Welcome to the National Mentoring Research Center E-Newsletter! This newsletter focuses on mentoring research, the work of the NMRC Research Board, and emerging knowledge that can help you plan and implement more effective mentoring services for youth. In this issue, we:

- Feature a reading by Dr. Michael Karcher that describes the many ways program staff influence mentor-mentee match outcomes,
- Summarize some great new research articles produced by the members of our NMRC Research Board and other scholars,
- Highlight NMRC tools and resources including a youth guide for mentees on how to make the most of their mentoring experience and tools to help you assess the impact of mentoring on mentors and caregivers.

- Rachel Bennett, Research Manager at MENTOR

First Edition
December, 2023

Have a question about mentoring evaluation and research?
Get an answer!
Write to us and we’ll answer your questions in a future issue.

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Disclaimer: The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.
Staff Support Matters

Michael Karcher, PhD – NMRC Research Board Member

One of the simple truths about people in any role is that when we are provided evidence that our efforts matter, we work harder, and we do better because we feel more confident and effective.

To my knowledge, there are no published studies that formally test the impact of “case manager” support of mentoring relationships on youth outcomes. Yet it is taken almost for granted that “match” support matters (obviously group mentoring models don’t have one-to-one matches, but needless to say those groups need support just as much as a mentoring pair would). Most of our knowledge about the role of support provided to matches by program staff, such as case managers and Match Support Specialists, on the outcomes of youth mentoring programs comes from qualitative assessments, case studies, or statistical associations between level of satisfaction with match support and either intermediate outcomes (e.g., satisfaction with program or with match), or distal outcomes (mentor persistence, youth outcomes). Yet we are hamstrung in what we can infer from such evidence in terms of what we can confidently suggest staff do differently when supporting the mentoring relationships they create.

I was part of a recent research study, *Pathways By Which Case Managers’ Match Support Influences Youth Mentoring Outcomes: Testing The Systemic Model Of Youth Mentoring*, that attempted to illuminate some of the connections between support of mentoring relationships and the outcomes they produced for young people. First, this study included support staff’s supervisors’ assessments of how well Match Support Specialists supported mentors, mentees, and matches (throughout this summary, I will refer to the staff who directly check in with and offer support to mentoring program participants as Match Support Specialists though, titles will vary from program to program). Fairly advanced statistical comparisons were then made between what could be learned from supervisors’ assessments of match support quality compared to those made by mentors themselves to determine if there were incompatible perspectives on the help matches were offered. We then analyzed how match support contributed to what actually happened on the ground between mentors and mentees and the outcomes of their time spent together.

The findings reported in our study may not make new or stronger assertions that Match Support Specialists improve outcomes but does offer some theoretically tested evidence for how match support staff influence mentoring interactions and contribute to intermediate and distal outcomes. I’ll focus here on several key takeaways from our study:

**Takeaway #1: What you see isn’t (necessarily) what you get.**

We learned that program directors and other supervisors of Match Support Specialists need more than their own observations to fully appreciate the value of their staff’s contributions to match outcomes. We found their assessments of their specialists’ competence in supporting matches captured only a sliver of what the Specialists do to support matches. In fact, we found that mentors’ perceptions of match support predicted match length and quality better than supervisors.

However, supervisors do observe other ways match specialists appear to facilitate longer matches, beyond that reflected in mentor support. In preliminary analyses of this
same model, we used a measure of overall staff competence as rated by supervisors. Using this measure, which included other indicators of staff competence (such as how effectively Match Support Specialists utilized supervisor feedback and documented contacts with those involved in the match), there was a direct effect of staff competence on match length. This means there are aspects of staff professionalism seen only by supervisors that, in fact, seem to capture additional information about other job duties (outside mentor and youth interactions with staff) that may facilitate longer matches. But in general, we found that supervisors’ assessments of overall competence are useful in predicting match length, but do not serve as substitutes for hearing from mentors about how well and in what ways they felt supported.

The main takeaway, however, is that what staff supervisors see isn’t all they get from those Match Support Specialists in terms of how they support matches. So, making decisions about promotion, staff retention, and overall competence using only supervisor ratings is likely to leave out perhaps the most important information about how Match Support Specialists are performing their most essential role, supporting matches.

**Takeaway #2: We all need to connect before we correct.**

The second takeaway is the importance of match support in keeping mentors focused on the foundational role of establishing a youth-centered relationship before venturing into goal-focused interactions. Without taking the crucial first steps of building trust and demonstrating to mentees their equal role in the mentoring relationship, mentees can easily interpret a goal-focused interaction as judgmental or overly critical. Match Support Specialists can help mentors appropriately set the stage for goal-focused interactions by:

- Teaching mentors to respect mentees’ opinions and providing education about how this contributes positively to the mentoring relationship.
- Providing mentors with training and resources on youth-centered approaches and offering opportunities to practice these skills.
- Modeling these behaviors during check-ins with mentors.

**Takeaway #3: Those supporting mentors need their own support.**

Continuing this line of thinking, fostering these competencies among Specialists themselves may require experiencing similar supports from their supervisors. Consider how supervisors can connect with staff before correcting or training in job functions peripheral to the match. Supervisors may be inclined to emphasize the job indicators they find (personally) most relevant, such as how well support staff seek and utilize the supervisor’s feedback and keep good documentation. But if training and reinforcement provided to staff prioritize these more clerical job duties over efforts to effectively coach mentors in fostering youth-centeredness in matches, match closeness and length may suffer. Supervisors can model the latter through their own availability, sharing resources, communicating concern for staff and by recognizing the Match Specialists’ efforts to remain available to, interested in, and willing to help mentors as their primary role. In other words, like mentees with mentors and mentors with their Match Support Specialists, those Specialists may not care how much their supervisors know, until they know how much their supervisors care.

By simply demonstrating concern about match success and a willingness to support mentors by being available and providing guidance, Specialists play an invaluable role influencing match outcomes such as match closeness and length. Because youth-centeredness emerged as a key driver in match quality and length in our study, Specialists will benefit from training and professional development that provides an opportunity to further integrate these approaches into their own practice, as well as the ability to model these behaviors for mentors.
Striving for safety, impact, and equity: A critical consideration of AJCP publications on formal youth mentoring programs

- by Matthew A. Hagler, Kristian V. Jones, Amy J. Anderson, Samuel D. McQuillin, Lindsey M. Weiler, & Bernadette Sánchez

(Reprinted from Abstract) In this virtual special issue (VSI) the authors curate and reflect upon 22 articles on formal youth mentoring previously published in the American Journal of Community Psychology (AJCP). First, the authors provide historical context and highlight AJCP’s 2002 special issue on mentoring, which played an important role in establishing youth mentoring as a vibrant area of research. Next, they review and discuss findings from subsequent AJCP studies in three interrelated lines of inquiry: (1) the importance of facilitating high-quality mentoring relationships; (2) associations among youth’s presenting needs, relationship quality, and outcomes; and (3) program practices leading to stronger, more impactful relationships. Throughout, the authors highlight and expand upon critical commentary from AJCP contributors, calling on the field to move away from paternalistic models that overly localize risk with youth and families without interrogating structural oppression. Recommendations include: (1) centering critical consciousness, racial equity, and social justice in program curricula and mentor trainings; (2) respectfully engaging grassroots programs developed for and by communities of color that are underrepresented in research; (3) making meaningful efforts to recruit mentors from marginalized communities and removing barriers to their participation; and (4) examining youth’s racial, ethnic, and other areas of identity development processes during mentoring.

Relevance for practitioners: As practitioners and researchers alike take stock of the field’s evolution over the last few decades and consider future directions in youth mentoring, this review notes a rich array of recommendations to enhance practices which embed equity and support the delivery of culturally responsive services. For example, though program models and implementation will vary widely throughout the mentoring field, mitigating the risk of harm to program participants due to an unexpected, premature end to the relationship should be a standard practice in every program; strategies to foster greater understanding of the common causes that put a match at risk for an early ending and how training, ongoing support, and caregiver engagement can safeguard against these risks are explained in greater detail. The authors also encourage increased use of youth-initiated mentoring (YIM) and evaluation approaches like Participatory Action Research (PAR) as strategies to both enhance a program’s validity with its community context, as well as centralizing the perspectives and expertise of the youth and families engaged in the program.
Mentoring as prevention of early school leaving: A qualitative systematic literature review

- by Anikó Fehérvári & Aranka Varga

(Reprinted from Abstract) One of the biggest challenges facing education systems is preventing early school leaving. Not completing secondary education has serious long-term negative consequences for both individuals and society. There is currently a wide body of empirical literature that reviews the causes of and risk factors for school dropout and the prevention of student attrition. With new reviews emerging over time, our analysis updates previous systematic analyses, and we therefore review empirical studies from seven databases between 2013 and 2021 that use mentoring to prevent early school leaving. We focus on mentoring because personal support is a crucial type of prevention program. We identified 25 studies from this period through a systematic search. The aim of our research was to identify the target groups, the mentoring roles, and the goals and outcomes of the mentoring programs in the interventions undertaken in the studies we identified. The studies present both school-based and community-based mentoring practices primarily in North American and European countries. The results show that the focus of the studies was mainly on secondary school target groups as there were few studies addressing younger age groups. Most of the studies focused on a 1-year period or shorter durations, and several studies found that mentoring had positive effects on students. However, not all the factors identified as development objectives have changed. It should also be stressed that the success of mentoring depends on the quality of the mentors and the quality of their relationship with the mentees, as well as on the implementation of the mentoring programs and the school contexts in which they operate. The importance of the latter has perhaps received less attention in previous reviews and analyses.

Relevance for practitioners: This systematic review aimed to evaluate updates in the existing research on mentoring as a strategy to prevent school dropout, referencing studies published in the last decade. Guided by questions like what age groups are typically targeted, if and how mentoring effected students, and what key implementation characteristics influenced the mentoring process, the authors conclude that mentoring can be an effective approach to foster positive educational outcomes with a few caveats. Programs were primarily delivered to middle or high school-aged students and tended to have the most impact on outcomes such as improving school engagement, reducing absenteeism, and positive peer relationships, rather than mediating outcomes in academic achievement. Many programs were likely to be limited to a single academic year and frequently cited this as a barrier to success. Mentoring programs with the goal of dropout prevention may be best suited to coordinate support efforts between the individuals (e.g., teachers, school counselors, caregivers) and systems that comprise a youth's ecological system or, engaging students at an earlier age to identify indicators they may be at risk for dropout. The authors also emphasize that effective interventions must consider the full context of a youth's environment and not isolate their focus on the individual student alone.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1156725
A moment of autonomy support brightens adolescents’ mood: Autonomy support, psychological control and adolescent affect in everyday life

- by Jolene van der Kaap-Deeder, Anne Bülow, Joachim Waterschoot, Isabel Truyen, & Loes Keijsers

(Reprinted from Abstract) This experience sampling study examined whether autonomy-supportive and psychologically controlling interactions with parents are intertwined with adolescents’ momentary affect. For 7 days (in 2020), 143 adolescents (Mage = 15.82; SDage = 1.75; 64% girls; 95% European, 1% African, 3% unknown) reported 5 or 6 times a day how they felt and how interactions with parents were experienced. Preregistered dynamic structural equation models on 1439 (including 532 adjacent) parent-adolescent interactions revealed significant within-family associations: Adolescents experienced more positive affect during and following autonomy-supportive interactions, and vice versa. Adolescents felt more negative affect during and 3 hours before psychologically controlling interactions. Between-family associations showed significant linkages between parenting and affect. These findings show that a moment of autonomy support can alter adolescents’ everyday well-being.

Relevance for practitioners: Although focused on outcomes for caregiver-adolescent interactions, findings from this study offer several insights relevant to youth mentoring, specifically, the connection between how we feel, think, and behave, and how this informs our interactions with others. We know that adopting youth-centered approaches is an important component in fostering trusting relationships with youth and supporting their development – particularly during adolescence when there is an increased need for independence. But this study suggests that when we ensure that youth feel their perspectives and needs are acknowledged, and their agency is genuinely honored, youth not only feel better, but this contributes to a reciprocal cycle of positive feelings and future supportive interactions. Infusing autonomy-supportive approaches into mentoring practices (e.g., providing opportunities for youth to make decisions) can also impact other significant domains in youth development. For example, a bevy of previous research on child development has linked outcomes like higher executive functioning, socio-emotional development, and greater educational motivation and effort in children who experienced more autonomy support when compared to peers.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13942

Participatory research approaches to studying social capital in youth mentoring: Not the panacea we hoped for

- by Rebecca Lynn Radlick & Sarah Przedpelska

(Reprinted from Abstract) Participatory approaches have gained broad interest among researchers as a vehicle for allowing participants’ experiences and voices to inform research, beyond simply being a source of data. However, participants in mentoring programs, particularly young people, often are not included in research partnerships in a meaningful way. Additionally, practitioners often struggle to translate research findings into program improvements. This paper examines the experiences of a research team collaborating with two user groups: mentoring practitioners, and youth with migrant and refugee backgrounds.
participating in mentoring programs. With ambitions for meaningful user involvement, the authors’ aim was to develop and test a digital intervention for supporting social capital in mentoring. The paper draws primarily upon participant observation and qualitative data from a focus group and panel discussions. While youth voices did inform and shape the research, the authors also experienced challenges related to youth understanding and engagement. The adult practitioners participated actively but encountered tensions due to their dual roles as co-researchers and mentoring professionals, and resource constraints. Ultimately, a close collaboration enabled the co-creation of adaptations to the authors’ research approaches, allowing meaningful participation for some of the youth, and facilitating program changes. This paper offers lessons for researchers wishing to conduct participatory research in the context of youth mentoring, as well as specific suggestions for those studying social capital. It contributes to the discussion on participatory approaches with multicultural youth, presenting critical reflections on our experiences within this mentoring context.

Relevance for practitioners: This case study offers lessons learned from a partnership between youth mentees, practitioners, and researchers implementing a participatory research approach to develop a digital platform designed to enhance social capital through mentoring. Although the collaborative effort did result in meaningful engagement from mentees whose honest feedback contributed to positive adaptations throughout different phases of the project, most youth were not engaged as much as the research team had hoped. For programs considering use of participatory methods in their program design or evaluation, the authors detail additional challenges to anticipate and plan for (e.g., differing priorities of adults and youth) and describe the valuable benefits of implementing this approach in service of making mentoring programs more relevant for those it impacts most.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107205

Mentors’ supporting approaches of mentees’ cognitive emotion regulation strategies
- by Atefeh Kiadarbandsari

(Reprinted from Abstract) This study assesses the frequency of youth mentees’ cognitive emotion regulation strategies during negative life events and it explores how mentors respond to their mentees’ cognitive emotion regulation strategies during those situations. This research engaged 40 mentees and 35 mentors in New Zealand. Analyses are completed
using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that the mentors reported their mentees' more frequent use of adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies (acceptance, positive reappraisal, positive refocusing, putting things into perspective, and refocus on planning), whereas youth mentees reported slightly different rates of the strategies (positive reappraisal, acceptance, refocus on planning, putting into perspective, and rumination). In response to their mentees, the mentors supported their mentees' cognitive emotion regulation through two over-arching responses: emotional support (e.g., reassurance, use of self-disclosure, normalizing mentees' feelings, redirecting self-blame, showing availability, and validation); and by providing new ways of learning (e.g., teaching positive reappraisal, refocus on planning and problem solving, positive refocus, situation analysis, promoting perspective-taking, as well as emphasizing ownership and taking responsibility). These findings provide insights into youth emotion regulation in mentoring contexts and also offer suggestions for future studies and mentor training.

**Relevance for practitioners:** Hearing about stressful and challenging situations from mentees is a common experience mentors will encounter during the mentoring relationship. These interactions provide meaningful opportunities for mentors to lend both emotional support to mentees while also teaching new skills for managing difficult emotions and responding to challenging life events when they arise. Because the ability to identify and manage our thoughts and feelings are crucial to building personal competencies and can positively impact other domains such as peer relationships, decision-making skills, and overall well-being, both formal and natural mentors need adequate training and support to do this well. Techniques from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) may be especially effective when integrated into training and resources offered to mentors to foster self-regulation skills in youth.

**Available at:** [https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584231163568](https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584231163568)
New Benefits of Mentoring for Mentors & Others Outside the Mentoring Relationship Section of the Measurement Guidance Toolkit

Though we know a lot about the impacts of mentoring on youth, we know far less about its impact on others involved in the mentoring relationship. This newly added section of the Toolkit focuses on measures that assess some of the potential benefits for both mentors (i.e., cultural humility, perspective taking, career identity development, and generativity) and parents/guardians (i.e., parenting stress and family functioning). Find more information about these measures and download tools for use in your program evaluation at the link below.

Available at: https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/resource/measurement-guidance-toolkit/#new-benefits-of-mentoring-for-mentors-and-others-outside-the-mentoring-relationship

New Blogposts

Members of the NMRC’s Research Board share insights on using mentoring to help address the risks of youth loneliness and social isolation, as well as provide an example of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) which partnered high school students with adult mentors to develop their own research. Read more at the links below!

The Challenges and Opportunity to Support Youth Loneliness and Social Isolation Through Community-Based Mentoring – by Westley Fallavollita

Available at: https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/blog/the-challenges-and-opportunity-to-support-youth-loneliness-and-social-isolation-through-community-based-mentoring/

Mentoring in Student-Action Research: A Case Study – by Wendy de los Reyes, Tyler Cooney, & Mariah Kornbluh

Available at: https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/blog/mentoring-in-student-action-research-a-case-study/
New Episodes of *Reflections on Research* Podcast

Join MENTOR’s Senior Director of Research and Quality, Mike Garringer, as he talks with different mentoring researchers about pressing topics and emerging research in youth mentoring. These short, 30-minute conversations provide an easy opportunity to learn more about the latest research in our field and how it applies to your program!

**Season 4 Episode 3** – Dr. Katie Edwards: This episode features Dr. Katie Edwards discussing mentoring in rural spaces, how mentors can support marginalized youth in rural communities, and how mentoring can reduce intimate partner and dating violence and victimization.

**Season 4 Episode 4** – Dr. Tim Cavell: In this episode, Dr. Tim Cavell talks about how mentoring works, why it is important to honor different types of programs, and the different ways mentors have an influence.

*Available at:* [https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/research-tools/reflections-on-research-podcast/](https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/research-tools/reflections-on-research-podcast/)

Youth Mentee Guide: Grow Your Mentor Relationships

- By National Mentoring Resource Center Research Board members Mary Agnes Hamilton, Molly Cory, Grace Gowdy, Lidia Monjars Gaytan, Julia Pryce, Rebecca Stelter, and Associate Board members, Amanda Davis, Joseph Gardella, Maritza Salsido, Savannah Simpson.

This guide offers tips and recommendations from young people for young people on how to make the most of a mentoring relationship. Mentees will learn more about what to expect from a mentor and the important role they play in making this relationship meaningful. The guide also includes a 2-page worksheet that matches can use to discuss their expectations and goals for a positive mentoring relationship. Download the guide at the link below.

Upcoming Events

Office Hours: Infusing Skills Training into Mentoring with Drs. Roger Jarjoura & Heather Taussig

Office Hours are back! Join us for a session co-facilitated by NMRC Research Board members, Roger Jarjoura and Heather Taussig on the topic of skills training and mentoring. With extensive experience in mentoring program development and evaluation, Heather and Roger will share guidance on how to integrate skills training into your program activities or curriculum to support youth development and foster positive outcomes. Whether you’re wondering how to identify the skills that will contribute to your intended program outcomes, how to support mentors in delivering skills training to mentees or, how to enhance activities your program already offers to build youth competencies, Heather and Roger can offer support in answering these questions.

*December 21 from 2:00 - 4:00 PM ET*

Sign up for this session here!

2024 Youth Mentoring Research Symposium

Join us for this in-person gathering at the National Mentoring Symposium in Washington, DC, sponsored by the National Mentoring Resource Center. This gathering unites new and experienced researchers in mentoring, youth development, education, and health fields to discuss the research on key topics impacting public policy and the mentoring movement.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Morning Plenary Keynote and Panel Discussion: Credible messenger and lived experience mentoring.
- Early Career Presentations: Learn more about the recent work of several members of the NMRC Associate Research Board.
- Afternoon Workshops: Choose from a practitioner or researcher track covering topics such as growing social capital, innovative program evaluation, youth voice and program design, interrupting negative peer influences, and expanding evaluation capacity in juvenile justice programs.

**DETAILS**

- **Date:** January 24, 2024 at 9:00am – 3:45pm ET
- **Location:** The Westin Washington, DC Downtown (formerly the Renaissance)
- **Registration:** [Register for the Symposium](#)
- **Questions:** Please contact Dr. Kelly Stewart

See the full agenda below for more information. Don’t miss this opportunity to be part of advancing mentoring research and practice!
AGENDA FOR 2024 NMRC RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

9:00 – 9:30  Welcome and Introductions – David DuBois (UIC, Research Board Chair) and Mike Garringer (MENTOR)

9:30 – 10:30 Opening Plenary: Credible Messengers and Lived Experience Mentors: Opportunities and Challenges

Overview of Research on Credible Messenger and Lived Experience Mentoring - David DuBois

Panel discussion: Implementation of Credible Messenger Programs – Facilitated by Gabe Kuperminc (Research Board Co-Chair)

• Panel consisting of representatives from CM3 and credible messenger programs

10:30 – 10:45 Break

10:45 – 11:30 Presentations from Early Career Research Board Members – Brief presentations on emerging new research by members of the NMRC Associate Board

• Lidia Monjaras Gaytan
• Savannah Simpson
• Molly Cory

11:30 – 1:00 Lunch (attendees on their own)

1:00 – 3:45 Practitioner and Researcher Tracks

Practitioner Track – This track is intended for mentoring program staff and volunteers who are interested in learning about innovative practices and how to apply research in key areas to their work. Attendees will choose one session to attend from 1:00-2:15 and one session from 2:30-3:45 from those listed below.

Researcher Track – This track is designed for researchers and evaluators to discuss the science of studying mentoring programs and relationships, including new ideas in methodology and data collection and analysis. Attendees will attend each of the “mini” presentations listed below. These planned conversations will be facilitated by NMRC Research Board members and will center on content to advance scholarship in the mentoring field.
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<td>Assessing Hope via Hope Theory: A Means of Strengthening Mentoring Programs - Crystal Aschenbrenner</td>
<td>Investigating the Potential Role of Mentoring in Interrupting and Mitigating the Influence of Deviant Peers on Delinquent Behavior - Tim Cavell and Sam McQuillin</td>
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<td>Online Mentoring of Sexual and Gender Minority Youth: Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Opportunities - Katie Edwards</td>
<td>Natural Language Processing: An Illustration of its Application in Mentoring Research - Gizem Erdem</td>
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<td>Innovative and Practical Strategies for Program Evaluation - Michael Karcher</td>
<td>Group Discussion of Promising New Directions for Mentoring Research - Facilitators: Tim Cavell and Renee Spencer</td>
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