

RESEARCH SUMMARY

“Mentoring relationships and the mental health of Aboriginal youth in Canada”

What is this study about?

This study compared the mentoring experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in Canada.

Where did the study take place?

This research study took place in Canada.

Who was involved in the study?

This study involved 125 Indigenous youth and 734 non-Indigenous youth participating in 20 different Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based mentoring programs across Canada. All youth were between the ages of 6-17. Parents and guardians for all participating youth were also involved in this study.

How was the study conducted?

Using a national survey of Big Brothers Big Sisters programs in Canada, the researchers compared the mentoring experiences and outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in Canada. To do so, the researchers invited parents and caregivers to rate their child’s mental health and behaviour before being matched with a mentor and 18-months after being matched with a mentor.

What were the key findings?

To begin, this study found that Indigenous youth were more likely to be mentored by a female adult.

Results also found that Indigenous youth were slightly less likely to report similarities between themselves and their mentors, compared to non-Indigenous youth.

This study discovered that Indigenous youth were significantly less likely to be in long-term mentoring relationships, compared to non-Indigenous youth in Canada.

Despite this finding, Indigenous youth were significantly more likely to report being in a high-quality mentoring relationship that involved consistent contact with their mentor.

This study also found that Indigenous youth with mentors experienced significantly fewer emotional challenges, compared to their non-mentored Indigenous peers.

“Given that only a handful of Aboriginal youth were mentored by an adult Aboriginal volunteer, mentoring programs may prove to be even more effective if Aboriginal mentors and more culturally relevant programming are incorporated into BBBS and other mentoring programs” (p.61).

Why does this research matter?

Based on these findings, the researchers suggested that mentoring offers an effective intervention for Indigenous youth in Canada. The researchers also offered several recommendations for recruitment, matching, and training.

Recruitment

- Since the majority of Indigenous youth were being mentored by non-Indigenous mentors, the researchers suggested that mentoring programs might be even more effective if they are able to recruit more Indigenous mentors.

Matching

- Match youth and mentors based on shared interests while also considering whether mentees and their parents want to be matched with a mentor who shares their cultural background.

Training

- Begin incorporating more training opportunities that can increase non-Indigenous mentors' cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Previous research with Indigenous community members in Canada strongly supports this recommendation. For example, according to Indigenous community members living in Saskatoon, it is critical to invite the local Indigenous community to participate in all aspects of the design of mentoring programs intended to benefit Indigenous youth (Sinclair & Pooyak, 2007).
- Some core topics that mentor training might include involve Canada's history of colonization, residential schooling, intergenerational trauma, and the ongoing systemic racism that Indigenous communities are facing in Canada.
- In general, the results of this study indicate that mentoring organizations should consider partnering with local Indigenous community members and inviting them to meaningfully participate in the construction of training and mentoring programs intended to benefit Indigenous youth.

Reference

DeWit, D. J., Wells, S., Elton-Marshall, T., & George, J. (2017). Mentoring relationships and the mental health of Aboriginal youth in Canada. *The journal of primary prevention*, 38(1-2), 49-66.