GROUP MENTORING

National Mentoring Resource Center Model Review

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Summary

January 2021

This review addresses four topics related to group mentoring for children and adolescents: (1) its documented effectiveness; (2) the extent to which effectiveness depends on characteristics of mentors, mentees, or program practices; (3) intervening processes likely to link group mentoring to youth outcomes; and (4) the success of efforts to reach and engage targeted youth, achieve high-quality implementation, and adopt and sustain programs over time. This update of a review completed nearly five years ago finds a substantial increase in the number of research studies examining group mentoring and adds to a growing body of evidence supporting at least the short-term effectiveness of formal group mentoring programs. In addition, there are pockets of research that address conditional factors, intervening processes, and factors related to implementation. Overall, the evidence to date supports the following conclusions:

- Group mentoring programs can produce an array of positive outcomes for youth (behavioral, emotional, academic, etc.) and seem to be effective across a wide range of youth characteristics (ages, ethnicities, etc.) and diverse program models.

- Additional social and relational processes, such as group cohesion, belonging, and a strong group identity, may also contribute to the outcomes youth experience from group mentoring.

- Group mentoring programs offer a context for activities that develop mentee skills, change mentee attitudes, and offer positive peer interactions; and these processes may lead to behavioral outcomes for participants.

Appended to this review are insights and recommendations for practice informed by the findings of the review.

Introduction

Group activities are ubiquitous in the lives of children and youth. The basic ingredients for group mentoring can be found in classrooms, community centers, parks—wherever multiple youth interact over a period of time with one or more group leaders (adults or older peers) for educational or recreational purposes. Informal group mentoring has been documented in youth organizations, such as after-school centers.[1] However, systematic efforts may be needed to foster mentoring in such settings with greater regularity.[2] Formal programs that match mentors with groups of youth are very popular, with estimates that 35 percent of formal youth mentoring programs use a group format and an additional 12 percent use a combination of one-to-one and group mentoring.[3]

This review of group mentoring addresses four questions, as follows:

1. What are the demonstrated effects of group mentoring on the development of children and adolescents?

2. To what extent are the benefits of group mentoring likely to depend on characteristics and backgrounds of the youth and/or their mentor(s) or program practices?

3. What intervening processes are likely to be involved in linking group mentoring to youth outcomes?

4. How successful have efforts to provide group mentoring to young persons been in terms of reaching and engaging targeted groups of youth, achieving high-quality implementation, and being adopted and maintained by host organizations and settings over time? What factors predict better reach, implementation, and adoption/sustainability?

For purposes of this review, group mentoring refers to a broad array of "natural" or programmatic contexts in which intentional mentoring activity takes place involving one or more mentors and at least two mentees (see What is Mentoring for definitions of mentoring activity and programs). The activity must involve group process (that is, interactions among group members). Group mentoring is thus differentiated from other types of group activities that do not incorporate significant opportunities for meaningful, two-way interactions between the mentors and mentees or among the mentees. As noted above, the contexts in which group mentoring can take place include formal programs designed for this purpose and more informally in a variety of settings where youth come together in groups, such as sports teams or after-school programs, so long as there is significant consistency in attendance to likely engender a sense of "membership."

A systematic literature search uncovered more than 120 articles, book chapters, and evaluation reports that examined group mentoring for youth and fell within the scope of this review. This is nearly triple the number found just five years ago. These publications described 56 distinct formal mentoring programs and 7 youth programs that intentionally incorporated mentoring into their programming while retaining their primary focus (e.g., on sports, arts, etc.).

Table 1 provides summary information about a diverse selection of programs, reflecting the tremendous creativity in how group mentoring programs are designed and delivered. Most programs (40) were classified as *Conventional* programs with four variations:

- "One-to-Many" programs match a single mentor with a group of (typically 3–10) youth.

- "Multi-mentor" programs match two or three mentors with a group (typically 5–20) youth.

- "Team" programs select two to three mentors, each with a specific mentoring role and match them with a group (typically 5–20) youth.

- "Unmatched" programs group a small number of mentors together with a larger number of youth; membership and mentor-mentee matches are somewhat fluid.

A smaller number of programs (8) were classified as *Hybrid*, with two predominant variations:

- "Blended" programs integrate one-to-one and group mentoring by creating groups of one-to-one matches.

- "Compound" programs include both one-to-one mentoring and separate group activities (group mentors are not necessarily the same as one-to-one mentors).

In addition to formal group mentoring programs, seven programs were identified that did not fit neatly into the above categories. These programs were labeled *Incorporated* group mentoring because mentoring was intentionally built in, while retaining a primary focus on youth activities such as athletic teams and arts. Such intentionality was typically marked by specific training of group leaders around youth development and mentoring strategies and explicit scheduling of program time devoted to mentoring activity. This emerging typology may prove useful in differentiating the approaches that are most effective across varied contexts and populations. It is interesting to see the growing interest in incorporating mentoring explicitly into youth programs. However, it is important to acknowledge that the diversity of programs made drawing the boundaries between categories somewhat fuzzy. For example, one sports-based program was deemed a *Conventional* program, as mentoring was central to its activity, whereas an initiative to train youth sports coaches in youth development and mentoring skills was classified as *Incorporated* group mentoring. Further, it was sometimes difficult to discern the boundaries of what counted as group mentoring. For example, an intervention that followed a highly interactive, manualized curriculum was not considered group mentoring because it did not include an intentional component that emphasized group process. In contrast, a curriculum-driven program that included intentional time and space for informal group interaction was considered group mentoring.

Overall, the literature reflects diverse efforts to capitalize on the positive potential of peer interactions and integrate adult mentor and peer processes. Group mentoring programs encourage youth to discuss personal challenges together, engage in project-based learning, normalize traumatic experiences, use role plays to practice new skills, and employ other creative engagement practices. Programs target youth varying in exposure to risk, ethnic/cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and age (limited to elementary through high school for this review). Programs vary in group size (from 3 to more than 20 youth), number of mentors (1 to 10), and mentor-to-mentee ratios (from one-to-one to one-to-twenty). Question 1 focused on quantitative studies with designs that allow reasonably strong causal inferences (i.e., comparison groups) about effectiveness. There were 29 programs evaluated with such studies, twice the number from the original review. For *Incorporated* group mentoring, the focus was on examining change in outcomes over time with statistical control for youth characteristics that may influence outcomes; only one such study included findings relevant to Question 1. Questions 2-4 drew from the full array of identified studies. Each section includes a brief background to orient the reader to major findings from the mentoring field and where appropriate, from related areas (e.g., group therapy).

Group mentoring programs encourage youth to **discuss personal challenges together**, engage in **project-based learning**, normalize traumatic experiences, use role plays to **practice new skills**, and employ other **creative engagement practices**.

1. What Are the Demonstrated Effects of Group Mentoring on the Development of Children and Adolescents?

BACKGROUND

Diverse fields, including clinical and school psychology,[4, 5, 6, 7] education,[8] and social work[9] commonly employ group interventions for children and adolescents. Meta-analyses have concluded that group therapies, particularly those using cognitive-behavioral techniques, are effective for treating youths' substance abuse, aggression, and anxiety disorders,[3, 4, 5, 6] with comparable, if not superior, effects to those of individual therapies.

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A meta-analysis[10] found no difference in effectiveness for mentoring programs that used a group compared to a one-to-one format. Direct comparisons of group and one-to-one approaches of the same program are rare, but one study compared a group versus a one-to-one version of an online science, technology, and mathematics (STEM) mentoring program and found the group version to be more effective across multiple indicators, including expanded social networks.[11]

Another study, compared outcomes for dyads that were and were not embedded in groups and found similar improvements across a range of youth outcomes for both versions of the program; however, mirroring the findings for the STEM program, youth in dyads that were embedded in groups reported more social connections with other mentees and mentors.[12]

Program evaluations examined varied outcomes, including healthy attitudes, skills, behavior, emotional well-being, and academic achievement, with 24 of 29 programs reporting significant positive effects on at least one youth outcome. It should be noted, however, that not all of these studies could be considered "gold standard" tests of program effectiveness, due to a lack of random assignment, relatively small sample sizes, and other study limitations. Effectiveness of *Conventional* and *Hybrid* group mentoring programs is discussed, along with the limited evidence of effectiveness for *Incorporated* group programs.

Conventional Group Mentoring Programs

Nearly all of the conventional programs were designed to serve youth exposed to behavioral (e.g., conduct problems) or academic risk, marginalization (e.g., poverty), disability, or health concerns (e.g., chronic illness). Some programs focused on building strengths for specific populations (e.g., girls' engagement in STEM).

Project Arrive[13, 14, 15] is an example of a multi-mentor program that was developed to facilitate adaptation to high school for youth identified as being at high risk of school dropout and juvenile justice system involvement (see callout box). The outcome evaluation compared 114 program participants to 71 comparison students with similar risk profiles. Outcome analyses showed strong results favoring program participants on "external" resilience resources at the end of the program, including teacher and peer support, school belonging, meaningful involvement in school and at home, and engagement with prosocial peers (one external resource, home support, failed to show a significant difference between participants and comparisons). In contrast, program participants showed improvements on only one "internal" resilience asset — problem-solving skills — relative to comparisons, and there were no significant differences for empathy, self-efficacy, or self-awareness. With regard to academics, program participants had better attendance than comparisons through ninth grade, and earned significantly more credits toward graduation through tenth grade. Although grade point averages remained relatively low both for participants and comparisons, the average participant was on track to graduate by the end of tenth grade, while the average comparison student had fallen nearly half a semester behind.

Whereas programs like Project Arrive emphasized a broad perspective aligned with theories of youth development and resilience, other programs more narrowly targeted specific youth populations or outcomes. For example, several programs focused on youth who were at risk for involvement with or already involved in the juvenile justice system. One example is Reading for Life, a juvenile diversion program for nonviolent offenders, ages 11–18. In a randomized study, 408 youth assigned to either Reading for Life or a control condition involving minimally supervised community service, program youth showed substantial reductions in subsequent arrests two years after the intervention.[16] Similarly, Arches, a program for justice-involved youth, employed mentors who shared similar backgrounds with the youth, and found significant reductions in recidivism two years later.[17] However, other programs, including the Buddy System, EQUIP, and Girls Circle, showed a mix of

positive, null, and even negative effects that appeared to depend on characteristics of the youth, their program engagement, the mentors, and program design characteristics (described in more detail under Question 2 in this review).[18, 19, 20]

Many *Conventional* programs targeted specific behavioral risk factors, such as health and nutrition,[21, 22] disabilities,[23] academics,[24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29] and emotional or behavioral risk.[27, 30] In most cases, evaluations have found effects favoring program youth. Thus, programs such as Soccer for Success that sought to promote healthy behavior found that program youth outperformed comparisons in measures of physical activity and healthy nutrition.[22] Eye to Eye, a program for elementary and middle school youth with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (LD/ADHD) employed "near peers," high school or college students who also had LD/ADHD. Participants showed improvements in self-esteem, interpersonal relations, and symptoms of depression but not anxiety, compared to non-mentored comparison youth.[23]

Hybrid Group Mentoring Programs

Hybrid programs are often designed to capitalize on the combined potential benefits of positive peer interactions and one-to-one relationships with a mentor. Similar to conventional programs, these programs often focus on youth identified with behavioral risk or seek to meet the needs of unique populations. In part because relatively few hybrid programs have been evaluated with rigorous designs, the evidence supporting their effectiveness is less clear. Indeed, just four of the six hybrid programs considered in this section have shown evidence of overall effectiveness.

> *Hybrid* **programs** are often designed to capitalize on the combined potential benefits of **positive peer interactions** and **one-to-one relationships with a mentor**.

Campus Connections (previously known as Campus Corps) blends one-to-one and group mentoring in an "intentional multilevel mentoring community."[31] Four mentor-mentee pairs made up of youth (ages 11–18) with a history of juvenile offending matched with college student mentors, are grouped within a "mentor family," which, in turn, is nested within a larger mentoring community supervised by experienced mentors and graduate students. Compared to youth with similar risk profiles, program youth reported less problem behavior at the end of the program, and improved attitudes regarding acceptance of problem behavior and autonomy from marijuana use, although not on refusal skills or autonomy from substance use.[30]

Another "blended" program, the Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP), offers a structured group component combined with one-to-one mentoring as a strategy for promoting social, academic, and behavioral competencies among early adolescent girls (see callout box). One evaluation that compared 79 program participants with 47 non-mentored girls found that global self-esteem declined for comparison girls but not for participants. Differences were not found for academic self-esteem or assertiveness.[32] A more recent randomized trial was hindered by difficulties in implementing the planned evaluation, and failed to find overall effects although there were positive effects on several outcomes related to greater participation.[33]

In contrast to Campus Connections and YWLP, most of the hybrid programs identified in this review employed a compound model in which group mentoring activities occurred separately from one-to-one mentoring. Whereas one such program, Metodología TUTAL, failed to find overall effects on academic outcomes for middle and high school youth,[34] the other programs each reported evidence of effectiveness in academic and health-related outcomes.[35, 36] The most researched in this group is a family of programs based on the My Life model, which works to promote self-determination and healthy transitions to adulthood among foster-care-system-involved youth.[37, 38] One of those programs, Take Charge, focused on the transition from high school to adult life, and was evaluated in three randomized studies. In the first study of 69 youth, program participants reported greater self-determination, self-rated goals and accomplishments, quality of life, use of transition services, and independent living activities. Rates of high school graduation, employment, and stable living arrangements did not reach statistical significance due to the small sample size.[37] A second study of 123 youth found improvements for program participants relative to controls in self-determination, education planning, school performance, and symptoms of anxiety and depression.[39] The third study, a two-year follow-up using a combined sample from the two earlier studies found evidence of modest long-term effects on education, housing, and criminal justice outcomes, although few findings reached conventional levels of statistical significance.[33] Another program based on the My Life model, Better Futures, targeted youth with mental health challenges; an experimental study of 36 program youth and 31 controls, showed positive effects on preparation for and participation in postsecondary education, school attitudes, family and community self-efficacy, self-determination, transition planning, mental health, and hope for the future.[38]

Group Mentoring Incorporated into Other Youth Programs

Only one study of programs that incorporated mentoring into other youth programs was found that offers some evidence of effectiveness of this approach.[40] That study compared (a) three sport programs that intentionally taught life skills, (b) six non-sport programs that intentionally taught life skills, and (c) seventeen sport programs in which life skills were not intentionally taught. The sport programs that intentionally taught life skills were judged both by youth self-reports and observer ratings to have higher program quality than other programs. Moreover, youth in those programs perceived greater gains in indices of positive youth development, after controlling effects of gender, grade level, years of program involvement, and ethnicity.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is evidence that group mentoring programs can be effective in fostering at least short-term improvements in a broad range of youth outcomes, including those in the behavioral, academic, emotional, and attitudinal/motivational domains.

2. Whereas a small number of studies have documented positive effects of group mentoring programs one or more years after youths' participation, the evidence supporting potential longer-term effects of group mentoring programs remains limited.

3. Evidence suggests that programs with diverse designs, including conventional and hybrid, can be effective; however, there is inadequate evidence to gauge the potential effects of informal forms of group mentoring (e.g., incorporated programs).

2. What Factors Condition or Influence the Effectiveness of Group Mentoring?

BACKGROUND

Differences in characteristics and backgrounds of participating youth and mentors as well as those relating to program design and practices and the setting or context in which group mentoring occurs may be important sources of variability in the effectiveness of group mentoring programs. It is important to note that the context, structure, and goals of group mentoring programs likely differ in significant ways from other types of mentoring programs.[41] Whereas research on one-to-one mentoring programs has identified a range of program practices that have apparent implications for effectiveness,[11] such findings may not generalize to group mentoring programs. Group mentoring programs are often based in schools or human service settings and are often constrained by relatively brief duration as well as shorter and less frequent meeting times. The logistical challenges of bringing together multiple people over a sustained period of time may result in most programs having established meeting schedules and locations. While potentially restricting spontaneity in mentor and mentee interactions, such regularity also may offer a welcome sense of consistency and predictability.[68] Indeed, the esprit de corps derived from having the same mentor(s) meeting consistently with the same group of youth may be one of the principal defining features of group mentoring.

More generally, differences in the formality of group mentoring structure that potentially have implications for effectiveness include the frequency and intensity of group meetings, inclusion of one-to-one activities (either as a formal component as in hybrid programs or via informal check-ins between mentors and individual group members), the overall size of the group or the ratio of mentors to mentees, duration of the program, the levels and types of training and support provided to mentors, and the degree to which group sessions are guided by a sequenced and structured curriculum. With regard to the latter, many programs incorporate session-by-session themes and activities and some include opportunities for group members to choose topics. Incorporation of evidence-based and theoretically grounded practices also could help optimize results. Examples include the use of cognitive-behavioral principles from the therapy literature[29] and training in development of a "growth mindset" from the field of education.[42] Other program practices that could contribute to effectiveness include use of creative activities (e.g., journaling, arts projects)[16, 23] and activities to increase cultural awareness and pride (e.g., rites of passage).[43]

The role of an effective group mentor is a balancing act: experience and maturity vs. similarity (e.g., in age, life-circumstances, culture/ethnicity); an ability to combine a strong stance of leadership and authority with an engaging and fun manner that demonstrates curiosity and interest in young people's lives.[44, 45, 46, 47, 48] This review uncovered examples of effective programs that employ "near-peer" mentors and others in which mentors are adults, often with extensive experience working with youth. To the extent that participating youth are at risk for difficulties in school or social-emotional development (as often appears to be the case), some experience in working with such youth could be important in promoting youth outcomes.[49] Likewise, to the extent program goals call for specific skills or life experience, effectiveness may be contingent on mentors having significant knowledge about the subject matter.[17, 48, 49] Thus, it may be valuable to engage mentors with science and

technology backgrounds in a program designed to increase youths' STEM engagement, or mentors with a history of criminal justice involvement as "credible messengers" in a program for juvenile justice involved youth.

Team mentoring could potentially be used to address the diverse skill sets needed for effective group mentoring. For example, a mentor who shares a similar background with mentees in the group but lacks the kind of expertise needed to manage complex group dynamics might benefit from partnering with a co-mentor who does have such expertise. Programs, such as TeamWorks[50] and Pyramid Mentoring,[51] address this challenge by intentionally matching together a team of mentors for each group, each bringing complementary skills, and playing a specific role. The field is rife with innovative and promising ideas about program practices; however, research is only beginning to tackle questions about how best to implement group mentoring programs.

Program rationales often emphasize advantages of the group setting for particular populations. For example, studies have suggested that the interpersonal emphasis of group mentoring mirrors culturally rooted preferences for interdependence among African-Americans and other youth of color, and may be particularly valuable in addressing the needs of girls.[2, 53, 52] These ideas are rarely tested systematically, however. Programs examined in this review served elementary through high school ages, included socioeconomically and ethnically diverse youth, and youth exposed to varying levels of risk. The favorable effects found in most studies suggest that group mentoring can be effective across a wide range of mentee characteristics.

RESEARCH
Characteristics of mentees: Gender, cultural or ethnic background, and social class are often cited in the rationales for group mentoring programs. One study that addressed such questions, a systematic review of mentoring interventions to promote adolescent girls' and young women's sexual health, found that group-based models showed more promise than traditional one-to-one mentoring approaches, including positive impacts on knowledge and behavior related to reproductive health, academic achievement, financial behavior, social networks, and experiencing violence.[53] Other evidence regarding the role of gender, culture/ethnicity, and social class is mixed and sometimes appears contradictory. For example, one small-sample study of a computer-mediated group program for teens with disabilities reported better attendance for girls than boys.[54] On the other hand, the evaluation of Reading for Life[16] found that the program may be more effective for boys than girls. An evaluation of the YWLP found little evidence that program effects differed depending on youth SES and ethnicity, although in one isolated finding the overall benefits of program participation for global self-esteem did not hold true for girls from low-income families.[31] In the Youth Development Program, immigrant (but not US-born) participants reported increases in school engagement relative to comparison youth.[55] It may be most fruitful to consider not only whether a group format is best suited to meeting the needs of specific youth populations, but also more broadly the extent to which a group format aligns with characteristics and preferences of potential mentors and with the goals of the program.

In some programs youth identified as having greater risk for negative outcomes appeared to benefit more than their peers exposed to lower risk. For example, one study of Peer Group Connection, a peer mentoring program designed to facilitate the transition from middle to high school, found that males whose characteristics at the start of the program in ninth grade indicated a low likelihood of graduating from high school were more likely than others to actually graduate four years later.[24] In the Reading for Life evaluation, youth from families with relatively low income showed lower than expected rates of recidivism compared to higher income peers.[16] A long-term follow-up study of the My Life model for youth in foster care found reduced risk of criminal justice involvement for youth at high risk, but also found that youth with low or moderate risk were more likely to achieve intermediate outcomes related to self-determination and positive transitions to adulthood.[36] A mixed picture also emerges when considering risk for juvenile or adult criminal justice involvement. The Buddy System, a group program dating to the 1970s designed to prevent antisocial behavior, found that whereas youth with prior arrests were less likely to be rearrested a year after participating in the program, youth with no prior arrests were more likely to be rearrested; these findings were replicated in a 35-year follow-up study (we will return to consideration of "peer contagion" effects in the next section).[20] As noted previously, Arches,[17] EQUIP,[19] and Reading for Life,[16] three programs which worked with justice-involved youth each showed positive impacts on recidivism, pointing to potential positive impacts of group mentoring for youth facing serious difficulties. However, such a conclusion is tempered by lack of positive impacts for Girls Circle,[18] a program for incarcerated girls.

A series of studies of YWLP have examined whether psychosocial factors in the lives of mentees influence program effectiveness. One study found that youth who reported positive relationships with their mothers, characterized by trust and positive communication, were more likely than others to also report positive relationships with their mentors.[56] Interestingly, youth who reported feelings of alienation from their mothers also tended to report positive relationship quality with their mentors, suggesting that mentoring relationships can help compensate for relationship difficulties in young people's lives. Peer self-esteem, another psychosocial factor examined, was unrelated to mentor relationship quality.

Mentor characteristics: Four studies of the YWLP and one study of Campus Connections investigated the role of mentor characteristics in program effectiveness. In one study of YWLP, the researchers examined qualities of mentors that contributed to mentees' satisfaction with the mentor-mentee relationship and with mentees perceptions of their own improvement over the course of participation.[57] Mentees perceived greater gains in interpersonal competence when their mentors reported lower levels of anxiety; other aspects of mentee socioemotional development were unrelated to mentor qualities, including mentors' self-concept, depression, and ethnocultural empathy. Mentees' relationship satisfaction was higher when mentors reported positive relationships with their own mothers, but unexpectedly, also when mentors reported lower levels of decision-making autonomy.[58] The latter finding, might best be understood in light of another study which found that the college women who sign up to become mentors tend to score higher than their peers on decision-making autonomy, cultural sensitivity, and mental health.[59] Mentors with strong feelings

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of autonomy in decision-making may have difficulty truly collaborating with their mentees. Also, it is notable that the negative association of mentor autonomy and positive association of ethnocultural empathy with mentee outcomes were stronger for cross-ethnic matches than matches in which both the mentor and mentee were of the same race or ethnicity. In a study focused on ethnocultural empathy and ethnic identity, mentee's ethnic identity exploration was associated with higher levels of mentor ethnocultural empathy and ethnic identity exploration, regardless of the mentor's ethnic group. Finally, a study of Campus Connections investigated mentor personality characteristics and trajectories of mentoring self-efficacy over the course of the program.[60] Mentors who reported increasing self-efficacy had more positive relationships with their mentees as perceived both by mentors and mentees compared to mentors whose self-efficacy declined. Mentors who worked with younger mentees, and who were high in extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness tended to report increasing self-efficacy, whereas mentors high in emotionality were more likely to report decreasing efficacy. Notably, mentee risk was unrelated to mentor efficacy.

Program characteristics: The potential implications of different program practices for youth outcomes are only beginning to receive systematic study. Yet available research offers some insight into potentially important practices. In the Project Arrive evaluation, smaller group size was related to more positive youth perceptions of group climate and mentor relationship quality.[14] Smaller mentor to mentee ratios were also associated with increases in youths' school grades.[61] Studies of YWLP have found that supportive relationships among mentors were predictive of improvements in participants' self-esteem[62] and that participants' self-reported social adjustment was stronger when groups were led by co-facilitators (vs. a single facilitator). In another study of YWLP, program facilitators (i.e., program staff responsible for coordinating group activities) with experience with at-risk youth and having two facilitators contributed to improvements in mentees' social adjustment.[50] Finally, several studies show that greater youth attendance and participation (i.e., "dosage") was associated with beneficial outcomes, pointing to the importance of maintaining youth engagement throughout the program.[63, 52]

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is evidence that group mentoring is effective across a wide range of mentee characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, and risk exposure, with isolated findings suggesting that group mentoring is particularly effective for youth exposed to higher risk.

2. There is some evidence that the socioemotional skills and relationship histories that mentors and mentees bring to the mentoring group can influence program effectiveness.

3. Although the research on program practices is limited, two areas that show promise for enhancing effectiveness involve limiting group size (or mentor-to-mentee ratio) and program practices that foster peer support among mentors (e.g., opportunities for mentors of different groups to interact or through co-mentorship within groups).

3. What Intervening Processes Are Most Important in Linking Group Mentoring to Youth Outcomes?

BACKGROUND

Similar to other mentoring approaches, the interpersonal relationships formed between mentors and mentees have been posited to be the primary link between group mentoring and youth outcomes.[11] Whereas individual youth might experience less closeness in their relationships with mentors,[64] groups also theoretically may foster other developmental and relational processes that enhance important youth outcomes, including relationships with peers and, in some programs, multiple mentors. At least two types of intervening processes could contribute to positive outcomes for youth in group mentoring: (1) group social-relational processes, and (2) social-cognitive skills and attitudes learned through intentional group-based activities and discussions. Further, within group mentoring, there are three pathways of social-relational processes which can support youth outcomes: youth-mentor relationships, youth-youth relationships, and mentor-mentor relationships.[32, 65, 66] As will be discussed later, these processes may contribute uniquely to youth outcomes in different domains,[63, 67, 67] and may also serve to foster or impede mentor-mentee relationship development for combined group and one-to-one programs.[68] The increased number of adults and peers with whom participants have an opportunity to develop relationships within group programs may also increase the potential for strengthened social networks as a benefit of group programs.[28, 55] The presence of peers is a unique feature of group (as compared to one-to-one) mentoring, which offers both opportunities and challenges in terms of the promotion of particular group processes and outcomes.

Young people face the challenge of simultaneously establishing their **independence from parents** and **building positive peer networks**[72]. Group mentoring programs may offer a "one-stop shop" for addressing both sides of that challenge, as **youth form relationships with nonparental adults** who can foster and mediate positive peer interactions.[51]

Research on interventions for problem behaviors has raised concerns about the potential for "contagion" of negative behaviors when high-risk youth are grouped for preventive or therapeutic purposes.[69] A meta-analysis of group-based social-skills training with antisocial youth found little evidence of such effects, but did note that positive effects were stronger when groups included a mix of prosocial and antisocial youth.[70] Thus, it may be that avoiding the formation of groups made up predominantly of youth who share a high risk for behavioral problems is a more critical consideration than whether to implement group interventions at all. In addition, providing mentors and group facilitators with training that can help them manage behavior within the group and develop effective ways to reconnect groups after conflict may help prevent or minimize negative processes.[17, 63, 71]

Young people face the challenge of simultaneously establishing their independence from parents and building positive peer networks.[72] Group mentoring programs may offer a "one-stop shop" for addressing both sides of that challenge, as youth form relationships with nonparental adults who can foster and mediate positive peer interactions.[51] Accordingly, a sense of connection with mentor(s), group cohesion, and peer-based mutual help, may be particularly important processes.[68]

For example, as has been demonstrated in research on mutual help groups for adults with mental illness,[73] the opportunity to both offer and receive help from peers can help foster positive outcomes. The role of a curriculum is one area that is somewhat unique to group mentoring as compared to one-to-one mentoring. Whereas strict adherence to a curriculum can be a barrier to relational development if it prevents group members from discussion of topics that are meaningful to them, curriculum may be particularly useful early on in programs as a means of broaching topics and providing a context for discussions that serve as a foundation for further group and relational development.[63, 70] Curriculum can also provide opportunities both for skill development and relational growth.[67, 74] Further, other researchers have found that close mentoring relationships that also engaged in goal-setting activities and in which mentors provided constructive feedback had the greatest impact on mentees' outcomes,[75] suggesting that curriculum in group programs that provide opportunities for such interactions could be useful.

Other social processes that have been proposed as intervening processes in group mentoring include a sense of belonging and connection,[76, 77] provision of a "safe space" that fosters open dialog,[2, 76, 46, 78] establishment of a network of different relationships with peers and adults,[45, 70, 79, 80] a structure that enables youth to take increasing responsibility for planning and managing group activities over time,[81] and a setting that establishes prosocial behavioral norms.[82] For groups in which there are multiple mentors and mentees, ensuring that positive connections are being made across the multiple youth and adults in groups may also be important.[81] Multiple studies have identified the importance of trust-building within groups, and[73, 79, 83] related to this, the formation of a group identity has also been suggested as an intervening process.[45, 73, 79]

Positive attitudes and social-cognitive skills gained through participation may also be important to the effectiveness of group mentoring. Growth in such skills and attitudes are important outcomes in their own right, but can also be considered as intervening factors that have the potential to facilitate behavioral or other outcomes. For example, increases in motivation and academic skills can lead to academic attainment,[37] and increased confidence in maintaining a healthy diet and physical activity can lead to improvements in health behaviors.[77] Unfortunately, very little research within the group mentoring literature has addressed these processes.

RESEARCH
Group social-relational processes: Group mentoring programs provide a unique opportunity to study the group processes that may support and/or impede the development of mentoring relationships and youth outcomes. Group mentoring also has potential to foster a sense of connectedness in youth, to both individuals and a collective, which itself has been associated with positive youth outcomes.[84] As noted earlier, group mentoring programs take different forms, and different social-relational processes may be at play in different types of programs. Below we present evidence from studies of different types of group mentoring programs, which can help us understand the processes that support positive experiences and youth outcomes across program models.

Conventional group format

A longitudinal study of Project Arrive found a number of associations between social-relational processes in the program and youth outcomes. Positive relationships with mentors were associated with increases in GPA and credits earned post-program as well as one year later.

Perceptions of positive group climate were associated with increased GPA a year after the program ended as well.[14] Mentees' perceptions of group climate were positively associated with both self-efficacy and school-belonging at the end of the program, and their perceptions of their mentoring relationships were associated with school-belonging.[63] Smaller mentor-mentee ratios and completion of mentor training were both associated with mentee GPA. Qualitative data supported the importance of these factors. For example, mentors felt that training helped them effectively implement groups and that the formation of a positive climate was more difficult in larger groups. Both mentors and mentees noted positive aspects of having multiple mentors with different backgrounds in the groups. Whereas relational and instrumental strategies are sometimes seen as competing approaches in mentoring, in Project Arrive groups, the use of these strategies co-occurred. Groups with high levels of relational interactions also had high levels of instrumental interactions, the latter of which were associated with higher mentor-perceived group cohesion.[63] The relational processes, with both the mentors and peers, were noted as being particularly important for developing a sense of belonging.[14] There is also some emerging evidence from the Project Arrive evaluation that program related increases in problem-solving skills and school connectedness can help explain improvements in academic outcomes,[85] and that program participation may empower youth to increase their civic engagement.[86]

Both qualitative and quantitative studies of Go Girls![77, 87] have similarly suggested that a sense of group belonging is critical to the effectiveness of group mentoring. However, while the evaluations of Go Girls! considered the development of a sense of group belonging as a proximal outcome, the quantitative evaluation did not examine its role in explaining other youth outcomes.

Further supporting the role of social and relational processes and connections within mentoring groups is an evaluation of the Room to Read's Girls Education Program, which incorporates life skills training and mentoring to increase secondary school completion and foster life skills among early adolescent girls in India.[88] A qualitative study embedded within the experimental evaluation found that the program helped girls form closer relationships with peers in school, which in turn, contributed to increased valuing of school. The relationships formed within the program fostered greater social engagement and support for program participants. Further, the program seems to empower girls to advocate for themselves, itself a relational skill.

Hybrid format

The variety of different types of relationships available, and opportunities for participating in both one-to-one and group interactions, in hybrid programs may offer unique advantages for fostering a range of social processes. Two hybrid programs have been studied extensively using both quantitative and qualitative methods, and have yielded rich findings that inform understanding about processes that may influence youth outcomes.

Several studies of the YWLP have examined the social processes that occur within the mentoring group and the association of those processes to relational development and youth outcomes. Of particular interest, researchers found no differences between mentoring groups in mentees' end-of-program satisfaction with their groups. There were differences between mentoring groups, however, in mentees' end-of-program satisfaction with their one-to-one mentoring relationships.

This may appear counterintuitive, but analysis of observations of the groups that were done over the course of the program helped shed light on why this might be. Observations revealed that mentees who expressed high satisfaction with their one-to-one relationship tended to belong to groups characterized by high levels of social processes such as caretaking and trust building throughout the year.[71] This suggests that there is an interaction between what happens in the mentoring groups and mentees' experiences of their mentoring relationships; specifically, it appears that positive group processes might support one-to-one relational development. A study using social network methodology revealed that mentors who other group members reported to be more connected to multiple mentees within their groups, also self-reported stronger relationships with their own mentees. Similarly, mentees who others reported as reaching out more to multiple group members self-reported stronger one-to-one relationships with their mentors.[79] Interviews with mentors and mentees supported the interaction between group- and dyadic-level social processes, revealing that participants felt that the group influenced the development of the mentoring relationships in three major ways. First, the group meetings provided stability to the relationships, ensuring that the pairs saw each other weekly even when their schedules were busy. Second, the combination of a structured curriculum with one-to-one time meant that the pairs could get to know each other through group activities, and then use one-to-one time to have deeper conversations about topics raised in the groups. This seemed to be particularly useful for mentors and mentees who were shy or less comfortable with initiating one-to-one interactions. However, if the curriculum was adhered to too rigidly, it could inhibit relational development by cutting off deeper discussions. Third, the group provided a social network in which mentors could seek support from each other if they had challenges in their relationships with their mentees. The group also offered a learning opportunity: mentors and mentees could observe each other and other pairs in the group to help them reflect on their own relationships.[68] Mentees reported that the group component was particularly helpful for developing relational skills, and that the group and the one-to-one relationships were equally influential in fostering self-understanding. Mentees said that mentors had the most influence on academics, mirroring results from Project Arrive.[14] The mentors and curriculum both were seen as promoting self-regulation.[65]

A number of studies of Campus Connections have provided additional insight into the social-relational processes that may support positive experiences and outcomes in group mentoring. Similar to YWLP, mentees self-reported growth in areas of relational skills, sense of self (particularly confidence and future plans), and academics, and noted that the group and one-to-one mentoring component contributed to these outcomes in different ways, but that both were important.[67] Mentees who reported strong alliance with their mentors and a high level of group belonging described how their mentors displayed empathy, authenticity, and mutuality and how the program's structure and activities contributed to their positive experiences.[74] These results mirror research from YWLP which also noted the important role of mutuality and empathy within mentor-mentee relationships in combined group and one-to-one programs.[89]

Incorporated

Studies of programs in which mentoring is embedded within youth serving contexts also provide some insight into social processes that may support positive youth outcomes. In such programs, one or more adults interact with youth in group settings, and mentoring may occur either informally or intentionally through engagement in the program activities.

A series of studies of Boys & Girls Clubs[49, 90] provides an overview of some promising processes that settings such as after-school programs offer for group mentoring to occur. Staff in youth development programs have "front line access" to youth's peer relationships, frequently watching and taking part in youths' interactions with their peers. Thus, they may be able to intervene in or address social challenges in a way that other adults don't have the opportunity to do.[49] Further, because programs frequently include multiple adult staff, they offer opportunities for collective mentoring, whereby two or more adults have strong relationships with a youth, and in combination can provide a greater level of support. Collective mentoring is enhanced when the staff intentionally share information and communicate with each other about the youth.[88] Additional research expanding on the role of staff-youth relationships in youth development programs has identified the important role of respect[91] and trust[92, 93] between staff and youth, of specific staff strategies that support youth's developmental needs at different ages,[94] and the actions that staff take which foster youth's development of trust in them.[95] All of these processes have implications for group mentoring programs. Although we include Boys & Girls Clubs here as an example of incorporated group mentoring, available research suggest that not all Boys & Girls Clubs intentionally or effectively incorporate group mentoring into their programs. Indeed, one feature that has been found to differentiate more and less successful clubs is the quality of staff-youth relationships, which are strengthened by formal and ongoing training as well as the creation of time and space within activities for staff to build relationships with youth.[90]

Researchers studying a program that matches youth with paid mentors, who are embedded in youths' schools but who provide extended support both in- and out-of-school contexts over multiple years, developed a model of mentor characteristics and practices that fostered relational development. From interviews with mentors and mentees the researchers built the TRICS model: The right who, Respect, Information gathering, Consistency, and Support. Thus, mentors must have the right initial characteristics to spur the development of a relationship. Then, the practices they engage in reflect their respect for the youth, include gaining knowledge about the youth's life, are consistent, and provide multiple types of social support.[96] Once trust is established, mentors are able to move to a new phase in the mentoring relationship.

There is less evidence documenting the association of social and relational processes in incorporated programs with youth outcomes. One exception is a study of informal group mentoring in the East Bay Drill Team, which seeks to mitigate involvement in gangs, drugs, and violence and to promote academic attainment and citizenship among African-American youth exposed to community violence.[81] The study found that greater involvement with the team was associated with more positive perceptions of trusting and supportive relationships with adult team leaders, greater sense of community, connectedness to other team members, and more prosocial behavioral norms. Perceptions of connectedness with group leaders softened the association of youths' exposure to community violence with negative behavioral outcomes, including delinquency and drug use. Perceptions of sense of community and prosocial peer norms were linked to higher self-esteem and lower psychological distress. Although it is unclear from the program description whether the adult leaders are trained to be mentors, the program intentionally seeks to build relationships through program activities, which leads us to consider it as an example of an incorporated program.

Negative group influences: This review identified a few instances of *negative* program effects, two of which were seen in the academic outcome domain. The evaluation of the Youth Development Program[55] found that program participants reported greater declines in sense of school belonging relative to comparisons; however, subsequent analyses of mentors' process notes suggested that the negative effects were limited to groups that had difficult discussions about racial issues in the school and that had low levels of group cohesion, connectedness to mentors, and mutual help. Twelve Together,[25] an after-school dropout prevention program for middle school students, also found small negative effects on English grades and course credits earned at the post-program assessment; however, those negative effects were no longer present at the one-year follow-up. Finally, the evaluation of Go Girls! found small increases in negative attitudes about healthy eating and exercise despite overall improvements in healthy behaviors.[75] None of the negative findings from these studies seem to reflect concerns about "contagion" effects, in which group members train one another to enact destructive behaviors; however, because few studies included follow-up assessments more than a few weeks beyond program conclusion, the possibility that negative effects might emerge over time cannot be ruled out.

An important exception to this general trend is findings from studies of The Buddy System, a delinquency prevention group mentoring program for 10- to 17-year-olds with behavioral problems. Initial outcome evaluation revealed differential effects: arrest rates for youth who had arrests in the year prior to the program decreased, but arrests for youth without any previous arrests increased post-program.[97] These results were mostly replicated at the 35-year follow-up,[20] such that individuals with prior arrests had lower rates of arrest in adulthood than those in the control group, and females (but not males) with no arrests prior to the program showed higher rates of arrest in adulthood. The authors believe that both the positive and iatrogenic effects of the program result from the same basic process: Relationships formed within the program broadened peer networks, and thereby activities, in ways that shifted youths' trajectories into adulthood. This supposition is supported by the fact that those individuals whose court records included a relationship (i.e., romantic partner, friend, family member) had higher arrest rates than those whose arrests did not include a relationship. This suggests that the shared activity of networks increases participation in criminal behavior.[20] Given these iatrogenic effects, which appear to be related to the peer networks formed through the group component, group mentoring programs should think about whether similar processes could come into play in their own programs, especially if they serve youth who are considered at-risk for juvenile delinquency.

In addition, some cautions can be drawn about the potential for negative group processes. In the social network study of YWLP, groups in which mentors tended to be connected to mentors and mentees to mentees but with fewer social connections across those roles, mentees reported lower levels of connection to their mentors.[81] This reflected prior results which suggested that mentors spending more time connecting with other mentors during group time could lead to weaker ties to their mentees.[73] In an observational study of YWLP, groups in which mentees reported lower levels of satisfaction with their one-to-one relationships experienced more negative social processes, such as rejection and disengagement.[73] In Campus Connections, youth who reported low group belonging and low levels of alliance with their mentors had difficulties connecting with peers and reported feeling misunderstood or ignored by others in the group.[76]

CONCLUSIONS

1. It appears that the group and one-to-one relationships both contribute to experiences and outcomes in group mentoring programs, perhaps by simultaneously involving multiple types of relationships between and among mentors and peers; preliminary evidence suggests that these processes, in turn, contribute to positive behavioral outcomes over time.

2. In addition to whatever role may be played by the relationships between mentors and mentees in group mentoring, research suggests that there are additional social and relational processes, including group cohesion and belonging, mutual help, and a sense of group identity, that may contribute to youth outcomes especially for programs aiming to increase youth's social connectedness.

3. There is limited evidence of unintended negative consequences of group mentoring; whereas only one study has found "contagion" effects, in which members appear to foster negative behaviors among others in the group, there is potential for negative group processes to emerge, which may influence participants' experiences and outcomes.

4. Have Group Mentoring Programs and Supports Reached and Engaged Targeted Youth, been Implemented with High Quality, and been Adopted and Sustained?

BACKGROUND

Research on one-to-one youth mentoring and the prevention literature more generally suggests that a range of factors could be important in program adoption, reaching and engaging targeted youth, ensuring quality implementation, and sustaining programs over time.[98, 99] For example, in the context of education policies that emphasize standardized testing, successful implementation of a mentoring program may hinge on whether the program is viewed as contributing to students' academic success, being needed and likely to achieve important benefits. Further, the extent to which sufficient resources (e.g., funding, staffing, relevant expertise) are available, and the extent to which program elements can be adapted to fit local needs and to maximize compatibility with the local culture may also be critical. Also important is attention to organizational processes, such as decision-making, communication, and collaboration within the organization as well as with other organizations. A further consideration is the availability of leadership to set priorities and foster consensus on a vision for the program, to "champion" support both for establishing and maintaining it over time, and to ensure managerial and administrative support throughout the program's implementation.

The research considered for this review reveals little attention to the study of factors that may increase the likelihood of reaching and engaging targeted youth or foster the adoption or sustainability of group mentoring within different settings. Topics in this area that have received some attention include implementing mentoring programs given limited resources, ensuring that group mentoring is implemented with a high degree of fidelity or quality, maintaining mentees'

engagement, selecting appropriate mentors and creating structures to support their work, and logistical issues. With few exceptions, the evidence supporting practices that address these issues is limited to conceptual propositions and experience-based observation.

Theoretically, the size of the group may have implications for issues such as program reach and implementation. Implementing larger groups may increase a program's ability to reach more youth, but may make it difficult for mentors and mentees to develop close relationships, may make formation of subgroups or "cliques" that exclude some members more likely, and may place additional burdens on mentors (e.g., additional effort devoted to behavior management). Further, logistical challenges may grow as the number of members in a group increases. Other practical considerations include whether there is a regular meeting space and time, as well as accessible transportation to and from meetings.

> From a cost perspective, a theoretically appealing feature of group mentoring is the prospect of **reaching a large number of youth with fewer human and financial resources** than needed for traditional approaches.[45,46,53]

With regard to implementation, programs may seek to reduce the burden on mentors by utilizing a co- or team-mentoring approach. Advantages of this approach include being able to draw on complementary skills, enabling mentors to cover for one another (e.g., group can still meet if one mentor is unable to attend), and an opportunity to model positive interactions and teamwork. However, co-mentoring and team mentoring can also introduce challenges, for example, if a more experienced mentor does not share authority with a more junior mentor. Relying on a co-mentor to "pick up the slack" might result in individual mentors feeling a decreased sense of responsibility. Thus, meetings between co-mentors outside of group time may be necessary, increasing mentors' time commitment to the program. From a cost perspective, a theoretically appealing feature of group mentoring is the prospect of reaching a large number of youth with fewer human and financial resources than needed for traditional approaches.[45, 46, 53]

RESEARCH

Capturing and maintaining youth engagement.
Research touches on the idea that maintaining a viable group may require balancing interests and preferences of each group member with those of the group as a whole (e.g., the integrity of the group may become threatened if some members become disengaged). The evaluators of the iCode program,[49] an intensive group mentoring program focused on science and technology, noted that mentees sometimes had difficulty attending the expected number of sessions because of conflicts with other interests, such as sports and recreational activities. In response, the program managers encouraged mentors to be flexible about attendance policies. Despite these efforts, the researchers reported retention rates below 50 percent for the year-long program.

In other programs, the risk factors that make youth eligible for the program can create challenges to engaging and maintaining their participation; thus, programs that target youth with a history of truancy at school might encounter low attendance and programs targeting youth with conduct problems might encounter disruptive behavior. For example, the Village Model of Care, an intervention for African-American youth attending an urban, alternative school, had difficulty recruiting and engaging students for a number of these reasons.

Parents and students were difficult to contact. Parents and youth expressed concerns about the benefits of the program, the time commitment, and the risks associated with students' leaving the program when it ended in the early evening.

The program then faced implementation difficulties when administrators asked that after-school programs start later in the year due to transfers into the school in the early fall. Implementation was further challenged by disruptive behavior during group meetings.[100]

The social context of the program may also impact its ability to recruit and engage youth. The Arches program relied on referrals from probation officers, and found that probation officers' willingness to refer youth depended on their prior relationship with the program site; thus, sites that invested in building relationships with probation officers had more referrals. Changes in leadership and policies in the probation department also influenced recruitment. Program completion rates varied across sites from 30 to 100 percent, and attendance at sessions ranged across sites from 26 to 49 percent. Challenges to retention and engagement included a perception that the curriculum was boring and the availability of other activities, particularly during the summer months. On the flip side, relationships with mentors and access to other services such as job-readiness training obtained through program connections, fostered program engagement and retention.[17]

Implementation Fidelity. Various factors may affect the extent to which programs are implemented as intended. Dimensions of fidelity include adherence to the program model, quality of delivery of activities, and extent and quality of youth exposure to the program.[18] Evaluations that reported findings related to program fidelity have typically shown variability in mentors' adherence to the program model, even when mentors "buy into" the program's approach. In a qualitative study of Go Girls!, mentors spoke of logistical concerns (e.g., not having enough equipment), interpersonal difficulties (e.g., difficulties with co-mentors), and challenges with meeting diverse needs of participants.[101] Strategies for ensuring fidelity have included providing mentors with structured session-by-session guidance and conducting regular supervision before and after each session.[29] Although few studies have systematically examined associations between implementation fidelity and program effectiveness, some have attributed positive outcomes in part to achieving a high degree of fidelity, while others have attributed failure to achieve positive outcomes to difficulties with implementing the program as intended. At the same time, because group mentoring differs from other forms of group programs in its focus on relationships as a mechanism of change, it is less clear how much close fidelity to a structured curriculum affects youth outcomes. One study of YWLP suggested that mentors perceived the curriculum as helpful for fostering discussion of sensitive topics, especially at the beginning of the program, but that it could also restrict the development of relationships if it was adhered to too rigidly.[70] In Project Arrive, mentors strongly endorsed having access to a curriculum that provided a choice of activities and the flexibility for mentors and youth to craft their own activities and discussion topics within the overall program model.[63]

Cost considerations. The limited evidence suggests that group mentoring programs are less expensive to implement than one-to-one programs and other types of interventions.[66] An arguably more important analysis is one that considers both costs and benefits. For example, the evaluation of Reading for Life estimated the cost per participant at about $1,000 per youth compared to $300 per youth in the control condition.

However, when taking into account the estimated societal cost of each subsequent arrest that was "prevented" by the program, the study's authors estimated that the program saved approximately $3.50 for every dollar spent.[16] The long-term follow-up of My Life found a cost benefit of as much as $3.00 comparing the per person investment in the program to criminal justice outcomes such as days spent in jail.[36] See the "Insights for Practitioners" section that follows this review for additional discussion of cost considerations and return on investment.

Other program considerations. As noted, the skills required to be an effective group mentor may be quite different from those of a one-to-one mentor. Research referenced previously points to quality implementation potentially being facilitated by training mentors with skills in group facilitation, perhaps involving professionals with group expertise to support and assist mentors in managing group dynamics.[63, 102] Taking advantage of existing community resources offers a potential solution to these challenges. For example, partnering with a local university, programs may capitalize on students who are highly motivated to apply skills they are learning in their areas of study. This strategy was used by Mentoring for Sexual Health, in which nursing students served as mentors.[34] Similarly, undergraduate students earned course credit while serving as mentors in the Youth Development Program and YWLP, so that supervision, which included planning, reflection, and ongoing training, could be integrated into course requirements.[57, 67] None of these programs formally evaluated this strategy, but the latter two programs showed positive effects on youth outcomes that the researchers attributed in part to the partnerships that enabled and structured the use of the students as mentors. Further, program structure and mentor training and support appear to be important factors for quality implementation of group programs.[64, 103]

CONCLUSIONS

1. Research is currently lacking to inform understanding of factors that may influence reaching and engaging targeted groups of youth, ensuring high quality implementation, and fostering the adoption and longer-term sustainability of group mentoring as an approach to supporting young persons in different settings.

2. Available studies suggest that key implementation challenges specific to group mentoring may include managing limited resources, maintaining mentees' engagement, selecting appropriate mentors and creating structures to support their work, and logistical issues; however, systematic data are lacking to address best practices in these areas.

Implications for Practice

(Mike Garringer, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership)

This revised review represents the first of these National Mentoring Resource Center Model Reviews to undergo an update and it is extremely encouraging to see the growth in the number of studies and accompanying knowledge base around group mentoring models since 2015. As the main review notes, the authors found an almost three-fold increase in the number of studies meeting criteria for inclusion, a huge leap in the available literature. Most critically, this increase in both the number of studies and number of distinct programs represented in that literature has helped tremendously in expanding the information available to practitioners to make good decisions about the design and implementation of their programs. Perhaps most interestingly, this review even offers suggestions for potentially important practices in unstructured group mentoring contexts, where looser forms of mentoring are embedded within existing youth work environments. This is a significant addition to the practice literature since these types of group youth programs are ubiquitous, but without much research to date explaining how staff or volunteers might effectively act as mentors in those types of programs. However, as the main review notes, many group youth programs are choosing to add a more formal, structured mentoring experience and are developing actual programs or sub-programs that more closely mirror the practices we associate with common mentoring programs (e.g., matching, structured mentoring interactions). Thus, the insights for practitioners discussed below are largely written with those more formal one-to-many, team, and hybrid group mentoring programs in mind.

GROUP MENTORING OFFERS TREMENDOUS FLEXIBILITY IN PROGRAM DESIGN

One of the immediate realizations based on this expanded research literature on group mentoring is noting just how diverse the array of services operating under that moniker are when describing the configurations of the programs. The authors note that there are conventional group mentoring programs which offer a one-to-many or team-to-many approach to grouping mentors and mentees, as well as hybrid programs where pairs of mentor-mentee dyads engage with other pairs in group activities. There are variations that use peers as the mentors—even models where the older peers are mentored by adults while also, in turn, mentoring younger students, like a Russian nesting doll of mentoring interactions. The authors ultimately conclude that the collection of programs we call group mentoring is a bit "fuzzy" and that drawing hard lines that distinguish group mentoring efforts from similar things is a challenging proposition at best. But that fuzziness also represents a certain kind of freedom, from a practitioner point of view.

Because there is almost an endless array of viable options in terms of how to structure and organize a group mentoring program, practitioners have the ability to customize the design of the program to really meet the youth they are serving "where they are at" and build something that is hyper-specific to local needs. In fact, it might be worth asking focus groups of the types of young people a program would serve for their thoughts on what would be valuable, how they might want to spend their time in a group, and the types of school or community challenges they might want the program to focus on. But practitioners should also note that it is the intentionality of the mentoring component (as defined through an emphasis on relationship-building, the development of mutuality

and trust between group members, and the training and support offered to adult mentors in their nuanced role) that separates group mentoring programs from myriad other forms of group-based youth support. Bringing adults and youth groups together might result in some mentoring "moments" among participants, and very possibly also some sustained mentoring relationships, but a group mentoring program is grounded in intentional cultivation of relationships that grow into more than a series of fleeting interactions.

When designing a new group program, or refining an existing one, there are several things that practitioners should keep in mind, based on the review, when customizing the program to local youths' needs:

1. ***Think about the three pathways that may influence the benefits that youth receive from the program.*** As the authors note, youth may benefit from several relationships in these programs: mentor-youth, youth-other youth, and mentor-mentor. Each of these may uniquely contribute to the "suite" of outcomes that a program is hoping for. These relationships can be mutually reinforcing (e.g., the relationship with the mentor enhancing self-esteem, which is further deepened through positive peer interactions) or work separately (conversations with the other mentees building a sense of belonging and school connectedness while mentors focus on more direct skill development and goal setting). The mentor-mentor relationship is an oft-forgotten one, but the comradery, working alliance, and mutual trust that mentors have with each other is also likely to influence the effectiveness of the program and how well mentors make use of their collective skills and personalities in facilitating the program. Practitioners should think carefully about how each of these relationship pathways might influence your outcomes and what the program can do to strengthen each relationship type.

2. ***Consider borrowing concepts and activities from other fields and youth work settings.*** While those three relationship types are important, the authors are also clear to note that focused activities and curricula-driven interactions are prominent in most group mentoring programs—those relationships need something to do together, after all. The authors specifically mention the promise of integrating evidence-based practices from related fields into these programs, using growth mindset theory and cognitive behavioral principles as just two examples. But the therapeutic, youth development, education, and mental health fields offer a wealth of proven interventions and group activities that could be implemented or adopted in a group mentoring program. Group therapy in particular might offer a wealth of group trust-building activities and other useful structures, norms, and rules that could be adapted for mentoring contexts. It is worth noting, however, that the goal here is not to turn group mentors into "lite" therapists or counselors, but rather to borrow concepts and activities when appropriate and in service of particular goals or outcomes. In fact, clearly defining the role of mentor as something other than other adult roles youth may encounter can help clarify what a program is all about for youth in the early stages.

   Programs may want to consult with local scholars or high-level professionals working in these disciplines and get support developing a customized curriculum that draws on relevant theories and known successful interventions for working with youth on the types of needs they may bring to the program.

The infusion of evidence-based mental health or educational interventions and practices into mentoring contexts is something that scholars have increasingly mentioned in recent years (see several of our *Reflections on Research* podcasts for [discussions](#) of [these ideas](#)), and may be a critical aspect of generating strong outcomes for group programs wondering what activities will be helpful.

3. **Strive for a blend of relational and instrumental activities.** While noting the value of having a curriculum that guides participants and offers proven practices, the authors also make it clear that too much emphasis on rigid interactions at the expense of relationship building and simple fun times can potentially cause challenges. Programs should strive for the right combination and sequencing of program activities — offering time for trust-building and team-building early in the program and ramping up to more purposeful and challenging activities and interactions once groups have found a groove. But there may even be need for on-the-fly flexibility, especially if there are critical issues or concerns that emerge for the youth in the local context (e.g., a cut in school funding that has everyone upset) or in the larger world (e.g., political unrest or international conflicts). Sometimes, a group of youth simply won't feel up to the planned activity of that meeting and another conversation or focus might be needed—and might make the bonds between participants even stronger in the long run. Having a curriculum that has flexibility, while still offering enough structure that youth are getting a curated, focused experience, seems to be an important aspect of designing a good group mentoring program.

4. **Consider the optimal group size and frequency and duration of meetings.** Another aspect touched on in the review, regardless of whether a program is a hybrid or more "traditional" group structure, is thinking about the size of the program, the size of the groups within the program, and the frequency in which those groups come together (and for how long over time). The review notes that there may be some inherent limit to how large a group of youth can be before mentors will struggle to maintain control and the group will lose its cohesion and splinter off into cliques and other disparate subgroups. Too small a group and you won't have much rich peer interaction; too large and you may get chaos. There may also be an upper limit to the total size of the program as a whole, especially if groups are sharing a common space for some or all of their time together. Similarly, the authors note that one of the advantages of group mentoring is that its often-scheduled meeting times offer order and consistency to people coming together. Unfortunately, meeting too frequently or at inopportune times might make the schedule feel burdensome, especially for older youth who may have busy schedules during the school day and beyond. Practitioners will need to determine how often groups should come together to foster a sense of cohesion and collaboration without making the program seem like an overscheduled intrusion. This also includes thinking about how long the group should meet overall. Fewer than four or five meetings seems incompatible with the notion of building meaningful personal relationships, let alone doing some actual work together. Keeping the same group of youth together over multiple years seems needlessly stifling. The program examples in the main review offer some hints for practitioners around group size and frequency and duration of meetings, with most of the programs operating in this space seeming to settle around a ratio of 4–6 youth per mentor, meeting weekly or biweekly, for a school or calendar year.

Practitioners may want to consult the recently released Group Mentoring Supplement to the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* for further discussion and program examples related to these important program structure decisions (see the end of this section for a link to this resource).

CONSIDER A FEW T.R.I.C.S. WHEN RECRUITING AND TRAINING MENTORS

One interesting idea, mentioned in the section of the review addressing how mentor characteristics may influence relationship development and outcomes, is the T.R.I.C.S. framework, which was originally developed in relation to a paid group mentoring effort based in schools and extending into out-of-school time. This acronym stands for The right who, Respect, Information gathering, Consistency, and Support, which qualitative research suggested were important to the mentor role in a group context. "The right who" referred to the personalities and dispositions of mentors and whether they could build relationships with multiple youth and manage them in group contexts. The other four characteristics referred to how they interacted with youth, showing respect, showing interest in the details of their lives, and demonstrating consistent support in connecting the youth to resources or offering emotional or other support—all topics that sound perfect for mentor training if volunteers don't bring those youth-work habits to the table already. The review authors note that prior experience managing groups of young people may be very beneficial in a group mentoring program, but the T.R.I.C.S. framework suggests that you can also emphasize and strengthen those skills if you have recruited good caring relationship-oriented adults in the first place.

USE GROUP ACTIVITIES TO BUILD INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIPS

It may sound counterintuitive, but one of the more interesting practices briefly mentioned in the main review was the use of group activities at the very beginning of a program cycle to help participants get to know each other in a hybrid mentoring program (one with one-to-one pairs meeting in groups). Research suggested that the group activities led to stronger individual mentor-mentee bonds by offering a safe and fun way of "breaking the ice" and learning about each other. Those initial individual conversations with mentors are often awkward and uncomfortable and may lead to some misunderstandings or uncertain feelings. But the use of group games, especially those that involve sharing about oneself or talking about interests, may help avoid all that and build better relationships between mentors and mentees, as well as a more connected relationships across groups and all project participants. While this one example came from a hybrid program, this may have implications for group mentoring programs across the board. Group activities can certainly grow the cohesion and sense of belonging of the whole group, but they may also lead to some stronger relationships individually between participants as they learn about each other and find commonalities and connection points. Well-planned group programs will understand how group activities can provide a safe space for both group team building but also meaningful interactions at the individual level.

HELP GROW THE EVIDENCE-BASE AROUND GROUP MENTORING IMPACT

The authors of the review note that several of the few attempts at cost-benefit analyses of group mentoring programs to date have produced some positive figures suggesting that certain outcomes may lead to long-term societal benefits or benefits for individual participants over their lifetimes. This research is in its infancy and it's hard to say much definitively about either the costs of group mentoring or the long-term "return" that it might produce. It is worth noting that while one survey of the nation's mentoring programs[104] found that group mentoring models were less expensive than other models ($1,191/youth served compared to $1,913 for traditional one-to-one models) "hybrid" programs that blend mentoring pairs and structured group activities were also relatively expensive ($1,659), suggesting that the structure, activities, and staffing needed to make the programs work may vary considerably across the many configurations and settings where these programs happen. But, at least initially, it is heartening to see positive cost-benefit numbers associated with these programs.

While the authors of the review express some hope that this emerging cost-benefit analysis might highlight the benefits of these group mentoring models, they also really lament the current lack of longitudinal findings related to group mentoring. While the literature is abundant with examples of programs achieving good proximal outcomes in a wide variety of areas (e.g., academics, heath, social, etc.), the reality is that we often don't know how group mentoring experiences for elementary and middle school youth translate into high school or beyond, nor do we know much about how group mentoring at key transition points extend beyond those times, into adulthood and beyond. While we are starting to get some hints at longer-term outcomes for one-to-one mentoring (such as from the recent long-term follow-up with participants from the Big Brothers Big Sisters study in the 1990s) there is very little known about how meaningful change or growth from a group mentoring program influences the longer arc of mentees' lives.

Changing that will be difficult, perhaps especially so for group mentoring programs that may have really large numbers of youth to track down for follow-up data collection and a complex web of relationships from the experience that may be recalled less clearly many years later than an intense one-to-one mentoring relationship. It would benefit the field greatly if group mentoring programs could keep track of alumni, get their consent and buy-in for follow-up data collection, and work with funders and researchers to follow youth participants over time and see what types of long-term outcomes emerge. This might be particularly helpful for programs using some of those evidence-based intervention strategies noted above, especially those focused on addressing serious negative behaviors or improving academic achievement or career readiness. But it can only happen if group programs are willing to make those research partnerships a reality.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF A SAFE SPACE AND A SENSE OF BELONGING

Lastly, there is another facet of group mentoring programs worth noting here for practitioners — one that was mentioned as both a precursor to meaningful outcomes and presented as a meaningful outcome in and of itself: Group mentoring as a source of *safety* and *belonging* for young people. If there is one theme that is consistent in the group mentoring literature it is that, when done well and with intentionality, these groups can offer a sense of belonging, togetherness, and community that

is very often missing from children's lives and hard to replicate in other programmatic experiences. So many studies have noted youth and mentors expressing themes of safety and trust, sharing that these groups were places where the typical pecking order of a school or the relationships youth had with each other outside of the program tended to melt away and be replaced with something that felt safe, co-created, and greater than the sum of its individual parts. Recent studies have really emphasized themes of group cohesion as a pathway to positive outcomes for these programs (see, particularly, the Project Arrive example discussed in the review). But it seems that cohesion can only happen if the group has rules and rituals that create safety, trust, and mutual ownership, and belonging. Practitioners should think about how the program can create those spaces and the tools that groups will need to do that work. But if all a group mentoring program ever accomplishes is to make a bunch of young people feel connected and cared for in a way that never would have happened otherwise, that is a real gift and very much worth the effort.

DEEPER PRACTICE GUIDANCE IS NOW AVAILABLE

Also worth noting is that this recent growth in research has allowed for the development of more comprehensive research-to-practice materials covering many of the themes noted in this review. Specifically, MENTOR has recently collaborated with Dr. Kuperminc and other scholars on a supplement to the *Elements of Effective Practice on Mentoring* focused on the types of group mentoring models mentioned throughout this review. This resource was released in 2020 and will be considered for inclusion on the National Mentoring Resource Center website and distributed by MENTOR alongside other dedicated learning opportunities on the recommended practices highlighted in the publication. We encourage programs to utilize this and other in-depth practice guidance documents that are emerging as we learn more about group mentoring.

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TABLE 1 - SUMMARY OF SELECTED STUDIES OF EFFECTS OF GROUP MENTORING

OUTCOME KEY: **+** Positive effect; **-** Unfavorable effect; **x** No effect or nonsignificant finding
MEN= Mentoring program or naturally occurring mentoring relationship

CONVENTIONAL GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS						
Type of Mentoring			Study Methods & Findings			
Name	Structure	Processes/ Activities	Methodology	Question 1: Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	Question 2: Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	Question 3: Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Arches	**Goal:** Reduce recidivism for justice-involved youth **Setting:** Community **Duration:** 6–12 months **Format:** Group and one-to-one **Mentors:** Adults from similar backgrounds to youth in program **Mentees:** Youth (16–24) on probation	Mentors given training to facilitate group mentoring sessions using interactive journaling curriculum based on cognitive-behavioral principles and are also available for additional one-to-one meetings; group and individual meetings based on motivational interviewing concepts. Full curriculum involves 48 group sessions and 4 journaling course books.	**Design:** QED **Sample:** 279 Arches participants and 682 comparison youth who began probation at the same time (but did not participate in program) **Mentoring:** Arches compared with matched comparison group **Outcome:** Assessed arrests and convictions at 12 and 24 months after beginning probation.	**+** Felony reconviction at 12 and 24 months **+** Felony arrests at 12 months (trend) **x** Overall arrests		
Bridges to the Future	**Goal:** Increase economic assets and opportunities **Setting:** Uganda Duration: 9 months (school year) **Format:** Small groups matched to one mentor **Mentors:** University students **Mentees:** Youth in primary school	All eligible youth (including control) received usual care for orphaned and vulnerable children. In the mentoring program, youth were provided with a matched savvwings account (one-to-one matched ratio for Bridges and two-to-one ratio for Bridges Plus), microenterprise workshops, and one-hour monthly mentoring programming following a nine-session curriculum.	**Design:** RCT **Sample:** Primary schools assigned to control (16 schools, 496 participants), standard Bridges program (16 schools, 402 participants) or Bridges Plus program (16 schools, 512 participants) **Mentoring:** Bridges and Bridges Plus compared with control condition **Outcome:** Data collected at baseline and at 12, 24, 36, and 48 months included academic performance (standardized exam scores), school transition (secondary/vocational school).	**+** Academic performance (standardized test scores) **+** Greater likelihood of transitioning to postprimary education		

CONVENTIONAL GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Type of Mentoring		Study Methods & Findings			
Name	Structure	Processes/ Activities	Methodology	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Buddy System	*Goal:* Prevent juvenile delinquency *Setting:* Community *Duration:* 1 year *Format:* 3 youth per "buddy" (mentor) *Mentors:* Adults who had preexisting relationships with youth and recruited from community (paid mentors) *Mentees:* youth (11–17) at risk for delinquency	Mentors (called mediators) trained and supervised by consultants. Mediators met weekly with mentees and engaged in social activities contingent on youth behavior.	*Design:* RCT *Sample:* 553 youth assigned to Buddy System or no-treatment control; 475 assessed at long-term follow-up *Mentoring:* Buddy System Mentoring compared with no-treatment control *Outcome:* Improvement in referred (problem) behaviors and arrests assessed both during program and at long-term follow-up (35 years).		**+** MEN X Prior arrests→among youth with arrests prior to referral, significantly fewer program participants arrested both at short-term and long-term (adult) follow up **-** MEN X Prior arrests→among youth without an arrest prior to referral, significantly more program participants arrested; additional interaction with gender in long-term follow-up (more arrests for female program participants)	
CyberMentor	*Goal:* Encourage girls' participation in STEM education *Setting:* online *Duration:* 6 months Format: Many-to-many *Mentors:* Adult female academics (graduate students or professionals) *Mentees:* Girls enrolled in high-achiever track education in Germany	Mentors communicated with youth online via email, online chat, or forums.	*Design:* QED *Sample:* 347 who participated in one-on-one (156) or group (191) version of CyberMentor program *Mentoring:* Group mentoring compared to one-on-one mentoring *Outcome:* Assessed proportion of STEM communication (in email/message contents), STEM-related networking (number of STEM contacts), and academic/professional intentions in STEM.	**+** Greater proportion of STEM communication in grwwwoup mentoring condition **+** Greater number of STEM-related network contacts in group mentoring condition **+** Increased elective intentions for STEM after six months for group mentoring condition (compared to one-to-one) mentoring condition		

CONVENTIONAL GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Type of Mentoring		Study Methods & Findings			
Name	Structure	Processes/ Activities	Methodology	Question 1: Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	Question 2: Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	Question 3: Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Eye to Eye	*Goal:* Socioemotional development *Setting:* School *Duration:* Academic year *Format:* Multi-mentor *Mentors:* High school and college students with Learning Disabilities and/or Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (LD-ADHD) *Mentees:* Elementary and middle school students with LD-ADHD	Mentors undergo background checks and complete training conducted by program staff on the curriculum, program objectives, and how to be an effective mentor. Each group of mentors is supervised by a student leader who undergoes and intensive five-day training. Mentors engage in art projects and other activities to meet social-emotional objectives, including discussing strengths and challenges associated with having LD-ADHD.	*Design:* QED with data collected at the beginning and end of the academic year *Sample:* 234 youth in three conditions: 99 mentored youth with LD/ADHD participating in Eye to Eye, 51 LD/ADHD youth not in the program (control-NM condition), and 84 youth without LD/ADHD diagnosis (control-TD condition) *Mentoring:* Eye to Eye compared with Control-NM and Control-TD groups *Outcome:* Assessments were conducted at the beginning and end of the school year via youth self-report. Outcomes included subscales of the Behavior Assessment System for Child Second Edition (BASC-2): anxiety, depression, interpersonal relations, and self-esteem. Covariates assessed were family affluence, mentoring relationship quality, and demographic and diagnostic information (collected from youth and parents).	**+** Self-esteem **+** Interpersonal relations **+** Symptoms of depression **✗** Symptoms of anxiety		
Go Girls!	*Goal:* Encourage girls to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles *Setting:* School/after school *Duration:* 7 weeks *Format:* One-to-many *Mentors:* Adult female volunteers *Mentees:* Adolescent girls (11–14)	Girls participate in seven two-hour weekly sessions run by two female volunteers. Group size ranged from 4–15 girls. Session topics focused on physical activity, healthy eating, and encouraging girls to feel positively about themselves.	*Design:* QED time series (7 weeks prior, baseline, end of program, 7 weeks following program completion) *Sample:* 344 girls *Mentoring:* change over time compared to pre-program *Outcome:* Physical activity and healthy eating behaviors and attitudes; program belonging	**+** Physical activity **+** Healthy eating **–** Attitudes toward physical activity		

CONVENTIONAL GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Type of Mentoring			Study Methods & Findings			
Name	**Structure**	**Processes/ Activities**	**Methodology**	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Peer Group Connection	*Goal:* Support students through transition from middle to high school *Setting:* School *Duration:* 34 weeks *Format:* Many-to-many *Mentors:* Older high school students *Mentees:* Entering ninth grade students	*Curriculum focus:* enhance school attachment, form connections with prosocial peers, develop decision-making skills, resist negative influence, set realistic goals, manage anger and stress, develop belief system consistent with an achievement orientation. Peer leaders (mentors) work in pairs with groups of 10–12 youth.	**2015 Study** *Design:* RCT *Sample:* Students from two high schools (157 and 269 youth) randomly assigned to program (97 and 94 students) or control (60 and 175) *Mentoring:* Peer Group Connection compared with control *Outcome:* High school graduation **2019 Study** *Design:* RCT *Sample:* Students randomly assigned to program (1,525) or control (1,531) *Mentoring:* Peer Group Connection compared to control *Outcome:* School engagement	+ School engagement (2019 study)	+ MEN X Gender X at-risk status → males with characteristics at program start indicating lower likelihood of high school graduation were more likely than others to have graduated four years later (2015 study)	
Project Arrive	*Goal:* Facilitate adaptation to high school for youth at risk of dropout and juvenile justice system involvement *Setting:* School *Duration:* Academic year *Format:* Multi-mentor *Mentors:* School staff or community partners *Mentees:* Ninth grade students	Two co-mentors met weekly with groups of six to eight students during school hours for 50-minute sessions. A full-time program coordinator conducts a four-hour training for mentors, assists with recruiting and enrolling students, meets monthly with mentoring teams, provides match and logistical support, and serves as a liaison between each school and the district's student support programs office. Mentors receive a binder with program procedures, contact information, and curricular materials, and access to a website with activities that address common adolescent issues. Mentors select activities or work with their mentees to develop activities and discuss topics in line with overall program goals.	*Design:* QED with data collected at five time points: pre-intervention plus the end of fall and spring semester for two years *Sample:* Survey sample (n = 114 students in Project arrive, n = 71 students comparison) and Academic sample of 1,219 youth attending schools meeting criteria to participate in program (n = 240 Project Arrive, n = 983 comparison) *Mentoring:* Project Arrive compared to demographically similar students *Outcome:* External resources: school support, school belonging, school meaningful participation, peer caring relationships, prosocial peers, home support, home meaningful participation Internal assets: Self-efficacy, empathy, problem-solving, self-awareness. *Academic outcomes:* GPA, credits earned *Juvenile offenses:* arrest records	+ Teacher and peer support + School belonging + Meaningful involvement in school and at home + Engagement with prosocial peers + Problem-solving skills + Attendance & credits earned X Home support X Empathy X Self-efficacy X Self-awareness X Juvenile offenses	+ MEN X Group Size → smaller group size associated with more positive perceptions of group climate and mentor relationship quality + MEN X Group Size → smaller mentee-to-mentor ratio associated with increases in GPA relationship quality	+ MEN → (+) Positive relationships with mentors→ (+) GPA (+) Credits earned + MEN → (+) Positive group climate→ (+) Credits earned (+) Self-efficacy (+) School belonging

CONVENTIONAL GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Type of Mentoring			Study Methods & Findings			
Name	**Structure**	**Processes/ Activities**	**Methodology**	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes link-ing mentoring to youth outcomes?
Reading for Life	*Goal:* Diversion program for nonviolent offenders; reduce recidivism by promoting moral development and character education *Setting:* Community *Duration:* 10 weeks *Format:* Multi-mentor *Mentors:* Adult volunteers *Mentees:* Nonviolent offenders (often first-time) aged 11–18	Groups comprised of up to five youth (based on reading ability) work with two mentors. Mentors undergo initial training with ongoing training and supervision; volunteers shadow experienced mentors prior to leading groups themselves. Groups select a novel from a list and 60-minute mentoring sessions include oral readings, journaling and discussion. Groups also choose a one-day community service project that coincides with themes from their novel. The program ends with a final presentation for youths' parents, mentors, and staff.	*Design:* RCT, measured yearly for four years *Sample:* Nonviolent offenders ages 11–18 (n = 194 treatment; n = 214 controls) *Mentoring:* Randomly assigned to mentoring or 25 hours community service *Outcome:* Counts for arrests, misdemeanors, and felonies	+ Arrests + Misdemeanor offenses + Felony offenses	+ MEN X SES → lower rates of recidivism for youth from low-income families compared to higher income peers	
Room to Read	*Goal:* Life skills development *Setting:* School *Duration:* School year *Format* counsellors One-to-many *Mentors:* Adult female volunteers with high school completion *Mentees:* Girls beginning in grade 6 in India	Biweekly life skills classes conducted in school combined with group mentoring sessions (small group discussions focused on topics from classes).	*Design:* RCT *Sample:* 2,459 girls *Mentoring:* Comparison of girls in schools randomly assigned to implement the Room to Read program with control condition (non-program schools) *Outcome:* Life skills (10 indices), freedom of movement, educational and employment aspirations, marital expectations	+ Socioemotional support + Empowerment + Future planning + Gender norms X Freedom of movement X Educational and employment aspirations		Qualitative study embedded within experimental evaluation found that program helped girls form closer relationships with peers in school, which in turn, contributed to increased valuing of school.

CONVENTIONAL GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

Type of Mentoring			Study Methods & Findings			
Name	Structure	Processes/ Activities	Methodology	Question 1: Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	Question 2: Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	Question 3: Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Soccer for Success	*Goal:* Reduce childhood obesity risk, promote healthy eating and exercise, foster positive youth development *Setting:* School *Duration:* 24 weeks *Format:* Group *Mentors:* Adult coaches *Mentees:* Youth K–8 in urban communities at risk for obesity	Activities grounded in Social Learning Theory; trained coaches deliver program curriculum and serve as mentors/role models to participating youth.	*Design:* QED of 16 randomly assigned intervention and 14 control sites in five US cities *Sample:* 712 youth in Soccer for Success; 522 in control condition *Mentoring:* Soccer for Success compared with control condition *Outcome:* BMI percentile, waist circumference, PACER fitness test assessed at baseline (fall) and follow-up (spring)	+ BMI percentile + Waist circumference + PACER test		
Untitled: Sports Based	*Goal:* Promote physical and mental well-being among youth *Setting:* Community *Duration:* 18 weeks *Format:* One-to-many *Mentors:* Certified sports coaches from local sports associations *Mentees:* High school students in Hong Kong	Students participated in 18-week after-school Positive Youth Development–based sports mentorship program. Students participated in small groups of 12–19 youth engaging in youth-chosen sports and facilitated by the mentors who received training prior to implementing the program. Group meetings followed a semi-structured curriculum.	*Design:* RCT *Sample:* 664 students *Mentoring:* 18 weekly sports mentoring sessions (90 minutes) compared with control condition (web-based health education game) *Outcome:* Survey and physical fitness tests completed at baseline and one month after completion of intervention	+ Mental well-being + Self-efficacy + Resilience + Flexibility + Muscle strength + Balance + Physical activity levels X Physical well-being X BMI X Body fat proportion X Social connectedness		

HYBRID GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Program			Evaluation		
Name	**Structure**	**Processes/ Activities**	**Methodology**	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Campus Connections/ Campus Corps	*Goal:* Prevent deeper engagement with the juvenile justice system, school dropouts, and serious behavioral health problems *Setting:* College campus *Duration:* 12 weeks *Format:* One-to-one and group *Mentors:* Undergraduate students in a three-semester service-learning course *Mentees:* High risk youth ages 11–18, mostly recruited from probation and office of the District Attorney. Youth deeply involved in the juvenile justice system are not included	Each mentor is assigned "mentor family" (groups of four or five other pairs) and supervised by more experienced mentors and graduate students trained in therapeutic interventions and systemic thinking. Each week includes a four-hour meeting where mentors and mentees walk on campus, work on individualized career planning, have family dinners, or engage in other prosocial activities.	*Design:* QED, pre- and post-test *Sample:* 382 youth (n = 286 in Campus Corps; n = 136 comparison referred after program was full) *Mentoring:* Mentoring versus "treatment as usual" Outcome: Single youth-report open-ended truancy item, 13-item youth report scale of delinquent behavior and substance use	+ Delinquent behavior + Substance use + Truancy		
Mentoring for Sexual Health	*Goal:* Promotion of sexual health *Setting:* School *Duration:* 12 weeks *Format:* Many-to-many *Mentors:* Nursing students *Mentees:* Middle school students in Korea	Program combined formal group sessions and informal individual contacts. Trained mentors developed and delivered four formal group education sessions under the supervision of a faculty member.	*Design:* QED pre- and post-test design with nonequivalent control *Sample:* 17 student members of Health Discussion class participated as mentees and compared with 16 student members of a different class (matched for grade and sex) *Mentoring:* Mentoring intervention compared with nonequivalent control group *Outcome:* Knowledge and attitudes assessed at 12-weeks post-intervention	+ Sexual knowledge + Positive sexual attitudes		

HYBRID GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Program		Evaluation			
Name	**Structure**	**Processes/ Activities**	**Methodology**	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Metodologia TUTAL	*Goal:* Promotion of youth well-being *Setting:* School *Duration:* Eight months (school year) *Format:* One-to-many *Mentors:* Teachers *Mentees:* Students (9–16) in public schools in Portugal	Program included weekly one-to-one mentoring meetings to help with academic tasks, discuss personal issues, and promote development of self-regulation strategies. Group mentoring operated as compulsory 90-minute weekly meetings focused on schoolwork, promoting social integration, and discussing themes relevant to each group (group size approximately 20 youth/mentor).	*Design:* RCT *Sample:* Youth assigned to Metodologia TUTAL program (157) or control (160) *Mentoring:* Mentoring compared with control *Outcome:* Personal, social, and academic well-being assessed two months after start of program and six months later (after completion of program)	✗ No overall effects on mental and physical well-being, peer social support, school well-being, perceived academic competence, hope, autonomy, and parent relations	✚ MEN X perceived support for basic psychological needs (relatedness, competence) → higher ratings for physical well-being, school environment, and personal competence	
My Life (Take Charge, Better Futures)	*Goal:* Enhance self-determination skills to improve outcomes for youth (e.g., transitioning out of foster care) *Setting:* School or community *Duration:* Open-ended *Format:* One-to-one and group *Mentors:* Young adults (near peers) with shared experiences (e.g., foster care or mental health involvement) *Mentees:* Youth and young adults with disabilities (Take Charge) or in foster care (My Life, Better Futures)	My Life Mentoring: Youth meet weekly with mentors for 60–90 minutes, either during unscheduled class periods or outside of school time; mentors help youth build skills by rehearsing strategies and practicing activities for goal achievement.	**Sample 2018 Study** (My Life Mentoring) *Design:* RCT *Sample:* Combined and augmented two prior randomized trials; total 293 youth (144 intervention, 149 control) *Mentoring:* My Life Mentoring compared with control group *Outcome:* Self-determination and self-efficacy; criminal justice outcomes assessed with long-term follow-up into early adulthood	✚ Enrollment in postsecondary education ✗ Criminal justice involvement	✚ MEN X Gender → (-) Criminal Justice Involvement (CJI) for males in intervention group, no effect for females ✚ MEN X Developmental Disability (DD) → (-) CJI for youth without a DD no effect for youth with a DD	

HYBRID GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Program			Evaluation		
Name	**Structure**	**Processes/ Activities**	**Methodology**	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
The Young Women Leaders Program	*Goal:* Preventing delinquency and related negative outcomes in adolescent girls identified as at-risk *Setting:* Community *Duration:* Up to three years, mentees receive a new mentor each year *Format:* One-to-one and group *Mentors:* College women who commit five hours a week for the academic year *Mentees:* Seventh to ninth grade girls at risk for delinquency	Mentoring pairs meet for at least four hours a month one-to-one to do mutually agreed upon activities Pairs meet two hours a week after school in groups of 8–10 mentees, their mentors, and a facilitator for connection, homework time, introduction of skills, working on service projects, and group discussion of problematic topics All pairs attend structured activities once a semester on the college campus and most groups have sleepovers or play days.	*Design:* Quasi-experimental and randomized (true randomization did not occur in year one; five-year follow-up) *Sample:* 165 youth *Mentoring:* Examined outcome based on dosage *Outcomes:* Self-esteem (global and school self-esteem, family and peer self-esteem), assertiveness assessed at pretest (fall) and posttest (spring)	+ Global self-esteem X Academic self-esteem X Assertiveness	X MEN X SES X MEN X Ethnicity	MEN → (+) Mentoring groups characterized by caretaking and trust building → (+) satisfaction with one-to-one mentoring relationship

INCORPORATED GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Program		Evaluation			
Name	**Structure**	**Processes/ Activities**	**Methodology**	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Boys & Girls Clubs/ After-School Program	*Goal:* Promote positive youth development *Setting:* Community *Duration:* Open-ended *Format:* Group activities *Mentors:* Program staff and/or volunteers *Mentees:* Children and adolescents	Clubs provide a safe environment for kids during out-of-school hours and offer a diverse range of programs and activities.	*Design:* Qualitative *Sample:* 17 youth 12–18 *Mentoring:* Participants in Club *Outcome:* Observation of staff-youth interactions and interviews with youth			Qualitative data indicated three relational strategies used by staff to build relationships with youth: minimizing relational distance, active inclusion, attention to proximal relational ties. Relationships between staff and youth form foundation for youth program engagement and promotion of positive outcomes.
NC Playa'z	*Goal:* Promote positive youth development *Setting:* Community theater *Duration:* Unspecified *Format:* Group *Mentors:* Adult volunteer *Mentees:* Youth (6–16 years) recruited from a youth center and surrounding neighborhood in large urban area	Weekly drama group meetings of 90 minutes. Group chose, rehearsed, and performed a play under direction of a group leader/ director who supported teamwork, trust, and accountability as group norms.	*Design:* Qualitative analysis of group experience *Sample:* Final group of 10 youth (six girls and four boys) aged 10–13 *Mentoring:* Participation in theatre troupe *Outcome:* Group decision-making skills and group work; analysis of journals, videotaped sessions, and group leader observations, combined with brief questionnaires	Overall sentiment of youth and adults (including parents) very positive.		Noted that use of theater program allowed students to have a voice and also provided structure, communication, and a sense of group belonging.

INCORPORATED GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS

	Program			Evaluation		
Name	**Structure**	**Processes/ Activities**	**Methodology**	**Question 1:** Effect of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 2:** Factors conditioning or shaping effects of mentoring on youth outcomes?	**Question 3:** Intervening processes linking mentoring to youth outcomes?
Unnamed program (drill team for African-American youth exposed to community violence)	*Goal:* Prevent at-risk youth from participating in risky behaviors via involvement in drill team (performing arts) *Setting:* Community Duration: Open-ended *Format:* Mentoring incorporated into program *Mentors:* Older peers and adult staff leaders *Mentees:* Youth as young as 8 work in small groups with team leaders	To be eligible, youth must keep good academic standing. Youth spend three hours per day, two days a week learning drills in small groups. Program staff follow a year-long curriculum on topics such as character development, addressed in team setting and one-to-one meetings with youth. Performances with whole drill team as well as smaller groups.	*Design:* Correlational analysis *Sample:* 65 youth and young adult members of drill team *Mentoring:* Reported relationships with team and staff leaders *Outcome:* Program participation; participation in other program settings; youth report of supportive relationships with adult staff, sense of community, norms for behavior, psychological distress, self-esteem, problem behaviors			Greater involvement with team associated with more positive perceptions of trusting and supportive relationships with adult team leaders and more prosocial behavioral norms