



# RELATIONAL DYNAMICS IN YOUTH MENTORING: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

Children's Research Network (CRN)  
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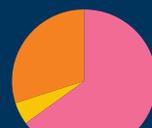
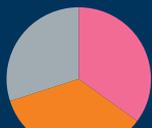
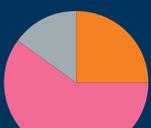
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# [01]

Introduction



The aim of youth mentoring relationships is ‘to create a supportive social bond between a young person and an adult in which trust and closeness can develop and the adult can help the young person to cope and develop to the best of his or her abilities’ (Dolan and Brady, 2011: 128). Evaluations of mentoring programmes provide evidence to suggest that involvement in youth mentoring relationships can result in benefits for young people in a range of areas, including emotional well-being, reduced delinquency, education, and social connectedness (Dolan et al., 2011a; DuBois et al., 2011).

However, research indicates that not every mentoring programme will produce these results; the most successful mentoring programmes are those that foster the development of close, trusting, and safe relationships between mentors and mentees. Mentoring relationships are more likely to be beneficial for young people if they are characterised by high levels of perceived closeness, happiness, affection, trust, warmth, and support (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, & Lipman, 2016) and are supported by programmes which prioritise rigorous screening of volunteers, create matches based on shared interests, and provide training to mentors and regular supervision of matches (Stelter et al., 2018). Research has also shown that the mentor’s understanding of the mentoring role, which in turn influences their style of interaction with the young person, impacts significantly on the quality and benefits of mentoring for young people (Brumovska, 2017; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Spencer, 2006; Morrow & Styles, 1995). However, it has been argued that these experiences have not been explored sufficiently to date and that there is a need for researchers to better understand the relational processes or dynamics that are key to promoting positive outcomes for youth mentoring programmes (Erdem et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2016; McQuillin et al., 2015).

Almost two decades ago, the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) youth mentoring programme was first introduced in Ireland by Foróige, the National Youth Development Organisation, who were among the first to pioneer formal youth mentoring programmes in an Irish context. In 2007, Foróige commissioned the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Big Brothers Big Sisters programme in providing support for young people in Ireland. This study (Dolan et al., 2011a; 2011b), which included a randomised controlled trial, qualitative study, and implementation study, found evidence that participation in the BBBS programme was associated with positive developmental outcomes for youths in Ireland, particularly in the areas of emotional well-being and perceived support. Overall, the programme practices were found to adhere to best practice.

The purpose of this study is to seek to create further knowledge on the dynamics of the BBBS youth mentoring programme through a secondary analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the original BBBS Evaluation Study (Dolan et al., 2011a; 2011b). It is anticipated that this secondary analysis will generate further understanding of the relational processes and dynamics at play

in youth mentoring programmes.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- to review the research literature in relation to youth mentoring programmes and the factors that moderate their impact
- to analyse the relational dynamics that developed between youths and their mentors, how these dynamics change over time, and how the dynamics of the youth–mentor relationship affect youth outcomes over time
- to explore the experiences of mentors, including motivations for volunteering, conceptualisation of their role, benefits and challenges of being a mentor, and their perceptions of programme supports.

## Overview of the Report

Following this introduction, this report details the findings from a narrative literature review which summarises the research evidence in relation to youth mentoring programmes. This review also discusses the role that the mentoring relationship and other relationship dynamics exert on the effectiveness of such mentoring programmes. It then details the methodological approaches undertaken by the original BBBS evaluation study (Dolan et al., 2011a), and highlights the quantitative and qualitative approaches undertaken in the current study. The findings from the secondary analysis of quantitative data are then presented and discussed, followed by the qualitative findings. The report concludes by discussing the implications of these findings and makes recommendations for future policy and practice initiatives.

# [02]

Literature Review



## What Are Formal Youth Mentoring Programmes?

According to Hall (2003), the term ‘mentoring’ is regarded as a ‘conceptually loose’ construct in the literature, and even a brief review of this research area will uncover an array of different proposed definitions and operationalisations (Rhodes, 2008; Dubois & Karcher, 2005). Generally, however, mentoring is characterised as an intense interpersonal relationship where a more senior or experienced individual (mentor) provides guidance, support, or encouragement to a younger or more junior individual (mentee or protégé) (Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Kram, 1985). There is also some consensus in the literature that an essential hallmark of a successful mentoring relationship is the presence of an emotional bond between the mentor and mentee (Raposa et al., 2017; Dubois & Karcher, 2005).

### Definition of Mentoring

A mentoring relationship is characterised by three key features:

- The mentor has more experience or wisdom than the mentee.
- The mentor offers guidance or support to the mentee.
- There is an emotional bond between the mentor and mentee.

### Mentor

A mentor is an older, more experienced person who seeks to support, guide, or otherwise enhance the development of a younger (non-related) individual.

### Mentee

A mentee or protégé is a younger, less experienced person who is helped, guided, supported, or advised by a (non-parental) adult.

- Dubois & Karcher (2005)

Although mentoring can occur naturally, there has been a sharp increase in the implementation of formal youth mentoring programmes, as a result of growing public and governmental interest in the potential of mentoring relationships to help foster positive development among young people, particularly for disadvantaged or ‘at-risk’ youths (DuBois et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2011). These programmes are based on the premise that supportive relationships with adults are important for youths’ personal, cognitive, and psychological development (Allen & Eby, 2011). Formal youth mentoring programmes are initiatives that attempt to formally ‘match’ or pair a young person with an adult, with the aim that the pairing will cultivate a relationship or bond that will benefit the young person’s development and well-being (Gettings & Wilson, 2014).

Although children and adolescents from all backgrounds can participate in these initiatives, programmes frequently focus on youths who are perceived as being disadvantaged or at risk of poor (academic, social, behavioural, etc.) outcomes (Grossman et al., 2012; DuBois et al., 2011). Typically, youth mentoring programmes recruit, screen, and train adult volunteers to become mentors to a non-familial youth, who has been referred to the programme (DuBois & Keller, 2017; Raposa et al., 2017). Characteristically, youth mentoring programmes require that the adult mentor and their matched youth spend regular, one-on-one time together in a community or school setting, over a specified period of time (usually no less than 12 months). These programmes may also provide ongoing staff support to both the mentor and the youth as they get to know one another (DuBois & Keller, 2017).

Although youth mentoring is an old concept, there has been a rapid increase in the variety and volume of mentoring programmes developed in recent decades (Matz, 2013; Farruggia et al., 2011). For example, it is estimated that there are over 5,000 different mentoring programmes, involving over 3 million youth, in the US alone (Matz, 2013; Blakeslee & Keller, 2012). While the majority of programmes appear to take place in the US, they are fast becoming commonplace in many countries around the world (Gettings & Wilson, 2014; Farruggia et al., 2011). Currently, a large variety of different mentoring programmes exist worldwide (Matz, 2013; Bruster & Foreman, 2012; Grossman et al., 2012). While some have only evolved in the last decade or so (e.g., Amachi, Cincinnati Youth Collaborative), others have been around for more than a century (Big Brothers Big Sisters) (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014). Of all the existing youth mentoring programmes, BBBS is one of the most extensively examined, having undergone rigorous evaluations in numerous countries (Matz, 2013; Grossman et al., 2012; Herrera et al., 2011; Tierney et al., 1995).

### What is Big Brothers Big Sisters?

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) is one of the largest volunteer-supported mentoring networks in the world (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014). Children (6–18 years) facing adversity (e.g., single-parent or low-income families or those from disadvantaged communities) join the programme and are paired with a volunteer adult mentor (Mihalic et al., 2004). Mentors (“Big”) are screened and trained before they are carefully matched with a mentee (“Little”). Mentors are asked to commit to meeting their mentees three or more times a month for a total of 5 or more hours and engaging in mutually agreed-upon activities, such as going to after-school events, matches, or the cinema (Matz, 2013). A programme coordinator regularly makes contact with the mentor, mentee, and parent to monitor the relationship.

## Are Formal Youth Mentoring Programmes Beneficial?

Generally, evaluations of formal one-to-one youth mentoring programmes have provided evidence to suggest that these initiatives are efficacious at promoting positive developmental outcomes among young people (DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes, 2008). However, despite the pervasive support and enthusiasm for these programmes among policymakers (Tolan et al., 2014), research findings also suggest a need for caution, revealing that mentoring programmes may also produce negative outcomes for some youths (DuBois et al., 2011; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). According to DuBois and Keller (2017) other caveats which temper support for the effectiveness of these youth mentoring programmes include modest effect sizes; observed inconsistencies in impacts, both within and across mentoring programmes; and poor longevity of results (DuBois et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2007).

Over the last number of decades a substantial body of empirical research evidence has accumulated to suggest that young people who take part in youth mentoring programmes show significant improvements in a wide range of behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and health-related outcomes (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Tolan et al., 2014; Meyerson, 2013; DuBois et al., 2011; Cheng et al., 2008).

First, youth mentoring programmes appear to show promise in promoting **emotional and psychological well-being** among young people (Barry et al., 2018; Erdem et al., 2016; Larsson et al., 2016; Cavell & Elledge, 2013; DuBois et al., 2002). In particular, research has suggested that mentored youths seem less likely to suffer from mental health issues and show greater levels of life satisfaction than non-mentored youths (Agmon et al., 2015; Phelps et al., 2007; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). For instance, a recent longitudinal investigation of the effectiveness of the BBBS of Canada programme indicated that mentored youths (with chronic health problems) experienced fewer symptoms of social anxiety and showed reduced levels of depression than their non-mentored peers (Lipman et al., 2018). Other research has also found a link between mentoring and increased psychological well-being and self-esteem (Whitney et al., 2011; Portwood et al., 2005). Research has suggested that mentoring-based programmes may be effective in promoting youths' self-regulation skills (Bowers et al., 2015; Mueller et al., 2011). Findings from a number of systematic reviews and meta-analytical evaluations confirm the potential of youth mentoring programmes as an effective tool that can help significantly reduce emotional and psychological problems among at-risk youths (Tolan et al., 2014; Meyerson, 2013; DuBois et al., 2011).

Second, research has shown that youths who participate in mentoring programmes are less likely to engage in **delinquency** and show a reduction in other problem-related or aggressive behaviours (Williams, 2011; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Kaplan et al., 2009; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007). For example, several RCT evaluation studies provide evidence to suggest that participation in community based youth mentoring programmes, like the BBBS (e.g. Herrera et al.,

2007; Grossman & Tierney, 1998), is associated with reduced substance abuse and violence (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014; Tolan et al., 2013; Tolan et al., 2014). Indeed, an 18-month study of eight BBBS of America programmes found that youths in the mentoring programme were 46% less likely than a control group to begin using drugs, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol, and 32% less likely to hit someone (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Tierney et al., 1995). Similarly, an examination of a school-based mentoring programme for children with elevated aggression or social-emotional problems carried out by Wyman et al. (2010), found that children in the mentoring group showed better behavioural control than a control group of non-mentored students. Additionally, Jackson (2002) found that youths who engaged in an intensive mentoring programme showed a significant reduction in their (parent-reported) negative behaviours. Other similar effects have been documented with community-based youth mentoring programmes, which have been reported to significantly reduce youth drug or alcohol use and engagement in problem behaviours (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014; Matz, 2013; Juvocy, 2003; Keating et al., 2002).

In addition, findings from several empirical studies and systematic reviews contend that mentoring may also impact youths' **social relationships and skills** (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Lipman & Spencer, 2016; DuBois et al., 2002). For example, a qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of a mentoring programme for at-risk girls found that girls who reported growing to trust their mentor also showed growing levels of trust towards other adults and peers (Deutsch et al., 2017). Wyman et al. (2010) found an increase in peer social skills among female (but not male) youths who took part in a school-based mentoring programme. The study of mentoring in the learning environment (SMILE), a large experimental study, found a small but positive association between mentoring and increased peer connectedness and social skills for all genders (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014). Findings from Hughes et al. (2005) suggested that mentored youths show a more positive perception of peer acceptance than non-mentored youths. Grossman and Rhodes (2002) reported that youths who belonged to a long-term (i.e., over 12 months) mentoring relationship showed increases in self-perceived social acceptance, in comparison to a control group. Similarly, research by Chapman et al. (2017) reported that youths who were engaged in a mentoring programme over a 12-month period showed significant gains in their self-reported sense of community and social self-efficacy. Moreover, Berry et al. (2009) reported a link between at-risk youths' participation in mentoring programmes and increases in their prosocial behaviour. Crucially, numerous large-scale evaluations of other mentoring programmes have indicated that mentoring is associated with improved peer and parent relationships or attachment among young people (Deane et al., 2016; Matz, 2013; Clarke, 2009; Herrera et al., 2007; Aseltine et al., 2000; Grossman & Tierney, 1998).

A number of early evaluation studies have also provided evidence for the role of youth mentoring programmes in promoting greater cognitive skills, including improved **academic and educational achievement** (Bayer et al., 2015; Grant et al., 2014; Matz, 2013; Broussard et al.,

2006). For instance, DuBois and Silverthorn (1995) reported that youths with adult mentors were more likely than non-mentored youths to finish their second-level or high-school education and attend college or university (as cited by Agmon et al., 2015). Herrera et al. (2007) found that participating in mentoring programmes was associated with reduced truancy, increased school attendance, better grades, and greater scholastic self-efficacy. Furthermore, Shiner et al. (2004) evidenced improved goal-setting and decision-making skills among at-risk youths who participated in a mentoring programme. Research by Holt et al. (2008) found that mentored youths showed increases in decision-making self-efficacy, whereas the control group reported a decline in their perceived decision-making ability. Research by Sánchez et al. (2008) reported that having a mentor was positively related to youths' expectations of school success, while Zimmerman et al. (2002) found that mentored adolescents displayed more positive school attitudes than youths who did not have a mentor. Zimmerman et al. (2002) proposed that mentors may buffer potential negative effects on adolescents' academic attitudes, which may result from having friends who exhibit poor school functioning skills or attitudes (Sterett et al., 2011). Several other reports show that youths who participated in a mentoring programme, where the relationship lasted 12 months or longer, showed more confidence in education and displayed improved school attendance (Matz, 2013; Bruster & Foreman, 2012; Juvoc, 2003).

However, although support for the efficacy of youth-mentoring approaches in promoting more positive developmental outcomes for at-risk youths appears to be widespread in the literature, as outlined above, it is also increasingly recognised that caution should be exerted when interpreting and generalising these findings (DuBois et al., 2011; Eby et al., 2008). In particular, researchers now contend that the strength of the evidence supporting the link between mentoring and youths' positive developmental outcomes is tempered by a number of important research limitations and inconsistencies (DuBois & Keller, 2017).

Crucially, while it is acknowledged that youth mentoring programmes may exert significant positive effects on youths' behavioural, emotional, social, and cognitive outcomes (Spencer et al., 2017; Meyerson, 2013; Rhodes, 2005; DuBois et al., 2002), researchers now query the extent to which mentoring programmes exert substantial effects on youths' development (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Matz, 2013). Of note are findings from recent meta-analyses which indicate that the magnitude of effects that mentoring programmes exert on youth outcomes tend to be small to moderate, at best (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, Lipman & Spencer, 2016; Erdem et al., 2016; DuBois et al., 2011, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007). For example, findings from a meta-analysis that compared differences between mentored and non-mentored individuals on a wide range of developmental outcomes (e.g. behavioural, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, career) found that although youth mentoring was associated with favourable outcomes, effects tended to be relatively small (Eby et al., 2008). Tolan et al. (2014) also recently conducted a meta-analytic

review evaluating the effects of mentoring programmes on at-risk youths' self-reported levels of delinquency, drug use, aggression, and academic achievement, and while significant effects were observed for all four outcomes, their size was modest (0.11 for academic achievement, 0.16 for drug use, 0.21 for delinquency, 0.29 for aggression) (Tolan et al., 2014).

Researchers have also expressed concern over the durability of mentoring effects over time (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Erdem et al., 2016; Matz, 2013; Meyerson, 2013). Results from a number of longitudinal evaluations have suggested that the positive effects associated with mentoring programmes tend to dissipate within a few months of programme completion (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014; Herrera et al., 2011; Holt et al., 2008; Karcher & Herrera, 2007). For instance, although an array of positive results (e.g., reduced substance use, fewer behavioural issues, increased school and family connectedness) were observed in Aseltine et al.'s (2000) experimental evaluation of the Across Ages mentoring programme, no significant effects were observed beyond the academic year (Rodríguez-Planas, 2012). Similarly, Herrera et al. (2007) investigated the sustained benefits associated with participation in a BBBS programme and found that the outcomes were not sustained over time. Conversely, in their meta-analytic review on the effectiveness of mentoring programmes, DuBois et al. (2011) did not observe any significant differences in effect sizes over time. However, it should be noted that only six studies were found to report follow-up analyses and could be included in this assessment.

Researchers have also noted several important inconsistencies in the observed effectiveness of mentoring programmes across different study evaluations (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Rodríguez-Planas, 2014; Matz, 2013; DuBois et al., 2011). In particular, it has been noted that some mentoring programmes have not been found to produce any significant impact on youths' developmental outcomes (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Rodríguez-Planas, 2014). For instance, Matz (2013) notes that in some cases youths who participate in mentoring programmes appear less likely to engage in delinquency behaviours, but that this finding is not observed consistently across programmes. In their review of the impact of youth mentoring on delinquency, Jolliffe and Farrington (2007) identified 18 studies relevant for inclusion, only seven of which were found to produce a positive, significant effect; 11 studies reported non-significant findings. Similarly, an experimental evaluation by Bernstein et al. (2009) reported no significant associations between youths' participation in a school-based mentoring programme and improved academic or behavioural outcomes.

While the outcomes from youth mentoring programmes are often positive, some studies have reported unintended negative consequences for young participants (Spencer et al., 2017; DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Morgan et al., 2016; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007; DuBois et al., 2002). For example, Rodríguez-Planas (2012) conducted a randomised, experimental study examining the effects of a mentoring programme in reducing risky behaviour and increasing educational outcomes among at-risk youth. In contrast to the expected direction of effects, mentored

youths showed greater increases in problem behaviour over time. Importantly, other research has suggested that early terminations in mentoring relationships may reinforce youths' low self-esteem, and may result in youths experiencing lower academic confidence and self-worth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

As a result of these observed inconsistencies, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are being increasingly urged to not overestimate the potential benefits of youth mentoring (Eby et al., 2008). Overall, research indicates that while mentoring can be a flexible and effective intervention strategy, mentoring programmes may not be suitable in all contexts (Morgan et al., 2016; Matz, 2013). Some researchers have postulated that these observed discrepancies in the direction and strength of effects among mentoring programmes may result from differences in how they were conducted (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016). Therefore, there is a need for researchers to better understand the mentoring dynamics or relational processes that are key to promoting positive outcomes for youth mentoring programmes across all contexts (Erdem et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2016; McQuillin et al., 2015; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010).

## What Impacts the Success of Youth Mentoring Programmes?

Prior research suggests that several aspects of the mentoring relationship may impact the relationship between programme participation and youth outcomes (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Erdem et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2016; Tolan et al., 2014; Whitney et al., 2011; DuBois et al., 2002). In particular, research points to the importance of a number of indicators, such as compatibility or similarity between youths and mentors, frequency of mentor–youth contact, duration of the match, relationship quality, and emotional closeness (Rhodes et al., 2017; DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, Lipman, and Spencer, 2016; DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, and Lipman, 2016; Erdem et al., 2016; Grossman et al., 2012; DuBois et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2007; Nakkula & Harris, 2005; Langhout et al., 2004). It is also contended that other individual and programme-related characteristics, such as intensity of mentor training or youth/mentor motivation for participating in the programme, may also influence programme success (DuBois & Keller, 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017; DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; McQuillin et al., 2015; Matz, 2013).

First, a growing body of evidence suggests that the quality of the preparation, training, and support that mentors receive may play an integral role in influencing the success of youth mentoring programmes (Spencer et al., 2017; Erdem et al., 2016; DuBois et al., 2011; Whitney et al., 2011; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Crucially, it is argued that ongoing mentor training, as opposed to initial training, is an important predictor of effect size in youth mentoring programmes (McQuillin et al., 2015). Interestingly, evidence suggests that there is no difference in the effects of community-based mentoring programmes that employed pre-intervention mentor training only and no mentor training (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). However, DuBois et al. (2002) observed support for the positive impact that ongoing

mentor training may exert on programme outcomes. In their evaluation of over 55 separate youth mentoring programmes, DuBois et al. (2002) noted that the strength of programme effects appeared to increase dramatically when mentors were provided with ongoing training and support (McQuillin et al., 2015).

Aspects of mentors' 'mentoring' styles have also been shown to be important in impacting youth outcomes (Rhodes et al., 2017; Bellamy et al., 2004). For example, a variety of research has indicated that mentoring pairs that are characterised by similar interests and compatibility tend to produce more positive outcomes (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Higley et al., 2016; Gettings & Wilson, 2014; Liang et al., 2006; Rhodes et al., 2002). Of particular note is the finding from DuBois et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis, which confirmed that programmes that matched mentors and youths based on similar interests produced larger effect sizes, on a variety of outcomes, than those that did not. Other research suggests that mentoring that employs a strengths-based approach and focuses on emphasising youth assets, rather than their deficits, may also positively affect programme outcomes (Higley et al., 2016; Liang et al., 2013). Findings from an array of other studies and reviews indicate that under-structured or overly prescriptive mentoring styles may not be effective in promoting positive youth outcomes (Matz, 2013; Keller & Pryce, 2012; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). Indeed, Langhout et al. (2004) evidenced that programmes where matches are characterised by activity, structure, and expectations (e.g., conditional support) appear to produce more successful effects. Similarly, DuBois and Keller (2017) surmised that mentoring programmes appear to be most effective when they are able to facilitate mentor–mentee activities that are both engaging and responsive to the interests of the mentee, but also incorporate the structure and guidance that are necessary to scaffold youths' positive growth and development.

Research consistently indicates that considerable variation in programme outcomes may occur as a function of both match duration and frequency of contact (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, Lipman & Spencer, 2016; Erdem et al., 2016; Higley et al., 2016; Gettings & Wilson, 2014; Grossman & Rhodes, 2012; DuBois et al., 2011; Clarke, 2009; Langhout et al., 2004). Specifically, the majority of available evidence suggests that longer mentoring relationships typically result in more positive youth outcomes (DuBois & Karcher, 2017; Gettings & Wilson, 2014; Matz, 2013; Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher, 2005; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). In fact, it has been proposed that match length may be one of the best benchmarks for overall programme effectiveness (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017). The frequency and consistency of contact, as well as the length of the youth–mentor meetings, may also impact programme success (Bowers et al., 2015). For example, DuBois et al. (2002) evidenced that programmes that reported expectations for frequency of contact between mentors and mentees showed significantly larger effects than programmes that did not include this expectation. Evaluations by Grossman and Rhodes (2002) and Grossman et al. (2012) also indicated that the longevity of the mentoring relationship makes a difference to youth outcomes (Clarke, 2009). Specifically,

Grossman and colleagues (2002, 2012) observed that the effect that mentoring exerts on youths' outcomes becomes progressively stronger as match length increases (typically > 12 months). More recent investigations apparently confirm the link between match length/consistency and positive developmental outcomes (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017).

Despite this proposed positive link between the longevity of the mentoring relationship and the strength of the observed effects, early terminations in youth mentoring programmes are typically reported for a high percentage of matches (Rhodes et al., 2017; Bowers et al., 2015; Erdem et al., 2016; Higley et al., 2016; Gettings & Wilson, 2014; Rodríguez-Planas, 2014; Morgan et al., 2016). More specifically, DeWit and different sets of colleagues (2016, 2016) reported that an estimated 30%–50% of all programme-supported community mentoring relationships between youths and adult mentors appear to end before the standard period of commitment (typically 12 months). Worryingly, research has indicated that when mentoring relationships close early or unexpectedly, youths may be at increased risk of experiencing harmful behavioural, emotional, or social outcomes (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017). For instance, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) noted that youths in mentoring relationships that lasted less than 3 months showed significant declines in a number of outcomes (e.g., self-esteem), relative to the youths in the control group. Likewise, Bernstein et al. (2009) found that matches lasting less than 6 months were actually more harmful to a child when compared with the youth's pre-match state (no mentor). Other reports contend that premature match closures can result in negative youth outcomes, such as mentees feeling disappointed and abandoned or rejected by their mentor (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Spencer, 2006; Karcher, 2005). While a review by DuBois et al. (2011) did find some positive support from mentoring programmes which lasted less than 6 months, typically mentoring is not thought to be effective when matches are terminated within the first 3 months (Grossman et al., 2012). However, Matz (2013) contended that while early match terminations may not lead to positive youth outcomes, they do not necessarily impact youths negatively; it depends on the reasons for the match ending.

The perceived quality of the mentoring relationship is consistently associated with more positive educational, emotional, and behavioural outcomes in young people (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014; DuBois et al., 2011; DuBois et al., 2002; Whitney et al., 2011). Although 'quality' is a subjective term, researchers generally appear to operationalise high-quality mentoring relationships as those that are characterised by high levels of perceived closeness, happiness, affection, trust, warmth, and support (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016). In particular, Rhodes (2008) argued that feelings of closeness and warmth between youths and their mentors are an essential prerequisite of any successful youth mentoring programme, without which mentoring will be unlikely to make any noticeable benefits to youths' lives. Similarly, Chapman et al. (2017) argued that supportive youth–mentor relationships are key to the success of mentoring interventions and programmes. Rhodes et al.

(2017) contended that by providing care and support, mentors may be able to challenge youths' potential negative self-beliefs or to show youths that positive relationships with adults are possible. Conversely, Whitney et al. (2011) proposed that if mentoring relationships are not positive in their emotional closeness, then youths will not feel supported. Spencer et al. (2017) observed that lack of closeness or youth/mentor dissatisfaction with matches may also negatively impact match duration and may result in early match closures, thereby impeding programme effects. Importantly, findings from several independent research reports have indicated that close, supportive mentoring relationships are associated with an array of positive developmental and relational outcomes (Rhodes et al., 2017; Bowers et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Planas, 2014; Chan et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 2013; DuBois et al., 2011; Whitney et al., 2011; Renick Thomson & Zand, 2010). Mentor satisfaction and perception of relationship quality has also been linked with more positive youth outcomes (Rhodes et al., 2017; Larose et al., 2010; Goldner & Maysel, 2009).

## Conclusion

Decades of international research suggest that formal youth mentoring programmes may be a beneficial intervention tool for helping to improve developmental outcomes for youths who are at risk of disadvantage (Meyerson, 2013; DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes, 2008; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007). On the other hand, several researchers have identified important limitations to these mentoring programmes, which should give cause for concern, including the typically small size of observed treatment effects, the general lack of youth benefits observed consistently over time, and the inconsistencies in outcomes observed across programmes (DuBois & Keller, 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017; (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Eby et al., 2008; Hererra et al., 2007). Notably, however, a growing body of research suggests that the relational dynamics that develop between youths and their mentors, as well as other programme supports, likely have a strong impact on the beneficial outcomes produced by these mentoring programmes (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Higley et al., 2016; McQuillin et al., 2015; Tolan et al., 2014; Matz, 2013; Whitney et al., 2011). In particular, it is argued that mentoring programmes that provide adequate support and structure to the match pairs, throughout their mentoring relationship, are likely to produce more successful outcomes (Rodríguez-Planas, 2014). In addition, beneficial programme outcomes are more likely to occur when mentors and mentees build strong, close, and supportive relationships through frequent contact, and when these emotional ties are maintained over time (Erdem et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Planas, 2014).

# [03]

## Methodology



## Overview of the Original Study Design and Findings

The original BBBS programme evaluation conducted from 2007–2011 was a mixed-methods research study with three strands:

- **Quantitative strand:** A randomised control trial (RCT) was conducted, whereby 164 study participants were randomly allocated to either a treatment or a control group. The developmental outcomes for both groups were assessed at four time points (baseline, 12 months post-baseline, 18 months post-baseline, and 24 months post-baseline) over a two-year period.<sup>1</sup> This approach was undertaken to assess if the group receiving mentoring showed improved outcomes compared to the group not receiving mentoring.
- **Qualitative strand:** Nine longitudinal qualitative case studies of mentoring pairs were conducted to explore the perspectives of young people, parents, mentors, and project workers regarding the mentoring process.
- **Implementation strand:** A review of programme implementation was undertaken to assess if the programme was implemented as planned. This involved staff interviews, collection of monitoring data, and review of programme materials.

The key findings of the original evaluation study were as follows:

- Young people with a mentor were more hopeful and had a greater sense of efficacy in relation to the future than those without a mentor.
- Young people with a mentor felt better supported overall than those without a mentor.
- Parents of mentored youths rated their pro-social behaviour more positively than did parents of non-mentored youths.
- There were positive but non-significant trends in the core RCT study in relation to social acceptance, school liking, plans for school and college completion, and reduced drug and alcohol use.
- There were also non-significant findings in relation to misconduct and scholastic efficacy.
- There was an average effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.09 after two years across all the youth measures, which compares favourably to the RCT study by Tierney et al. (1995) of BBBS in the USA (Dolan et al., 2011a).

## Aims of the Current Study

As outlined earlier, the purpose of this study is to conduct a secondary analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from the Foróige BBBS of Ireland Evaluation Study (Dolan et al., 2011a; 2011b), in order to generate further understanding of the relational processes and dynamics at play in youth mentoring programmes. The main objectives of this study are:

- To review the research literature in relation to youth mentoring programmes and the factors that moderate their impact.
- To describe the relational dynamics that developed between youths and their mentors, explore how these dynamics changed over time, and analyse how the dynamics of the youth–mentor relationship influenced youth outcomes over time (**Quantitative**).
- To explore the experiences of mentors, including motivations for volunteering, conceptualisations of their role, benefits and challenges of being a mentor, and their perceptions of programme supports. (**Qualitative**)

Secondary analysis is generally understood as the reanalysis of data already collected in a previous study in order to address a new research question (Bryman, 2016). While secondary data analysis has the advantage of using existing data to address new research questions, it can bring a range of ethical and methodological challenges (Rodriguez, 2018). A key consideration is whether the participants have given consent to the use of their data for another purpose (Rodriguez, 2018). In the case of this study, all research participants consented to their participation in the original study. The research team for the current study includes two members of the original research team, and the study involves making use of data that was collected as part of the original study but not analysed fully at the time, due to time constraints. Thus, it was felt that the further consent of participants was not required as all participants had already consented to these objectives.

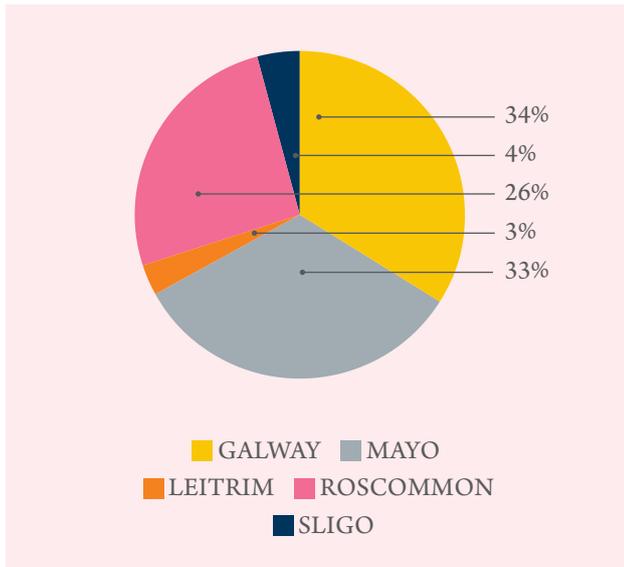
The methods adopted in the quantitative and qualitative strands of the current study are described below:

## Quantitative Methodology

Data from a total of 76 young people (39 male, 37 female), aged 10–15 years ( $M = 12.24$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ), is reported here.<sup>2</sup> All participants were part of the BBBS mentoring programme throughout the west of Ireland. Overall, an attrition rate of 4% was observed at both time 2 and time 3, with 73 participants completing follow-up outcome measures at these time points. An attrition rate of 11% was observed at time 4, with 68 participants completing the follow-up survey at time 4. Figure 1 shows the geographical spread of youths recruited from different regions in Ireland.

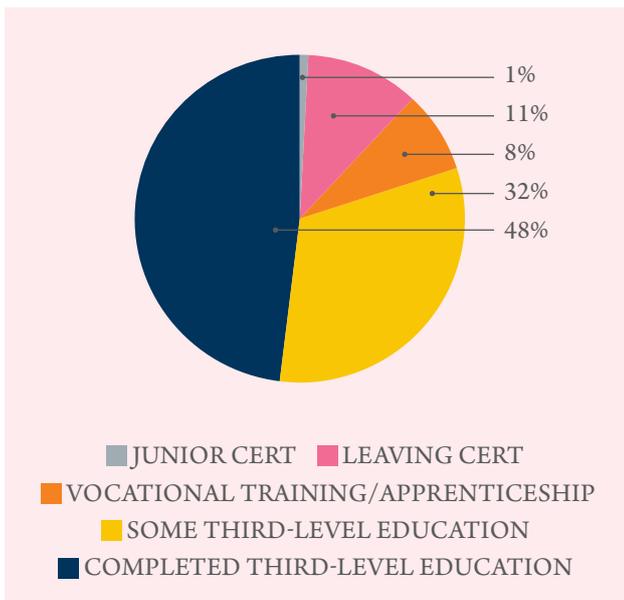
1 A full description of ethical issues, methodology, and tools used is provided in the earlier BBBS Report (see Dolan et al., 2011a).

2 Although an additional 69 youth (36 male, 33 female) were also recruited to a wait-list control group, for comparison purposes, only findings from the intervention group are reported in this study.

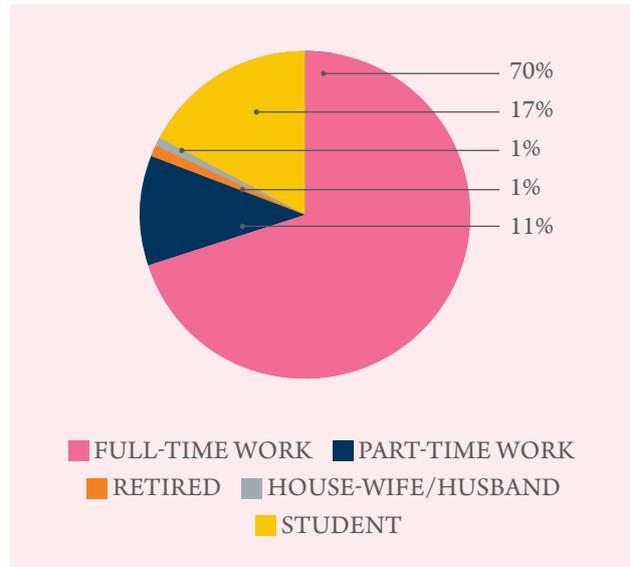


**Figure 1. Spread of youths across the different counties in the west of Ireland**

Data was also collected from 76 (39 male, 37 female) adults, who volunteered to act as mentors to the youths in the BBBS programme. All mentors were aged 18–56 years ( $M = 30.98$ ,  $SD = 8.37$ ) and were paired with one of the youths in the BBBS intervention group as a Big Brother or Big Sister. For 98% of mentors, this was their first experience of acting as a Big Brother or Big Sister. As can be seen in Figure 2, 48% of mentors had completed third-level education. The majority of mentors (70%) were also currently in full-time employment, while a significant minority (17%) were college students (see Figure 3). Approximately 86% of mentors were of Irish nationality. All other mentors (14%) also identified as being of other white ethnic backgrounds.



**Figure 2. Percentage breakdown of mentor education levels**



**Figure 3. Percentage breakdown of mentor occupation status**

Before taking part in the BBBS programme, all youths completed a baseline (time 1) self-report survey assessing their current emotional well-being, educational attainment, risk behaviours, and level of relational support. Demographic information was also collected at time 1. Once youths completed these initial assessments, they were enrolled into the programme and forwarded for matching with their individual mentors. The programme was delivered per the BBBS service delivery manual. All volunteers were vetted and trained before being matched. All mentors were expected to commit to at least one year of service and were asked to meet with their mentee for 1–2 hours per week. However, it was at the discretion of the mentor and young person to choose how much time to spend together. Each match was also free to choose how to spend their time together.

Approximately 12 months after the initial baseline assessments, follow-up surveys were carried out (time 2). At time 2, youths completed questionnaires containing the same outcome measures as at time 1, assessing their current emotional well-being, educational attainment, risk behaviours, and level of relational support. Youths also reported on their current level of satisfaction with their mentor, perceived mentor support, and closeness. Identical questionnaires assessing youths' developmental outcomes and match satisfaction were carried out at time 3 (18 months post-baseline) and time 4 (two years post-baseline). Mentors were also asked to complete self-report (postal) surveys at times 2, 3, and 4, assessing their satisfaction with their mentee, as well as the frequency (e.g., number of hours) which mentors interacted with their mentee. Assessments of mentors' satisfaction with their mentees and youths' satisfaction with their mentors were not assessed at time 1, as mentors and mentees had not yet been matched at baseline.

## Measures

### Youth developmental outcomes

A series of fit-for-purpose instruments were employed to measure youths' self-reported developmental outcomes at times 1–4.

**Emotional Well-Being:** Youth emotional well-being was assessed through two separate, independent measures: *The Children's Hope Scale* (CHS) (Snyder et al., 1997) and *the Social Acceptance* sub-scale of Harter's (1985) self-perception profile for children. The CHS is a six item measure which taps children's perceptions of their own agency (e.g., ability to take control) and their perceived capability to come up with pathways through which they can achieve their goals. Higher scores on this measure represent higher perceptions of agency and capability. Social Acceptance was assessed through six items and measures youths' sense of acceptance by their peers. Three items are reverse-coded, so higher scores reflect higher levels of social acceptance.

**Education:** Four assessments were used to measure youths' educational outcomes. *School Liking* is a three-item measure (Eccles, 1999) which assesses how well the young person likes school and feels excited about going to school. Higher scores represent greater school liking. Scholastic Efficacy was composed of six items from the Harter (1985) sub-scale of the self-perception profile for children scale. *Scholastic Efficacy* assesses youths' confidence in doing their school work. Three items are reversed, so higher scores reflect greater efficacy. *Education Plans* were assessed using three items which measured youths' plans to finish secondary or high school, go to college, and finish college. Higher scores represent greater intentions to complete their education. *Grade Scores* were assessed using four individual items which measured youths' academic performance in Maths, Irish, and English, as well as their overall grade performance. Higher scores represent higher academic performance.

**Risk Behaviour:** Engagement in Misconduct (Brown et al., 1986) was assessed through the use of six items which tap youths' self-reported behaviour in relation to skipping school without permission, hitting people, taking something without paying for it, and using alcohol and tobacco. Higher scores represent higher levels of misconduct.

**Relational Support:** Youths' relational support was assessed through the Parental Trust scale (Inventory of Parent Attachment) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) and the Social Provisions Scale – revised (SPS-R) (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Parental Trust was assessed through the use of four items and reflects the extent to which youths feel they have a trusting relationship with their parent or guardian. Higher scores are indicative of greater trusting relationships. The SPS-R scale consists of 16 items which assess youths' perceptions of *Social Support*. The scale is composed of four subscales which examine youths' social relationships and support across four different contexts: *Perceived Social Support from Friends* (four items); *Perceived Social Support from Parents* (four items); *Perceived Social Support from Siblings* (four items), and *Perceived Social Support from Other Adults* (four

items). Higher scores reflect greater perceived social support levels.

### Youth satisfaction with match

Respondents also completed measures assessing their satisfaction with their BBBS mentor at times 2–4. Specifically, all young people in this BBBS programme completed surveys assessing their perceptions of the level of support they receive from their mentors (*Mentor Support*), the degree to which mentors helped them to cope (*Mentor Helping*), and youths' perceived happiness (*Mentor Happiness*) and closeness (*Mentor Closeness*) with their mentor. *Mentor Support* was assessed using an adapted version of the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona & Russell, 1990) (four items). Higher scores reflect greater-quality relationships between the young people and their mentors. *Mentor Helping* was measured using three items adapted from the Rhodes et al. (1987) Helped to Cope scale. Higher scores reflect greater levels of mentors helping young mentees to cope. *Mentor Happiness* was measured using seven items. Higher scores indicate youths' higher degree of happiness with their mentor match. One single item was used to measure *Closeness*. Higher scores on this item indicate youths' greater perceived closeness with their mentor.

**Mentor Satisfaction with Match:** At times 2–4, mentors also indicated their own self-reported perceptions of their mentor–mentee relationship. Mentor Satisfaction was assessed using the 25-item Mentor Satisfaction Scale (Rhodes et al., 1987). Items are reverse-coded, so higher scores represent greater levels of mentor satisfaction with their match.

### Interaction frequency and match length

At times 2, 3, and 4, a Foróige caseworker recorded the amount of time that each young person had spent with their assigned mentors. Interaction Frequency was measured as the number of hours that youths and mentors had spent interacting during that time or since the last measurement was recorded. A Foróige caseworker also recorded the length of each mentoring relationship. In particular, the total number of months that each young person was matched with a mentor was recorded by the caseworker. The caseworker also noted whether the mentoring match was terminated early, and if so, whether that young person was re-matched with another mentor or not.

## Quantitative Analysis

A series of statistical tests were carried out in order to examine the nature of the youth–mentor relationship.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate whether mentoring relationship dynamics (e.g., mentor satisfaction, closeness, support, helping & happiness) were associated with changes in youths’ developmental outcomes over time (e.g., hope, social support [friend, sibling, parental & other adults], social acceptance, school liking, scholastic efficacy, education plans, grade scores, parental trust, and misconduct). Supplementary analyses, including t-tests, ANOVAs, correlations, and regressions, were also carried out to determine whether frequency of contact or length of match duration impact the perceived quality of the youth–mentor relationship.

These quantitative analyses set out to answer the following questions:

**Q 1. What are the match characteristics?**

**Q 2. How frequently did youths and mentors interact?**

**Q 3. Were youths and mentors happy with the mentor relationship?**

**Q 4. Are interaction frequency, youth satisfaction, and mentor satisfaction related?**

**Q 5. Did contact influence youth relationship satisfaction over time?**

**Q 6. Did contact influence mentor match satisfaction over time?**

**Q 7. Did youths show changes in developmental outcomes over time?**

**Q 8. Did youth or mentor satisfaction with the mentoring relationship influence changes in youth outcomes over time?**

Section 4a presents the results of the quantitative analyses according to these questions, and Section 4b discusses these quantitative findings.

## Qualitative Methodology

### Sample and recruitment

For the purposes of this study, semi-structured interview data collected from 10 mentors (five male, five female) as part of the original Dolan et al. study (2011b) was re-analysed. When the original study was undertaken, a purposive sample of 10

matches was selected from within the intervention group of the quantitative strand of the study, representing a balance across characteristics of age, gender, location, family situation, and reason for referral. As part of this process, mentors were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews on two occasions: at the early stages of the relationship, and approximately six months later. The first round of interviews was undertaken between November 2008 and March 2009, the second between May and October 2009. The average match had been ongoing for 5.2 months at the time of the first interviews. By the second round of interviews, the average match length was 12.7 months. In the interviews, respondents were asked about their experiences of the programme and how the mentoring relationship was proceeding. An initial interview was completed with all 10 mentors, while a follow-up interview was conducted with seven mentors, yielding a total of 17 interviews. Three follow-up interviews were not completed as a result of illness, inability to contact the person, or because the person had moved away. The average age of the mentor was 33 years on recruitment to the programme; most were single with some third-level education.

### Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word and analysed using NVivo software. The analysis followed the six-step framework for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The interview transcripts were read in full numerous times, which allowed the researchers to become familiar with the data. In the first phase of analysis, the data from all 17 transcripts was coded inductively. This large set of initial codes was subsequently refined and grouped into the following themes or questions. The analysis proceeded to identify sub-themes under each of these headings.

- What motivates mentors to volunteer for this role?
- How do volunteers conceptualise their roles as mentors?
- What contributes to mentor satisfaction in the relationship?
- What do mentors find challenging about being a mentor?
- What do mentors find helpful in terms of programme support?

Section 5a presents the qualitative findings according to these questions, and Section 5b discusses these qualitative findings.

<sup>3</sup> Analyses were carried out only on youth who were matched with a mentor over the course of the BBBS study.

# [4a]

## Quantitative Findings



A number of different descriptive and inferential tests were conducted in order to: 1) examine the nature of the youth–mentor relationship, 2) investigate whether the perceived quality of the mentoring relationship was impacted by the frequency of mentor–mentee contact, and 3) examine the connection between mentoring dynamics and youths’ developmental outcomes.

### Q1. What are the Match Characteristics?

Of the 76 young people who took part in the BBBS programme group (and completed outcomes measures), 90% were paired with a mentor. However, approximately 10% had still not been assigned a mentor by the end of this evaluation period, and 12% experienced matches which lasted for six months or less. A further 20% of young people were in a match which lasted 7–11 months, while the majority (58%) of the sample experienced a match which lasted for 12 months or longer ( $M = 12.73, SD = 5.10$ ).<sup>4</sup> A visual breakdown of match length can be viewed in Figure 4. All matches between mentors and mentees were composed of same-sex pairs. For more information about match characteristics, please see Dolan et al. (2011a).

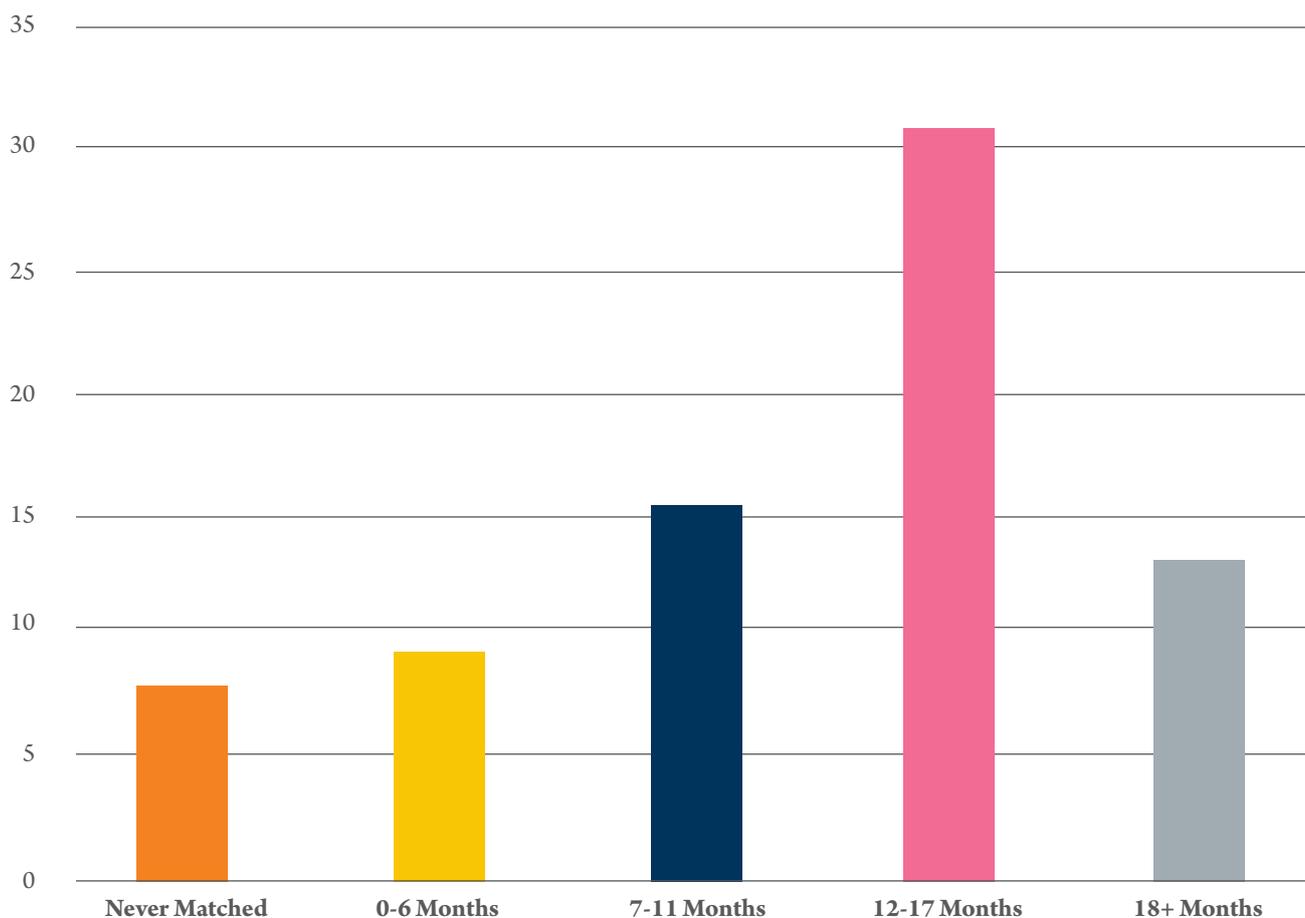
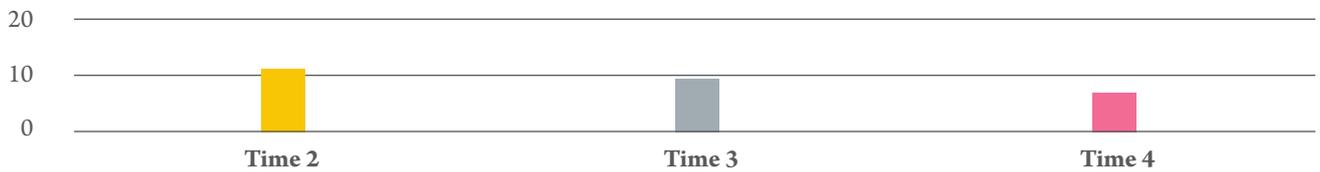


Figure 4. Graph showing number of youths who experienced matches of different durations

<sup>4</sup> Match length refers to the length of matches reported at the final data collection stage. However, some matches were still ongoing at this time and may have lasted longer than reported here.

## Q2. How Frequently Did Youths and Mentors Interact?

A one-way ANOVA was carried out to examine whether there were differences in the amount of time that mentors spent interacting with their mentees over the three time periods. Results indicated that there were significant differences in the frequency of interaction over time ( $F[2,223.70] = 5.02, p = 0.01, n2 = 0.03$ ). Specifically, mentors were found to spend significantly less time with their mentees at time 4 than at time 2 ( $t[74] = 2.61, p = 0.01$ ) or time 3 ( $t[74] = 3.22, p = 0.002$ ). Please see Figure 5.



	TIME 2		TIME 3		TIME 4	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
INTERACTION FREQUENCY	10.04	15.87	9.20	12.56	6.87	11.34

Figure 5. Graph showing number of hours' interaction between mentors & mentees over time

## Q3. Were Youths and Mentors Happy with the Mentor Relationship?

Descriptive statistics were calculated in order to examine whether matched youths and mentors were satisfied with the mentoring relationship over time. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, for all measures assessing youth and mentor match satisfaction across the different time points.

Table 1 Mean scores and standard deviations for each mentoring measure over time

MENTORING FACTORS	TIME 2		TIME 3		TIME 4	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
MENTORING FACTORS	10.74	1.66	10.62	1.81	11.00	1.54
HELP FROM MENTOR	10.86	1.12	10.71	1.39	10.93	1.63
HAPPINESS WITH MENTOR	21.36	2.90	21.81	2.70	21.19	4.06
CLOSENESS WITH MENTOR	3.31	0.71	3.39	0.82	3.41	0.84
MENTOR'S SATISFACTION	100.27	8.73	101.04	10.39	102.85	12.18

NOTE: Support from mentors scale ranges from 4–12; Help from mentors scale ranges from 3–12; Happiness with mentors scale ranges from 6–24; Closeness with mentor ranges from 1–4; Mentor's perceived satisfaction with match scale ranges from 25–125.

As can be seen in Table 1 above, youths reported high levels of perceived support, closeness, help, and happiness with their mentors at all three time points. Similarly, mentors reported experiencing high levels of satisfaction with their matches at all three time points. Descriptive statistics were also carried out to examine the percentage of youths and mentors who were happy with their mentoring relationship at times 2, 3, and 4.



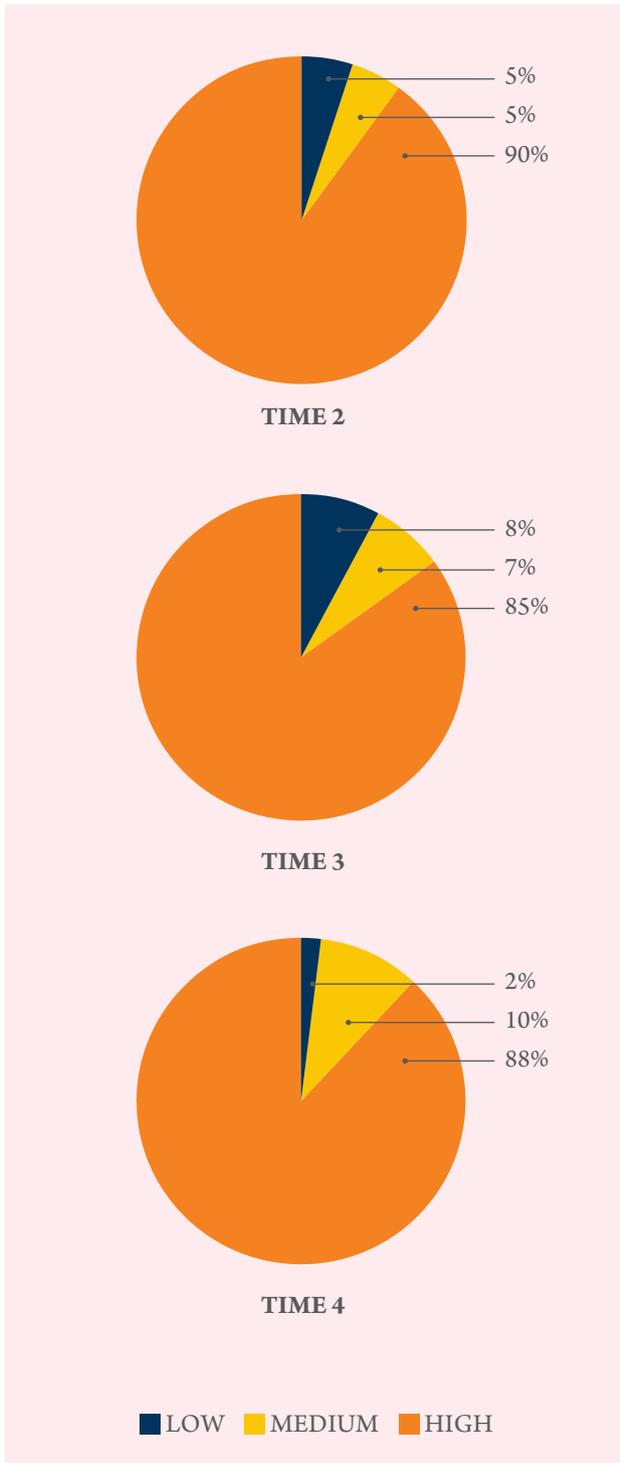
**Figure 6. Graph showing percentage of youths who felt very close, close, not close or not very close to their mentors.**

As can be seen in Figure 6 above, while 6% of youths felt either not close or not very close to their mentors at time 2, 94% felt close or very close to their mentors. However, by time 4, the percentage of youths who reported feeling close or very close to their mentors dropped to 84%, while those feeling not close or not very close had increased to 16%.



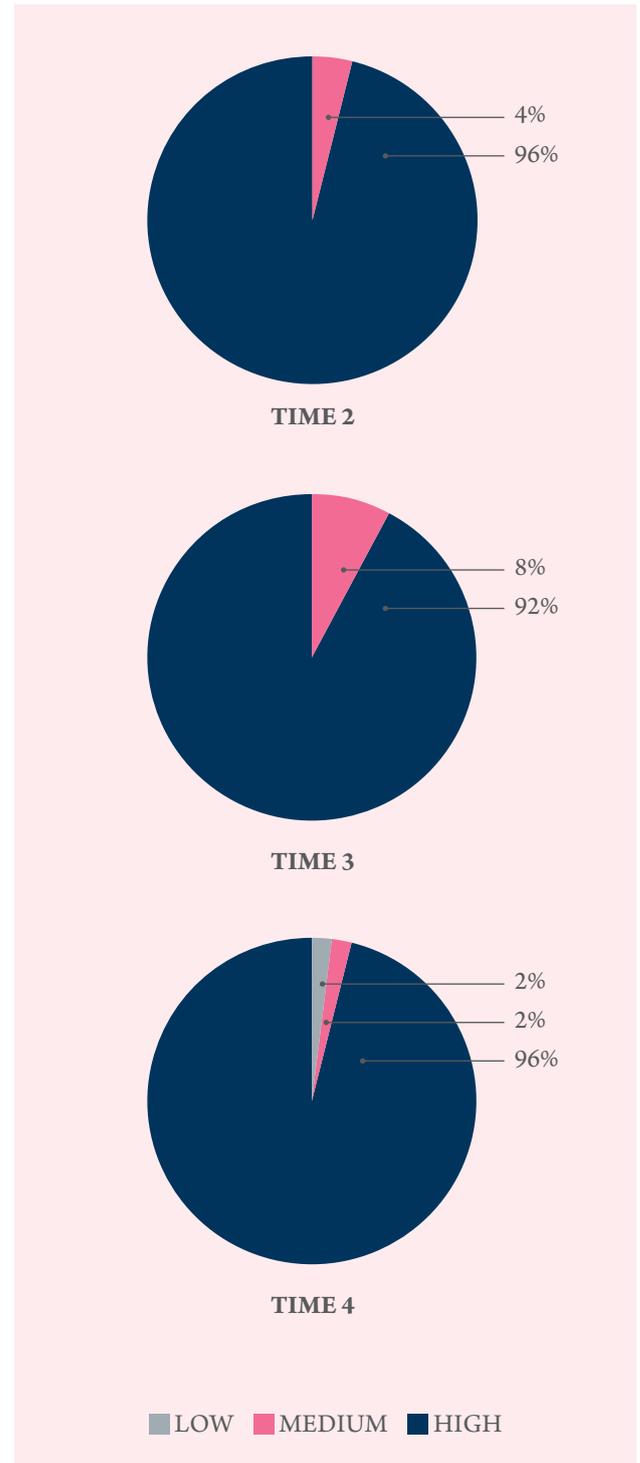
**Figure 7. Percentage of mentors of reported low, low-medium, medium-high, or high levels of match satisfaction**

As can be seen in Figure 7 above, no mentor displayed low levels of satisfaction with their match, and only 2–3% of mentors reported medium-low levels of match satisfaction across time. Approximately 45% of mentors showed high levels of match satisfaction at time 2, which had increased to 64% at time 3 and 69% at time 4.



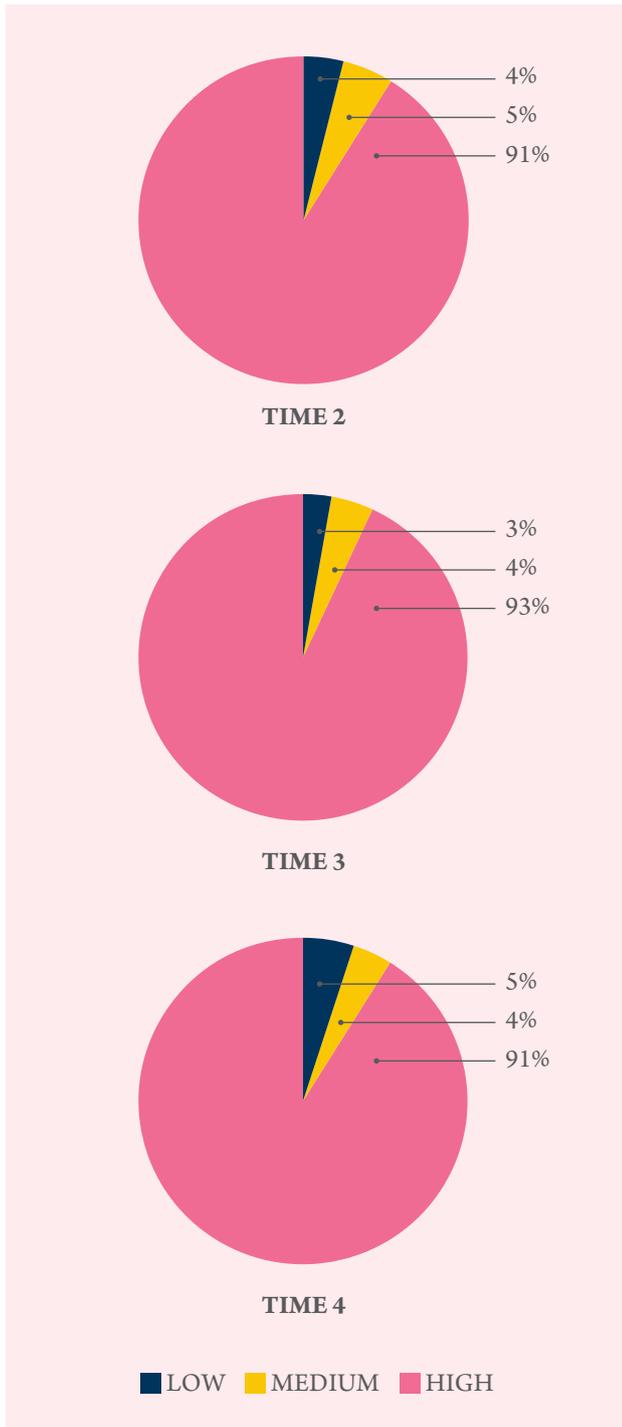
**Figure 8. Percentage of youths reporting low, medium, & high levels of mentor support**

Additionally, as can be seen in Figure 8 above, 90% of youths reported experiencing high levels of mentor support at time 2; this figure dropped slightly to 85% at time 3, but had increased again to 88% by time 4.



**Figure 9. Percentage of youths reporting low, medium, & high levels of mentor helping**

Moreover, as shown in Figure 9, while no youths reported experiencing low levels of help from their mentors at either time 2 or time 3, 2% of the sample felt that they were not helped to cope by their mentors at time 4.



**Figure 10. Percentage of youths reporting low, medium, or high levels of happiness with mentor**

Overall, 96% of youths reported experiencing high levels of mentor helping at both time 2 and time 4, while 92% reported high helping levels at time 3. Finally, as can be seen in Figure 10 above, the majority of young people (91%–93%) also reported high levels of happiness with their mentor at all three time points.

### 3b. Did the Youth–Mentor Relationship Change Over Time?

A series of one-way repeated-measures ANOVAs were calculated to statistically test whether any significant changes in youths’ or mentors’ mean level of satisfaction with their mentoring relationship occurred over time. Results indicated that there were no significant mean changes in youths’ perceived levels of support, closeness, help, or happiness (all  $p_s > 0.05$ ) over time. Results also revealed no significant changes over time in mentors’ level of satisfaction with the match (all  $p_s > 0.05$ ).

Overall, an examination of mean scores and frequency distributions revealed that both mentors and youths appeared satisfied with their matches over time. A large majority of youths reported experiencing high levels of support and help, and showed high levels of closeness and happiness with their mentors. The majority of mentors also showed high levels of satisfaction with their relationship with their mentee. Overall, mentors’ and youths’ mean level of satisfaction with their relationship did not fluctuate significantly over time.

### Q4. Are Interaction Frequency, Youth Satisfaction, and Mentor Satisfaction Related?

A series of Spearman’s rho correlations were conducted to examine the relationship between Youths’ Satisfaction (e.g., Closeness, Support, Happiness, Helping), Mentor’s Satisfaction, and Youth–Mentor Interaction Frequency at each time point.

**Table 2 Correlations showing relationships between youth closeness, support, happiness, helping, mentor satisfaction, and interaction frequency at time 2**

Factor	1	2	3	4	5
1. Closeness	--				
2. Support	0.45**	--			
3. Happiness	0.34*	0.49**	--		
4. Helping	0.42*	0.74**	0.49**	--	
5. Mentor Satisfaction	0.25	0.19	0.22	0.18	--
6. Interaction Frequency	0.01	0.31*	0.32*	0.41**	0.22

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$

As can be seen in Table 2, youths’ perceived closeness, support, helping, and happiness all correlated positively with each other. Significant positive correlations were also found between interaction frequency and youths’ perceived support, happiness, and helping. Mentor satisfaction was not associated significantly with any other factor at time 2.

**Table 3 Correlations showing relationships between youth closeness, support, happiness, helping, mentor satisfaction, and interaction frequency at time 3**

Factor	1	2	3	4	5
1. Closeness	--				
2. Support	0.59**	--			
3. Happiness	0.54**	0.43**	--		
4. Helping	0.53**	0.54**	0.45**	--	
5. Mentor Satisfaction	0.11	0.06	0.23*	-0.03	--
6. Interaction Frequency	0.27*	0.31*	0.34*	0.30*	-0.12

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$

At time 3, as shown in Table 3 above, interaction frequency and youths' perceived closeness, support, helping, and happiness correlated positively with each other. Additionally, while mentor satisfaction correlated positively with youths' happiness, no other significant associations for mentor satisfaction were found at time 3.

**Table 4 Correlations showing relationships between youth closeness, support, happiness, helping, mentor satisfaction, and interaction frequency at time 4**

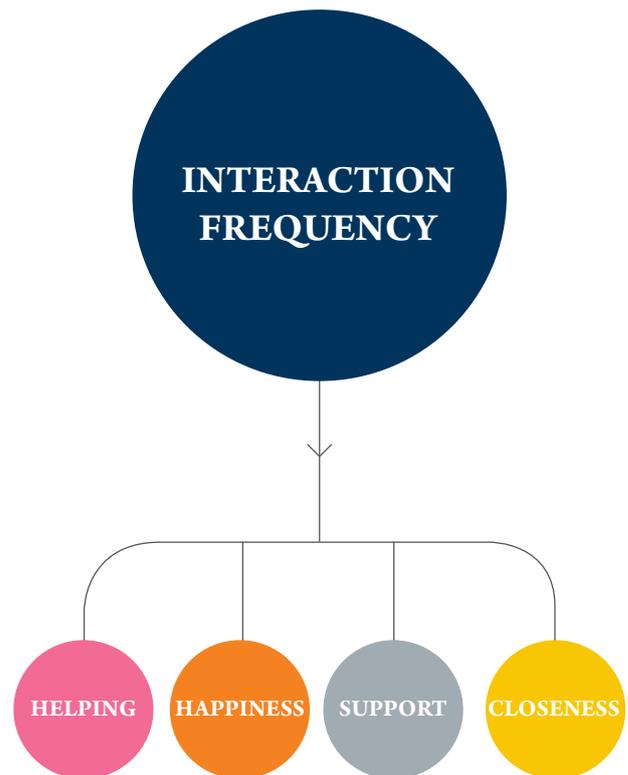
Factor	1	2	3	4	5
1. Closeness	--				
2. Support	0.32*	--			
3. Happiness	0.17	0.33	--		
4. Helping	0.63*	0.47**	0.36*	--	
5. Mentor Satisfaction	0.30*	0.01	0.10	0.16	--
6. Interaction Frequency	0.33*	0.04	-0.01	0.26	0.37*

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$

However, as can be seen in Table 4 above, while youths' closeness, support, and helping correlated positively with each other at time 4, youths' happiness with their mentor was significantly related only to their perceptions of mentor helping. Youths' closeness with their mentors was found to be positively associated with both mentor satisfaction and interaction frequency. Interaction frequency and mentor satisfaction also correlated positively with each other.

### Q5. Did Contact Influence Youth Relationship Satisfaction Over Time?

A series of multiple regression analyses were calculated in order to statistically examine whether the amount of time that youths and mentors spent interacting (interaction frequency) significantly influenced youths' satisfaction with their mentoring relationship over time.



Results from the regression analyses indicated that interaction frequency significantly influenced youths' perception of mentor helping at time 2 ( $F[1,75] = 5.45, p = 0.02, R^2 = 0.07, Adjusted R^2 = 0.06$ ). Specifically, youths who had interacted with their mentors more from time 1 to time 2 reported higher levels of perceived mentor helping ( $B = 0.02, \beta = 0.26, SE = 0.01, p = 0.02$ ) at time 2. However, interaction frequency was not found to be significantly associated with any other aspect of youth satisfaction at time 2. Similarly, at time 3, interaction frequency also significantly influenced youths' perception of mentor helping ( $F[1,75] = 4.86, p = 0.03, R^2 = 0.06, Adjusted R^2 = 0.05$ ), in that youths who had spent more time with their mentors between time 2 and time 3 showed higher levels of perceived mentor helping ( $B = 0.03, \beta = 0.25, SE = 0.01, p = 0.03$ ) at time 3. Interaction frequency was found to significantly influence youths' perceived closeness with their mentor ( $F[1,61] = 5.16, p = 0.03, R^2 = 0.08, Adjusted R^2 = 0.06$ ). In particular, findings indicated that greater mentor–youth interaction predicted greater closeness ( $B = 0.02, \beta = 0.28, SE = 0.01, p = 0.03$ ) at time 3. At time 4, interaction frequency was only found to significantly influence youths' perceived closeness with their mentor ( $F[1,52] = 4.89, p = 0.03, R^2 = 0.09, Adjusted R^2 = 0.07$ ), whereby youths who spent more hours interacting with their mentor between time 3 and time 4 appeared to feel closer to their mentors at time 4 ( $B = 0.02, \beta = 0.30, SE = 0.01, p = 0.03$ ).

Independent t-tests were also conducted to examine whether there were differences in youth match satisfaction at time 3 and time 4 between those who had been mentored for over 12 months, compared to those who had been mentored for less than 12 months. No significant differences (all  $ps > 0.05$ ) were observed at either time point.

## Q6. Did Contact Influence Mentor Match Satisfaction Over Time?

A series of multiple regression analyses were calculated in order to statistically examine whether the amount of time that youths and mentors spent interacting, significantly influenced mentors' satisfaction with their matches over time.

Interaction  
Frequency

Mentor  
Satisfaction

Results from the regression analyses indicated that interaction frequency significantly influenced mentors' satisfaction at time 2 ( $F[1,75] = 4.53, p = 0.04, R^2 = 0.06, Adjusted R^2 = 0.05$ ). Mentors who interacted with their mentees more from time 1 to time 2 reported higher levels of satisfaction with their matches ( $B = 0.12, \beta = 0.24, SE = 0.06, p = 0.04$ ). However, interaction frequency did not significantly influence mentor satisfaction at time 3 or time 4. Independent t-tests were also conducted to examine whether there were differences in mentor satisfaction at time 3 and time 4 between those who had been in matches which lasted for more than, or less than, 12 months. No significant differences (all  $ps > 0.05$ ) were observed.

## Q7. Did Youths Show Changes in Developmental Outcomes Over Time?

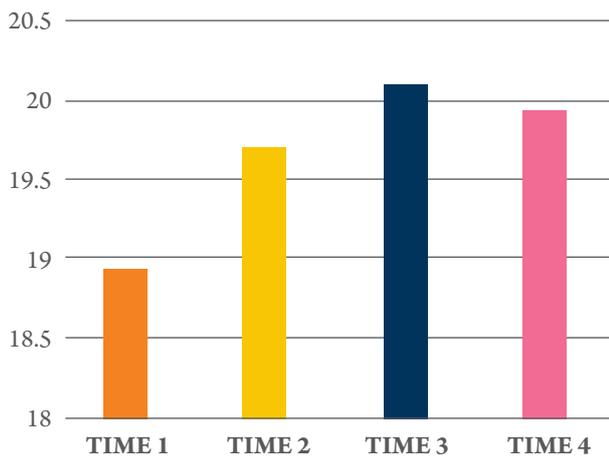
Table 5 provides a descriptive summary, including means and standard deviations, of youth-reported scores on each developmental outcome over time. As seen in Table 5, youths endorsed moderate to high scores on all developmental outcomes at each time period. Only one exception to this trend was observed: for youths' misconduct, which remained relatively low across all four time points.

In order to examine whether youths showed significant changes in any of these developmental outcomes over time, a series of one-way repeated-measures ANOVAs were conducted. Results indicated a number of significant changes in youths' outcomes over time. First, scores on the hope scale appeared to change significantly across time ( $F[3,171] = 22.41, p = 0.009, \eta^2 = 0.06$ ). Specifically, youths showed significantly lower levels of hope at time 1 than at time 2 ( $t[72] = -2.70, p = 0.009$ ), time 3 ( $t[72] = -3.24, p = 0.002$ ), and time 4 ( $t[69] = 2.69, p = 0.009$ ). However, there were no significant differences in youths' hope between times 2–4 (see Figure 11).

**Table 5 Descriptive Statistics (Means & Standard Deviations) for Youth Developmental Outcomes**

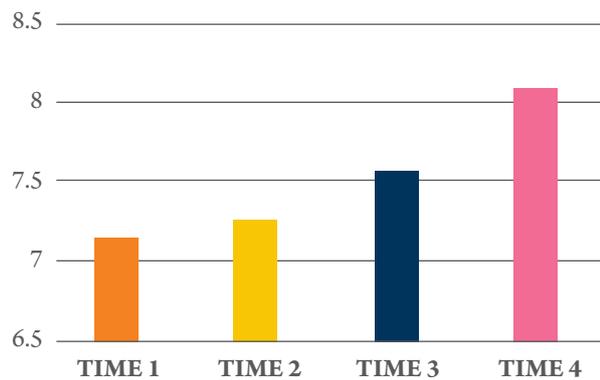
	TIME 1		TIME 2		TIME 3		TIME 4	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
HOPE	18.96	3.22	19.82	2.91	20.08	2.65	19.96	3.00
SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE	17.55	3.96	18.54	3.71	19.27	3.87	19.22	3.40
SCHOOL LIKING	7.27	2.67	7.37	2.93	7.51	2.65	8.03	2.34
SCHOLASTIC EFFICACY	17.11	3.77	17.40	3.63	17.50	3.85	17.36	3.54
EDUCATION PLANS	8.91	2.95	9.45	2.46	9.45	2.55	9.40	2.54
GRADE SCORES	14.16	3.05	13.88	2.91	13.75	2.77	13.78	2.97
MISCONDUCT	8.60	2.99	8.43	2.76	8.59	3.32	8.51	3.70
PARENTAL TRUST	13.85	2.64	14.12	2.67	14.05	2.25	14.29	2.31
SOCIAL SUPPORT: FRIENDS	10.51	1.70	10.78	1.54	10.80	1.49	10.96	1.43
SOCIAL SUPPORT: PARENTS	10.68	1.81	10.75	1.85	10.96	1.57	10.62	1.95
SOCIAL SUPPORT: SIBLINGS	9.42	2.49	9.41	2.41	9.83	2.04	9.43	2.70
SOCIAL SUPPORT: ADULTS	9.79	2.54	10.40	1.75	9.60	2.31	9.91	1.89
SOCIAL SUPPORT: TOTAL	40.40	5.91	41.34	5.46	41.18	5.14	41.01	5.32

NOTE: Hope ranges from 6–24; Social Acceptance ranges from 6–24; School Liking ranges from 3–12; Scholastic Efficacy ranges from 6–24; Education Plans range from 3–12; Grade Scores range from 4–20; Misconduct ranges from 6–24; Parental Trust ranges from 4–16; Total Social Support ranges from 16–48 (Friend Support 4–12; Parent Support 4–12; Sibling Support 4–12; Other Adult Support 4–12).



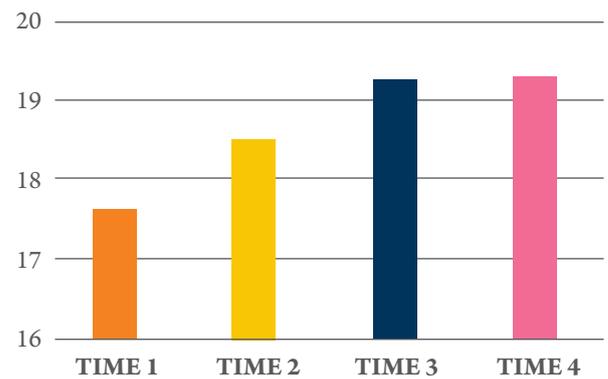
**Figure 11. Changes in youths' mean hope scores from time 1 to time 4**

Results also showed significant differences in youths' school liking over time ( $F[3,192] = 4.56, p = 0.004, n^2 = 0.07$ ); mentored youths showed significantly higher levels of school liking at time 4 than they did at time 1 ( $t[68] = 2.72, p = 0.008$ ) or time 2 ( $t[65] = -3.29, p = 0.002$ ). There was no significant difference between youths' school liking at time 3 and time 4 (see Figure 12).



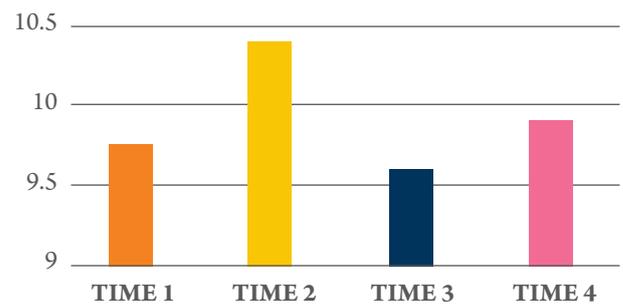
**Figure 12. Mean differences in youths' school liking over time**

Findings also indicated that there were significant differences in youths' social acceptance scores across time ( $F[3,165] = 10.59, p < 0.001, n^2 = 0.15$ ). While there were no significant differences between youths' self-reported social acceptance at time 1 and time 2, youths showed significantly higher levels of social acceptance at time 3 ( $t[72] = -4.76, p < 0.001$ ) and time 4 ( $t[66] = -4.13, p < 0.001$ ) than at time 1 (see Figure 13).



**Figure 13. Mean differences in youths' social acceptance over time**

Results indicated that there were differences in the level of social support that youths received from other adults over time ( $F[3,175] = 3.74, p = 0.015, n^2 = 0.05$ ). Youths reported higher levels of support from other adults at time 2 than time 3 ( $t[70] = 2.78, p = 0.007$ ), but there was no difference in scores between time 2 and time 4, time 1 and time 2, or time 3 and time 4 (see Figure 14).

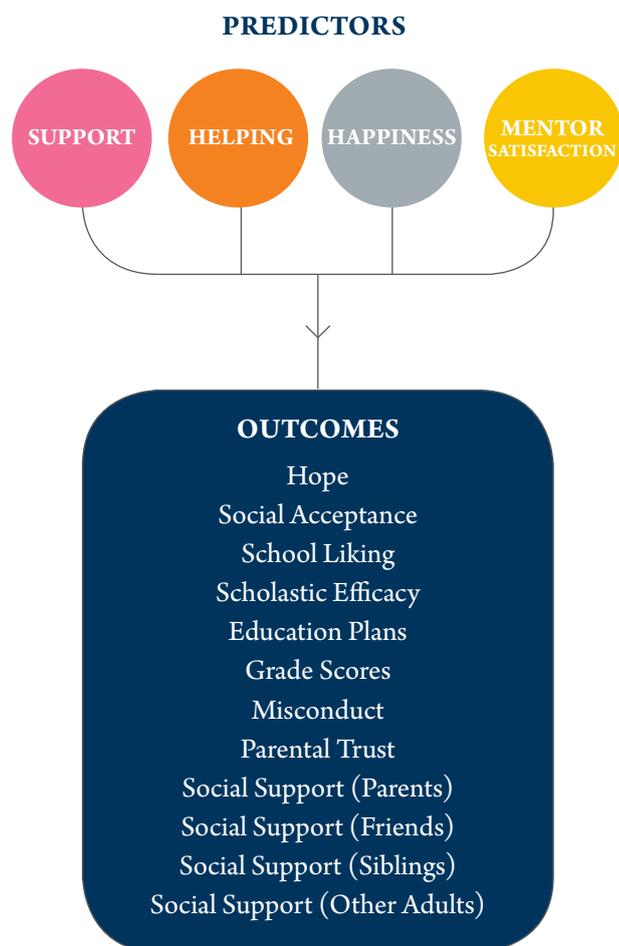


**Figure 14. Mean differences in youths' social support from other adults over time**

No other significant differences in outcomes over time were observed on any of the other youth developmental factors.

## Q 8. Did Youth or Mentor Satisfaction with the Mentoring Relationship Influence Changes in Youth Outcomes Over Time?

A series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted (e.g., Support from mentor; Perceived Helping from Mentor; Happiness with mentor)<sup>5</sup> to examine how youth and mentor satisfaction with their matches influenced youths' developmental outcomes over time.



Specifically, separate regression analyses were carried out for each outcome measure (Hope, Social Acceptance, School Liking, Education Plans, Grades, Scholastic Efficacy, Misconduct, Parental Trust, Social Support), at each time point (times 2, 3, 4). Youths' perceived Support, Helping, and Happiness with their mentor, and Mentors' Satisfaction with their match, were entered into the model simultaneously as individual predictors. Each model also contained three covariates: youth gender, youth age, and the baseline (time 1) outcome measurements. Hierarchical regression analyses were employed in order to assess the impact that each of the four predictors had on youth outcomes, after controlling for the effect that gender, age, and baseline (time 1) scores had on the criterion variable of interest.

In relation to the control variables, results from the regression analyses indicated that baseline (time 1) measures appeared to have a significant positive impact on youths' all subsequent outcome scores (times 2, 3, 4) (all  $p_s < 0.05$ ), apart from youths' perceived social support from friends, which was non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Additionally, while youth gender was not found to be significantly associated with developmental outcomes, at any stage, some limited effects were observed for youth age. Older youths were found to report significantly higher levels of misconduct ( $B = 0.52, \beta = 0.24, p = 0.02$ ) at time 2, as well as lower levels of Parental Trust ( $B = -0.43, \beta = -0.21, p = 0.04$ ) and support from parents ( $B = -0.29, \beta = -0.20, p = 0.04$ ) at time 2, and lower perceived support from other adults ( $B = -0.55, \beta = -0.30, p = 0.002$ ) at time 3, in comparison to younger youth.

Results from the main hierarchical regression analyses revealed that after controlling for gender, age, and baseline responses on the outcome measures, the predictors indicating youths' and mentors' satisfaction with their matches had a significant influence on four different developmental outcomes at time 2: Social Acceptance ( $R^2 = 0.36$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $F[7,72] = 6.41, p < 0.001$ ), Grade Scores ( $R^2 = 0.34$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.32$ ,  $F[7,72] = 8.11, p < 0.001$ ), support from other adults ( $R^2 = 0.36$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $F[7,72] = 6.41, p < 0.001$ ), and parental trust ( $R^2 = 0.36$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.31$ ,  $F[7,72] = 6.26, p < 0.001$ ). Specifically, while mentor satisfaction did not have significant effects on any youth outcomes at time 2, higher levels of perceived mentor support were associated with both greater youth social acceptance ( $B = 0.67, \beta = 0.34, p = 0.04$ ) and greater perceived support from other adults ( $B = 0.39, \beta = 0.37, p = 0.02$ ). Moreover, higher levels of perceived mentor helping were associated with higher grade scores ( $B = 1.21, \beta = 0.48, p = 0.001$ ), while greater happiness with one's mentor was associated with higher levels of parental trust ( $B = 0.22, \beta = 0.24, p = 0.04$ ), at time 2. No other significant links between youth outcomes and mentoring relational dynamics were observed at time 2.

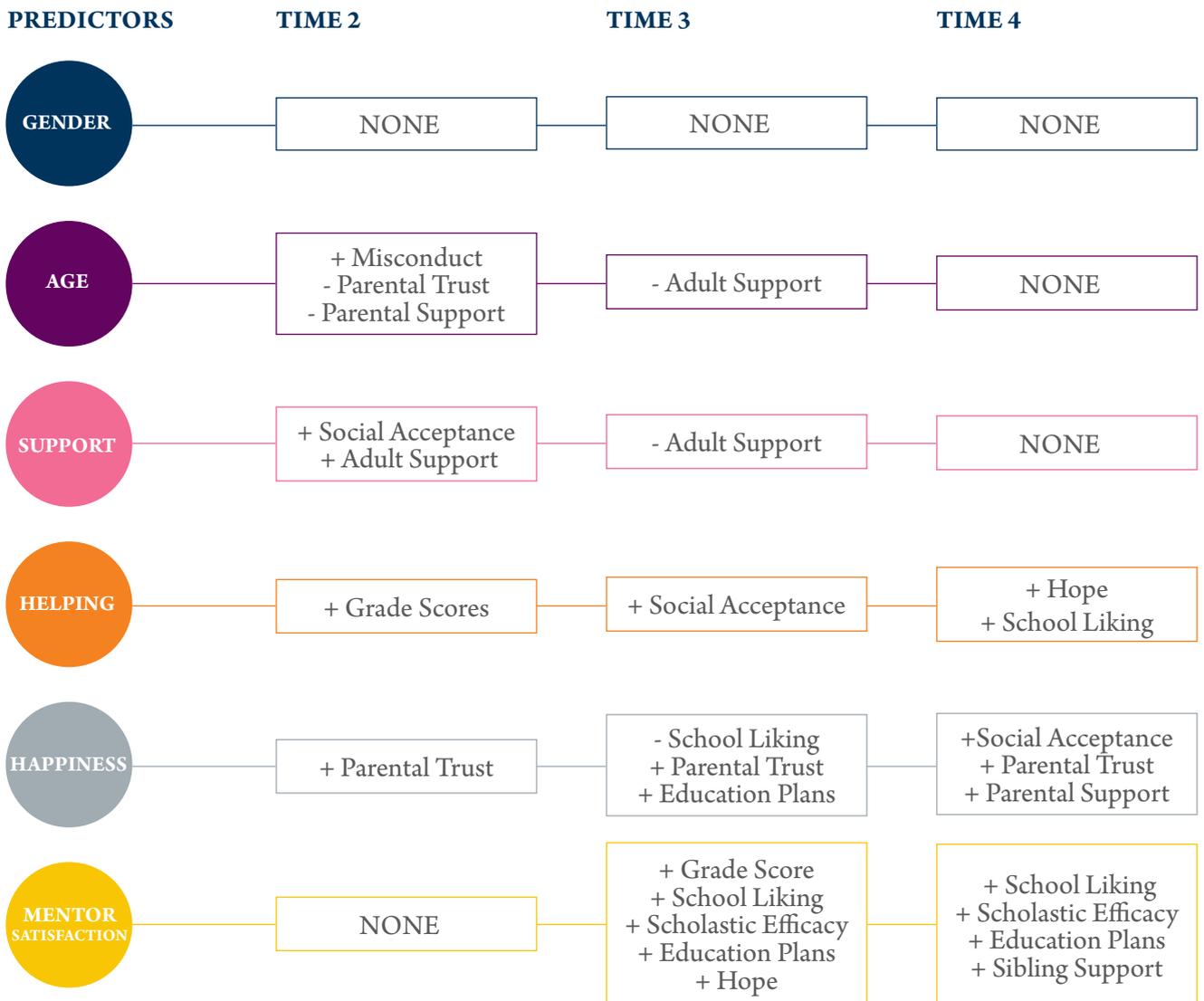
Additionally, at time 3, a number of predictors were found to exert significant effects on the majority of developmental outcomes, even after controlling for youths' gender, age, and baseline scores: Hope ( $R^2 = 0.40$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $F[7,72] = 6.06, p < 0.001$ ), School Liking ( $R^2 = 0.37$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.30$ ,  $F[7,72] = 5.47, p < 0.001$ ), Social Acceptance ( $R^2 = 0.55$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.50$ ,  $F[7,72] = 11.13, p < 0.001$ ), Grade Scores ( $R^2 = 0.41$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.34$ ,  $F[7,73] = 6.43, p < 0.001$ ), Education Plans ( $R^2 = 0.45$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.40$ ,  $F[7,73] = 7.81, p < 0.001$ ), Scholastic Efficacy ( $R^2 = 0.31$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.24$ ,  $F[7,73] = 4.23, p = 0.001$ ), Parental Trust ( $R^2 = 0.44$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.38$ ,  $F[7,73] = 7.35, p < 0.001$ ) and Support from other adults ( $R^2 = 0.49$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.44$ ,  $F[7,73] = 9.10, p < 0.001$ ). Notably, greater mentor satisfaction was associated with significantly higher levels of youth hope ( $B = 0.05, \beta = 0.21, p = 0.04$ ), scholastic efficacy ( $B = 0.11, \beta = 0.30, p = 0.008$ ), education plans ( $B = 0.06, \beta = 0.26, p = 0.009$ ), school liking ( $B = 0.07, \beta = 0.28, p = 0.008$ ) and grade scores ( $B = 0.06, \beta = 0.22, p = 0.03$ ) at time 3.

<sup>5</sup> A decision was made to exclude closeness as a predictor in this analysis, as this was not a scale variable and consisted of a single-item measure.

Furthermore, results indicated that higher levels of mentor helping were significantly linked with greater social acceptance ( $B = 0.87, \beta = 0.38, p = 0.005$ ), while greater perceived mentor support was significantly associated with increased perceptions of social support from other adults ( $B = 0.46, \beta = 0.37, p = 0.002$ ). Youths' happiness with their mentor was also significantly associated with higher levels of parental trust ( $B = 0.19, \beta = 0.23, p = 0.04$ ) and greater education plans ( $B = 0.21, \beta = 0.23, p = 0.03$ ) at time 3. However, greater levels of happiness with one's mentor at time 3 were also associated with reduced school liking ( $B = -0.24, \beta = -0.25, p = 0.03$ ).

Similarly, at time 4, after controlling for baseline outcome responses, gender, and age, a number of significant predictor effects were also observed for Hope ( $R^2 = 0.52, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.43, F[7,44] = 5.67, p < 0.001$ ), School Liking ( $R^2 = 0.48, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.38, F[7,44] = 4.91, p = 0.001$ ), Social Acceptance ( $R^2 = 0.61, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.53, F[7,44] = 8.17, p < 0.001$ ), Education Plans ( $R^2 = 0.48, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.38, F[7,44] = 4.87, p = 0.001$ ), Scholastic Efficacy ( $R^2 = 0.40,$

$\text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.29, F[7,44] = 3.54, p = 0.005$ ), Parental Trust ( $R^2 = 0.52, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.43, F[7,44] = 5.81, p < 0.001$ ), and support from parents ( $R^2 = 0.48, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.38, F[7,44] = 4.87, p < 0.001$ ). In particular, higher levels of perceived mentor helping were associated with higher levels of hope ( $B = 0.92, \beta = 0.37, p = 0.03$ ) and greater school liking ( $B = 0.94, \beta = 0.46, p = 0.01$ ). Youths' happiness with their mentor appeared to be associated with greater social acceptance ( $B = 0.33, \beta = 0.36, p = 0.01$ ), parental trust ( $B = 0.21, \beta = 0.33, p = 0.02$ ), and perceived parental support ( $B = 0.12, \beta = 0.24, p = 0.04$ ). Greater mentor satisfaction was linked to greater scholastic efficacy ( $B = 0.09, \beta = 0.34, p = 0.02$ ), higher education plans ( $B = 0.06, \beta = 0.26, p = 0.04$ ), increased school liking ( $B = 0.08, \beta = 0.42, p = 0.001$ ), and better sibling support ( $B = 0.07, \beta = 0.32, p = 0.04$ ). However, mentor support did not appear to be associated with any youth outcomes at time 4. Figure 15 below provides a diagrammatic overview of the significant effects observed for each mentoring predictor over time. The direction of effects (positive/negative) is denoted by the sign(+/-).



**Figure 15. Significant relationships between gender, age, and mentoring, and each developmental outcome, over time.**

## Summary of Quantitative Results

Several interesting findings emerged from this research. Youths reported high levels of perceived mentor support, helping, happiness, and closeness at all three time points, while mentors reported moderate to high levels of perceived satisfaction with their match over time. Mentors appear to spend significantly less time interacting with their mentees over time. Nonetheless, greater interaction between mentors and youths was associated with greater feelings of closeness at times 3 and 4, higher perceived helping at times 1 and 2, and greater mentor satisfaction at time 1, but did not impact youth perceptions of mentor support or happiness with their mentor at any time point. Interestingly, mentor satisfaction was typically not correlated with youth quality indicators. Moreover, while both youth and mentor satisfaction with their matches appeared to be positively associated with a number of youth outcomes over time, one negative association between youth happiness with their mentor and their level of school liking was observed at Time 3.

### Key Quantitative Findings

- Youth reported high levels of perceived mentor closeness, happiness, support, and helping over time.
- Mentors reported moderate to high levels of mentor satisfaction over time.
- Mentors who spent more time with their mentees reported higher levels of mentor satisfaction at time 2.
- Youth who spent more time with their mentors reported higher levels of perceived helping at times 2 and 3, and greater perceived closeness at times 3 and 4.
- The amount of time youth and mentors spent together declined from time 1 to time 4.
- Mentor satisfaction and youth perceptions of closeness, support, helping, and happiness were generally not related.
- Youth perceptions of mentor support, happiness, and helping and mentor satisfaction were significantly linked with more positive youth outcomes, but results varied over time.
- Youth perceptions of happiness with their mentor was negatively associated with school liking at time 3.

[4b]

Quantitative Discussion



The aim of this strand of the research was to conduct a secondary analysis of the quantitative data from the BBBS of Ireland evaluation study (Dolan et al., 2011a). In particular, the objective was to learn more about the relational dynamics which developed between mentors and youths who participated in this formal mentoring programme, and to explore the role that relationship quality played in impacting youths' developmental outcomes. From this investigation, a number of important findings emerged to suggest that not only is the quality of the mentoring relationship directly associated with programme outcomes, but that different aspects of these mentoring dynamics may have different impacts on youth outcomes. Further evidence appeared to suggest that the amount of time youths and mentors spent interacting had some significant, but limited, impacts on both youths' and mentors perceptions of match quality and satisfaction. However, the number of months that youths were mentored was found to have no significant impact on perceived relationship quality. Overall, findings have several notable implications for research and practice.

One major finding of this research is the apparent connection between the quality of the mentoring relationship and changes in youth developmental outcomes. Notably, youth perceptions of support, helping, and happiness with/from their mentor, as well as mentors' own levels of reported match satisfaction, were generally associated with more favourable youth outcomes over time. Effect sizes (e.g., Beta values) were found to range from 0.21 to 0.48, indicating that a moderate-to-strong relationship exists between these four indicators of relationship quality and youth outcomes. Thus, these findings are in line with those from other research studies and provide further evidence to suggest that the quality of the mentoring relationship may contribute to youths' positive social, emotional, and academic developmental changes (Van Dam et al., 2018; Larose et al., 2015; Eby et al., 2013; Herrera et al., 2011; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Hence, it is proposed that further exploring and understanding both youths' and mentors perceptions of mentoring relationship quality should be a priority concern for both researchers and practitioners (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

Nonetheless, some notable discrepancies were observed in the relationship between individual youth outcomes and these predictors of mentoring quality, which warrant further attention and discussion. First, while both youth and mentor satisfaction were associated with numerous positive developmental changes for young people, no link was found between relationship quality and other youth outcomes. Specifically, although youth perceptions of support, helping, happiness, and mentor satisfaction were associated with increases in youth academic outcomes (e.g., school liking, scholastic efficacy, grades scores, education plans), social outcomes (e.g., social acceptance, parental trust, social support from parents, siblings, and other adults), and emotional outcomes (e.g. hope), no indicator of mentoring relationship quality was found to impact youth engagement in risky behaviour (e.g., misconduct) or their perceptions of social support from their friends, at any time point. However, it should be noted that levels of misconduct remained low among participants across all time points of the study.

In addition to these non-significant trends, one negative relationship was observed in the current research: between greater youth happiness with their mentor and lower school liking at 18 months. Although this relationship was not found consistently across time, it is inconsistent with the pattern of relationships typically reported in the literature (Eby et al., 2012; Herrera et al., 2011) – yet there are some possible explanations for why this negative relationship occurred. For instance, research suggests that mentors frequently act as 'connectors' – often helping young people to strengthen their social networks and build positive social relationships with others (Renick Thomson & Zand, 2010; Munson et al., 2010; Rhodes et al., 2006; Spencer, 2006; Hartup & Laursen, 1999). Thus, one possible explanation for the link between greater match happiness and reduced school liking is that youths who experienced growth in their social relationships with others displayed greater happiness in their mentoring matches, and their change in school liking attitudes may reflect their adoption of the social values of their new social group or peers. Although this remains speculative, an established body of research provides evidence to suggest that youths adopt similar attitudes to those endorsed by their peer or friendship groups (Rutland et al., 2010; Aboud, 2005). Further support for this proposition comes from the qualitative findings reported by Dolan et al. (2011a), which indicated that mentors did appear to act as social connectors for youths in this study. Nevertheless, what is clear from these research findings is that there is a need for researchers and practitioners to explore the youth–mentor relationship in more detail, in order to gain a greater understanding about the specific dynamics (e.g., perceived benefits of relationship, expectations of mentoring, style of mentoring, type of support) that moderate youths' perceived happiness with their mentoring relationship over time (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Raposa et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2008; Lankau et al., 2005; Rhodes, 2002).

Another noteworthy finding from the current research is that although youths' perceptions of support, helping, happiness, and mentor satisfaction were significantly associated with a number of youth outcomes, each of these indicators appeared to be related to different developmental outcomes. For example, perceptions of mentor support was linked with increases in perceived social acceptance and support from other adults at time 2, and while mentor support was also linked to greater perceived adult support at time 3, the link with social acceptance was no longer found to be significant. By time 4, perceived support was not related to any changes in youth outcomes. Thus, the current results provide evidence to suggest that although youths may benefit from feeling supported by their mentor, these benefits may be limited to the areas of social support and acceptance. On the other hand, higher levels of happiness with the mentoring relationship were found to be consistently associated with greater levels of parental trust, at all three time points, indicating that happiness with one's mentor may have more significant impacts on youths' parental relationships. In addition, while mentor satisfaction was not associated with any outcomes at time 2, over time it appeared to develop a particularly close relationship with youths' academic outcomes: higher levels

of mentor satisfaction were consistently linked with greater school liking, education plans, and scholastic efficacy at both 18 months and 24 months. Thus, the current research appears to provide preliminary evidence that different mentoring dynamics may be associated with different outcomes for young people (Keller & Pryce, 2012; Larose et al., 2010). Nonetheless, further research is needed in order to explore these findings further and provide further support to this proposed trend.

While some links between mentoring quality and youth outcomes have emerged consistently over time (as outlined above), other relationships appear to be more transient. In particular, while perceptions of mentor helpfulness were positively associated with youths' developmental outcomes, these perceptions were significantly associated with different developmental outcomes, over time. Specifically, greater mentor helping was associated with higher grade scores at 12 months (time 2), increased social acceptance at 18 months (time 3) and greater perceived agency and school liking at 24 months (time 4). Although these results may suggest that mentor helping has an inconsistent (though positive) relationship with youth development, it is also possible that the link between mentor helping and youth outcomes may depend on the nature of the help provided (Rhodes, 2005). Findings from other research suggest that mentors may help youths to cope with negative experiences by providing guidance or counsel on how to deal with particular issues or problems (Sánchez et al., 2008; Karcher, 2005). Thus, the observed link between mentor helping and improved school liking, hope, grade scores, and social acceptance in the current study may be evident due to mentors providing greater, more tangible support on these specific issues.

When discussing the relationship between mentoring quality and youth outcomes, it is important to briefly comment on the impact that youth age and gender had on youths' growth and development. While gender was not significantly associated with any of the twelve outcomes assessed, age was negatively associated with a small number of outcomes (e.g., misconduct, parental trust, perceived social support from parents and other adults) at time 2 or time 3. While a major advantage of the current analytical approach is that it controls for the effect of these demographic characteristics on youth outcomes, it is possible that other individual differences, not measured here, may also impact youths' developmental outcomes. Greater knowledge about how other individual differences (e.g., cultural norms, ethnicity, motivations for joining programme) may influence mentoring relationships or youth outcomes is necessary in order to help researchers and practitioners develop programmes and promote positive youth-mentor relationships that benefit young people from all different backgrounds (Zhou et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2017; Darling et al., 2006).

Another interesting finding from this research pertains to the observed relationship between interaction frequency and the perceived quality of the mentoring relationship (e.g., support, happiness, closeness, helping, and mentor satisfaction). Previous research has indicated that the amount of time that youths and mentors spend interacting is directly associated

with both mentors' and mentees' perceptions of relationship quality (Van Dam et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2006; Lankau et al., 2005; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). However, the findings from the current research run counter to this observed trend. Surprisingly, results suggested that the amount of time that young people and mentors spent interacting had little impact on youths' or mentors' perceptions of relationship quality. Interaction frequency had no impact on youths' perceptions of support from their mentor or happiness with their mentoring relationship. Moreover, while frequency of contact did appear to be associated with greater mentor satisfaction, and with youth perceptions of mentor closeness and mentor helping, its relationship with mentor satisfaction and helping appeared to dissipate over time. However, although interaction frequency appeared to decline significantly over time, the quality of the relationship did not appear to dissolve when contact declined.

While these findings are somewhat unexpected, there are several possible explanations. First, although relatively more limited in the literature, other researchers have uncovered non-significant links between the amount of mentor-mentee contact and the 'success' or 'quality' of the mentoring relationship (Rhodes et al., 2005). However, researchers commonly operationalise the 'success' or 'quality' of the mentoring relationship in different ways, which may contribute to the observed discrepancies in research findings across the different studies. In the current research, the 'quality' of the youth-mentor relationship was assessed by a limited number of individual indicators (e.g., support from mentor, closeness with mentor, helping from mentor, youth happiness with match, mentor satisfaction with match). Other researchers have contended that the quality of the mentoring relationship is also determined by the degree to which youths and mentors form an emotional bond, and may be characterised by other predictors such as empathy, trust, liking, attachment, relatedness, and respect (Van Dam et al., 2018; Larose et al., 2015; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Lankau et al., 2005; Rhodes et al., 2005). Thus, it is important to recognise that there may be other, important indicators of mentoring quality, not measured in the current study, and that frequency of contact may be more strongly associated with these other aspects. The current research only measured the amount of time that mentors and mentees spent in each other's company; other forms of communication were not quantitatively assessed. Therefore, youths and mentors may also stay in contact using other forms of communication (e.g., text messaging, phone calls), and these may have a more powerful impact on the strength or quality of the relationship between the pair than the number of hours spent together.

It is probable that other characteristics, apart from the method or frequency of communication, are linked to the quality of the established mentoring relationship. Findings from a number of recent publications suggest that an array of factors play a role in facilitating the development of quality mentoring relationships (Erdem et al., 2016; Martin & Sifers, 2012; Karcher et al., 2009). For example, research by Erdem et al. (2016) proposed that the consistency of communication may be more important to mentoring relationships than its frequency. Other research claims that the kind of interactions (e.g., activities or discussions) that

take place between mentors and mentees may also be closely tied to the mentoring relationship quality (DuBois & Keller, 2017; Higley et al., 2016; Larose et al., 2015; Keller & Pryce, 2012; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). Relationship quality has also been linked with characteristics such as mentor/mentee expectations for match, personality, similarity, programme supports, style of mentoring, and self-efficacy (Zhou et al., 2018; Erdem et al., 2016; Raposa et al., 2016; Larose et al., 2015; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). However, evidence on the comparative effect of these predictors is still limited. Future research would benefit from extending this research base and further exploring what factors have the greatest influence on perceived relationship quality, in order to provide more firm conclusions about the nature of the relationship between interaction frequency and different aspects of perceived mentoring quality, and to highlight possible moderators of these relationships. This information is essential for practitioners, to enable them to help young people and mentors to form strong, positive mentoring relationships that endure over time.

Finally, it is important to comment on the observed match characteristics, as they may have significant ramifications for practice. In particular, it is important to note that all matches took place between mentors and youths of the same sex. Therefore, the current results can provide little insight into the type of relational dynamics that may develop between cross-gendered matches. Previous research has indicated that mentor demographics, such as mentors' gender, can influence the relational dynamics (Liang et al., 2013; Allen & Eby, 2011; Ragins et al., 2000; Ragins & Scandura, 1997). Findings from the current research also indicated that while youths and mentors appeared to report moderate to high levels of match quality across the two-year period, a significant proportion of youths were either never matched with a mentor or experienced early match terminations. Although the literature proposes that the duration of the match is an important benchmark of programme success and can impact the benefits that youths receive from the mentoring relationship (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Erdem et al., 2016; Nakkula & Harris, 2013; Clarke, 2009; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009), the findings from the current research did not support this proposition. Surprisingly, results showed no difference in perceptions of mentoring quality (at times 3 and 4) between those whose mentoring relationship lasted for more than 12 months and those whose matches lasted for less than 12 months. Hence, these research findings again highlight the importance of investigating other predictors that can impact the quality of the youth–mentor relationship or moderate the effect of match duration (see Spencer et al., 2018).

## Key Considerations and Recommendations

In general, this research attempted to shed further light on two important research questions currently perplexing the mentoring field: 1) What influences the strength and quality of the mentoring relationship? 2) How does the quality of the mentoring relationship impact the nature and degree of youth outcomes? Assessing the link between match quality and youth outcomes is important, as it is key to enabling youth mentoring programmes to be as effective and efficient

as possible (Nakkula & Harris, 2013; Larose et al., 2010). As such, a number of key considerations emerging from the findings of this research should be highlighted, as they may have relevance for both policy and practice.

In particular, the collective evidence from this research suggests that youths and mentors who participated in the BBBS programme developed strong, quality relationships that endured over time. This is a significant finding given that relationship quality is often considered an important hallmark of programme success (Allen et al., 2006), and it provides further evidence in support of the efficacy of the BBBS mentoring programme. It is also important to acknowledge that the current study only reflects youths' and mentors' reports on a small number of indicators of relational quality (e.g. support, happiness, helping, closeness, mentor satisfaction). It is crucial that researchers and practitioners recognise that there are other indicators of the quality of mentoring relationships that are not assessed here (see Van Dam et al., 2018; Erdem et al., 2016; Nakkula & Harris, 2013; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Although the current research represents a key preliminary step in identifying how specific indicators of mentoring relationship quality benefit or hinder youth growth and development, greater understanding about how other mentoring dynamics impact youth outcomes is still needed. An important objective for future research and practice is to explore how mentors' and youths' perceptions of other aspects of relational and instrumental support or quality evolve throughout their involvement in youth mentoring programmes, and to examine how these different quality indicators impact youth outcomes over time.

Another relevant finding of the current research is the emergence of limited evidence of a significant association between dosage (e.g. frequency of interaction and duration of match) and perceptions of mentoring quality. This has significant implications for both research and practice, because it suggests that other characteristics, separate from the level or duration of contact, may impact youths' and mentors' perceptions of relationship quality or match satisfaction (see Zhou et al., 2018; Larose et al., 2015; Martin & Sifers, 2012; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). Therefore, further research is needed to establish not only how mentoring works but also why it works. Specifically, researchers need to determine what factors help young people and mentors establish quality relationships, in order to help practitioners support youths and mentors to establish close, supportive, trusting, empathic, affiliative bonds.

Findings of this research also highlight the importance of examining both mentors' and mentees' perceptions of the mentoring relationship (see also Herrera et al., 2011; Allen et al., 2006). Not only did the hierarchical regression analyses in the current study indicate that youth and mentor perspectives may be associated with different developmental outcomes, but findings also suggested that mentors' satisfaction with the match was (generally) unrelated to youths' perceptions of happiness, closeness, support, or helping, as indicated by the non-significant correlation analyses. Thus, it is important for researchers and practitioners to generate a greater understanding of the factors that impact both youths' and

mentors' experiences in these mentoring programmes, and to recognise that youths' perceptions of relationship quality and mentors' perceptions of relationship quality may be influenced by different factors.

## **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations associated with the current quantitative study that should be noted and addressed. First, it is important to acknowledge that due to the secondary analytic nature of this research, participants consist entirely of young people who had participated in the BBBS programme; as in the original study, relationship quality was assessed only with the intervention group. Although the longitudinal nature of the data is a major strength, the generalisability of the quantitative findings may be limited due to the lack of a comparison group. Future research should strive to address this limitation and expand the findings of this research by assessing how the mentoring relationship quality mediates the effects of mentoring programmes, by comparing differences between intervention and control groups. Another potential limitation is the small sample size ( $N = 76$ ) in the current research, which may have resulted in a lack of statistical power for some of the quantitative statistical analyses. Finally, the current research reflects findings from young people who participated in an established and structured formal, community-based youth mentoring programme; findings may not translate to other non-community-based settings or to non-formal mentoring relationships.

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## Qualitative Findings



In-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews were undertaken with ten mentors at two time points. A thematic analysis of interview data was undertaken, guided by the following questions:

- What motivates mentors to volunteer for this role?
- How do volunteers conceptualise their roles as mentors?
- What contributes to mentor satisfaction in the relationship?
- What do mentors find challenging about being a mentor?
- What do mentors find helpful in terms of programme support?

## What Motivates Mentors to Volunteer for This Role?

A number of mentors said that they were actively looking for an opportunity to do something constructive when they came across a poster or advertisement seeking mentors for the Big Brother Big Sisters programme:

*I would have been all caught up in my own family sort of, and then just they seemed to be gone, and that's it, you think, I'd like to do something. I'd like to do something constructive, and if I can do something that is of benefit to somebody else, all the better, you know. (Eileen)*

Nine of the mentors specified factors associated with the BBBS programme as part of their motivation for volunteering for this particular programme. They felt that young people would benefit from one-to-one support provided by an older adult.

*I liked the fact that it was one on one, one to one, and I think kids don't get enough of that at home. I used to be a teacher, so I would see it first-hand, you know, the lack of, I guess, friendly adult faces in their lives, you know, people who aren't going to judge them and tell them exactly what they need to be doing and make sure they're doing it, you know. (Gary)*

*I suppose for me, coming from a big family too, there is a need to spend a bit of time with someone on your own. I would have been aware of it when I was younger too, and I suppose because of my background and my upbringing and problems in my childhood, it would have been a lovely thing for me to have somebody that you could just spend a bit of one-to-one time with, away from your home and away from your school and away from all the other influences in your life. Somebody that comes in and is just dropped in your life, completely neutral, doesn't know anything about your past, doesn't know anything about your future, your family, and is just there to be with you. So that was what made me want to do it, I suppose. (Deirdre)*

Two mentors said that they were not looking for a volunteering role but were approached to take it on and found themselves agreeing.

*I kind of just enquired about it and then I kind of fell into it, and then I was being kind of vetted for it, you know. Next thing I was on the list and then I was doing it. (Sean)*

*The local community guard ... he kind of put my name forward because I'm involved, as I say, with the under 8s and whatever, and I get on well enough with the kids ... I was asked to do it ... so I wasn't really motivated in any way. (Jimmy)*

One mentor cited career goals as her motivation for volunteering. The BBBS role would help her to achieve her Gaisce award.

*With regards to the CV, a lot of people get a lot of good grades, and I think it's all about distinguishing yourself, and I think the way you can do that is by showing you're more versatile and you've got other interests; you're just not sitting ten hours a day with a book in front of you, that you're adaptable. So I thought the Gaisce was quite a good one to do, just for the sake that, it's got four different areas, it gives you a good opportunity, kind of, to push yourself, and it does show self-motivation and that. (Amy)*

## How Do Volunteers Conceptualise Their Roles as Mentors?

Respondents identified two key conceptualisations of the role of mentor: 'mentor as a friend' and 'mentor as a positive influence.'

### Mentor as a friend

The majority of mentors spoke about their role as being a friend to the young person. In their interviews, they spoke about how they had set about building a friendship with their mentee. They empathised with the young person, provided emotional support, and were happy to accept the young person for who they were. They were likely to see the relationship as a meeting of equals, with both parties coming together to enjoy each other's company and share experiences. Some almost downplayed the significance of their role, emphasising the low-key nature of their contribution, as in the cases of mentor Orla, who called it 'just a friendship', and mentor Gary, who called his mentoring relationship a 'normal friendship'.

*I have built a friendship with her, so that's all you can kind of ask from these things ... it's just a friendship, like, so I think that's progressed fairly good. (Orla)*

*It's just been, it's just been a nice kind of gentle progression. A normal friendship. (Gary)*

Mentors who saw their role as being a friend were likely to emphasise the nature of their activities as 'hanging out', meeting without any particular objective or agenda in mind apart from doing something enjoyable.

*I think at the moment he's just, just friendship, you know. Because we really don't kind of have deep and meaningful or anything like that, it's just very much let's go and hang out and, you know, we'll talk about school and we'll talk about, whatever ... just having a bit of craic and knowing that he has somebody to talk to or somebody to hang out with, well then, I suppose that's what it's all about. (Kieran)*

*We've more of a friendship where we'd be catching up on different things that are happening in her life, where she is with competitions or what she's doing, you know, those exams for starting secondary school. (Amy)*

Some, such as Sean, were uncomfortable with the term 'mentor', indicating that they felt it was too formal a description for what they did. Sean saw his relationship with the young person as similar to a friendship he would have with someone his own age.

*I wouldn't see myself as a mentor. I just meet him every week, I don't tell him these lofty things, the way he should lead his life, do you know that kind of way? We just do whatever, like. We're kind of buddies more than anything else. To be honest, it's no big deal. It's grand, just like meeting up with one of the lads, you know. (Sean)*

Mentors who saw their role as being a friend often spoke about how well matched they were and that they shared similar interests with their mentee. For example, Kieran spoke of how he and his mentee both enjoyed discovering more about each other's interests and finding that they also really enjoyed them. His narrative emphasises the mutual enjoyment that comes from sharing interesting and fun activities.

*I think we were well matched, both quite sporty and into music, and we just seem to enjoy the same. It's never been an issue that one has enjoyed something and the other hasn't, has found it hard or whatever, so I suppose that's a good sign of having things in common. Both of us are willing to try new things as well, which has been great. I'd be kite surfing, so I'd talk to him about the kite surfing; that's how we got to go flying kites, and he'd never even thought about that and yet absolutely loved it and then had to go again. (Kieran)*

Some mentors also saw their role as being there for the young person should they need to talk. Orla saw it as important that she was someone that the young person could trust, allowing them the opportunity to confide in an older adult if they

wished to do so. Similarly, Gary saw his role as providing a space where the young person could express himself freely, without fear of judgement.

*I'm not associated with his family, or I'm not associated with his group of friends, so he'd probably say or do things that he wouldn't feel like he could around them, and I'd probably do the same, you know, just somebody outside that's not judging. (Gary)*

*She'd know that she could turn to you to tell stuff, stuff that she can't tell her parents, she doesn't feel comfortable with telling her mum like, ya know, like for teenagers there's obviously going to be boys and stuff like that. So she can tell it to you and she trusts you and they know that you're not going to repeat it. (Orla)*

Many of the mentors strongly endorsed the policy of the BBBS programme of not giving mentors details about the young person's family background, expressing the view that they preferred to allow the young person to tell them as much or as little as they wished about their family background. For example, mentor Deirdre felt strongly, based on her own experiences of childhood stigma, that the mentoring relationship should allow the young person to escape from other people's pre-conceived notions of who they are, based on their family context.

*Everybody knew that my mother was an alcoholic, the whole school knew, all my friends knew, everybody in the town knew, and it would have been lovely to have someone that would just see me as me and not as the daughter of this alcoholic. So I can see a big plus in not knowing any of the background ... because you're taking that person for who they are, not where they've come from. So it's a big thing for me. (Deirdre)*

At their time 2 interviews, the mentors who saw their role as a friend were more likely to comment that the relationship had become more reciprocal in terms of the mentee initiating contact. As the relationship developed, these mentors were not overly focused on ensuring they met every week, which they felt was in keeping with how a normal friendship would operate.

*I think we have got closer, he very much instigates contact with me as well ... In the early stages, I was always kind of a bit excited to get a text message, because it was so unusual for him to contact me, but now it's kind of like a two-way thing, which is really, really good. (Kieran)*

*I would like to get to see him a little bit more, but I think it's kind of more, we have a more of a common understanding now, whereas if we didn't get to see for a few weeks, it wouldn't be bad, because he understands that I do want to, want to hang out with him. (Gary)*

Some mentors who saw their role primarily as that of 'friend' also saw their role as having a positive influence on the young person. However, this was conceptualised as emerging as a result of their friendship, and was not seen as an active strategy that they employed in the mentoring relationship. Amy articulated the ambivalence referenced by some mentors regarding their role as an influence on the young person. She mentioned not wanting to 'enforce her views' on somebody. Mentors such as her were uncomfortable with directing or expecting the young person to change in any way.

*I suppose it's something that I've thought about: What do I need to, how much am I trying to help the Little Sister, how much life values or what? And I suppose really it's more of a fact of, I don't really know. It's like you want her to, I suppose good behaviour, stuff like that, trying to, without enforcing your views on somebody. (Amy)*

Some mentors saw their role as broadening the horizons of the young person by providing an insight into another way of life or outlook on life that is different to the one they are used to. For example, mentor Gary emphasised the positive aspects of his mentee's community and saw his role as introducing the young person to another way of life.

*I think there's another influence outside of let's say his immediate community, because his immediate community is excellent, would have great, very strong bonds, but I guess it's good to explore what's outside of that. I guess he's just seeing maybe different aspects and different ways of living. (Gary)*

A number of mentors alluded to the fact that there was potential for their mentees to become involved in risk behaviour or to choose the wrong path and hoped that their relationships would help them to choose a more positive path.

*He's lucky that he seems to have quite a good family background, strong family there, close-knit family, but I would imagine the challenges in his life are who he hangs out with and how much of an influence they are. He seems to be a bit of a leader himself but at the same time I would imagine he could be quite influenced, you know, so I guess just the decisions he makes in the future. He tells me he has, from what I see, it looks like he has a good grasp on right and wrong and what you should and shouldn't do, but you can see a few things round the edges. There's the potential there to lead on to different paths, I suppose. (Gary)*

This mentor added that he tries to reinforce what he perceives to be positive attitudes or behaviours on the part of the mentee. Similarly, Kieran was aware that his mentee had a side to his life that he wasn't always aware of and expressed a hope that the positive activities they had engaged in would help him to see that there is an alternative.

*For the good times that we have, he's still kind of a sixteen-year-old teenager and you know? He has slowly, I suppose, started admitting to me that he goes out drinking and partying and he has massive fights with his mother and things like that. So I think the positiveness of doing things without the need for, kind of, you know, drinking or whatever has been good. (Kieran)*

### Mentor as a positive influence

A minority of mentors took an active role in encouraging and directing youths, in order to bring about a change in values or behaviour in them. In these cases, the mentors were more likely to refer to what they perceived to be negative aspects of the mentees' family backgrounds and to highlight the need for intervention. Rather than being led by what the mentee felt was important, they focused on imparting values and behaviours that they felt were needed.

For example, Jimmy felt it was important for young men to be involved in sport to keep them 'on the straight and narrow' and to ensure they don't end up in a 'dole situation or want to do nothing'. He made it clear that his role was about encouraging the young person to re-engage with sport and that he had to 'behave'.

*My opinion always is that if a young fella is involved in sport and team sports, he won't go too far wrong. Keeps them kind of on the straight and narrow ... From the beginning, I said, Owen, I believe you play football, that you were quite good, you have stopped playing, I'm going to try to encourage you to play football, I'm going to do certain things with you, and if you behave, and you show a bit of interest, you will go places, and if you don't behave, I'll stop doing them with you. And he has behaved. (Jimmy)*

This mentor saw his role as compensating for the fact that the young person's parents were not doing their job. He saw his role as providing the young person with direction through sport.

*I wasn't interested in the mother, father, what they do, where they are, because I suppose I figure if they were doing the job right I wouldn't be here ... They appear to have everything in the house, he's on the computer, he's on these games and all this kind of stuff, and I'd be more interested in getting him away from that and getting him playing a bit of sport. (Jimmy)*

This mentor was active in connecting the young person with sporting opportunities and facilitating him to mix with people who he felt would be 'better' for him. Similarly, Kevin felt it was important this his mentee learned that hard work and perseverance were required to achieve the material and status benefits of the football lifestyle he aspired to.

*Maybe let him see that by working extremely hard, you will get nice cars, you will get a nice house, you will get all of these things, and that there's more to football than just going over to England and playing football ... Just to reach the target of being a footballer, first you've got to train. It starts with the very basics, so he understands some of the principles, little principles like that. (Kevin)*

A number of mentors were quite explicit regarding what they felt the young person should be doing and were proactive in encouraging or even directing the young person to do it. One mentor saw it as part of his role to 'correct' the young person if they felt their behaviour was out of line.

*I encourage her asking about school and kind of drop little bits into the conversations about how important education is and so on and so forth. (Eileen)*

*When I kind of check him on little things and he might sulk, I might feel a little bit guilty, but I kind of correct myself and say no, he shouldn't be at that, like. But it doesn't happen often, maybe three times in the whole time we've been meeting, like. I think it's seven or eight months we've been meeting at this stage. (Sean)*

These mentors were more aware of their own behaviour in the relationship and were conscious of presenting a respectful character to the young person. Sean said that his Little Brother knew that he didn't drink or smoke, and he felt he had to 'clean up' his language when he was around him.

*I have to meet this young fella and I have to behave properly. You can't be cursing and all this kind of stuff, do you know? So it's good for me in that respect, it's a good discipline, like. Responsibility, basically. (Sean)*

Mentor Eileen mentioned that her mentee's mother 'would have known me as a fairly reliable, decent' person and appeared keen to be seen by the young person as an encouraging adult.

*Just to let her see, like, that I'm an adult and I love to encourage her. (Eileen)*

## What Contributes to Mentor Satisfaction in the Relationship?

Mentors spoke of a range of benefits that they experience from the mentoring relationship. On the whole, they enjoy it. Some said that they were surprised by how much they have found it beneficial to them personally. Four of the mentors said that they see it as time out for them personally, giving them the opportunity to do something in their lives that they may not do otherwise.

*It would be an escape from my circle of friends, you know, someone who is not involved in my life the whole time, which is refreshing. (Gary)*

*It's time out for me as well, which I never even thought about before starting, that you're actually, you know, you're going and hanging out and playing pool. Like, I'd never go and play pool or never play PlayStation or whatever ... That's been good for me. (Kieran)*

*It's relaxing just to go swimming or to just sit in the cinema and chill out, yeah, do you know, because sometimes you don't get that yourself, like, so it's an excuse to. (Hilary)*

These mentors also spoke of the benefit of trying new activities that they would never otherwise have done, including handball and DJing. They also spoke of how they enjoyed getting to know and become friends with somebody who is different to them in age and social background.

*You can make a friendship with somebody who's completely from a different age group, a different background ... if you weren't within the programme you would never probably have met. (Orla)*

*Getting back to see how the mind of the youth works again. (Gary)*

Mentors who saw their role as having a positive influence were more likely to emphasise seeing a change in the young person as a benefit from the relationship for them. Some mentors referred to the specific change they felt was important as bringing them happiness, as illustrated in the following quotes.

*I feel that I can help him, and then I suppose I get just simple satisfaction out of seeing the kid being happier. It doesn't really come down to much more than that. Suppose maybe he's getting an appreciation of the simple things in life, more so ... going back and finding the simple things again, you know. (Kevin)*

*I'm not really hoping to get anything out of it. If I get, kind of like, it's like satisfaction from doing it and just watching her, I don't know, whatever it'd be. I won't say improve, that's cheeky, but watching her blossom, shall I say. That would be my reward, I would love that. (Eileen)*

*If he gets a bit of direction, and if he comes out okay, that will be good for me too. (Jimmy)*

For many of the mentors, their satisfaction in the match was derived from the factor that motivated them to volunteer in the first place. For example, match Deirdre was motivated to volunteer because she would have valued an outside

adult influence when she was young, so her main source of satisfaction in the relationship is being able to do that for another young person.

*For me, it's nice to see and spend time with a child who is living the same life I lived. I think I would have benefitted at her age having an outside influence in my life. I came from a large family as well, and to be taken as a person on my own, rather than one of a large family, would have been nice. So to be able to do that for a child who is shadowing my own childhood would be my biggest benefit. (Deirdre)*

Sean spoke of seeing the match as 'good discipline' for him personally on the basis that he had to honour a commitment made to another person.

*It's a good responsibility for me. I've come to realise that it's a good discipline, like, to meet him every week or whatever, because as I've said, I'm kind of happy-go-lucky, do you know, winging my way through, but this is kind of grounding, like. (Sean)*

## What Do Mentors Find Challenging about Being a Mentor?

The most common challenge reported by mentors was finding time to meet. This included finding time to meet that could accommodate the mentees' schedule as well as the mentors' work commitments. Those based some distance away from their mentee may also have to include travelling time to meet with them and then also allow ample time to do something meaningful. Deirdre described the challenge of finding a time to meet that fitted with her domestic commitments:

*I need to have myself planned to say, Okay, either my husband isn't working nights or he's not golfing or he's not something else, so that he can take the kids and I can go. So it takes more planning for me, I suppose, because I have young children, than I thought it would. And then I suppose because Rebecca's not from my area and I've a half-hour drive to pick her up before we even go anywhere, that takes time. It's not a problem, it's fine, but it's just, I need to plan it more than I thought I would. (Deirdre)*

Many of the male mentors spoke about their concerns about child protection issues and their doubt about whether they should be taking on a role of this nature, because of how it might be perceived by others. A number of the mentors said this was an issue that they considered at the start but also was present throughout their match when friends or family members raised concerns about whether they should be doing it.

*I think as a man I kind of had, you know, the perception of, you know, an older man hanging around with a young boy or whatever, that was something that kind of played on my mind. It was funny, because I did my training with two other lads, and they were the issues that they had as well. It was a big issue for men, kind of, the whole, because of the climate in Ireland, you know, of sexual abuse or whatever. (Kieran)*

*Some of my friends who are teachers would say to me, you know, there's a bit of a grey area there. I've thought about it from time to time, but then when you meet up with him and it's just two of the lads having the craic, you know, you don't take any notice, and you forget about that, like. (Sean)*

A challenge frequently mentioned by mentors was the period at the start of the match when they were getting to know the Little and had to build a relationship with them. Many were anxious that they might not be compatible with their Little and would find it hard to fill the time.

*Probably the same as her, just, Oh, will she like me? Will I like it? Will we like the same things? Will I be matched with somebody, you know, or every week will I be going, Oh God! (Hilary)*

*I had misgivings about me being fifty-five, and when I heard it was a ten-year-old girl, she was ten when I heard of her, I thought, We're going to have nothing in common here. How am I going to approach this? (Eileen)*

*The biggest worry I had at the start was we wouldn't get on. Because if I wasn't getting on with him, I wouldn't see the point in me doing it. (Jimmy)*

A number of the mentors spoke of having to learn the appropriate boundaries for their role. One said that he was not sure if he should mention his Little's weight issue but was advised by the caseworker that it was not his responsibility to do so. Another said that he was sometimes not sure, when the young person was quiet, if there was something wrong or whether it was just 'normal' for a teenager to be like that. Some of the female mentors in particular had to judge whether or not to tell the caseworker something that the mentee had confided in them. While concerned about protecting the confidence in their relationship, they also had responsibilities to act if they felt the young person was at risk of harm in any way.

*She brought up an issue that I was just like, Okay, I wasn't going through the handling by myself, so you have to refer it. I referred it straight away and it was handled straight away. Paula [caseworker] looked into it. It was grand, because there was somebody there that you could rely on to talk to about it. (Orla)*

One mentor said that she felt uncomfortable with how much personal information her Little was sharing with her from an early stage.

*I think it was on the first meeting that we spoke about that, and on subsequent meetings she really gave up quite a bit of information. In fact sometimes she gives up information and I'm thinking, Oh, oh, more than I should be, you know, hearing, and I kind of try and steer away from that. (Eileen)*

Some of the mentors said that they experienced difficulties with communication and meetings at the early stages. For example, they may have texted their mentee but not heard back from them or found that the mentee did not turn up for meetings as arranged. They generally drew on the support of caseworkers to help them to understand what was causing the issue and to help them to resolve it.

*In early days, would have been an issue that I'd be texting or ringing Adam and I wouldn't hear back from him or whatever, so I did ring Cormac [caseworker] kind of going, What's the story here? He said, Look, he's a young person, they have phones but they never have credit and they never really use their phones, you know. And I hadn't thought about that so, you know, it was nice to have Cormac's experience I suppose to support me in that. (Kieran)*

*Sometimes getting activities to do was a little bit challenging, and we would fall back on the movies, but then it came a point where we were going to the movies too much so we had to go and do activities again. (Gary)*

## What Do Mentors Find Helpful in Terms of Programme Support?

Mentors referred to a number of aspects of programme support that they found particularly helpful. With regard to their early involvement with the programme, mentors spoke very positively about the professional nature of vetting and intake, which was described by Gary as 'very efficient and very professionally done'. Kieran said that the rigorous nature of assessment for the role of mentor, which includes Garda vetting, interview, references, and a visit to your house, helped to ease his anxieties about the child protection issues mentioned earlier.

*I think that in a way allayed any of my fears about the kind of, not abuse, but you know, any kind of fears you had about that ... They made you think about it, and they made you think about why you wanted to do it and what you'd be able to bring to it or whatever. So yeah, I think it was excellent. I think it needed to be that thorough for me and I suppose for them as well. (Kieran)*

The initial training provided to mentors was also seen as helpful by all mentors. Some said that it helped to allay their concerns regarding the match and to be more confident meeting their Little for the first time.

*The training was very good, and even the interview process and everything, you know, it was very well structured and the structure was closely followed. (Amy)*

*While I was a bit nervous going up to [Little's] house to meet him, I tell you I would have been far more nervous if I hadn't had the training. And I think probably unconsciously it did prepare me for the little things, like them telling you to make a list of things you want to do. So if I was driving over after finishing work and being stressed and we hadn't decided something to do, we could pull out the magic list and, you know, suggest something that we hadn't done on it, so that was, yes, training was really excellent, in fairness, it prepared us very well. (Kieran)*

A number of mentors highlighted the fact that they were 'well matched' with their mentee as helping their relationship to become established.

*We'd be very similar though in our personalities, we're well matched. [Caseworker] matched us quite well. We both like football, blah, blah, blah. He's quite snappy with the tongue, I'm quite snappy with the tongue in a sense that we'd be kind of smart, smart arse and we like to have a good laugh. (Kevin)*

*We're very well matched. I mean we're both from large families, we'd have a lot of the same interests in book and cooking and the same sort of music and stuff like that. (Deirdre)*

Following the establishment of their matches, they experienced the ongoing support and supervision from BBBS caseworkers as very valuable in helping them to deal with issues and challenges that had arisen in the match. They also valued opportunities to meet with other mentors and being supported to access activities or meeting spaces for their matches.

*He'd [caseworker] be there on the phone if I need anything. He's constantly, not constantly, but like at the regular intervals, you know, to meet up, so I couldn't ask more than that. (Gary)*

*He [caseworker] would regularly check in, just, you know, routinely just to see how things were going and if we needed anything sent, you know, passes for the cinema or different things like that. (Amy)*

*The new [youth facility] is a great facility to have, you know, to have a free service like that that we can just go and make a cup of tea and play a game of pool or you know? It's nice to have somewhere to go, so that's a big advantage to have.*  
(Deirdre)

## Summary of Qualitative Results

Several interesting findings emerged from this research. Youths reported high levels of perceived mentor support, helping, happiness, and closeness at all three time points, while mentors reported moderate to high levels of perceived satisfaction with their match over time. Mentors appear to spend significantly less time interacting with their mentees over time. Nonetheless, greater interaction between mentors and youths was associated with greater feelings of closeness at times 3 and 4, higher perceived helping at times 1 and 2, and greater mentor satisfaction at time 1, but did not impact youth perceptions of mentor support or happiness with their mentor at any time point. Interestingly, mentor satisfaction was typically not correlated with youth quality indicators. Moreover, while both youth and mentor satisfaction with their matches appeared to be positively associated with a number of youth outcomes over time, one negative association between youth happiness with their mentor and their level of school liking was observed at Time 3.

## Key Quantitative Findings

- Youth reported high levels of perceived mentor closeness, happiness, support, and helping over time.
- Mentors reported moderate to high levels of mentor satisfaction over time.
- Mentors who spent more time with their mentees reported higher levels of mentor satisfaction at time 2.
- Youth who spent more time with their mentors reported higher levels of perceived helping at times 2 and 3, and greater perceived closeness at times 3 and 4.
- The amount of time youth and mentors spent together declined from time 1 to time 4.
- Mentor satisfaction and youth perceptions of closeness, support, helping, and happiness were generally not related.
- Youth perceptions of mentor support, happiness, and helping and mentor satisfaction were significantly linked with more positive youth outcomes, but results varied over time.
- Youth perceptions of happiness with their mentor was negatively associated with school liking at time 3.

[5b]

Qualitative Discussion



It has been well established through research that volunteers for a particular role may have different reasons for volunteering and that they may be motivated by a range of forces (Clary and Snyder, 1991). Volunteer recruitment, satisfaction, and retention are tied to the ability of the volunteer experience to fulfil the volunteer's important motives (Clary and Snyder, 1991). In the current study, mentors were found to have a range of motivations for volunteering for the BBBS programme, including wanting to do something valuable with their time or to enhance their career prospects. Two mentors did not have particular motivations but found themselves asked and agreed to volunteer. For the majority of mentors, the key attraction was the one-to-one nature of the programme and the opportunity it provided to make a more significant difference to one young person. Previous research has indicated that mentor motivation for participating in the programme may influence programme success (DuBois & Keller, 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017; DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; McQuillin et al., 2015; Matz, 2013), so it is important for researchers and practitioners to be aware of mentors' motivations for volunteering.

Lakind et al. (2015) examined how mentors' perceptions of their mentees and mentee environments informed their sense of how they fulfilled the mentoring role. They found that mentors' perceptions of the risk and protective factors in mentees' lives and environments influenced how they conceptualised their roles. Similar findings were observed in this study, identifying two key understandings of the mentor's role. The majority of mentors saw their role primarily as being a friend to the young person. These mentors tended not to have preconceived ideas about their mentees, took them at face value, and focused on developing a relationship. They tended to emphasise the young person's strengths and enjoyed spending time with them. While some of these mentors also saw their role as being a positive influence, this influence was expected to arise as a consequence of spending time together rather than from the mentor taking a directive approach during meetings. A minority of mentors saw their role primarily as being a positive influence on the young person. They tended to focus on the problems or deficits in the youth's family or community and saw their role as ameliorating or acting as a bulwark against what they perceived to be negative familial or environmental influences. They adopted a more directing role, teaching or instilling particular values, behaviours, or forms of knowledge that they felt to be important for the young person.

While it was beyond the scope of this study to assess the impact that varying mentoring styles or conceptualisations have on youth outcomes, or their perceived benefits of the mentoring relationship, previous research suggests that mentoring which focuses on emphasising youth assets, rather than their deficits, is likely to be more successful (Higley et al., 2016; Liang et al., 2013). Furthermore, while some structure is important in mentoring relationships (Langhout et al., 2004), overly prescriptive mentoring styles may not be effective in promoting positive youth outcomes (Matz, 2013; Keller & Pryce, 2012; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). DuBois and Keller (2017) suggested that mentoring programmes appear to be most effective when they facilitate mentor-mentee

activities that are engaging and responsive to the interests of the mentee, but also offer the structure and guidance that are necessary to support youths' positive growth and development.

Mentor satisfaction and perception of relationship quality has been linked to more positive youth outcomes (Rhodes et al., 2017; Bowers et al., 2015; Larose et al., 2010; Goldner & Maysseless, 2009), while a lack of closeness or dissatisfaction with the match may result in early match closures (Spencer et al., 2017). Rhodes (2008) and Chapman et al. (2017) have argued that feelings of closeness and warmth between youths and their mentors are an essential prerequisite of any successful youth mentoring programme, without which mentoring will be unlikely to make any noticeable benefits to youths' lives. It was clear from the narratives of mentors that most enjoyed the relationship and valued spending time with the young person. It was also clear that mentor satisfaction was linked to how they conceptualised their roles. Mentors who saw their role as being a friend were more likely to refer to enjoyment of shared activities and to see the relationship as enhancing their own lives. Mentors who saw their role as a positive influence were more likely to derive satisfaction from seeing the changes that they felt were needed in the young person. In this regard, the findings reflect those of Brumovska (2017), who argues that mentors' satisfaction in the mentoring relationship is related to their initial motivations for mentoring and their conceptualisations of their role.

It is clear from this strand of the research that the role of voluntary mentor can bring a number of challenges. Mentors spoke of challenges they faced prior to, at the start of, and later in their mentoring relationship. A key theme that emerged from their narratives was the role played by the programme structures and supports in helping them to overcome these challenges. A number of specific examples can be identified in this regard. For example, mentors spoke of how well matched they were in terms of interests and personality, which helped them to find common ground and eased the initial challenge of building a relationship. Research has shown that mentoring relationships in which the mentors and mentee have similar interests and compatibility tend to produce more positive outcomes (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Higley et al., 2016; Gettings & Wilson, 2014; Liang et al., 2006; Rhodes et al., 2002).

As noted earlier, there is a substantial body of evidence to suggest that the quality of training and support that mentors receive is critical to the 'success' of youth mentoring programmes (Spencer et al., 2017; Erdem et al., 2016; DuBois et al., 2011; Whitney et al., 2011; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Durlak & DuPre, 2008). In their meta-analysis of youth mentoring studies, DuBois et al. (2002) found that the strength of youth mentoring programme effects appeared to increase dramatically when mentors were provided with ongoing training and support (McQuillin et al., 2015). While the BBBS programme does not provide ongoing training for mentors, it does provide regular supervision and opportunities for mentors to meet with other mentors, thereby facilitating peer support to emerge. Mentors participating in this research spoke very positively about the value of initial training they

received, which helped them to prepare for the role. For example, one mentor found that it supported him to approach his meetings constructively, having a list of potential activities that he would enjoy on hand. Mentors also experienced challenges in building the relationship at the start, overcoming communication issues with their mentees, and understanding the nature of appropriate boundaries. The support of programme staff was seen as critical in helping them to deal with these challenges. Mentors also greatly valued that the programme provided access to community facilities, cinema or bowling tickets, and trips with other matches, which helped to ensure variety and interest in their meetings.

Four out of the five male volunteers interviewed said they were concerned about the possibility of the potential for a child abuse allegation to be made or for their motives for getting involved in the programme to be questioned. While the programme was unable to change the prevailing cultural discourses on child protection (Brady & Curtin, 2012), it supported mentors in dealing with these concerns in a number of ways. Some mentors noted that the stringent nature of initial intake and assessment, in addition to the ongoing monitoring of the match by programme caseworkers, reassured them that child protection issues were taken seriously by the programme. In addition, having the opportunity to air these concerns during their initial training and to discuss them with other mentors was important in providing reassurance that they were not alone in having these concerns. Given that child protection concerns were cited as a factor causing difficulties with the recruitment of male mentors in other youth mentoring programmes, the capacity of the programme to overcome these challenges is critical to its capacity to provide mentors for young males (Miller, 2007).

There is consensus in the mentoring literature that frequency and consistency of contact, as well as the length of the youth–mentor meetings, are important (Bowers et al., 2015). According to best practice in mentoring relationships, mentors and mentees are expected to meet for at least four hours per month for a minimum of 12 months (Mentor, 2005). This frequency of meeting is considered important to ensure that a close personal relationship develops between the adult and young person. DuBois et al. (2002) found that programmes that reported expectations for frequency of contact between mentors and mentees showed significantly larger effects than programmes that did not include this expectation, while recent studies confirm the link between match length/consistency and positive developmental outcomes (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017). In the original BBBS study (Dolan et al., 2011b), we found an average of 4.32 meeting hours per month for the study sample, which is just above the minimum requirement. However, 43% of matches actually met for less than the average time expected from the programme, while 57% of matches met for four hours or more, which is equal to or above the minimum expected. Further analysis revealed that matches in the study sample met for up to five hours per month for the first seven months of their matches, after which the average meeting time declined to around three hours per month. This suggests that matches were less likely to meet consistently as their match progressed.

One of the key challenges identified by mentors in this study relates to finding time to meet in the context of their busy lives and the often busy lives of their mentees. Some mentors are based in rural areas and thus may have to make time for commuting as well as match activities. There were indications from some mentors that they were less likely to meet on a consistent basis as the match became more established. Some mentors said they met their mentee more or less weekly for the first six months or so, to develop the relationship, but after that, the match felt more like a friendship and they didn't feel the need to meet quite so often. There was an implication that both parties felt comfortable with easing off the frequent meeting once their relationship was well established. However, in the original quantitative study (Dolan et al., 2011a) programme effects were strongest when the number of hours of meeting was highest, with effects declining as the number of hours declined, which suggests a correlation between frequency of meeting and outcomes. It could be argued that this trend reflects the nature of authentic relationships in which the rules around meeting tend to be more relaxed. Another interpretation is that a degree of complacency creeps into the relationship following the initial attentiveness to the programme guidelines regarding meeting frequency. This raises the possibility that programme managers should pay particular attention to ensuring that matches meet frequently after six months of meeting.

While a number of important insights emerged from this qualitative data, it is important to acknowledge limitations in relation to the small sample size employed in this study.

# [06]

Key Findings, Conclusions,  
and Recommendations



Formal youth mentoring programmes are based on the premise that supportive relationships with adults are important for youths' personal, cognitive, and psychological development (Allen & Eby, 2011). Formal youth mentoring programmes are initiatives that attempt to 'match' or form a relationship between a young person and an adult, with the aim of supporting the young person's development and well-being (Gettings & Wilson, 2014). Over the last number of decades a substantial body of empirical research has been generated to suggest that young people who take part in youth mentoring programmes show improvements in a wide range of behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and health-related outcomes (DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose & Lipman, 2016; Tolan et al., 2014; Meyerson, 2013; DuBois et al., 2011; Cheng et al., 2008). However, it is also increasingly recognised that not all youth mentoring programmes or relationships yield positive outcomes at all times and that there is a need for researchers to better understand the mentoring dynamics or relational processes that are key to promoting positive outcomes (Erdem et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2016; McQuillin et al., 2015; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). In summary, findings from the research literature suggest that mentoring programmes are more likely to be effective when:

1. youths and mentors report feelings of closeness, happiness, support, and warmth in their mentoring relationships
2. mentors receive quality training and support
3. mentors and mentees have frequent contact throughout their relationship
4. mentoring relationships last longer.

In this research, a secondary analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from the BBBS of Ireland Evaluation Study (Dolan et al., 2011a; 2011b) was undertaken in order to generate further understanding of the relational processes and dynamics at play in youth mentoring programmes. Through the quantitative strand of the research, it was hoped to gain an insight into the relational dynamics that developed between youths and their mentors, how these dynamics changed over time, how frequency of contact and match duration influenced youths' and mentors' perceptions of the relationship dynamics, and how the perceived quality of the youth-mentor relationship influenced youth outcomes over time. Through the qualitative part of the study, the experiences of mentors were explored, including motivations for volunteering, conceptualisation of their role, benefits and challenges of being a mentor, and their perceptions of programme supports.

In this final section, qualitative and quantitative evidence is integrated to make a series of conclusions and recommendations with regard to relationship dynamics in the BBBS of Ireland youth mentoring programme.

## **Youth Satisfaction with Their Mentoring Relationship**

It is widely accepted among mentoring researchers that beneficial programme outcomes are more likely to occur when mentors and mentees experience close and supportive

relationships (Erdem et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Planas, 2014). Rhodes & DuBois (2008) and Chapman et al. (2017) have argued that feelings of closeness and warmth between youths and their mentors are key to the success of youth mentoring programmes, because without these relationship components, mentoring will be unlikely to make any noticeable benefit to youths' lives. Crucially, the quantitative analysis undertaken as part of this study, found that youths reported high levels of perceived mentor support, helping, happiness, and closeness at all three time points. While this study did not explore youth perspectives on relationship quality, these issues were explored in the qualitative study undertaken by Dolan et al. (2011b). In the Dolan et al. (2011b) report, young people spoke of feeling happier and supported in their match. The support they experienced included emotional support, practical support, advice, and esteem support.

## **Mentor Satisfaction with Their Mentoring Experience**

Mentor satisfaction and perception of relationship quality has been linked to more positive youth outcomes (Rhodes et al., 2017; Bowers et al., 2015; Larose et al., 2010; Goldner & Mayselless, 2009), while a lack of closeness or dissatisfaction with the match may result in early match closures (Spencer et al., 2017). The quantitative findings from this study indicated that mentors reported moderate to high levels of perceived match satisfaction over time. This trend was supported by the qualitative findings, which showed that the majority of mentors enjoyed spending time with their Little and felt that they have benefited from the relationship personally. The relational factors that appeared to contribute to mentor satisfaction included having similar interests to their mentee, having the opportunity to engage in relaxing pastimes that they would not otherwise do, getting to build a friendship with a young person, and seeing positive changes in the young person over time. The programme-related factors that appeared to contribute to mentor satisfaction included the initial vetting and training, the regular support and supervision from caseworkers, and having opportunities to meet other mentors.

## **Relationship between Youth/Mentor Satisfaction and Youth Outcomes**

Findings from the quantitative element of this research showed that youth perceptions of support, helping, and happiness with or from their mentor, as well as mentors' own level of match satisfaction, were generally associated with more favourable youth outcomes over time. Results indicated that a moderate to strong relationship (e.g., effect size) appeared to exist between these four indicators of relationship quality and youths' outcomes. These findings are in line with those from other research studies and provide further evidence to suggest that the quality of the mentoring relationship may contribute to youths' positive social, emotional, and academic developmental changes (Van Dam et al., 2018; Larose et al., 2015; Eby et al., 2012; Herrera et al., 2011; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). However, neither youth nor mentor satisfaction was significantly associated

with youths' engagement in risky behaviours over time. Hence, findings may indicate that these indicators of youth or mentor satisfaction may be more relevant for some areas of development than others.

## Differences in Mentor Styles and Approaches

The majority of mentors taking part in the qualitative study appeared to view their role primarily as being a friend to the young person. These mentors emphasised the young person's strengths and appeared to enjoy spending time with the young person. Previous research has shown that this type of approach, which is generally referred to as a developmental approach, is associated with greater feelings of youth-mentor closeness, greater youth satisfaction with the mentoring relationship, and longer-lasting mentoring relationships (Podmore et al., 2014; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Morrow & Styles, 1995). Furthermore, previous research has found that mentors who take a positive view of their mentee are more likely to build a close bond with them (Higley et al., 2016; Liang et al., 2013). A minority of mentors in the qualitative research were found to take a more directive approach. These mentors discussed feeling rewarded by being able to be a role model to the young person or by witnessing positive changes in the young person over time. Although previous research suggests that different mentoring approaches (e.g., developmental or directive/prescriptive) may have differential effects on the success of the mentoring relationship (Podmore et al., 2014), it was beyond the scope of the current research to explore how different mentoring styles impacted youth outcomes in the BBBS programme.

## Relationship between Perceived Relationship Quality and Frequency of Contact

There is consensus in the mentoring literature that frequency of contact and length of the youth-mentor meetings are important (Bowers et al., 2015). According to best practice in mentoring relationships, mentors and mentees are expected to meet for at least four hours per month for a minimum of 12 months (Mentor, 2005). This frequency of meeting is considered important to ensure that a close personal relationship develops between the adult and young person. DuBois et al. (2002) found that programmes that reported expectations for frequency of contact between mentors and mentees showed significantly larger effects than programmes that did not include this expectation, while a recent studies confirm the link between match length or consistency and positive developmental outcomes (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2017).

A notable observation from the quantitative analysis in this study is the finding that although interaction frequency appeared to significantly decline over time, the perceived quality of the relationship did not appear to reduce when contact declined. Overall, the findings from the quantitative research suggested that the amount of time young people and mentors spent interacting had little impact on youths'

or mentors' perceptions of relationship quality. Specifically, frequency of contact was found to impact mentors' satisfaction and youth perceptions of perceived mentor helpfulness at the early but not the latter stages of the mentoring relationship, and appeared to have no association with youth perceptions of match happiness or mentor support at any time point. These findings are at odds with previous research showing that the amount of time youths and mentors spend interacting is directly associated with both mentors' and mentees' perceptions of relationship quality (Van Dam et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2006; Lankau et al., 2005; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

One of the key challenges identified by mentors in the qualitative research was finding time to meet in the context of their busy lives and the busy lives of their mentees. Moreover, there was an implication that both parties felt comfortable with easing off the frequency of meeting, once the mentor-mentee relationship was well established. Coupled with the quantitative results, these findings may suggest that frequent contact between youths and mentors has a more important impact on perceptions of relationship quality for new, rather than established, mentoring relationships. It could also be argued that this trend reflects the nature of authentic relationships in which the rules around meeting tend to be more relaxed. However, in the BBBS RCT study (Dolan et al., 2011a), programme effects were strongest when the number of hours of meeting was highest, with effects declining as the number of hours meeting declined, which suggests a relationship between frequency of meeting and outcomes.

## Relationship between Match Quality and Match Duration

Although the literature proposes that the duration of the match is an important benchmark of programme success and can impact the benefits that youth receive from the mentoring relationship (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Erdem et al., 2016; Nakkula & Harris, 2013; Clarke, 2009; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009), the findings from the current research did not support this proposition. Interestingly, results from the quantitative analysis showed no apparent difference in perceptions of mentoring quality between those whose mentoring relationship lasted for more than 12 months and those whose matches lasted for less than 12 months.

## Mentors' Perceptions of Training and Programme Support

As noted earlier, there is a substantial body of evidence to suggest that the quality of training and support that mentors receive is critical to the success of youth mentoring programmes (Spencer et al., 2017; Erdem et al., 2016; DuBois et al., 2011; Whitney et al., 2011; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). In their meta-analysis of youth mentoring studies, DuBois et al. (2002) found that the strength of youth mentoring programme effects appeared to increase dramatically when mentors were provided with ongoing training and support (McQuillin et al., 2015). While at the time the study was conducted, the BBBS programme did not provide ongoing

training for mentors regular supervision and opportunities for mentors to meet with other mentors, thereby facilitating peer support to emerge. Findings from the qualitative research suggest that mentors found the training provided the BBBS programme to be invaluable. Mentors participating in the qualitative research spoke very positively about the value of initial training they received, which helped them to prepare for the role and assuage concerns they had about becoming involved with the programme.

## Recommendations and Suggestions for Research and Practice

Based on these quantitative and qualitative observations, a number of recommendations and suggestions for future research and practice can be made.

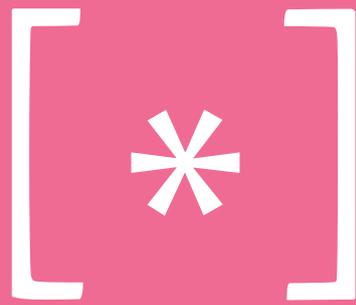
1. First, findings from the current research indicate that while the majority of youths report experiencing high-quality matches throughout their involvement in the BBBS programme, a small minority of youths experienced early match terminations or reported not feeling satisfied with the relationship they had with their mentor. Given the finding that match quality can impact youth outcomes, it would be valuable for future research to better identify and understand the relationship characteristics that result in early match terminations or contribute to low youth satisfaction with their mentoring relationship. It is important for researchers and practitioners to be aware that some mentoring relationships may not be beneficial for youth, and to work together to identify strategies that can promote more positive mentoring experiences for all young people.
2. Similarly, although the majority of mentors appeared to evidence high levels of match satisfaction in both the quantitative and qualitative research findings, mentors in the qualitative research identified a number of key challenges (e.g., child-protection issues, youth disclosure, incompatibility with their match, etc.), which may have negatively affected their initial satisfaction or comfort in their mentoring relationships, or may have made them apprehensive about volunteering as a mentor in the first instance. Crucially, mentors also discussed how the initial training provided by the BBBS programme, the continued supervision and support from BBBS caseworkers, and social support provided from other mentors alleviated these concerns over time. These findings have significant implications for mentoring programmes and services, as they highlight the importance of providing continued formal and informal support to mentors throughout their volunteer experience. It may also be beneficial for mentoring programmes to be aware of the fears and concerns that potential volunteers may have and to address these concerns early in the recruitment process, in order to maximise recruitment potential.
3. Results from the quantitative research indicated that youths and mentors appear to spend significantly less time meeting up over time. Findings from the qualitative research suggested that mentors perceived less need to

meet up as frequently once the mentoring relationship had become more established. Given that other research has indicated that frequency of contact is linked to programme success and youth outcomes, it may be important for caseworkers or programme managers to ensure that youths and mentors in longer-term matches do not become complacent, and perhaps actively remind or encourage matches to meet more regularly. Furthermore, as findings from the quantitative research observed an inconsistent relationship between frequency of meet-ups and perceptions of relationship quality, it may be beneficial for future research to examine how other forms of mentor–youth communication impact both the quality of the mentoring relationship and the developmental benefits that youths receive from being a part of these high-quality mentoring relationships.

4. Finally, findings from the qualitative research suggested that mentors appear to conceptualise their role in one of two ways: to be a friend or to be a positive influence. This finding is important, as other research suggests that these type of developmental and prescriptive mentoring approaches may differentially impact programme success. If some mentoring styles are less beneficial to youths than others, then it may be important for mentoring programmes to include screening measures for volunteers wishing to become a mentor, to ensure that they do not take an overly prescriptive approach with their mentee. However, it should be acknowledged that the qualitative sample used to explore these differences in mentoring styles was small, which may impede the generalisation of these findings. Additionally, as the original quantitative data did not measure mentors' styles of mentoring, this study was not able to examine whether different mentoring approaches impacted either youth perceptions of relationship quality or their developmental outcomes. Hence, future research in this area may be warranted, before more informed recommendations for how to improve the success of mentoring programmes can be provided.

### Overall Conclusion

This research offers novel insights into the dynamics that impact the quality of the relationship which forms between youths and their mentors, and expands our understanding of how relationship quality can impact the success of formal youth mentoring programmes such as the BBBS programme. While these findings may have notable implications for practice, further research examining how other relationship dynamics moderate programme success, or how different mentoring styles impact the benefits that youths receive from participating in these mentoring programmes, may be important.



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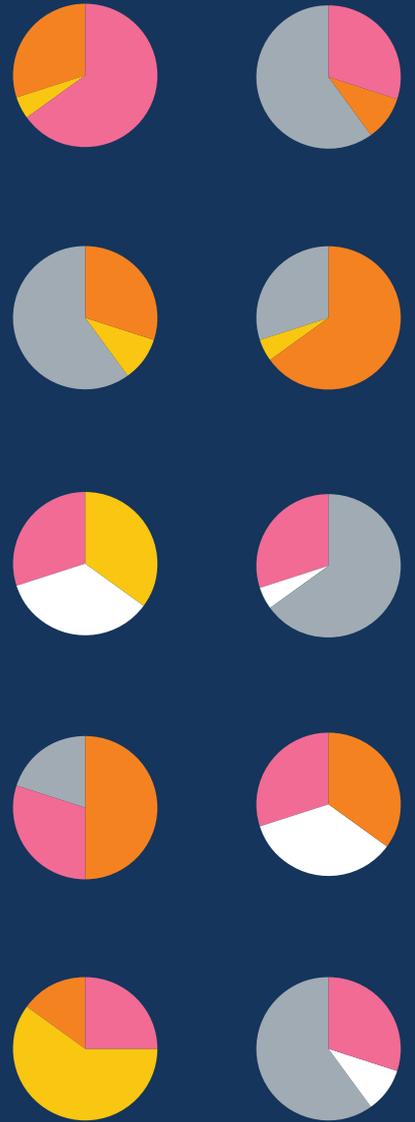
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