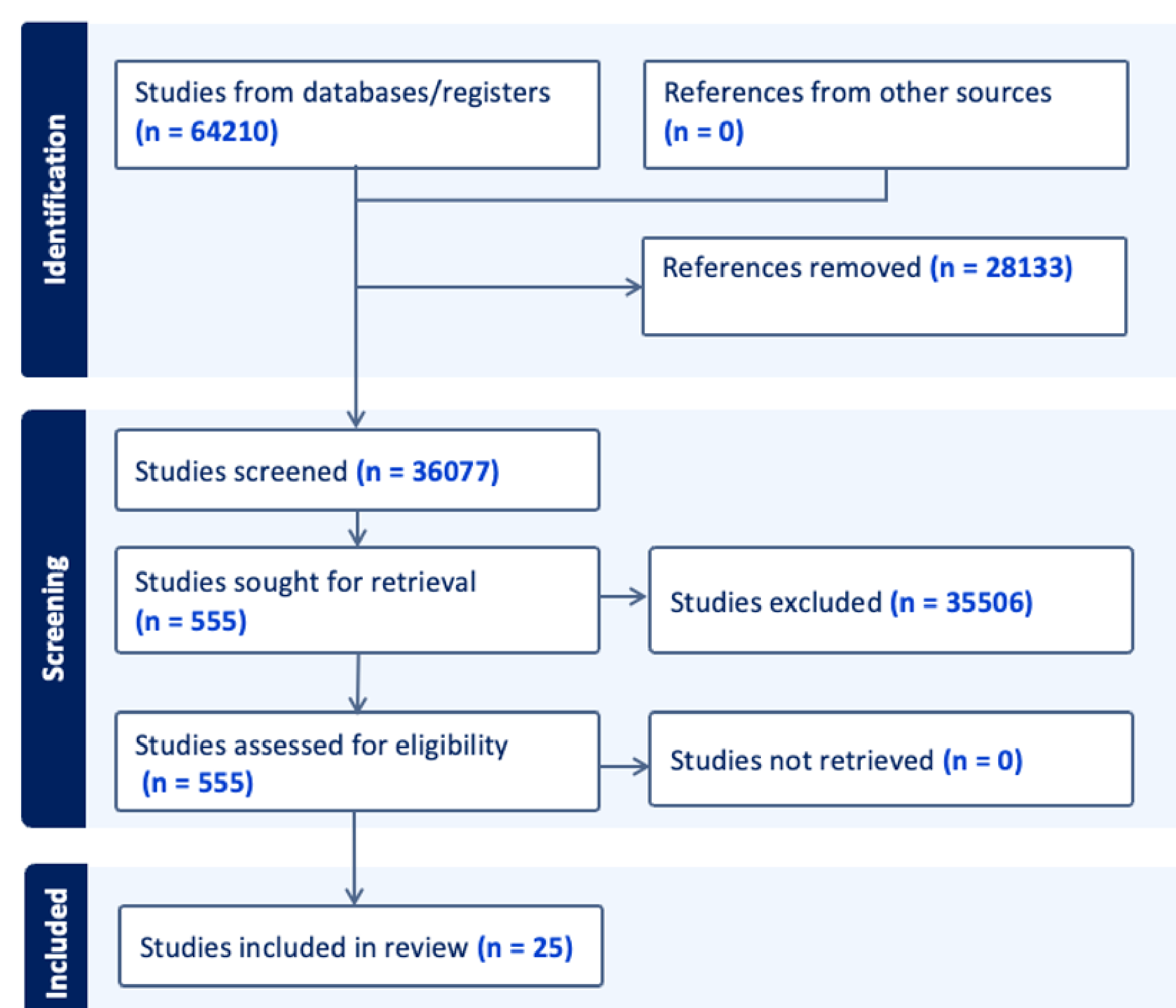


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

DISCUSSION

- Effectiveness depended on matching intervention design to caregiver needs rather than any single intervention model
- Successful interventions promoted psychological safety, tailored learning, social support, and facilitator credibility
- Successful interventions require more than simply knowledge transfer. They require low intensity participation, clear role articulation, and a focus on building self-efficacy
- Given the central role of self-efficacy in shaping caregivers' confidence, persistence, and performance, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory provides a critical theoretical foundation for caregiver education interventions

RESULTS (cont.) Realist Review

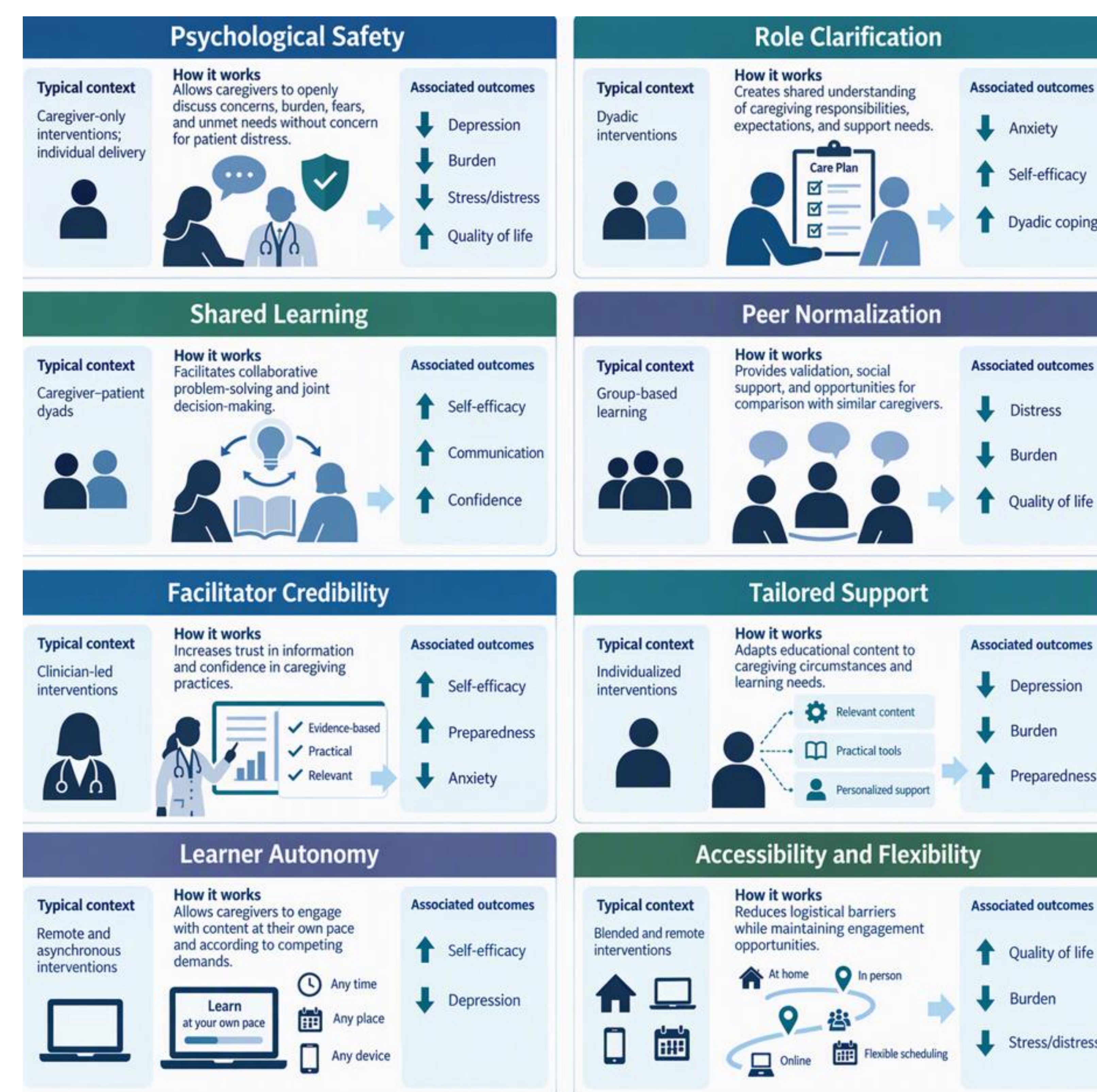


Figure 2: Highlights of Realist Review

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