

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN A STATEWIDE MENTORING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring relationships have been proven to provide benefits to youth and are rapidly expanding into schools. There was concern whether or not the gender of students would limit the success of mentoring programs for some students. This article focuses on TeamMates, a state-wide, school-based, one-to-one, adult-to-youth mentoring program that includes extensive support for program implementation and ongoing operation. The program was effective for both males and females in demonstrating positive perceptions of change in students' behaviors as reported by students, parents, teachers, and mentors. Perceptions of change on the Mentoring Change Scale total mean scores for both males and females were at least average or above with no effective significant gender differences identified. Item differences between males and females and implications for future research are discussed.

A growing body of research shows positive effects of mentoring programs with youth. Youth who have participated in a mentoring program are reported to have experienced a reduction in alcohol and drug use, the likelihood of becoming a teen parent, and the incidence of hitting and violence toward others (Jekielek, Moore, Hair,

& Scarupa, 2002). They have shown improved relationships with peers, adults, and parents; were more able to express feelings; had increased self-confidence; showed an improved attitude toward school; had fewer absences; made better grades; were more likely to stay in school; and were less likely to repeat grades than prior to participating in a mentoring program (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999).

While indicating that research regarding success of mentoring programs has been criticized for lack of rigorous peer-reviewed studies, Rhodes (2002) also observed that much work has been done and national programs and organizations now provide structure, support, training materials, and resources to those initiating mentoring programs. These efforts would seem to be making a positive contribution. A meta-analysis by DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) of 55 programs meeting specific evaluation criteria provided modest support for the effectiveness of youth mentoring; effects were significantly enhanced when "best practice" was followed and strong mentor/student relationships were formed.

Gender Differences and Mentoring

There is a concern with any school intervention whether it will work for all students, in this case for both males and females. Much research to date has focused on general program effectiveness rather than examining specific populations. Few studies directly compared males and females in mentoring programs. Grossman and Tierney (1998) described that while both mentored and control groups showed an increase in academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and relationship problems, the problems for the mentored group, although not significantly, increased more slowly for both males and females (i.e., no difference for gender). Reed, McMillon, and McBeth (1995) found no significant difference for gender for academic success in a study with high-risk students. In a study with college-age students who were all described as bright and high achieving, females were more involved in the relational qualities of the relationship (e.g., empathy, engagement, authenticity, and empowerment); males were more involved with in-

strumental or goal-based activities (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). Differences were described in males' and females' responses to mentoring rather than overall effects. The meta-analysis by DuBois et al., (2002) found favorable effects for mentoring with no significant differences for gender. Research to date would suggest that while there are no significant gender differences regarding overall effects, there is indication that there may be differences in males' and females' responses to specific aspects of mentoring activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the TeamMates mentoring program would serve males and females equally well. The following research hypotheses were addressed: (a) There will be a positive perception of change by males and females as rated by students, teachers, mentors, and parents; (b) There will be no difference in the perception of total scale change in males and females as rated by students, teachers, mentors, and parents; (c) Examination of the rank order of males' and females' item responses will reveal participation in a common experience by students, teachers, mentors, and parents; and (d) Analysis of specific items will reveal some significant differences between males and females as rated by students, teachers, mentors, and parents. Any observed differences will be tested for significance at $p > .05$.

Methodology

Program Studied

This study was carried out with the TeamMates program, a mid-western, statewide, school-based, one-to-one mentoring program. The TeamMates State Office includes a state advisory board, executive director, and four regional coordinators responsible for geographic areas and/or large school districts. The state office provides each school program with a TeamMates Program Management Manual (The Men-

toring Institute, 2001) that includes the information to initiate and ongoing technical assistance to operate a student-mentoring program

Students may be referred to the TeamMates program by teachers, principals, counselors, or parents. The referral form includes criteria for referring a student: poor academic achievement, poor attendance, difficulty with peer relationships, school discipline issues, personal issues, and other—to allow the referring person to describe the basis for the referral. The program information form describes the program as serving “students in need of an additional caring adult in their lives” (The Mentoring Institute, 2001).

TeamMates involves adult mentors meeting with students once a week for approximately one hour during school time. The primary tasks of a mentor are to establish a positive, personal relationship with the student; help the student develop life skills; assist students in obtaining additional resources; and help students in their ability to interact with others. The program works with students beginning in early middle school through high school completion, with the goal of post-high school training/education. The program employs “best practices” as described by DuBois et al., (2002) and has demonstrated positive perception of change in student behavior as rated by student, parents, teachers, and mentors (Isemhagen & Dappen, 2001).

Population and Sample

Each student, teacher, parent, and mentor of the 1,490 student/mentor matches received a survey. At least one survey (student, teacher, mentor, or parent) was returned from 1,169 (78%) of them. Surveys were returned from 393 (64%) students, 445 (72%) teachers, 135 (22%) parents, and 269 (44%) mentors. Gender information was available for 614 of the 1,169 students: 332 (54%) males and 282 (46%) females. Of the 393 student surveys, 220 (56%) described males; 173 (44%) described females. Out of 445 teacher surveys, 248 (56%) described males; 197 (44%) described females. From the 269 mentor surveys, 140 (52%) described males; 129 (48%) described females. Finally, the 135 parent surveys described 78 (58%) males and 57 (42%) females.

Procedure

A survey procedure was used to collect data from the 1,490 students in grades six through 12 participating in the TeamMates program and their parents, mentors, and teachers (English/Language Arts). Surveys were mailed in April, 2001, to the TeamMates local district coordinator within the 33 participating schools who then distributed, collected, and returned the surveys to the state TeamMates office. Following distribution of the surveys, program coordinators reminded the students, teachers, mentors, and parents to complete and return the surveys. To maintain confidentiality, surveys contained only the student identification number.

Instrument

The Mentoring Change Scale was adapted from a Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (2001) survey used to evaluate their mentoring program. The instrument was selected to measure student behavior change as a result of participation in the TeamMates mentoring program. The instrument contains 21 items in the areas of personal/social competency, caring/respect, and future aspirations. Responses were in a 5-point Likert-type format for each item, asking respondents to report changes in students' behavior seen over the past year with 1 representing "Very Good," 2 "Good," 3 "Average," 4 "Below Average," and 5 "Very Poor." Respondents could also mark a "Don't Know" category. Coefficient Alpha internal-consistency estimates for the Mentoring Change Scale were .90 for students ($n = 429$), .96 for teachers ($n = 333$), .92 for mentors ($n = 196$), and .93 for parents ($n = 206$) (Isernhagen & Dappen, 2001).

Data Analyses and Design

The data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows 10.0 statistical software. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was done to determine total mean scores. Responses of "Don't Know" were not included in the computation of the mean. Respondents who skipped one or more items were not included in the computation of the mean. The Bonferroni cor-

rection formula for the number of tests run was applied. Information on the number of matches in districts was obtained from the Team-Mates of Nebraska state office, as reported by regional and school district coordinators.

Results

Perceptions of Change in Males and Females

Mentoring Change Scale total mean Likert-type scores (with standard deviations in parenthesis) of perceptions of student change as a result of participating in the mentoring program by students were 1.93 (.57) for males and 1.84 (.54) for females; for teachers, 3.05 (.86) for males and 2.84 (.86) for females; for mentors, 2.58 (.62) for males and 2.51 (.65) for females; and for parents, 2.35 (.68) for males and 2.22 (.70) for females. All are in the average to above average ranges.

Differences in Perceptions of Change for Males and Females

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the differences between males and females was a statistically significant ($\alpha = .0125$ based on the previously described Bonferroni correction) between males and females by teachers. Teachers rated change in females stronger than for males. The effect size (Eta Squared) for the mean difference between males and females was .014. This difference would best be described as small, based on .01 being described as small, .06 as medium, and .14 as large (Cohen, 1988). There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions of change for males and females as reported by students, mentors, or parents.

Comparisons Between Males and Females Rank Ordering of Item Responses

The survey item responses obtained from each response group were rank ordered separately for males and females. These rank orders were correlated using a Spearman's Rho rank order correlation coefficient in order to determine the similarity of the ranks for males and

females. The correlations (with significance in parenthesis) for students was .891 ($p < .000$); teachers, .795 ($p < .000$); mentors, .860 ($p < .000$); and parents, .631 ($p < .002$). The correlation of the rank ordering of items for males and females was highly and significantly the same, probably reflecting participation in a common over-all experience.

Item Differences Between Males and Females

An examination of differences was done between males and females to determine specific item significant differences between males and females on each of the 21 items of the Mentoring Change Scale as rated by students, teachers, mentors, and parents. This is a total of 84 item comparisons. There was no difference between males and females on 59 of 84 items (70%).

Females were rated significantly higher than males on 22 of 84 items (26%). Students rated females significantly higher than males on the following items: "able to express feelings," "personal hygiene, appearance," "able to avoid early parenting," "school preparedness," and "classroom behavior." Teachers rated females significantly higher than males on the following items: "able to express feelings," "able to avoid delinquency," "shows trust toward you," "respects others," "relationships with other adults," "uses school resources," "academic performance," "attitude towards school," "school preparedness," "class participation," and "classroom behavior." Mentors rated females significantly higher than males on the following items: "able to express feelings," and "academic performance." Parents rated females significantly higher than males on the following items: "able to express feelings," "school preparedness," "classroom participation," and "classroom behavior."

Males were rated significantly higher than females on 3 of 84 items (4%). Teachers rated males significantly higher than females on the item "personal hygiene, appearance." Mentors rated males significantly higher than females on the items "has interests or hobbies" and "relationships with families."

Individual items that were rated high or low for males and females by all of the groups (students, teachers, mentors, and parents) were also examined. All eight groups included "able to avoid pregnancy" in their highest five items. All eight groups included "shows trust toward you" and "able to avoid substance abuse" in their highest six items. Six of the groups included "personal hygiene and appearance" in their highest five items and it was number six and eight in the others. All eight groups included "academic performance" and "school preparedness" in their lowest five items.

Discussion

Perceptions of Change for Males and Females

Students', teachers', mentors', and parents' perceptions of change for males and females following participation in TeamMates mentoring program were all rated average or above average. This bodes well for schools that have or may be considering implementing a mentoring program. Students, regardless of gender, benefited from involvement in the TeamMates mentoring program.

Mentoring Change Scale Mean Total Scale Differences for Males and Females

In examining differences between males and females Mentoring Change Scale mean total scale scores, there was no significant difference for students, mentors, or parents. While teachers rated both males and females average or above average, they rated females significantly higher than males. The effect size for this difference would be described as small (Cohen, 1988). Viewed from the perspective of total scale mean scores, there are no differences between males and females in their perceived change as a result of participating in the TeamMates program.

Correlation of Item Rankings

The correlation of item rankings for males and females by students, teachers, mentors, and parents were all substantial, high, or very high. From the perspective of the rank order of items by mean scores, males and females experienced the mentoring program in a similar manner.

Individual Item Differences

There was no significant difference between males and females on over 70% of the items (59 of 84) as rated by students, teachers, mentors, and parents. This supports the perspective that males and females are perceived as experiencing similar change as a result of participating in the TeamMates program. While there were no significant differences between males and females on a substantial majority of the item ratings, there were some important differences.

Females were perceived as significantly higher on 22 of 84 items (26%) in the ratings by students, teachers, mentors, and parents. Females were perceived by students, teachers, mentors, and parents as significantly higher than males on the item "able to express feelings." This would support the fact that females may be more able to express feelings in general and more able to change in this characteristic as a result of being involved in a mentoring program. Teachers rated females significantly higher on 11 items, students on five, parents on four, and mentors on two. There was mix of social-emotional and school-related items in each group. While within the average range, teachers rated males significantly lower than females on all six school-related items. This would identify school-related concerns as a possible focus for the program.

Males were perceived as significantly stronger on three out of a possible 84 items (4%) in the item ratings by students, mentors, teachers, and parents. Males were perceived as higher than females on two items by mentors ("has interests or hobbies" and "relationship with family") and one item ("personal hygiene and appearance") by teachers. This would be a positive indication of the mentors' knowledge of students' interests in relationship building as well as their perceptions

of the males' family relationships. Teachers' view of the males' change in personal hygiene and appearance is important, as it is one of the few areas that any group saw males as stronger. Mentor training might encourage mentors to recognize this in youth, which may support building the mentoring relationship.

All groups included "able to avoid pregnancy" in their highest five items. This is identified by Harvey and Spegner (1995) as a "marker" item that frequently relates to other risky behaviors that result in significant challenges for youth. Positive behavior change in this area is, therefore, particularly beneficial. The items "shows trust toward you" and "able to avoid substance abuse" were rated in the highest five for six groups and number six for the other. This indication of the formation of relationships of trust is significant in that trust is the basis for successful mentoring relationships (DuBois et al., 2002).

All groups rated the items "academic performance" and "school preparedness" in their lowest five items for males and females. While females were rated significantly higher than males on school related items, they are still perceived as relatively lower on these items than others. Since TeamMates is a school-based program, all groups may be especially focused and critical regarding change in that area, however, this finding would also further support school-related concerns as a focus for the program.

Parents were the only group to include "able to avoid delinquency" in their highest five items for males and females. They are likely more aware and sensitive to this area. This is a good indication of parents' perceived change in relationship to community behavior change by their children. Parents also were the only group to include "relationships with other adults" for females in their highest five items. This may indicate that parents see their daughters as relating better to other adults upon participation in the mentoring program. Teachers were the only group to include "classroom behavior" in their highest five items for females. This may indicate that a female's classroom behavior is positively affected with involvement in mentoring. Sharing this in mentor training may further enhance building the mentoring relationship.

Students were the only group to include the item "able to express feelings" in their lowest five items for both males and females. This is particularly interesting as females were rated significantly higher than males on this item by all groups and no other group included this item in the lowest five. While teachers, mentors, and parents see students as changing in this area, the students don't see themselves as changing. Mentor/mentee activities that focus on positive feedback for youth involved may be an important aspect of increasing student perceptions of change.

Only mentors for males and females and teachers for females included "sense of future" in their lowest five items. Focus groups with mentors have revealed that patience for change and concerns for the future are particularly difficult areas for mentors (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2001). Mentors tend to have high expectations for change. Teachers appear to be relatively more concerned about the future for females than males, despite their generally more positive ratings of females. This may reflect that teachers feel relatively more positive about males' futures than females' regardless of problems they may encounter, or could reflect concerns about females' ability to cope with problems they encounter.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was that while the number of boys and girls was substantial, a significant number of respondents did not voluntarily indicate gender on their surveys and therefore could not be included in the sample. There is the possibility that mentoring change ratings from respondents may differ from those program participants who did not respond.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for longitudinal study of school-based mentoring to determine the success rate of males and females participating over multiple years. This would include a study of males and females par-

participation in mentoring and success in post high school training/education following the mentoring opportunity. The current study would support earlier work that while males and females benefit equally overall from mentoring, there are important differences in specific responses to mentoring. Future research should explore these differences to enable development of more targeted and focused mentoring activities related to gender. For example, does the fact that the items "has interests or hobbies" and "relationships with family" as two of only four items in which males were rated higher than females indicate that focusing on mentoring match characteristics and program activities in these areas would enhance success with males? Also, does the item "able to express feelings," which was rated higher for females by all groups, indicate that program activities and mentors focusing on this would increase success for females? We should also examine ways to link with other school programs as well as community services. The research in mentoring provides support for modest gains in student behavior change (DuBois et al., 2002). As suggested by Rhodes (2002), in order to see increased levels of program success we now need to focus on how the characteristics of individuals involved in mentoring, such as gender, relate to program aspects.

Conclusion

Children need caring adults in their lives to nurture them, help them grow and mature into caring, successful adults. Mentoring programs provide the opportunity for youth to gain this important supportive relationship. Mentoring provides youth with the benefits of a number of positive school outcomes, personal/social growth outcomes, an increased possibility for post high school training/education, and improved hope for the future.

The TeamMates school-based, one-to-one mentoring program has demonstrated effectiveness as shown by the positive perceptions of students, parents, teachers, and mentors as they describe change in students. While positive change occurs for both males and females who are involved in student mentoring programs, this research would

indicate there are specific differences in how males and females may respond to certain program aspects that provide a rich new area of study.

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