



OJJDP-FUNDED RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Mentoring Best Practices Research: Effectiveness of Juvenile Mentoring for Youth on Parole and Probation in Ohio

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Youth on parole and probation in Ohio who received mentoring services did not reduce delinquent behavior and the findings suggest that mentoring programs working with youth in the justice system should tailor their approaches for this unique population.

Research Overview

Researchers at the Center for Criminal Justice Research at the University of Cincinnati examined six mentoring programs in Ohio to better understand their impact on recidivism. They examined four research questions: (1) Are the mentoring services studied here effective in reducing delinquent and criminal reoffending?; (2) Does the impact of these mentoring services differ based on youth characteristics?; (3) Does the quality of the match between mentor and mentee impact youth outcomes?; and (4) Does the quality of the mentoring program lead to differing outcomes?

Research Findings

Question 1: While the research team found some reductions in recidivism in the probation sample and for youth in the parole sample who completed the program, the differences were not statistically significant when controlling for key variables. Overall, the mentoring services provided in this study did not have a significant impact on recidivism for either sample.

Question 2: The effect of mentoring was the same for youth of all risk levels (i.e., how likely a youth is to engage in future delinquent behavior). Race and age affected recidivism. African American youth on parole and probation and older youth on probation had higher levels of recidivism.

Question 3: The quality of the mentor-mentee relationship had no influence on recidivism. The higher the satisfaction with the program, the higher the likelihood a youth was to recidivate. Both of these findings contradict past research.

Question 4: The study findings support the importance of adherence to evidence-based practices. The two programs

that adhered most to evidence-based practices yielded the largest reduction in the rate of recidivism between the mentored youth and nonmentored youth. In contrast, those programs that adhered least to evidence-based practices increased the rate of recidivism among those youth who participated in mentoring. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

Research Design

Researchers answered Questions 1 and 2 using a quasi-experimental design where youth on parole and probation who received mentoring services were matched with similar youth who did not receive mentoring services. They defined recidivism for the parole sample as return to incarceration and recidivism for the probation sample as any new adjudication. The research team administered a survey to youth who participated in mentoring while on probation to investigate Question 3. They used a process evaluation with in-depth interviews with key mentoring program personnel to answer Question 4. Small sample sizes and data concerns limited the generalizability of the findings.

Policy/Practice Implications

The findings from the present study suggest that mentoring programs for youth involved in the justice system—as they were implemented here—are unlikely to reduce recidivism in any meaningful way. The authors suggest that mentoring programs serving delinquent youth that wish to influence the youths' criminal justice outcomes should target relevant behaviors (e.g., impulsivity, negative attitudes, antisocial peers). Specifically, mentors should work with youth to change their antisocial thinking and behaviors and apply social learning principles to teach youth new prosocial skills.

Source: Duriez, S.A., Sullivan, C.C., Sullivan, C.J., Manchak, S., and Latessa, E.J. 2017. "Mentoring Best Practices Research: Effectiveness of Juvenile Mentoring Programs on Recidivism" Final report for Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2013-JU-FX-0004. NCJ 251378, available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/251378.pdf>

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