

Screening Evidence: Summary Narrative

Overall, available research provides limited support for the Screening Standard of the *Elements of Effective Practice*. More specifically, although the overall weight of the existing evidence does not indicate benefits of practices aligned with the Standard, there are some specific results that are supportive.

A low number of studies have addressed this topic. With respect to clarifying support for this Standard, these studies as a group are of moderate methodological rigor.

Studies address support for multiple practices that align with the Standard, including the use of screening procedures for mentors in the form of a written application, personal interview, and reference and criminal background checks. Evidence is more limited with respect to the types of program models and range of backgrounds of mentors and youth considered.

A systematic literature search revealed four studies with distinct samples that examined variation in a practice related to the Screening Standard of the *Elements of Effective Practice* in relation to indicators of a program's effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and/or safety. These studies report findings that are pertinent to six of the nine Benchmarks (B.2.1, B.2.2, B.2.3, B.2.4, B.2.5, B.2.6, and B.2.8) for this Standard.¹ Study findings primarily address outcomes related to program effectiveness (including aspects of mentoring relationship quality).

All four studies were quantitative and used a quasi-experimental design (Evidence Level 1B in DuBois, 2007), meaning that whether a practice was implemented or received was determined by factors other than random assignment. These investigations include a study exploring the experiences of 1,101 mentors in 98 school-based and community-based mentoring programs of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) and other organizations (Herrera, Sipe, McClanahan, Arbreton, & Pepper, 2000). Program staff reports of the number of screening techniques used (the four primary screening techniques were a written application (B.2.1), personal interviews (B.2.4), reference check (B.2.5), and criminal record checks (B.2.6)) was examined in relation to three measures of mentor-reported relationship quality (emotional support, instrumental help, and closeness), controlling for demographic characteristics of mentors and youth (e.g., mentor/youth gender and mentor age and ethnicity), measures of the amount of time spent together, and other program-related factors (e.g., community- vs. school-based program, required mentor commitment – short-term intensive, short-term non-intensive, or long-term). Mentors in community-based programs considered to have low-level screening (use of fewer than three of the above four techniques) reported significantly lower relationship quality (as assessed by each of the above three measures) than did those in programs considered to have medium- or high-level screening (3 or 4 screening techniques and more than 4 screening techniques, respectively). No associations between screening and relationship quality were evident for mentors in school-based mentoring programs.

Extent of Evidence Base
Low

Favorability of Findings
Limited

Rigor of Methodology
Moderate

Scope of Findings
Limited

A study of 1,197 mentoring programs across the nation that were focused on serving youth referred from the juvenile justice system (J. M. Miller, Barnes, H. V. Miller, & McKinnon, 2013) found that program reports of the frequency with which background checks were performed for prospective mentors (B.2.6; answers were given on a four-point scale where 0=never, 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, and 3=always) were not significantly correlated with program reports of the percentage of mentees meeting or exceeding program goals, controlling for a range of other program characteristics (e.g., years in operation, percent male and percent African American youth served, whether the mentoring was facility-based).

The remaining studies were meta-analyses of evaluations of youth mentoring program effectiveness. These studies were comprehensive syntheses of the findings of mentoring program evaluations published through 1998 (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002) and from 1999-2010 (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011), respectively.² These syntheses examined whether estimated mentoring program effects on youth outcomes differed based on each the following practices: whether the program employed procedures for screening mentors (DuBois et al., 2002, 2011); whether there was a communicated expectation for the duration of the relationship between mentor and youth (DuBois et al., 2002, 2011) and, if so, what the minimum expected duration was assessed either continuously as the number of months (DuBois et al., 2002) or categorically (less than six months, 6–11 months, or 12 or more months; DuBois et al., 2011; B.2.2, B.2.8); whether there was a communicated expectation for frequency of contact between mentors and youth and, if so, what amount of contact was expected (DuBois et al., 2002, 2011 B.2.3). In the earlier of the two meta-analyses (DuBois et al., 2002), programs communicating an expectation for frequency of mentor-youth contact were found to have larger estimated effects on youth outcomes in comparison to those for which this did not appear to be the case (DuBois et al., 2002). None of the other above practices relating to screening of mentors was found to be related to differences in estimates of program effects in either meta-analysis.

¹ When findings are pertinent to a particular Benchmark or Enhancement for this Standard, the number of the Benchmark or Enhancement is provided in parentheses. Please note that such references are provided regardless of whether the findings involved are consistent with (i.e., provide support for) the relevant Benchmark or Enhancement.

² The findings of these meta-analyses also are considered quasi-experimental because they are based on naturally-occurring variation across programs in whether or not the practice of interest (pre-match training) was incorporated into the design of the programs (DuBois, 2007).

References

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