“I really wanted her to have a Big Sister”: Caregiver perspectives on mentoring for early adolescent girls

Thomas E. Keller⁎, Bahia Overton⁎, Julia M. Pryce⁎, Johanna E. Barry⁎, Andrew Sutherland⁎, David L. DuBois⁎

⁎ School of Social Work, Portland State University, 1800 SW 6th Ave, Portland, OR 97201, United States
⁎⁎ School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, Maguire Hall, 1 E. Pearson St., Chicago, IL 60611, United States
⁎ Institute for Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1747 W. Roosevelt Rd., Chicago, IL 60608, United States

ABSTRACT

Formal youth mentoring programs tend to focus on the mentor-mentee dyad as the primary relationship cultivated and supported. The interests and preferences of the parent or caregiver in the mentoring relationship may receive little attention. In this study, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with primary caregivers (N = 20) of early adolescent girls participating in a Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based mentoring program to explore reasons why they wanted mentors for their daughters. Thematic analysis revealed that caregivers expected mentors to support their daughters as trusted companions, confidants, and conduits to opportunities and services. In addition, caregivers noted ways in which mentoring offered them respite and reinforced their parenting. The findings highlight the potential value of assessing caregiver perspectives and priorities so that program staff and mentors can partner more effectively with youth and families for successful mentoring experiences.

1. Introduction

Mentoring is a popular intervention for supporting the development of young people. Meta-analyses of evaluation studies indicate that mentoring programs have positive effects on multiple social, behavioral, academic, and health outcomes for participating youth (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). However, not all mentoring programs are equally effective; certain program practices and priorities are associated with more favorable youth outcomes (DuBois et al., 2002, 2011). The degree to which the parent/guardian of the youth mentee is engaged in the intervention is one factor that may enhance or diminish program effects (Keller, 2005; Taylor & Porcellini, 2014).

Program staff commonly express a belief that the success of community-based mentoring relationships is dependent on the involvement of the parent (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). A supportive parent has the potential to facilitate a positive mentoring relationship in a variety of ways, such as ensuring that the child meets with the mentor, sharing information about the child with the mentor, and encouraging and appreciating the mentor (Keller, 2005). Mentoring programs that incorporated parent involvement were found in one meta-analysis to be more effective than those that did not (DuBois et al., 2002), and there is evidence that the effects of mentoring may be partially attributed to resulting improvements in the parent-child relationship (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). Nevertheless, research that considers the social network of relationships surrounding the mentor/mentee dyad to explore the perspectives, priorities, and potential impact of other important stakeholders in the intervention, such as the parent/guardian, is only beginning to emerge (Keller & Blakeslee, 2014).

Much of the research focusing directly on the parents of mentored youth has been conducted by Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonico using qualitative methods to understand the experiences of parents and staff involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) programs (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014; Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, & Lewis, 2011). The first of these studies found that common assumptions made by mentoring programs and mentors—that parents seek mentors to be stand-in parents or role models to compensate for parental shortcomings—were largely unsubstantiated. The majority of interviewed parents played an active role in the mentoring relationship, often supporting but sometimes interfering with the relationship. Three major parental roles within the mentoring system were identified, including: (a) mediator, (b) coach, and (c) collaborator. Many parents appeared to play two or more of
these roles during the course of the mentoring relationship. When operating as a mediator, the parent worked to support the best interest of the child, taking action to foster, preserve, or redirect the mentoring relationship. When assuming the role of coach, the parent tended to perceive the mentor as needing additional support, maturity, or guidance and took action to influence the direction of the mentoring relationship. When assuming the role of collaborator, parents actively engaged in the mentoring relationship and worked with the mentor to create a shared vision for the relationship using a team approach (Spencer et al., 2011).

Findings from another study, which featured focus groups with the program staff in 24 different BBBS agencies, emphasized the significance of parental participation in the intervention, highlighting the view that “a parent can make or break a match” (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014, p. 77). The focus groups revealed distinctive philosophical and operational approaches agencies adopted for interacting with parents and families: (a) involving; (b) engaging and serving, and (c) collaborating. Agencies with an involving strategy encouraged families to conform to program instructions and expectations for supporting the mentoring relationship, with the parental role primarily defined as actively and responsibly communicating with program staff, attending agency events, and following program guidelines. The engaging and serving approach was characterized by program staff attempting to develop a relationship with the parent, learn about the family situation, and provide support and referrals to strengthen the family system so that, in turn, the mentoring relationship could be more successful. In agencies following the collaborating approach, program staff intentionally enlisted parents to work constructively with mentors as allies and partners, acknowledging and utilizing parental strengths and insights to promote the development of a successful mentoring relationship. In general, agencies with the collaborating orientation were more mindful of parents' preferences and priorities for the mentoring of their children (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014).

A third study investigated the question of parent involvement in the BBBS mentoring system with qualitative interviews from three perspectives—staff, mentor, and parent (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016). Program staff again shared their perception of the important influence of parents and their potential to support or undermine the mentoring relationship. Staff expressed most concern about parents being responsive in their communication with the agency, and not being either under-involved or over-involved in the mentoring relationship. Because many mentors appeared to have given relatively little consideration to the type of relationship they would have with the parent, the mentors tended to be heavily influenced by agency trainings, which often appear to have made mentors wary with warnings about the prospect of parents being needy or over-stepping program boundaries. In contrast, parents tended to have more clearly defined ideas about how they would facilitate the mentoring relationship, expecting to have an important role and being determined to protect their children from negative experiences and disappointments due to the program. However, a range of strategies for parent engagement was apparent. For example, some parents reported acting as observers, giving the mentoring relationship space to develop and only intervening as needed. Other parents expressed a wish to be more centrally involved, partnering with the mentor and advocating for the youth (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016).

The foregoing studies shed important light on the interactions of parents/guardians with mentors and program staff. However, another perhaps more fundamental question is why parents/guardians choose to engage with mentoring programs in the first place. Because a youth mentee is typically a minor under the care and responsibility of a parent/guardian, there is an ethical imperative for a mentoring program to recognize and respect the motivations and goals that prompted the parent/guardian to seek services. Likewise, programs have an interest in understanding what benefits caregivers might anticipate being derived through youth participation in a mentoring relationship. It stands to reason that a parent/guardian would be more likely to continue supporting a mentoring relationship that is meeting expectations and offering advantages. Some research does suggest that the likelihood of a positive and effective mentoring relationship is greater when the mentor and parent are better acquainted and share understandings and expectations (Meissen & Lounsbury, 1981). Although one study briefly noted that parent/guardians wish to have mentors who serve as confidants and role models and expose youth to new horizons (Spencer et al., 2011), very little research has investigated the rationale for mentoring from the caregiver’s perspective.

The caregiver, as the gatekeeper allowing the mentoring program access to the child, is trusting a non-familial adult who may not share the same cultural identity, language or religious practices with opportunities to influence the child's behavior, perspectives, and beliefs (e.g., Lindwall, 2017). In this regard, formal mentoring programs often attract youth of color and youth from more economically challenged communities and match them with typically White mentors who have access to greater resources and privileges (e.g., Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Such differences in race, culture, and opportunity, as well as education and economic status, may create stresses and concerns for the caregivers who seek mentors for their youth (Deutsch, Lawrence, & Henneberger, 2014; Sánchez & Colón, 2005). Families in communities that have experienced oppression and discrimination may feel a sense of cultural mistrust towards mentors of different racial or ethnic backgrounds (Sánchez, Colón-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield, & Berardi, 2014). In addition, research suggests that a failure to recognize, understand, or address cultural differences associated with race and class can contribute to premature mentoring relationship termination and disappointing program experiences (Spencer, 2007).

Similarly, youth gender and developmental status may be factors in the decision-making of the parent/guardian who enrolls a child in a mentoring program. For example, reasons for wanting a mentor may diverge from childhood to adolescence (Liang, Spencer, Brogan, & Corral, 2008). Likewise, the mentoring of females may address different developmental needs and employ different relational approaches than the mentoring of males (Liang, Bogat, & Duffy, 2014; Spencer & Liang, 2009). Furthermore, a mother seeking a female mentor for a daughter may have a different rationale than a mother seeking a male mentor for a son. In general, mentoring experiences can vary considerably depending upon multiple individual and contextual factors, and attention should be given to the mentoring of specific types of program participants (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sanchez, 2006). Accordingly, Spencer and Liang (2009) highlight the importance of better understanding the mentoring relationships of adolescent girls with adult female mentors.

To summarize, extant studies have begun to illuminate the ways that parents may influence the growth or deterioration of a relationship between a mentor and youth mentee, supporting the argument that parents play a critical role in community-based mentoring programs that should not be overlooked or underestimated. Developing a greater understanding of the goals, values, and perspectives of parents with regard to mentoring for their children may help to inform programs how to prepare mentors and parents to have positive and appropriate interactions that contribute to strong mentoring relationships and benefit youth participants. In the current study, the focus is on caregivers of early adolescent females from predominantly low-income minority communities participating in a one-to-one mentoring program. This exploratory study employs qualitative methods for interpretative description to investigate why the caregivers want mentors for their daughters.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants in the study were 20 primary caregivers of an equal
دریافت فوری
متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات