Exploring the Impact of Mentoring Relationships in Adolescent Empathy: A Mixed Methods Approach

Final Report

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ABOUT THE UNESCO CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) is part of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society at the National University of Ireland Galway. It was founded in 2007, through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland and the Health Service Executive, with a base in the School of Political Science and Sociology. The mission of the Centre is to help create the conditions for excellent policies, services, and practices that improve the lives of children, youth, and families through research, education, and service development. The UCFRC has an extensive network of relationships and research collaborations internationally and is widely recognised for its core expertise in the areas of Family Support and Youth Development.

The UNESCO Chair, awarded to Professor Pat Dolan in 2008, provides a platform for the UCFRC to influence and inform global policy for families and youth. The formation in 2015 of a Global Network of UNESCO Chairs in Children, Youth and Communities brings together universities, centres of excellence, and agencies that foster the development of young people in communities and civic society.

Research undertaken at the UCFRC is strongly connected to applied work for children and families and relevant to a diverse range of stakeholders, including service users, policymakers, politicians, service managers, and front-line staff. Activities are focused on knowledge creation around 'what works' in the real world of practice and on utilising community-based approaches to working with and for children and their families. Through its partnership with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the UCFRC is at the heart of policy, research, and evaluation activities that inform the delivery system for child welfare. The Centre engages in large-scale, commissioned research and evaluation projects adopting a variety of methodological approaches, ranging from experimental studies of innovative programmes to exploratory qualitative studies in key policy areas. These include a range of assessments of new and internationally tested interventions and initiatives aimed at targeting social and economic disadvantage among children and families.

Alongside research on policy and practice, the UCFRC is committed to generating academic publications, contributing to the development of theory and to providing education and training. The Centre also undertakes a programme of related activities, including conferences, symposia, visiting faculty exchanges, and supporting practitioner networks.

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ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH NETWORK

The Children's Research Network brings together a wide range of professionals with an interest in research on child and family issues across the island of Ireland.

The aim of the Network is to support the research community in Ireland and Northern Ireland and to better understand and improve the lives of children and young people, by creating and maintaining an inclusive, independent, no-profit network.

The Network seeks to connect researchers, develop structures and mechanisms to promote the sharing of information, link more experienced and early-career researchers, and develop a range of membership services that support researchers in this field.

The objectives of the Network are:

- to create opportunities for researchers

- to raise awareness of the research issues relevant to children and young people's well-being

- to connect the Network with other relevant groups and networks

- to support research skill development

- To pursue joint activities that the members may identify as useful in support of the aim of the network

The Prevention and Early Intervention Research Initiative (PEI-RI)

The Prevention and Early Intervention Research Initiative (PEI-RI) is a data archiving project at the Children's Research Network. The central aim of the PEI-RI is to archive data from a series of evaluations of prevention and early intervention services from around the island of Ireland, so that this data is available through the national data archives for further analysis and service development.

ABOUT THE BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS

Foróige is a national youth organisation with more than 50 years' experience of working with young people in Ireland. Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Ireland is part of the Foróige organisation in Ireland. The target group for the programme is young people aged 10–18 years who meet the criteria for participation, which include poor social skills, being shy or withdrawn, low self-esteem, and economic disadvantage. The essence of the intervention is the 'match' between the young person and a voluntary mentor.

The match is expected to meet for 1–2 hours per week for a minimum of one year, during which time it is hoped that a friendship will develop that will support the youth's personal and social development. Project officers are expected to operate the programme in strict accordance with the BBBS Service Delivery Manual. This sets out the procedures governing all aspects of the programme, including assessment of young people and mentors, training for volunteers, making a match, match supervision, match closure, and keeping records. Supervision of matches is an important aspect of the programme and involves the project officers making contact with the young person, mentor, and parent on a monthly basis or in response to needs as they arise. The files of project officers are subject to audit every year to ensure that the programme is being operated with fidelity to the manual.

BBBS Ireland works with a range of internal and external partners to extend the reach of its programme. Internal partners are community-based Foróige youth projects, while external partners are generally community-based projects managed by other youth work organisations or the Health Service Executive (HSE). Staff in these organisations are trained as BBBS case workers and manage a number of matches in their projects. BBBS Ireland is responsible for training and monitoring standards related to this intervention in these partner organisations.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBBS   Big Brothers Big Sisters

Bigs   Big Brothers and/or Big Sisters

DCYA   Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Littles   Young people in the study: Little Brothers and Little Sisters

NA   Not applicable

NUI Galway   National University of Ireland Galway

RCT   Randomised control trial

UCFRC   UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1 Introduction and Overview

This secondary data analysis was used to explore the impact of mentoring relationships on adolescent empathy. This research aimed to: (i) identify the role of mentoring relationships in adolescent perceived social support, (ii) explore the role of empathy in the experiences of youth in mentoring relationships, and (iii) disseminate the findings to inform policy through the creation of videos with young people currently involved in a mentoring programme.

Data for this secondary data analysis originated from the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Ireland: Evaluation Study undertaken by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway (Dolan et al., 2010). This was a mixed methods study consisting of a randomised control trial (n = 164) and nine longitudinal qualitative case studies of mentoring pairs, including the views of young people, mentors, mothers, and case workers.

Objectives of the Study

1. Identify how mentoring relationships impact on adolescent perceived social support.
2. Explore the role of empathy in the experiences of youth in mentoring relationships.
3. Disseminate the findings to inform policy through the creation of videos with young people currently involved in a mentoring programme.

Quantitative Strand

A subset of the overall database for young people was selected to examine the role of mentoring relationships in perceived social support. The selected subset included the relevant scales that measure the two latent variables, which are social support and mentoring relationships. The data used is longitudinal data that was measured over four different periods (time 1 to 4). At time 2, the young people were introduced to their mentors, and mentoring relationships were measured through different scales. Perceived social supports encompassed the supports of different groups: parents,

siblings, friends, and other adults. Standardised measures of mentoring relationships and perceived social support were created. The model was evaluated using a fixed-effect model.

Regarding the quantitative analysis, the full model was statistically significant, indicating that an improvement in the relationship with mentors also increased young people's level of perceived social support. Time was not significant in explaining any of the variance in perceived social support.

Qualitative Strand

The current study is a secondary content analysis Elo and Kyngas (2008) carried out with nine longitudinal case study interviews (mentors and mentees) to identify the role of mentoring in youth empathy. Interview manuscripts were analysed to find evidence of the empathy, both active empathy and passive empathy, over time.

Content analysis yielded a pattern in the qualitative interviews, where references to active empathy were more common than passive ones in mentoring relationships. There was an increase over time in active verbs and a reduction in passive ones. The majority of active empathy references were identified in Big Brothers and Big Sisters' interviews both at baseline and follow-up. There was a tendency for active empathy to increase for Littles over time. Mothers also had more active empathy references over time.

The findings suggest that mentoring can help to develop empathy in young people. This is very relevant for practice, as empathy can have benefits for young people, including interpersonal competence, less aggressiveness, less antisocial behaviours, improved friendships, increased prosocial behaviour, and improved capacity to anticipate the negative consequences of their behaviour. Empathy is also a crucial component of youth empowerment, as it is the foundation of contextual understanding, social responsibility, and social justice, which may give young people the power to transform social conditions of vulnerability and deprivation that they may be experiencing.

1.1   STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Following the introduction and overview of this secondary data analysis, where the origin and objectives of the study are explained, a summary of research findings and the implications for policy and practice are provided. Chapter 2 contains a concise literature review of the current state of research based on the principal theory and concepts underlying this study. Chapter 3 contains a detailed explanation of the methodology followed, including the quantitative (phase 1) and qualitative data analysis (phase 2). Lastly, the dissemination phase of the study is described. Chapter 4 describes the quantitative and qualitative findings of the research, describing in depth the relationship between mentoring relationships, social support, and empathy. Chapter 5 provides the context of the findings and the contribution to the body of knowledge that this secondary data analysis has made. Limitations and future recommendations are also included after the discussion of findings.

1.2   SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Empathy and mentoring are crucially related. Empathy is the motivation for mentors to engage in the mentoring programme, but empathy continues to develop over time in the mentoring pair, and young people 'mirror' their mentors' empathic behaviours.

- These findings are relevant, as this study suggests that mentoring relationships can contribute to the development of empathy in young people. Empathy itself has benefits for young people, including interpersonal competence, less aggressiveness, less antisocial behaviours, improved friendships, increased prosocial behaviour, and improved capacity to anticipate negative consequences of their behaviour.

- This study found that mentoring relationships can increase perceived social support in young people.

- Mentoring is one of the ways to engage vulnerable young people in an activity that they enjoy while giving them important life skills, such as empathy, which can and will make a difference in their life in the short and long term.

- Mentoring can improve young people's understanding of others and facilitate engagement in their community, allowing them to become active and resilient citizens who can make a difference for their lives and for other people around them.

- Empathy skills can be a protective factor for children and young people. This is relevant from a prevention and early intervention perspective, as it will avoid problems and difficulties for young people later in their lives.

1.3   IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- The role of practitioners was found to be crucial to provide support and reassurance for mentors when they had doubts or queries about the young person or their behaviour. Mothers and mentors also appreciated professionals being understanding towards them. Practitioners can be seen as the empathy 'bridge' that connects all parts of the match with each other.

- Mentoring is a way of supporting vulnerable young people, but it also has a 'ripple effect' on other family members, providing crucial support for mothers and families under a certain level of distress, including illness in the family and economic strains.

- Empathy screening for mentors can increase the success of matches, and this may be a crucial indicator of how successful matches will be and of the positive outcomes young people will obtain from the match.

- Mentoring relationships require time to develop fully, so the importance of matching should not be underestimated. Matching based on compatibility and shared interests is crucial for strong matches to develop and for outcomes such as empathy to develop over time.

1.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- This study provides support for the benefits of having youth-centred community-based interventions to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and young people. These kinds of initiatives should be promoted and resourced to continue to support young people and improve their lives and those of their families and communities.

- Further research is required to understand the conditions whereby mentoring relationships can ultimately promote and develop empathy in young people, and to identify the long-term benefits for young people over time.

2 Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the principles and theoretical concepts underpinning this research study, and also identifies the areas that require additional exploration and would benefit from further research in the future. The literature review is focused on mentoring, the Big Brothers Big Sisters programme, empathy, perceived social support, and research dissemination with young people.

2.1 MENTORING

Mentoring consists of a caring, trusting, and supportive relationship between a young person and a non-parental adult who provides guidance, support, and encouragement to the mentee (Schwartz, Lowe, and Rhodes, 2012; Rhodes et al., 2006). The aim of mentoring relationships is 'to create a supportive friendship 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, 2012: 128).

Mentoring can have an impact on young people by enhancing youth social relationships and emotional well-being, improving cognitive skills, and promoting positive identity development through role modelling and advocacy (Rhodes et al., 2006). Research by Spencer (2012) found that mentored young people had positive gains in many aspects of their lives, including social, emotional, behavioural, and academic domains. By contrast, non-mentored youth showed a decline in these areas.

Further research is required to understand the factors that lead to successful mentoring relationships and positive outcomes in young people, as not all mentoring relationships are beneficial (Spencer, 2012). Although there was no direct reference to empathy specifically, Pryce (2012) emphasised the importance of mentor and mentee characteristics to determine the quality of matches and the impact these can have on young people.

2.2   BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS PROGRAMME

The Big Brothers Big Sisters programme is an internationally recognised mentoring programme based on the principle that a created relationship between an adult and a young person can positively impact on their well-being, particularly when these young people are facing adversity in their lives (Dolan et al., 2011).

This is a community-based programme where mentors and mentees meet on a weekly basis, generally for a minimum of one year (Schwartz et al., 2012). BBBS policies and procedures are included in the Programme Manual. Careful considerations are taken into account to develop the matches. Volunteers are carefully screened to ensure that they have the capacity to bond with young people and honour the time commitment. Young people are also assessed carefully to find the best possible match for them, taking into consideration their unmet needs but also mentor abilities, parental preferences, and capacity of programme staff. Staff engage in frequent supervision with all parties through the duration of the match (Dolan et al., 2011). Careful consideration is also given at the closure stage (Spencer et al., 2017).

2.3   BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF IRELAND EVALUATION STUDY

Data for this secondary data analysis originated from the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Ireland: Evaluation Study (Dolan, et al., 2011) undertaken by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway. This was a mixed methods study consisting of a randomised control trial (n = 164) and nine longitudinal qualitative case studies of mentoring pairs, including the views of young people, mentors, mothers, and case workers.

This study consisted of a randomised control trial. Young people in the West of Ireland were randomly assigned to either the intervention group (mentoring) or the control group (youth activities). Young people, parents, mentors, and teachers were asked to complete surveys four times over a period of two years (October 2007 to October 2009). A total of 72 matches were made, three-quarters of which were ongoing at the time of the last data collection.

Qualitative data collection was carried out with a purposive sample, including young people from rural and urban areas and balanced by gender. Interviews took place three months into the match, and a year later.

2.3.1   Participant Profile

The majority of young people were born in Ireland and lived in an urban location. They had an average age of 12 and were equally divided between male and female. Half of the sample came from single-parent households. Their issues and needs were mostly economic disadvantage, poor social skills, shyness, and withdrawal.

Mentors (n = 73) ranged between 18 and 55 years, and 55% of them were female. The majority had third-level education (80%) and were in full-time employment (70%).

2.3.2 Summary of youth findings of the BBBS Evaluation

- Young people with a mentor were more hopeful and had a greater sense of efficacy in relation to the future than those in the control group.

- Young people with a mentor felt better supported overall than those without a mentor.

- 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 2 years across all the youth measures.

- Matches that meet regularly and last for a minimum of 12 months have stronger outcomes.

- The BBBS programme can be particularly effective for young people from one-parent families.

2.4 EMPATHY

Empathy can be defined as 'understanding others and this understanding includes the other's thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, situation, perspective or experiences' (Pamukcu and Meydan, 2010: 906). Empathy is relevant as it can enhance helping, cooperation, and generous behaviour (Rumble, Van Lange, and Parks, 2010).

Adolescence has been described as an essential period for social skills building, relationships development, and making community links (Wagaman, 2011). Research has identified that adolescents who have higher levels of empathy also have higher levels of interpersonal competence, less aggressiveness, and less discordant friendships compared to their peers with lower levels of empathy (Block-Lerner et al., 2007; Laible, Carlo, and Roesch, 2004).

Empathy is one of the essential qualities needed for mentoring relationships to promote positive developmental outcomes for young people (Rhodes et al., 2006; Spencer, 2006). Young people who perceive higher levels of trust, mutuality, and empathy in their relationship with their mentors show improvements in their social skills, including cooperation, self-control, assertiveness, and empathy (Pryce, 2012). Research has also identified that empathy can impact on social support; for example, taking the perspective of the 'other' has been linked with less aggressive behaviours, less interpersonal conflict, and increasing the provision of help of those in need (Devoldre et al., 2010).

2.4.1 Passive and Active Empathy

Empathy is a multidimensional concept. Miklikowska, Duriez, and Soenens (2011) described two components: empathic concern and perspective taking. Empathic concern is sympathy, which consists of concern for others based on the comprehension of their

internal states. People may be motivated to relieve the other person's distress. Perspective taking is cognitive understanding of other people's internal states and cognitions, but this may or may not lead to the expression of an affective reaction towards the other person. Both empathic concern and perspective taking make up global empathy.

Batson et al. (1987) created the 'empathy-altruism hypothesis' to refer to the emotional response people experience when they witness someone in need of help: personal distress and empathic concern. Personal distress involves being alarmed, upset, or worried, and people will be egoistically motivated to reduce that stress by helping the person or instead avoiding them. Empathic concern is centred on the other person, motivating compassion, sympathy, and an altruistic motivation to help. According to Cutrona and Cole (2000), increasing empathy for the person in distress will increase helping efforts from others.

Another distinction between passive and active empathy can be found in the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980; Davis and Kraus, 1991). This is a self-reported empathy scale that differentiates between perspective taking (cognitive capacity to understand other's point of view), empathic concern (sympathy, feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others in distress), and personal distress (personal anxiety due to the misfortune of others). Empathic concern is other-oriented and motivates helpful behaviour, whereas personal distress is self-oriented and involves distress-reducing behaviours such as escaping (Reis and Collins, 2000).

For this research, passive empathy will be defined as the ability to sympathise with the emotional states of others but not taking any action to relieve the person in distress. Active empathy refers to affective reactions and actions towards the person in distress or need.

2.4.2 Empathy and Social Support

Empathy and social support are two separate constructs, but they share conceptual and practical similarities. Social support is a complex concept; to define it and fully understand it can be a challenge (Dolan and Brady, 2012). For the purposes of this secondary data analysis, Cutrona's (1996) definition was selected:

> acts that demonstrate responsivity to others' needs (Cutrona, 1996: 17)

Empathy was defined earlier in this study as:

> understanding others and this understanding includes the other's thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, situation, perspective, or experiences (Pamukcu and Meydan, 2010: 906)

Both concepts involve the capacity to be responsive to and understanding of others, including their needs, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desires, and views. Social support goes beyond, however, as it requires an active role or action, which empathy may or may not include, as empathy can be passive or active.

Empathy, defined as an understanding of the emotional experiences and frames of reference of others, has been identified as crucial in mentoring relationships and particularly

in emotional support (Dolan and Brady, 2012). Emotional support is one type of social support, which refers to feelings and being there for people, listening to others, and offering unconditional love to others, particularly at times of upset or distress. This type of support has been closely linked to empathy in mentoring relationships and may manifest itself as mentors listening to their mentees and being able to empathise with them at challenging times or even during typical daily events (Dolan and Brady, 2012; Spencer, 2006).

Emotional support has currency in almost all situations and is therefore the most important type of social support that can be provided and received (Cutrona, 2000). Further supporting this claim, Reis and Collins (2000) identified positive and moderately sized correlations between empathy and prosocial and cooperative behaviours, including tangible actions such as volunteering, and emotional support. Empathy and concern for others were identified as the primary motivation underlying the most helpful activities (Reis and Collins, 2000). In mentoring relationships, kind and supportive words from a mentor reassures a mentee that support is available, as 'the support perceived by youth as available is of equal importance (if not more important) than the actual support they receive' (Dolan and Brady, 2012: 41). Emotional support has the potential to support young people by providing 'a listening ear', showing empathy and understanding as well as building trust (Dolan and Brady, 2012).

Closeness to the mentor is one of the variables of interest in this analysis. Closeness is an important dimension of social support and mentoring, as it is defined as the extent to which young people are at ease, comfortable and familiar with other people in their social network. An appropriate level of closeness is desired in mentoring relationships and can be an indicator of success in the match (Dolan and Brady, 2012).

2.5 PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

The dissemination of the project findings will be youth-led. This means that young people will provide feedback and support for all stages of the production and dissemination of the findings. This will provide an opportunity to have young people's voices heard in matters that are relevant to them (Kennan and Dolan, 2017). Including children and young people in decision-making can promote children's protection and increase their confidence, communication, and negotiation skills. It can also facilitate active citizenship, social inclusion, and healthy societies (Kennan and Dolan, 2017; Department of Children and Youth Affairs DCYA, 2015).

Video is an accessible format with the potential to reach new audiences who would otherwise be excluded from access to written research findings and from expressing their voice to stakeholders and policymakers on issues that matter to them.

3 Methodology

The objectives of this secondary analysis were achieved through three phases. Phase 1 involved a linear fixed-effect regression evaluating the impact of mentoring relationships on young people's social support. Phase 2 consisted of a secondary content analysis, and Phase 3 was focused on dissemination through a video designed by young people currently involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programme.

3.1 PHASE 1: QUANTITATIVE

A subset of the overall database for young people was selected to examine the role of mentoring relationships in young people's levels of perceived social support. The selected subset included the relevant scales that measure the two latent variables, which are perceived social support and mentoring relationships. The data used is longitudinal: it was measured over four different periods (time 1 to 4). At time 2, the young people were introduced to their mentors, and adolescents' perceptions of mentoring relationships were measured through different scales (see Table 1). The Social Provisions Scale encompassed the supports of different type of groups, including parent, siblings, friends, and other adults.

Table 1: List of Scales Included in the Study

Mentor relationship	Social Support
Social Provisions Scale (adapted to mentors)	**Social Provisions Scale (SPS-R)**
Rhodes Scale	Parent Sibling
Happiness with the match	Friend
How close do you feel to your Big?	Other adult

Following the objective of this study, which is to identify the role of mentor relationships in empathic social supports, the model of this study can be demonstrated as:
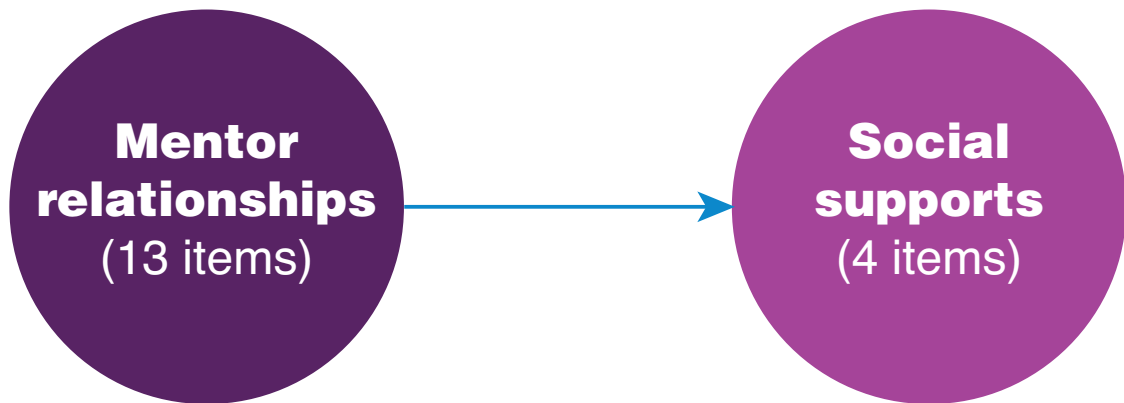
Figure 1: Study Model

Before proceeding with the analysis, the data had to go through a preparation phase (pre-data analysis). The pre-data analysis consisted of two stages: standardisation of the scale and computing the latent variables.

Due to using different scales in measuring the perceived mentor relationship, all the measurement items were standardised and combined to create a single variable: young people's overall perception of the relationship with their mentors. Also, the latent variable 'perceived social support' consists of four measurement items: parents' support, siblings' support, friends' support, and other adults' support. A single item for social support was also used to provide an overall score of perceived social support for young people. Figure 2 includes a summary of the measurement items used for each of the latent variables in the model.

How close do you feel to your Big?

I feel I can't trust my mentor with secrets because my mentor would tell my parent/guardian.

When something is bugging me, my mentor listens while I talk about it.

When I'm with my mentor, I feel disappointed.

When I'm with my mentor, I feel bored.

When my mentor gives me advice, it makes me feel kind of stupid.

When I'm with my mentor, I feel mad.

When I'm with my mentor, I feel ignored.

My mentor helps me take my mind off things by doing something with me.

My mentor has lots of good ideas about how to solve a problem.

Could you turn to your mentor for advice, if you were having problems?

Do you feel your talents and abilities are recognised by your mentor?

Does your relationship with your mentor provide you with a sense of acceptance and happiness?

Can you depend on your mentor to help you, if you really need

Mentor support

Social support

Other adults' support

Friends' support

Siblings' support

Parents' support

Figure 2: Measurement Items Used for Latent Variables

3.1.1 Data Analysis: Fixed-Effect Model

A fixed-effect model was used to assess the impact of the perceived mentor relationship on the perceived social support levels over time. The fixed-effect model assumes that the individual specific effect is correlated with the independent variables, and time-invariant factors will be excluded from the model by taking the difference between each observation within-group mean values in order to get rid of the individual specific effect term μ_i.

Fixed-effect model: $E\,(\mu_i \mid X_{it},\, Z_i) \neq 0$

3.1.2 Scale Reliability

Reliability of the scales was also measured. Reliability refers to the degree to which the study's measurement items would deliver the same results each time they are used under the same conditions with the same subjects. To assess the reliability of the scales, the standardised Cronbach's alpha was measured, and is reported in the table below. According to Hair et al. (2010), Cronbach's alpha is widely used as a measure of internal consistency of the measurement items. It is the average of all possible split-half coefficients resulting from different ways of splitting the scale items. The cut-off scores differ between disciplines; Hair et al. (2010: 123) explained that the general convention upon the lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is 0.70, although it may decrease to 0.60 in exploratory studies.

3.2 PHASE 2: QUALITATIVE

A secondary content analysis was carried out with nine longitudinal case study interviews (Bigs, Littles, mothers, and practitioners) to identify the role of mentoring relationships in youth empathy. Original interview manuscripts were analysed to find evidence of empathy, both active empathy (willing to act) and passive empathy (understanding for others) (Dolan et al., 2011). Table 2 includes the breakdown of qualitative interviews included in the original Big Brothers and Big Sisters evaluation study.

Content analysis is a systematic and objective method to quantify phenomena by turning words into content-related categories to build up a conceptual model or system (Elo and Kyngas, 2008. It focuses on the characteristics of language as communication focusing on th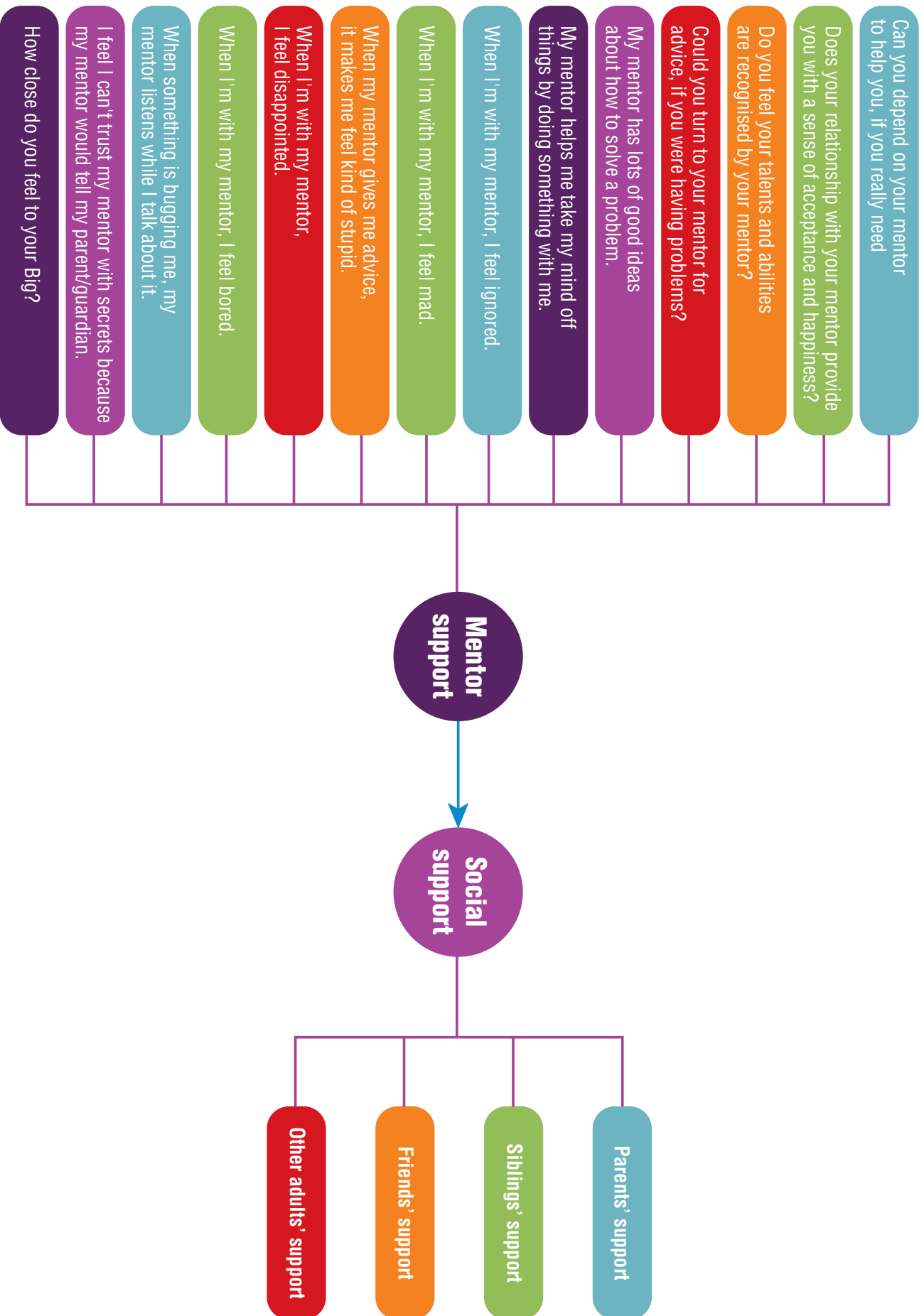e context and meaning of the text (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This study applied a deductive content analysis specifically, whereby the analysis is operationalised on the basis of previous knowledge and its purpose is theory-testing (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). Additionally, the frequency of coded categories was quantified to more clearly identify active and passive expression of empathy in the interviews (Mayring, 2000).

Content analysis, however, can be challenging, as an overemphasis on pre-existing theory can stop researchers from identifying the contextual aspects of the phenomenon (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The 'trustworthiness' of the analysis was achieved through different processes. The analysis was carried out with the original interview transcripts. Authentic citations were used to support the findings. The draft findings carried out by the lead researcher were discussed with other members of the research team, who were also part of the original study and are therefore familiar with the data (Elo and Kyngas, 2008).

Table 2: Summary of Qualitative Interviews in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Evaluation Study

Time 1					Time 2				
Youth	Parent	Mentor	Staff	Total	Youth	Parent	Mentor	Staff	Total
9	9	8	8	34	7	8	7	9	31
Average match time in months				5.2	Average match time in months				12.7

3.3 PHASE 3: DISSEMINATION

Research findings provided the evidence and support to create recommendations for practice that will be disseminated by young people currently involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring Programme. The lead researcher supported young people to produce their own scripts and creative montage for the video, and technical support was provided by a professional in the field. These videos were disseminated to relevant mentoring stakeholders and policymakers.

This dissemination phase involved two stages:

1. Consultation with a Youth Advisory Group on the format, content, and production of a five-minute video to disseminate the findings.
2. Production, filming and dissemination of the video to the general public, Big Brothers Big Sisters stakeholders, and relevant policymakers.

Youth Advisory Group

Young people currently matched and involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme in Galway were invited to take part in a Youth Advisory Group. Specific information and consent forms were designed for this dissemination phase to ensure the safety and well-being of young people involved. This process ensured that young people and parents were informed about the purpose of the dissemination phase of the study, what their involvement entailed, and the potential benefits and risks of being involved (Kennan and Dolan, 2017).

The Youth Advisory Group met with the video producer and the lead researcher in a workshop to discuss ideas on how best to present the project findings and creative ideas for the video. Young people provided support in the scripting and pre-production stages. Five young people involved in the Youth Advisory Group were invited to become actors in the video. The production of the video took place for one day. The film-maker carried out the post-production and edits.

3.4 SUMMARY

This study is a secondary analysis with a mixed methods design. Nine sets of interviews with Bigs, Littles, mothers, and practitioners were analysed to identify the role of mentoring in youth development. Data was analysed using content analysis. A fixed-effect model was used to evaluate the impact of mentoring relationships on adolescent perceived social support over time.

4 Findings

This chapter outlines the findings of Phase 1 (quantitative) and Phase 2 (qualitative). Phase 1 includes data only for young people at time 2, time 3, and time 4. Qualitative data explored the perspectives of young people, their mentors, and their mothers.

4.1   PHASE 1: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The fixed-effect model was applied to assess the impact of mentoring relationships on young people's perceived social support. The independent variables were mentor relationship and time, and the dependent variable was social support. Table 3 demonstrates the results of the regression. The effect of mentor relationship was positive and significant, with a β equal to 0.517, which meant that a unit of improvement in the relationship with mentors increased young people's level of perceived social support by 0.517 units. The mentor relationship explained 11.36% of the variance of social support (R-square = 0.1136). The relationship between time and social support was not significant, which indicated that social support does not simply change over time.

Table 3:   Random Effect Model 1: Social Support and Mentoring Relationship

Social support	Coefficient β	Standard Error	P value	95% Confidence Interval
Mentoring relationships	0.517	0.1144	0.000	0.29 to 0.743
Time	0.006	0.043	0.885	-0.08 to 0.093

4.1.1   Scale Reliability

Mentor scales reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8, which is above the acceptable value. Social supports scales reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.7 and 0.62, which are acceptable (see Table 4).

Table 4: Scale Reliability

Measurement items	Standardised Cronbach's alpha			
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4
Mentor relationships 1. Can you depend on your mentor to help you, if you really need 2. Does your relationship with your mentor provide you with a sense of acceptance and happiness? 3. Do you feel your talents and abilities are recognised by your mentor? 4. Could you turn to your mentor for advice, if you were having problems? 5. My mentor has lots of good ideas about how to solve a problem. 6. My mentor helps me take my mind off things by doing something with me. 7. When I'm with my mentor, I feel ignored. 8. When I'm with my mentor, I feel mad. 9. When my mentor gives me advice, it makes me feel kind of stupid. 10. When I'm with my mentor, I feel disappointed. 11. When I'm with my mentor, I feel bored. 12. When something is bugging me, my mentor listens while I talk about it. 13. I feel I can't trust my mentor with secrets because my mentor would tell my parent/guardian. 14. How close do you feel to your Big?	/	0.854	0.873	0.839
Social Support Friend support Parent support Sibling support Other adult support	0.673	0.675	0.620	0.714

4.2 PHASE 2: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This study aimed to identify the role of mentoring relationships in youth empathy. Overall the qualitative findings suggest that empathy plays a crucial role in mentoring relationships, as empathy seems to be the motivation for Big Brothers and Sisters to engage with

the programme in the first instance. Empathy for young people is also an outcome or consequence of their experience in the programme which also facilitates other processes that sustain the mentoring relationship over time, including building friendship and reciprocal understanding.

This content analysis explained the role of empathy in mentoring relationships from the perspective of Bigs, Littles, mothers, and case workers. It also describes how the role of empathy changes over time.

Big Brothers and Big Sisters ('Bigs')

Big Brothers and Sisters seemed to have preconceived ideas about the child that might need a mentor. This idea usually included a deprived child or one with serious personal or familial difficulties. The image of this 'child in need' motivated them to volunteer to support a child, irrespective of who they were: 'I didn't know what to expect. I thought was he like a troubled kid or something like that? Did he have problems? I mean he's grand, like.'

Another Big said:

> I thought at the start, Oh God, he'll have troubles. I think people do have an idea that it's for troubled kids, I kind of had that idea at the start, and I think people are asking me is he disadvantaged or whatever, you know.

Over time, the anonymous 'child in need' changed when Bigs let go of their initial perception of a child in need to actually get to know their Little Brother or Sister for who they are and to identify the reasons they were suitable candidates for the programme. Bigs made conscious decisions to avoid judgement and preconceived ideas of the children and their families. One Big said: 'I like to reinforce his positive aspects […] I just try not to judge him on it.' Another emphasised the importance of getting to know their Little:

> That's definitely the way it should be, that I just see her as the person she is, and I learn as we go along, just as she learns about me as we go along. […] 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.

Over time, Bigs learned to identify the positive aspects of their Littles and wanted their lives to be better: 'Well, I'd like to see him, because I know him, and I know he's not a bad kid. And I know that he can still go this way or that way. I'd like to see him sort out OK, for himself.'

Bigs described the strengths and talents of their Littles:

> I think she's a really kind of strong, capable girl. […] I don't think there'll be anything that will knock her down, like, you know what I mean, she's a really strong girl.

By contrast, one Big Brother was opinionated about Littles' parents and refused to have any contact with them: 'So 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.'

Some young people had experienced very difficult situations in their lives, for example, illness and bereavement. Bigs were able to be understanding and empathise, particularly with those who had very similar experiences in their lives.

> 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.

BBBS were also aware of not forcing their Littles to approach the topic but instead giving them the space and time to talk about it when they were ready.

> I think her dad had died and maybe she was having a bit of, not really bother now, dealing with that, but something she didn't talk much or something. 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.

Over time, Bigs were able to get to know and understand the circumstances in which their Littles lived and understood why they were matched as they found aspects in common. This allowed them to sympathise more with their Little Brothers and Sisters.

> And it's only as I get to know more about [young person] and [her] home life and her background, it's almost mirroring my own childhood in a way. We were very well matched. […] For me, it's nice to see and spend time with a child who is living the same life I lived.

Change and adaption were mentioned as a requirement for the match to be successful. Early on in the match, Bigs assumed the responsibility of changing and adapting themselves for both of them, particularly when issues emerged as the values and principles of Bigs were different to those of their Littles. Over time, however, the initial 'inequality' between how much effort the mentors put into the match became more balanced and was described as a more equal effort: 'It's kind of like a two-way thing, which is really really good, so I think it's just mutual like, mutual respect like.'

Punctuality and commitment were some of the issues that happened early in the match. Littles sometimes missed the meetings or showed up late. Bigs were upset but also empathetic and decided not to 'impose' what was important to them on their Littles:

> I give everything to what I'm doing, but if I'm being messed around I don't like it. […] I had to change in that the way I would have reared my children, I suppose, and taught them about being punctual and so on and so forth. […] They go under a different set of rules, social rules, I think. Once you understand that, I think you have to come to terms with it.

BBBS wanted to encourage their Littles but they were aware that what they perceived as important was not necessarily important for the child, including reading, school, and future career choices.

> I try to encourage her about the reading, things I think are important, but then again that's what I think is important. I kind of have to take a step back. I'm thinking in terms of my own.

Age difference was sometimes challenging for the match. Particularly at the beginning of the match, Bigs tried to be understanding of Littles' behaviours from a developmental point of view. They did not blame the young people or their personalities:

> You don't think of a ten-year-old being kind of moody, like, but it was moody. […] But we continued, and I didn't take any heed, just kept talking. Maybe she just had a bad day at school or something.

BBBS instead tried to find an age-appropriate justification, or an explanation derived from the circumstances the young people were experiencing: 'I would put that down to age, he's only thirteen, like. So I have to allow for that, do you know.'

Big Brothers and Sisters tried to adapt and 'tune in' to the interests and activities that their Littles enjoyed. Some of these activities may have been out of their age range, but they still enjoyed the time together: 'So it's been good, we're really enjoying it, we play the Wii, all the games. We did jewellery-making the last night; she's started on a scrapbook.' Some Bigs explicitly said they disliked specific activities but still wanted to please their Little:

> [She] loves shopping, she loves sports. So I tried to meet her halfway, because I hate sports now but really I did a bit of racquetball and stuff like that, but she probably would have preferred a bit more on the sports side.

Bigs deliberately avoided activities that could be very costly, as they knew this could be a burden on the young person and their families: 'Yeah, and I'm very aware of, I don't want everything to cost money as well.'

Some Bigs appeared to have altruistic motivations to become involved in the programme:

> It's about just meeting up with the kid, having a bit of a laugh, letting him see that there's more to life than what he's currently, there's more to life than what he's used to, you know.

These Bigs with altruistic motivations did not expect to get anything for themselves and instead wanted to give: 'Honestly, I know it sounds very clichéd, but I thought it'd be nice to give something back. […] I'm not really hoping to get anything out of it.'

Being a Big Brother or Sister required commitment. Despite being tired, some Bigs still met with their Littles and prioritised the commitment over their own needs and wishes: 'But there are evenings like, Oh God, I wish I didn't have to go out this evening, you know, if you're tired or you've had a tough day at work yourself, whatever.'

Some Bigs also chose to meet their Littles on days and times when they could spend enough time with them without rushing them:

> I don't want her to feel like I'm trying to squeeze her in or I'm rushing it, do you know, as well. That we're not bang, smack, oh listen your hour is up, that's me finished with you, type of thing.

Over time, a few Bigs began to realise the impact they had on the young person, and a particular activity that seemed trivial for a Big could be very significant for a young person and their family:

> [I] brought her to the circus once with her brother and you knew [...] they were delighted, like, and even her mum sort of rang me to say, like, you know, thanks. You kind of just, you felt afterwards, Oh god, you know, that to you isn't that exciting, going to a bloody circus like, but they really enjoyed it, like. Kind of afterwards you were a bit like, Oh, that was lovely [...] afterwards you're a bit like, Oh you know, you actually are making a bit of a difference, do you know that sort of way.

As the match developed over time, some Bigs understood the needs of their Littles and responded by providing support, stability, encouragement and friendship:

> Some kids out there do need the extra, like, help, you know what I mean, and I think with [young person] just kind of needed just a bit more support with her, and I think that's what you're giving her.

One of the mechanisms that certain Bigs used to understand their Littles was giving them a voice: 'So like, at the end if there are different opinions, you kind of have to take hers on board and, like, you're listening to what she's saying.'

Listening was also a useful skill described by a few of the Bigs:

> I think the main skill you need for this is to be able to listen to them and just being able to understand them. Mostly I think it's listening, because if you don't take heed of what she says, you could miss something important, do you know what I mean, something that could be worrying her, and if you're not there for her, you'll miss it.

Another mechanism used by specific Bigs was having a more horizontal relationship with the young person and not coming from the 'expert adult' perspective. They were willing to learn from their Littles:

> Reassure him that I don't know everything and there's things that he can teach me, so he can feel that he knows something that he's teaching me. So then when the time comes and the reverse is there, he'll accept it more, you know, for him.

A crucial aspect of the match over time, from the perspective of some Bigs, was the role of the case workers. Bigs felt supported by their case worker and described them as accessible people who were non-judgemental towards them and treated them as equals:

> She's great. No complaints about her anyway. She treats you like any other person. Even the way she approached [...] she's not looking down at you, you know. You're the same as her, and that's nice, like.

Little Brothers and Little Sisters ('Littles')

The role of empathy in mentoring relationships for Littles changed the most over time. This analysis found that empathy was not a motivation for Littles to engage in the programme, but empathy was instead an outcome of their involvement in it.

Some Little Brothers and Sisters were motivated to take part in the programme for the perceived benefits they thought they would obtain, including having someone to talk to and someone to meet outside their house. They also valued new experiences they had with the mentors: 'I do stuff that I never thought I'd do before. Before we met, I never knew […] at a football club, I was never out there.'

Over time, most Littles began to get to know their mentors and built a relationship with their Big: 'I am getting to know him better. […] Yeah, it is good fun, you get new experiences, meet a new person, getting to know them.' Other Littles described their Big as a friend: 'He's like one of my mates, like, get on normal with him. He's a normal guy; he's like dead sound.'

Once the young person met their Big Brother or Sister, they started to empathise with the challenges and difficulties they experienced. Young people realised that their Bigs were busy and had their own lives and responsibilities which they were leaving aside to spend time with them: 'I don't know what days are suitable, like, her husband works and she has to mind her kid.' One Little Sister even spent time with her Big's younger children and adapted to what they were going to like: 'We watch it with her two girls; they are only young, so we would watch something for their age.'

Some young people expressed the view that being matched was a privilege, and that even if they were interested in being matched, other young people with more serious needs than theirs should have priority in their match: 'No, not really, because like I don't really care because somebody might need more help than me.'

Mothers

Mothers in this study showed awareness of the needs of their young people and were honest in admitting that they could not always provide for those needs in the way they would have liked, usually because they were busy and had commitments:

> Everything that [young person] wants to do, that I can't do with her, do you know, because I have a son with ADHD, so it's very difficult for me to do anything with her so she gets to do everything with [Big], she's great.

This awareness was one of mothers' motivations to allow and encourage participation of their young people in the programme:

> She lost her dad at seven years of age, and I thought it'd be good to get her out of the house, to get involved with someone else besides me, like, do you know what I mean?

Another mother felt mentoring was good as the time she could spend with the young person was limited:

> I don't know, just, and it takes him away for the hour anyway, for him to get places, because I don't bring him any places myself. I have kids at home, it's very hard, so it's good, like, to see them going out doing things like that.

Mothers also showed empathy towards the young people by respecting their privacy in relation to the match. This mother, for example, wanted to let the young person know they could talk to her but did not want to be nosey: 'I wanted her to know that I was there for her, if she wanted to talk about it, but I didn't want her to think that I was being nosey or prying.'

Other matches were very open with mothers and kept them informed about what they were doing. These mothers felt included and appreciated this:

> Yes, yes, [Big Brother] kept me included the whole time, no matter what happened, if it was, do you know what I mean? The radio station they were meant to appear on the telly, he kept me included the whole time, yes.

Mothers also showed empathy towards the Big Brothers and Sisters. They were aware of the commitment they were making and the effort required to meet the young person on a regular basis:

> My best thing, well, not best, the fact that he's never let him down. He'll say, [Young person], I'll ring you between such a time to such a time, say, I'll ring you between five and six; [young person] got the phone in his hand from two minutes to five and guaranteed in that hour he'll ring.

Mothers appreciated what Bigs did for their children: spending time with them, answering their calls and texts, and listening to them: 'I mean she's taken the time out to actually listen to what [Little] has to say.'

Some Bigs experienced difficult personal situations during their matches, and mothers were also very sympathetic to these situations, but it also helped them to be understanding when the matches were altered or had to end because of these situations: 'As I say, [Big Sister's] mother died this year, so she wasn't, you know? She wasn't up for meeting, you know? For a couple of weeks, but [young person] understood that too.'

Other Bigs experienced personal milestones, such as marriage and new jobs, which sometimes led to the end of their matches. Mothers in these cases were also understanding of the circumstances changing. Even though the matches ended, mothers were still open to having their young people re-matched. This might suggest that they understood it was a personal situation and not an issue with the programme. Nevertheless, mothers empathised with their young people and the impact that the end of the matches had on them: 'But you can tell he does miss him. He does. Until he went, they were getting on like real brothers, the two of them.'

Staff

An essential aspect of Big Brothers and Big Sisters' staff is empathy, as this seemed to be the mechanism that allowed them to relate with Bigs, Littles, and their parents. Staff play a crucial role in the success of the matches: they oversee monitoring of the match and make sure all parties are happy over time. They provide support but also identify verbal and non-verbal cues that can help them understand if the relationship between Littles, Bigs, and mothers is good:

> Yeah, she always has a big smile on her face when she's talking about [Big Sister], you know, looks forward to the call, yeah, I mean I think it was [Little Sister's] confirmation there a while ago, and do you know, [Big Sister] sent her a card and gave her a present, and she thought the world of that. […] Her confirmation at the time, you know. So, things like that meant a lot to the child, you know.

Mothers appreciated having access to a case worker to support them throughout the match: 'And the support is good as well, to have the Big Brother case worker that you can sound things out against and check in with, yeah.'

Staff showed empathy by being understanding towards Bigs and their commitments. They were aware that Bigs were busy or had more than one job:

> She said he will miss meeting up with him, she goes, she was very empathetic, and the mum understood that [Big Brother], you know, I suppose there's nothing you can do, because it's voluntary and that's always in the back of your head, you know, they can decide to opt out at any time and there's not a thing you can do, unfortunately.

Staff, however, were very sympathetic of the effects that the termination of the matches had on all the parties, particularly that this could upset young people: 'He was going to meet him for the last time and explain to him, because there's no point in kind of adding salt to the wounds type of thing.'

Staff were particularly focused on keeping all parties informed about issues or situations that emerged that would impact on the match and each other. Staff encouraged and facilitated open and honest communication, particularly between Bigs and Littles, so they could know what to expect and why circumstances changed:

> He was covering for a friend, it was for a month really but no, he hasn't, and I just asked him to explain that to [young person] to ensure that he knows that it's because of two jobs, it's not anything else.

Case workers also showed empathy by focusing on the positive characteristics of Littles. They were non-judgemental of the difficulties and family circumstances they were experiencing:

> She is a real pleasant, really nice, just a really good girl, you know? Just really, a good head on her shoulders, really level-headed, very caring, and would help look after her younger sister who is now actually getting matched next week.
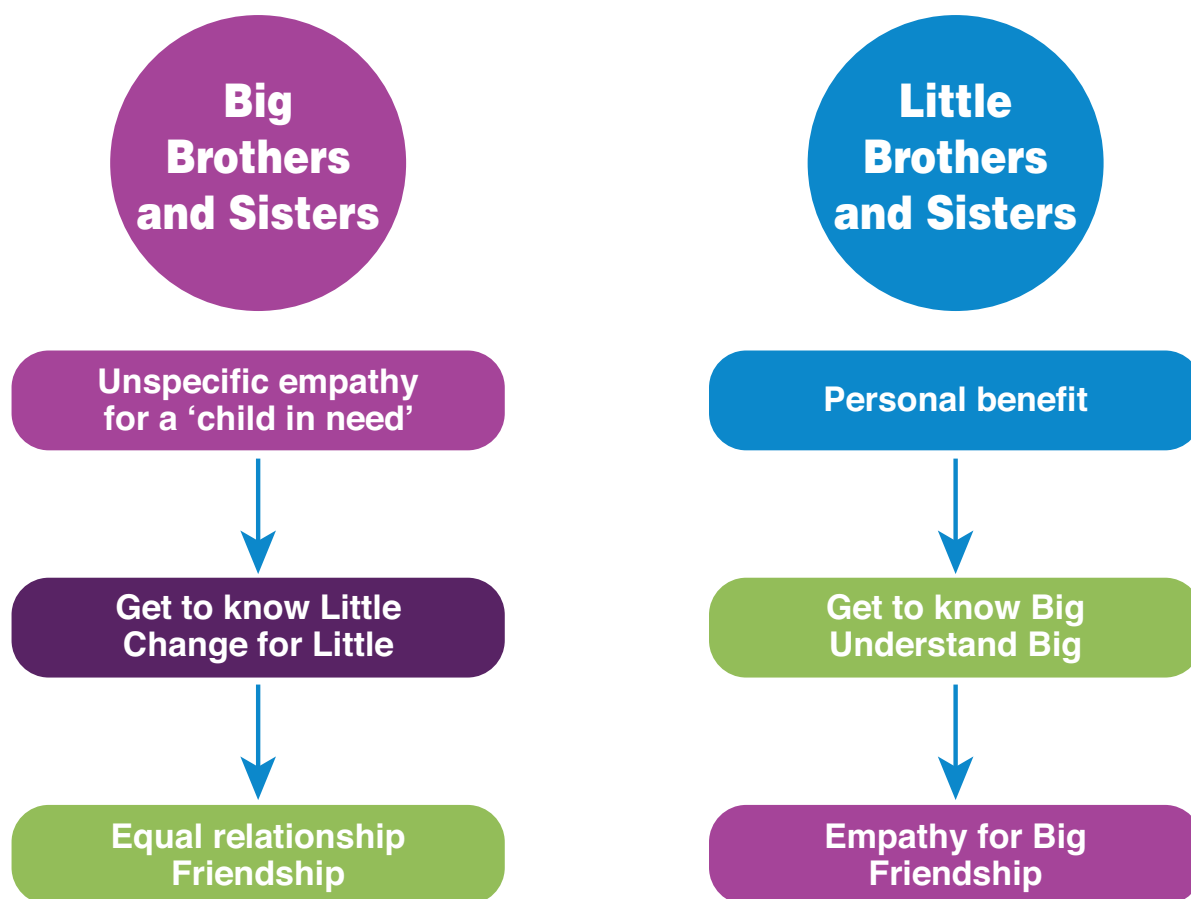
Figure 3: Evolvement of Empathy over Time for Bigs and Littles

Passive and Active Empathy

Interviews were analysed to identify active and passive verbs or actions that were associated with active and passive empathy. These were counted as an overall total and were also broken down by time and person (Bigs, Littles, mothers, and practitioners). Examples of active empathy were verbs such as *do*, *play*, *change*, *learn*, *talk*, and *encourage*. Passive empathy included phrases such as *don't like*, *not interested*, and *don't know*. The full list of active and passive empathy terms can be found in Appendix 1.

A pattern was identified in the interviews, where active references to empathy were more common than passive ones in mentoring relationships. There was an increase over time in active verbs and a reduction in passive terms. Most of active-empathy references were identified in Big Brothers' and Big Sisters' interviews both at baseline and follow-up. There was a tendency for active empathy to increase for Littles over time. Mothers also had more active-empathy references over time (see Table 4 and Figure 4).

Table 5: Summary of Content Analysis of Active and Passive Empathy

	Time 1		Time 2	
	Active	**Passive**	**Active**	**Passive**
Bigs	131	15	63	11
Littles	5	-	27	2
Mothers	13	2	26	10
Case workers	-	-	38	15
Total	149	17	154	15
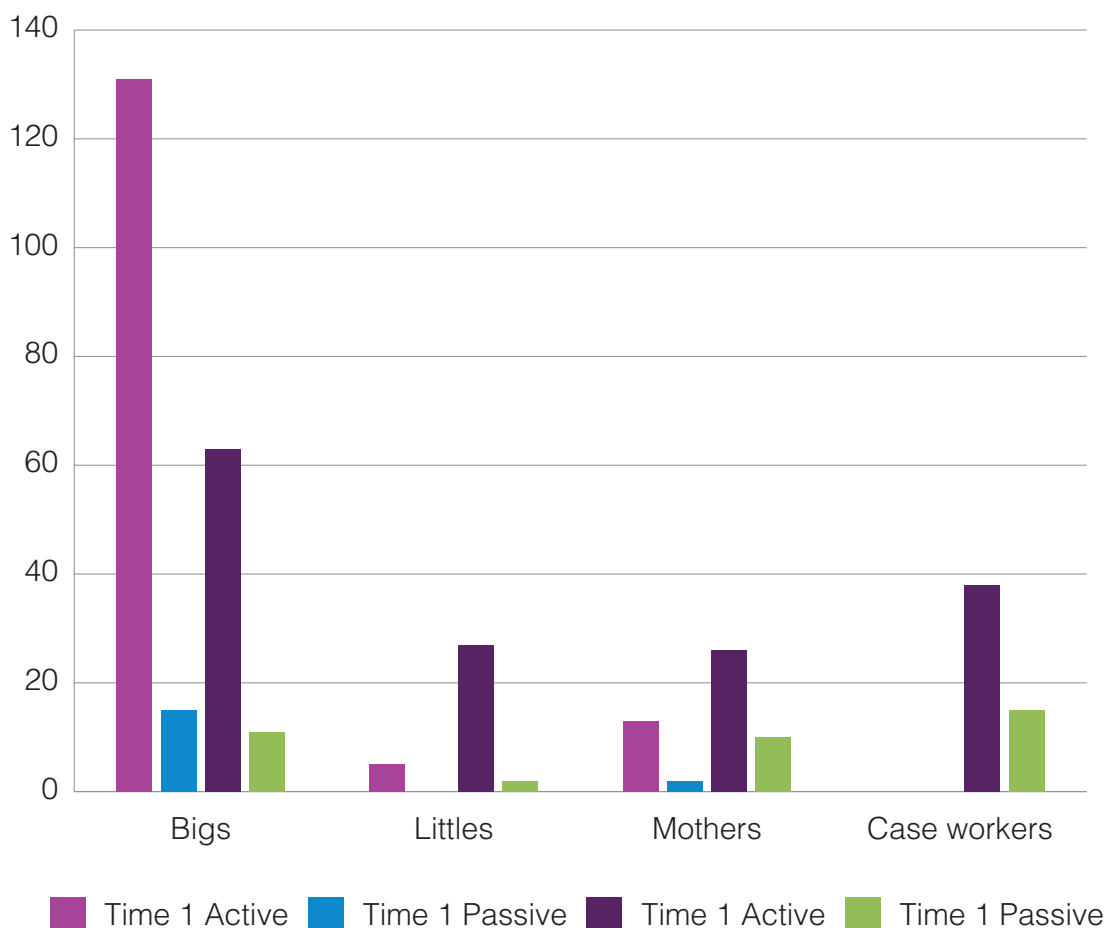
Figure 4: Summary of Passive and Active Empathy Over Time

The most common active references to empathic mentoring relationships at baseline by Bigs were do/doing something with the young person (9),[1] chat, talking or saying (6), help (6), encourage the young person (5), get to know the young person (5), and learn (5). At follow-up the most common active empathy references were listen (6), help (3), and come back to visit the young person (3). Passive empathy at baseline was not being interested (2), and over time it was missing the young person (2). Littles had no common words for active empathy at baseline, but at follow-up they did; these were having fun/laugh (4) and meet Big (4). Mothers mentioned ring/phone (5) the most times at baseline and do (2) and keep the mother included at follow-up (2). Case workers mentioned understand (3), keep in touch (2), and be aware (2) the most times as active empathy at follow-up and nothing you can do (2) as passive empathy.

1   Number in parenthesis represents frequency.

4.3   SUMMARY

This analysis identified that empathy was the initial motivation for mentors to engage in mentoring programmes. It enabled them to understand the circumstances of their Littles, but they also overcame possible stereotypes of mentored young people, to engage with them at a deep and genuine level that could result in strong friendships. Littles first engaged out of interest in what they may obtain, or in how they will benefit, but over time they start to mirror empathic behaviours of their mentors and with others in their community. Practitioners showed empathy towards all different parties and contribute to mutual understating that ultimately determined the success of the mentoring pair. Mothers were also empathic towards young people, recognising their needs but also honestly accepting that they cannot provide for them, and that allowing them to engage with mentors will highly benefit the young person.

The fixed-effect model found that the effect of mentor relationships on adolescent social support was positive, significant, and independent of time. Relationships with mentors increased perceived social support in young people. Quantitative findings provided further evidence to suggest that mentoring could be a way to develop empathy in young people, adding to the existing body of research on the benefits of mentoring for young people.

5 Discussion

This study found a crucial relationship between empathy and mentoring. Empathy is the initial motivation for mentors to become engaged in the programme, and it essentially facilitates the development of a solid mentoring relationship over time. Mentor empathy over time becomes a 'mirrored' behaviour that mentees can learn and put into practice towards their mentors in a more reciprocal relationship – but also towards other members of their community. Empathy can be learned and developed over time, and the relationship with a mentor can increase levels of social support and empathy in young people. Previous studies have shown that empathy can help young people by increasing their interpersonal competence, reducing aggressiveness and antisocial behaviours, improving friendship, increasing prosocial behaviour, and improving capacity to anticipate negative consequences of their behaviour (Block-Lerner et al., 2007; Gini et al., 2007; Laible, Carlo, and Roesch, 2004).

Mentors in this study showed a high level of empathy and compassion, and this was the essential motivation to volunteer. Previous research by Keller (2010) suggested that mentors tend to be more 'socially connected' than their counterparts who do not volunteer, and also score higher in empathy and cooperation. People who volunteer are high on two personality traits, 'other-oriented empathy' and 'helpfulness'. The majority of Bigs in the study were empathic and understanding towards their Littles, but there was one who expressed judgement over Little's family. Previous research findings have found that judgement of the young person or their family was associated with matches that ended very soon, because Bigs were not able to connect with or understand the young person (Spencer, 2012).

This is relevant for mentoring programmes going forward, because empathy screening for mentors may improve the success of mentoring matches in the future. Research has suggested that empathy screening may contribute to predict future outcomes for mentees. Further supporting this statement, albeit in the context of therapeutic relationships and not mentoring ones, Moyers and Miller (2013) found that empathy was a reliable predictor of counsellor success in treating people with an alcohol addiction, accounting for the majority of variance in patients' outcomes. Research on psychotherapy found that therapists who engage with their patients in empathic and authentic ways are more effective (Spencer, 2012).

This study also found that mentoring relationships can improve levels of perceived social support for young people. Previous research has found that mentors can support young people to cope with emotions and that this improves their ability to interact effectively with others and in negative social situations (Dolan and Brady, 2012). Sensitive and consistent support from a mentor can serve a 'corrective' purpose that can modify the young person's relationships with parents and other important people in their network (Keller, 2010), improving their levels of perceived social support from people in their networks.

In this research, mentors also facilitated mentees' engagement with their community, by getting actively involved in supporting other young people and children younger than them – in sports clubs, for example. Engagement in the community improves young people's understanding of others and provides an opportunity to help and empathise with the needs of others. Crucially, mentors can encourage young people to become active citizens, which enables their resilience by switching the young person's attention away from themselves and their problems to focus on others and their needs (Dolan and Brady, 2012; Keller, 2010). Wagaman (2011) identified empathy as a crucial component of youth empowerment, as empathy is the foundation of contextual understanding, leading to social responsibility and social justice. This is particularly relevant for young people involved in mentoring programmes that have specific unmet needs, as empathy and empowering can promote positive social change: 'adolescents who are empowered are more likely to act and exercise their power to transform social conditions' (Wagaman, 2011: 285).

Bigs and Littles in this study described the match as a friendship that developed over time. Describing mentoring as a friendship is relevant, as previous research identified that 'perspective-taking' empathy – the ability to cognitively understand other people's internal states – was the primary predictor of friendship quality (Soenens et al., 2007). This may suggest why empathy is important in mentoring relationship, as the quality of this 'friendship' will determine the benefits that young people will obtain from the match.

Research has previously explored this, suggesting that friendship can develop because of personal mentoring or professional mentoring relationships (Blinn-Pike, 2010; Gardiner, 1998); therefore, a purposeful match, created professionally through a mentoring programme, can develop into a genuine friendship. The underlying nature of mentoring relationships and professional friendships is not different, as both include positive feelings, emotional intimacy, meeting relational needs, and satisfying outcomes; a contract or formal context, however, binds professional mentoring friendships. Personal mentoring friendships rarely develop into deep mutual appreciation and trust (Gardiner, 1998).

Not only does the friendship develop over time, but the match itself transforms over time, which was clearly identified in this study. The beginning of mentoring relationships can be characterised by challenges and uncertainties. Previous research has identified that early in the mentoring relationship, mentors need to engage their mentees and respond to the needs and interests of the young person to allow the relationship to develop (Spencer, 2012). Over time, mentors need to adjust their expectations and get to know the capacities and interests of their mentees, which in turn facilitates their ability to structure activities that promote learning and the development of new skills tailored to their young person (Spencer, 2012).

This research also identified what can be described as a 'balancing' effect over time, where the match becomes a more horizontal relationship between Bigs and their Littles. This is supported for example when mentors listened to their Little's points of view and opinions and made decisions together. Mentoring research has found that this collaboration between Bigs and Littles allows young people to experience appropriate levels of power and control that can contribute to their well-being, efficacy, and competence (Spencer, 2012). Pryce (2012) coined the term 'highly attuned' to refer to a mentoring relationship characterised by mutual sharing and commitment, even though it was usually driven by a mentor's interest in the young person and allowing them to gain comfort in them and fully engaging the mentoring relationship. 'Minimally attuned' mentors tend to ignore the verbal and non-verbal cues of the young person, and the mentoring relationship will struggle to develop (Pryce, 2012). This further supports the need for rigour in matching processes and in the selection of mentors.

Littles had few expressions of active empathy at the beginning of the match, but empathy seems to develop over time, arguably as an outcome or consequence of the match, as active empathy was targeted at the mentor. According to Rumble et al. (2010), empathy-motivated help will occur if a person is able to perceive the need or distress in the other and also to imagine their perspective. This may explain differences in empathy levels in young people. Other studies have suggested that perspective-taking skills, such as empathy, require a certain level of self-perception that some children may have developed more than others (Warden and Mackinnon, 2003).

Gender is another possible explanation for differences in empathy identified. Research has identified that girls demonstrated more empathic awareness. It has also been suggested that girls and boys may differ in how they perceive and identify empathic behaviours, and this may impact self-reports (Warden and Mackinnon, 2003). Other studies have found that the capacity of a mentoring relationship to promote empathy in young people may be impacted by gender, race, and socioeconomic status of the young people (Liang and Grossman, 2010). For example, adolescent girls seem to prefer relationships with mentors who are focused on psychological qualities, including empathy and authenticity. Boys prefer a more instrumental style of mentoring based on more practical issues that relate to their success, such as career advice. These findings, however, may have been limited by the characteristics of young people and the structures, emphasis, and objective of a particular mentoring programme (Liang and Grossman, 2010). This study did not evaluate gender differences, but research on mentoring and empathy in the future might benefit from including gender as a variable for analysis.

Allowing mentoring relationships to develop over time is crucial for empathy development in young people, but also for other positive outcomes of mentoring to emerge. Longitudinal research on mentoring has found that positive effects of mentoring on youth become stronger as relationships persist over longer periods of time. The development of emotional closeness between mentors and mentees facilitates the positive effects of mentoring over time (Schwartz et al., 2012).

This study identified that the development of empathy in young people happens over time. However, the mechanisms by which mentoring improves empathy were not explored. Previous research by Wagaman (2011) provides a possible explanation of how Bigs facilitate

Littles' empathy development. Young people 'mirror' emotions, body states and intentions of other people whom they observe or 'tune into' (Wagaman, 2011: 286). This requires the ability to distinguish self- and other-awareness, the ability to regulate emotions, and the capacity to step into another person's point of view. Cutrona and Cole (2000) explained that eliciting support from a person's social network includes an educational component that can boost empathy. Therefore, it is possible that mentoring can promote empathy through education, empathy can be enhanced by learning, and mentors can be role models for young people. Additionally, perceived similarities between a person in distress and a member of their network can enhance empathy. Successful mentor matches based on similarities between the Big and Little could therefore be a suitable context which can facilitate the development or enhancement of empathy. Although not referring to empathy directly, Keller (2010) suggested that a mentor can provide opportunities for successful learning through demonstrating or role modelling behaviours, including interactions with others in a variety of social situations. Mentors can also encourage conversations about emotionally sensitive topics and emotional management.

Time and the quality of mentoring relationships play a crucial role in the success and quality of outcomes for young people. Active empathy seems to be a crucial component of successful mentoring matches. This study found that two of the most common active-empathy actions mentioned were the verb phrases *do* and *be there*. Research has found that successful mentoring relationships require time investment and regular meetings to be meaningful (Spencer, 2012). Not doing, or missing meetings, can lead to disappointment in the young person, whereas engaging, and shared and fun activities between an adult and a young person, can enhance emotional well-being and self-confidence in mentees (Spencer, 2012). Mentors and mentees need to be committed to make their match a success, otherwise this could compromise the achievements and gains for the young person, as well as the development of empathy.

Another aspect that is relevant for the success of mentoring relationships is practitioners. Practitioners play a crucial role in supporting matches, and this enables the duration of these matches over time, facilitating the development of empathy. Previous research found that mentoring programmes achieve more positive outcomes when they are supportive of the matches and have more structure in terms of training, support, activities, expected frequency of contact, and monitoring (Spencer et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2012). Additionally, this study found that empathic support is a crucial element to ensure that matches are successful, understand each other, resolve emerging issues, and allow young people to benefit from their mentoring experience.

The end of matches, although not thoroughly explored in this study, requires careful consideration, as it may have detrimental effects on young people. When matches ended prematurely in this study, Bigs, Littles, and their families had a mixture of emotions, such as missing, uncertainty, and even a degree of fear about the end approaching. Research by Spencer et al. (2017) suggested that premature endings of mentoring matches had negative effects for the young person, including decrease in self-worth and academic competence. The impact of the end varies according to the life experiences of a young person: past experiences, vulnerabilities, and loss in relationships will shape their reaction to the match

end. Matches that ended in this study were due to changes in life circumstances for the mentors, including new jobs and marriage; according to Spencer et al. (2017), parents and youth in these circumstances expressed the most satisfaction in the closure process. Planned endings, however, could still not avoid feelings of disappointment and sadness in Bigs and Littles (Spencer et al., 2017).

5.1 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The content, themes, and length of the interviews limited the content analysis. This had an impact on the quantitative element of the content analysis, as longer interviews would probably have more references than shorter ones. Bigs' interviews were longer overall, which may also partly explain why they had more references to empathy than other research participants.

The original data did not specifically ask participants about empathy in mentoring; therefore, this content was inferred from the interviews during the secondary analysis. This study evaluated the construct of social support as the variable of interest, because there are theoretical similarities between both concepts. However, the research team is aware that they are separate concepts and should not be interchangeable. Further research should include adequate and accurate measures of empathy.

This study is focused only on evaluating formal mentoring relationships. Future research may benefit from understanding the impact of informal[2] mentoring relationships in promoting or facilitating the development of empathy in young people. Blinn-Pike (2010) suggested that research tends to focus on only one type of mentoring at a time (formal or informal); however, young people may simultaneously or sequentially be involved in both types of mentoring relationships.

Future research also needs to focus on differentiating between active and passive empathy, and on how mentoring can have an impact on either or both. Ideally, since mentoring itself is an act of support from a mentor to the mentee, this behaviour will be 'mirrored' by the young person to support and help another person in need. Further understanding of the impact of mentoring on empathy is needed, making the differentiation between both types of empathy in young people. Longitudinal research could also contribute to identifying how both passive and active empathy develop over time, and whether successful matches could modify passive empathy into active. Research exploring the impact of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status could help determine how these characteristics impact on the development of empathy.

Further research on mentoring and empathy could also yield more specific information on the circumstances that can facilitate the development of empathy even further, and tailor mentoring programmes to further develop and promote empathy for the benefit of young people.

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2   Informal mentoring relationships are naturally occurring, not managed, structured, or officially recognised (Mullen, 2010).

5.2   SUMMARY

Overall, this study offers a case to support the role that mentoring can play in developing young people's social support and empathy. However, it is important to consider that this assumes that mentoring relationships are successful and long enough to have positive outcomes for young people. Previous research has identified that certain mentoring relationships can instead be detrimental for mentors, mentees, or both, limiting the degree of mentoring outcomes achieved. Mentoring relationships can experience both positive and negative experiences over time (Keller, 2010; Scandura and Pellegrini, 2010). Future research should include a specific measure of empathy to support the findings of this study, which focused on social support as a theoretically similar construct but did not measure empathy as such. It is evident from the study that it is worth carrying out further research on mentoring and empathy, in order to identify the circumstances that will facilitate this and to design mentoring programmes that can promote and maximise the development of empathy.

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Appendix

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE EMPATHY IDENTIFIED IN INTERVIEWS

	Time 1		Time 2	
Bigs	**Active**	**Passive**	**Active**	**Passive**
	Play	I don't like it	Come back	Wouldn't be able
	Do	I didn't realise	Come back	Is pissed off
	Chat	Don't think	Meet up	Take heed
	Encourage	Don't know	Come back	Miss it
	Asking	Thinking in terms of my own	Give something	Miss
	Drop little bits	Wish didn't have to go	Help	Be impatient
	Walk her home	Wasn't interested in the mother	Got something	Be stroppy
	Change	Not interested	Help	Hard to distinguish
	Change	I'm busy	Doors opening	Wouldn't know
	Change	I don't want to meet	Understand	Don't influence
	Open my eyes	Thought he'll have troubles	Mixing	Don't see him
	Understand	Have perception of disadvantaged child	Do something else	
	Come to terms	Don't think I've much of an influence	Enjoy	
	Let it go	Cancel	Open doors	
	Give everything	Hadn't thought	Become	
	Realise		Get used	
	Learn		Like	
	Learned		Listen	
	Encourage		Brought her	
	Leave it to her		Making a difference	
	I'm just there		Supporting	
	Didn't take any heed		Supporting	
	Talking		Tell you	
	Change		Listening	
	Understand		Be herself	
	Encourage		Don't annoy	
	Spoke		Say	
	Let her see		Be stable	
	Love to encourage		Build friendship	
	Encourage		Make a difference	
	Take a step back		Help	
	Ask		Support	
	Said		Give her	

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE EMPATHY IDENTIFIED IN INTERVIEWS (CONTINUED)

Time 1		Time 2	
Active	Passive	Active	Passive
Not hoping		Encouraging	
Give something		Prospering	
Get on with it		Take on board	
Do the thing		Listening	
Do something constructive		Listening	
Do something of benefit		Listen	
Doing		Understand	
Put out		Listening	
Ring		Making a difference	
Say		Get one	
Do		Relate	
Have time		Do something	
Don't want her to feel rushed		Stimulate	
Go shopping		Appreciative	
Go for coffee		Shop	
Bake		Meet halfway	
Make pizza		Did stuff	
Aware		Know her	
Tell her moods		Enjoy	
Give attention		Getting to know her	
I know		Understands	
Reminds me		Get in touch	
Be aware		Reassure	
See her as she is		Don't know everything	
Wasn't expecting information		Teach	
See her for the person she is		Accept it	
Learn		Talk	
Not knowing		Talk	
Take for who they are		Not judging	
Help			
Influence			
Help			
Help			

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE EMPATHY IDENTIFIED IN INTERVIEWS (CONTINUED)

	Time 1		Time 2	
	Active	Passive	Active	Passive
	Help Work around it Be there Doing something worthwhile Didn't know what to expect Be similar Allow Find new stuff to do Hanging out I wouldn't ask Put a bit of thought Build up a relationship Don't want to put under pressure Do stuff Got her to give me a lesson See similarities Text Have something to enjoy Build friendship See the difference Wouldn't get involved if can't commit Without enforcing your views Influence Text Pick her up Understand Don't push Don't text constantly Confide Listen Hear			

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE EMPATHY IDENTIFIEDIN INTERVIEWS (CONTINUED)

Time 1				Time 2		
	Active	Passive			Active	Passive
	Shouldn't have an opinion					
	Know her					
	Aren't judged					
	Not tell what to do					
	Be careful					
	Cancel stuff to meet with him					
	See what he likes					
	Get something they like					
	Notice					
	Explore					
	See different aspects					
	Reinforce					
	Not to judge					
	See					
	Learning					
	Learning					
	Seeing					
	Let down barriers					
	Break down barriers					
	Know interests					
	Get to know them					
	Have a fresh start					
	Go					
	Go					
	Enjoy it					
	Bought him					
	Let him see					
	I've something to give					
	Meeting					
	Having a laugh					
	Let him see					
	Understand					
	Understand					

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE EMPATHY IDENTIFIED IN INTERVIEWS (CONTINUED)

	Time 1		Time 2	
	Active	Passive	Active	Passive
Littles	Helps Help I know Talk Get out Keep in touch Makes me happy Do stuff		Meet Try to meet Meet Getting to know him It's fun Get new experiences Meet a new person Getting to know them Contacts Talk Getting to know her Do stuff Go shopping Be fun Watch (movie for younger kids) Do Talk Have fun Makes me laugh Calm down Be more fun Get on He is dead sound Done courses Be mind-blowing Go out Hang out Talk	Is busy Don't know where I would be

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE EMPATHY IDENTIFIED IN INTERVIEWS (CONTINUED)

	Time 1		Time 2	
	Active	**Passive**	**Active**	**Passive**
Mothers	Phoning Text Ring Take time out Listen Never let him down Ring Ring Ring Get him something Know Giving a break Get out Get involved	Been out Wouldn't have the time	Do Do Be there for her Talk See her as herself Not compare Take her at face value Support Get to know Mirroring Spend time Have space for himself Trying to find himself Understood Enjoys time for herself Takes him away Going out Doing things Keep in contact Meeting DJ'ing Went out of his way Know what he liked Misses Kept me included Kept me included	Separate Be nosey Prying Hard to find time No real interaction Get time alone Don't bring him places Misses Misses him Miss him
Case workers	NA	NA	Explain Ensure Understand Contacted Keep in phone contact Talk	Busy Working two jobs Wouldn't be open Not meeting regularly Push Wouldn't meet

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE EMPATHY IDENTIFIED IN INTERVIEWS (CONTINUED)

Time 1		Time 2	
Active	Passive	Active	Passive
		Keep in touch	Was upset
		Let her know	Forgot
		Meet up	Gone off
		Boost confidence	Cancelling
		Support	See negative side
		Become caring	Nothing you can do
		Grow up	Opt out
		Show up	Nothing you can do
		Talking man to man	Miss meeting Little
		Made arrangement	
		Shook hands	
		Honour arrangement	
		Understanding	
		Be aware	
		See a good side	
		Know	
		Smile	
		Looks forward	
		Send card and present	
		Tell	
		Was empathetic	
		Understood	
		Spoke highly	
		Gave a photo album	
		Give confidence and esteem	
		Help	
		Be aware	
		Meet him	
		Explain to him	
		Keep informed	
		Get updates	
		Keep informed	