



OJJDP-FUNDED RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Prediction and Prevention of Premature Closures of Mentoring Relationships: The Study To Analyze Relationships (STAR Project)

January 2018 • NCJ 251484

ojjdp.gov

The relationships among mentors, youth, parents, and program staff may influence the mentoring relationship and mismatched expectations among these parties may lead to early match closure.

Research Overview

A substantial proportion of relationships created in formal community-based youth mentoring programs end before fulfilling their time commitment. Relationships that end prematurely are less likely to achieve positive youth outcomes and also are potentially harmful. This study was a comprehensive investigation of how participant characteristics, dyadic processes, and program practices contribute to premature match closures. The study also examined the way in which mentoring programs manage the match closure process. The goal was to provide insights for the development and implementation of empirically based program practices to prevent or mitigate the consequences of early match terminations.

Research Findings

About 30 percent of the new matches in the study ended before reaching the 12-month commitment specified in the program model; 67 percent closed during the extended study period. The majority of closures (64 percent) were attributed to the mentor, most commonly because they moved their residence or they experienced time constraints. Mentors' and parents' prematch expectations regarding the desired length of the match predicted the actual likelihood of the match continuing over time. In-depth interviews with participants in a subsample of closed matches highlighted the importance of the mentor-youth connection and positive relationships among the relevant adults (e.g., mentor-parent, mentor-staff) who support the match. In addition, post-closure data indicated that very few matches closed with a formal procedure, such as an in-person meeting, to end program participation.

Research Design

This study incorporated both a prospective design to identify factors that predict relationship duration and a retrospective design to learn what transpired in relationships that ended early. Baseline surveys of mentors, youth, parents, and staff yielded data for survival analyses predicting relationship length, while post-closure surveys of these participants provided multiple perspectives on the relationship experience and reasons for closure. Researchers analyzed in-depth interviews and program case files for a subsample of matches using qualitative methods to understand trends in relationship development and to identify patterns and issues associated with match closure.

Policy/Practice Implications

Any strained relationships between parents, mentee, mentors, and program staff due to miscommunication, cultural misunderstanding, or misaligned expectations can threaten a match and lead to early closure. Methods used in this study to analyze this network of relationships inspired the development of resources to guide practitioners in conducting similar assessments to identify participant needs and concerns and offer responsive match support.

Resources

- **National Mentoring Resource Center resources inspired by STAR study:**
<http://www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/learning-opportunities/tools-to-strengthen-match-support-and-closure.html#>

Source: Keller, T.E., and Spencer, R. 2017. "Prediction and Prevention of Premature Closures of Mentoring Relationships: The Study to Analyze Relationships" Final report for Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, grant number 2012-MU-FX-0001. NCJ 251463, available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/251463.pdf>

This brief summarizes research conducted under grant number 2012-MU-FX-0001 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

