

RESEARCH SUMMARY

“It’s about time: Staff support contacts and mentor volunteer experiences”

What is this study about?

This study explores how mentoring organizations can better monitor and support mentors. To do so, this study investigated how the *amount of time* dedicated to match support contacts influenced mentors volunteering experiences and perceived quality of support.

Where did the study take place?

This research study took place in the United States.

Who was involved in the study?

This study involved 504 mentors who were involved with 55 different mentoring organizations. The majority of mentoring programs offered one-to-one programming (87.7%) within community (36.1%) and school-based settings (35.3%).

How was the study conducted?

During this study, all participating mentors completed surveys that asked them about the amount of support time they received from staff and their perceptions of program supervision, organizational culture, and volunteerism experience.

What were the key findings?

In general, this study indicates that staff members can influence mentoring relationship quality via how long they spend checking-in with mentors during their support contacts.

Results indicated that staff members most often spoke with mentors for a duration of 6-10 minutes (31.3%), followed by 1-5 minutes (25.7%), 11-20 minutes (19.2%), more than 20 minutes (12.6%), or no time at all (11.2%).

“Mentoring programs devote considerable effort to recruiting volunteers, but retaining those volunteers is critical for mentoring relationships to last long enough to have positive effects on youth development” (p.146).

The result of this study also found that mentors who received no support or short amounts of support (1-5 minutes) reported the lowest levels of perceived organizational culture, quality of supervision and support, and volunteering experiences.

Results also indicated that mentors who received support contacts that lasted *at least 6 minutes* reported higher perceptions of organizational culture, quality of supervision and support, and volunteer experiences significantly higher than those who did not.

In other words, as long as support contacts lasted more than 5 minutes, mentors were significantly more likely to report an enjoyable volunteering experience characterized by high-quality monitoring and support by their mentoring organization

Why does this research matter?

The results of this study point toward the critical importance of providing mentors with plenty of time to receive ongoing monitoring and support. Specific considerations and implications are discussed below.

Monitoring and Support

- The results of this study indicate that mentoring organizations should encourage staff members to avoid engaging in brief surface-level check-ins with mentors that last less than 5 minutes.
- In contrast, these results indicate that mentoring organizations should encourage staff members to spend at *least* five minutes connecting with mentors.
- During these conversations, staff can be encouraged to engage mentors in substantive and meaningful conversations about their relationships.
- This might be accomplished by sharing important resources, inviting mentors to discuss their current challenges, and share important insights into how the mentoring relationship is positively impacting the mentee.

Reference

Keller, T. E., Drew, A. L., Clark-Shim, H., Spencer, R., & Herrera, C. (2020). It's about time: Staff support contacts and mentor volunteer experiences. *Journal of Youth Development*, 15(4), 145-161.