

International Comparative Research on the Big Brothers Big Sisters Youth Mentoring Programme in Ireland and the Czech Republic

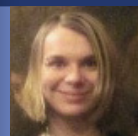
Research Context:

For more than a century, youth mentoring has matched adult mentors with young people who need or want a responsible, caring grown-up in their lives. Mentors give their time voluntarily to provide personal and social support for children growing up and for teenagers growing into adulthood.

Probably the leading global youth mentoring initiative is the 'Big Brothers Big Sisters' programme. Founded in 1904 by Ernest Kent Coulter, a law court clerk who wanted to help children appearing before the New York Children's Court, its mission is to help at-risk young people achieve their full potential through professionally supported one-to-one mentoring with measurable outcomes.

Research on best practice is central in Big Brothers Big Sisters. This study adds to what is known about 'helping processes' in mentoring relationships and supports good practice in interventions.

Author:



Tereza Brumovská
NUI Galway

Tereza Brumovská is a doctoral fellow at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway doing comparative research on the 'helping processes' in youth mentoring relationships. She has experience of youth work, social work and community development in Ireland, Sweden, Spain, Scotland and her native Czech Republic. Her Master's degree was published for research in youth mentoring relationships.
Email: t.brumovska1@nuigalway.ie

International Comparative Research on the Big Brothers Big Sisters Youth Mentoring Programme in Ireland and the Czech Republic

Research Question & Methodology:

The question this research asks is, how does the motivation type of an individual mentor affect the way they go about developing and maintaining a mentoring relationship, and in realising the benefits of mentoring for children, over the course of a year-long mentoring relationship?

The study used three rounds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with mentors, children and teens, and parents and case workers in the Czech Republic's Big Brothers Big Sisters programme during one year of relationships' duration. Participants were questioned on their experiences, feelings and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship, and the changes they felt it brought in the development of relationships and lives.

Findings:

- Firstly, the research study analysed the types of motivation of mentors in the beginning of mentoring relationships and how it impact on the approach styles of mentors and the relational dynamics as well as the perceived benefits of mentoring for mentors, children and parents. In conclusion, the type of motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic, Ryan, Deci, 1985) of mentors in the beginning of mentoring relationship is a mediator of quality of mentoring relationships and satisfaction of mentoring participants during relationship course of 12 months. The type of motivation of mentors for volunteering is a predictor of mentor's approach style in mentoring relationship and hence of the quality of formal youth mentoring relationships. This finding is analysed in greater detail in the research study.
- Secondly, the research study focused on the approach styles of mentors and how these approaches impact on the relational dynamics and quality. In particular, the study analysed autonomy supportive and controlling relational styles of mentors using the frameworks of self-determination theory and attachment theory (Ryan, Deci, 1985, 2000, Bowlby, 1975, Kuncze, Shaver, 1994). In conclusion, the relational styles of mentors can be divided into 1) secure autonomy supportive helping style, 2) anxious-preoccupied amotivational helping style and 3) dismissing-avoidant plus 4) fearful avoidant controlling style. These helping styles of mentors and their impact on dynamics and characteristic dimensions of relationships during the 12 months of relationships' duration, and resulted perceived benefits of mentoring for its participants are analysed in details in the research study.
- Thirdly, the recommendations for a good practice of formal mentoring interventions, in particular in terms of recruitment, screening, training and supervision of mentors are concluded based on the research findings. In particular, recommendations concerning to screening of mentors' motivation for volunteering as well as supervision of mentors' relational dilemmas are discussed in details.

About The Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP)

ISSP is an all-island platform of integrated social science research and graduate training, focusing on the social, cultural and economic transformation shaping Ireland in the 21st century.

www.issplatform.ie