



OJJDP-FUNDED RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Mentee Risk Status and Mentoring Program Practices as Predictors of Match Outcomes

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Mentees with many risk factors, such as beginning their mentoring relationship as an adolescent, having antisocial behavior problems, or experiencing many stressful life experiences, are less likely to have effective and long lasting mentoring relationships, compared to mentees with fewer risk factors; however, mentoring program practices make a difference, even with high-risk youth.

Research Overview

Researchers from Innovation Research & Training examined data from hundreds of mentoring programs to determine whether mentee risk and mentoring program practices predicted match longevity and strength, along with other outcomes. They also examined these outcomes for subpopulations of at-risk youth that are often served by mentoring programs, namely, children with an incarcerated parent and youth in foster care.

Premature closure of mentoring relationships (i.e. relationships that don't complete their length commitment and terminate early) have been found to be associated with poorer youth outcomes than relationships that close when expected. Longer mentoring relationships have also been associated with more positive youth outcomes. Thus, understanding what factors predict premature closure and match length can inform mentoring programs about practices that may result in longer and closer mentoring relationships that, in turn, have more positive youth outcomes. The researchers studied these questions by examining the impact of mentee risk factors and adherence to research- and safety-based mentoring program practices described in the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*, 3rd Edition, a national set of guidelines for mentoring programs, on match outcomes.

Research Findings

The researchers found that higher risk children and adolescents (defined as exhibiting more antisocial or risky health behaviors, or having been exposed to more personal or familial risk factors) were more likely to have a mentoring relationship end early than those with fewer risk

factors. In fact, cumulative risk exposure in mentees predicted premature closure across childhood and adolescence. In fact, mentoring relationships that began when mentees were adolescents were at greater risk for premature closure compared to relationships that began during childhood. This relationship between age and match length held across all levels of risk.

Children of incarcerated parents and youth in foster care appear to be at particularly high risk. Children of incarcerated parents have shorter mentoring relationships and have lower grades, school attendance, and parental trust after 1 year of mentoring, compared to youth who do not have an incarcerated parent. In addition, mentees in foster care also had shorter mentoring relationships and were in matches that were more likely to close prematurely than mentees who were not in foster care.

The way mentoring programs operate can make a difference in match outcomes, specifically, adhering more closely to the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*. Notably, programs that implemented more of the benchmark practices in the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* had longer lasting matches than programs that implemented fewer benchmark practices; however, benchmark implementation was not associated with premature closure. In particular, mentoring programs that fully adhered to the training standard had longer lasting matches than programs that did not fully implement the practices composing the training standard.

Children of incarcerated parents participating in mentoring programs that provided specialized training to their mentors on issues associated with mentoring this population experienced longer and stronger matches and had higher educational expectations than children whose programs did not offer specialized mentor training.

Source: Kupersmidt, J.B., Stump, K.N., Stelter, R.L., and Rhodes, J.E. 2017. "Mentee risk status and mentor training as predictors of youth outcomes." Final report for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, grant number 2012-JU-FX-0009. NCJ 251380, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/251380.pdf>



Children of incarcerated parents participating in mentoring programs that received special funding for serving this population also experienced longer and stronger matches than children whose programs did not receive additional funding.

Research Design

The researchers used a longitudinal design across studies using two archival datasets including the web-based MentorPro software system that MENTOR developed and disseminated, and the Agency Information Management database that Big Brothers Big Sisters of America developed and uses to manage matches by local affiliated mentoring programs. Both databases were designed for administrative program purposes to track and monitor mentoring relationships. The researchers also administered web-based surveys to assess program practices to a subset of 45 Big Brothers Big Sisters-affiliated agencies represented in the Agency Information Management database. Researchers conducted follow-up, semistructured telephone interviews with agency leaders, after they had completed the program practices self-assessment questionnaire. They examined correlational data using chi-square and t-test, linear and logistic regression, survival, and inverse propensity weighting regression analyses. When possible, analyses included adjustments for the nested nature of the participants within mentoring programs.

Policy/Practice Implications

The findings from these research studies suggest that higher risk youth, who stand to greatly benefit from being in a mentoring relationship, also pose significant challenges to mentoring programs. Furthermore, programs serving mentoring relationships that begin in adolescence or with youth exposed to many risk factors need to not only be of the highest quality, but also may need to supplement their core practices and funding in order to adequately address these challenges.

Although the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*, 3rd Edition, and now, the 4th Edition, provide guidelines for mentoring programs about practices that are informed by research and safety considerations, the efficacy of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*, in its entirety, had never been empirically examined. The studies conducted as part of the line of research that this grant supported represent the first empirical studies to test whether mentoring programs' alignment of their program practices to the guidelines predicts outcomes. Thus, these

studies also help move the field toward defining program competency and excellence.

Findings should be interpreted cautiously because most of the hypotheses examined related to program practice impact were only tested for mentoring programs providing one-to-one mentoring in the context of Big Brothers Big Sisters programs. Also, the studies on program practices that were conducted capitalized on a large national archival, administrative database using correlational (not experimental) designs. Despite these limitations, the policy and practice implications of this work suggest that providing training and support to mentoring programs to improve their implementation of benchmark practices and therefore, Standards, outlined in the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*, might contribute to improving match and youth outcomes.

Resources

- **OJJDP's National Mentoring Resource Center:**
www.NationalMentoringResourceCenter.org
- **Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring (Fourth Edition):**
http://www.mentoring.org/images/uploads/Final_Elements_Publication_Fourth.pdf
- **Innovation Research & Training:**
<http://www.mentoringcentral.net>