



OJJDP-FUNDED RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Associations between Parental Characteristics, Attitudes, and Engagement on Mentoring Relationship Outcomes

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Parental engagement with the mentor and mentoring program was associated with reductions in youth involvement in substance use, delinquency, and risky behaviors.

Research Overview

Researchers at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation conducted this study in partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Kentuckiana to investigate whether three types of parent/guardian mentoring variables (parent/family characteristics, parent engagement in the match, and parenting style) influence match quality, match length, and youth program outcomes. This summary highlights study findings related to levels of parent/guardian engagement in matches and the impact of parental factors on match metrics (length and strength of relationship) and youth outcomes. This study adds to existing knowledge about the dynamics of mentoring relationships and complements existing research on components and characteristics of mentoring program effectiveness.

Research Design

To answer four primary research questions, the project used an intervention-only pre-post design in which Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based and site-based mentoring programs were the intervention. Researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data from 350 youth, mentors, and parents/guardians in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Kentuckiana program at match and 12 months after match. Researchers used paper surveys for youth and mentors and tablet-based surveys for parents. Researchers supplemented survey data with school record data from 16 area school districts and data from the Big Brothers Big Sisters Agency Information Management (AIM) database. Analysis strategies for research questions ranged from basic descriptive information and frequencies to complex multivariate and multilevel models.

Research Findings

The research team found that participating families had strong youth/parent dynamics. Families ate meals together 4.9 times per week on average and reported high levels of family cohesion and parent-child bonding. Parents/guardians engaged actively in mentoring matches, meeting with mentors on average twice a month and communicating with mentors monthly. Key topics of conversation included scheduling match meetings, reviewing household rules, discussing how mentoring could help the youth, and reviewing how best to support the mentoring relationship.

Parent/guardian involvement varied by the type of match and was greater in community-based matches than in site-based matches.

Parent/guardian engagement in match relationships influenced youth strength of relationship ratings. The more satisfied the parent, the stronger the mentoring relationship (especially among Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based matches). Youth who reported lower quality relationships between parents and mentors had match strength ratings decline over the course of the match. Youth whose parents attended one or more Big Brothers Big Sisters parent or family engagement events had matches that were less likely to close before 12 months. Finally, youth whose mentors had strong relationships with parents/guardians performed better academically (higher grades) and developed more negative attitudes toward substance use and risky behaviors.

The relationships between these various engagement measures held when controlling for parent/guardian attitudes and family characteristics—suggesting that parent/guardian involvement in the match is more important in building long-lasting matches than parental characteristics, parenting styles, and parent-child bonding.

Policy/Practice Implications

This study confirms that parents impact match dynamics and program outcomes, including grades, delinquency, and related risk/protective factors. These findings underscore the importance of integrating parents into regular mentoring program activities. Because parents/guardians are diverse, it is important to support engagement throughout the mentoring relationship and to provide a variety of meaningful ways for parents/guardians to engage with mentors.

Resources

- **OJJDP.gov: Research Projects**
<https://www.ojjdp.gov/research/index.html#Research-Projects>
- **Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation**
www.pire.org
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Kentuckiana**
www.bbbsky.com

Source: Courser, M., S. Shamblen, K. Thompson, L. Young, A. Schweinhart, C. Shepherd, S. Hamilton-Nance, C. Aramburu, C. Burrmeister. 2017. "Assessing the Impact of Parental Characteristics, Parental Attitudes, and Parental Engagement on Mentoring Relationship Outcomes" Final report for Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, grant number 2013-JU-FX-0010. NCJ 251114, available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/app/publications/abstract.aspx?id=273294>

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