

Journal of Equity in Behavioral Health Therapy

Volume 2, Number 1

<https://journals.auctr.edu/index.php/jebht/index>



**The Impact of Engagement with Natural Mentors on the Psychosocial Functioning of
Children and Adolescents**

Ryckel Bean
Graduate Student

Department of Counselor Education, Clark Atlanta University

Abstract

Natural Mentors can play a major role in children's and adolescents' psychosocial development. Psychosocial functioning describes how one's personality develops and how social skills are learned during infancy and into adulthood (Bailey, 2023). One's psychosocial development can include elements of one's personal beliefs, emotions, relationships, and societal structures that can impact both their social and mental health status. This study identifies the correlation between the impact of engagement with natural mentors and the psychosocial functioning of African American adolescents aged sixteen to eighteen years old. This study delivers a cross-sectional survey design utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods examining personal experiences/attitudes, mentor engagement within their life, and adolescents' psychosocial development. Additionally, further studies are explored to support the influences of natural mentor engagement on adolescents' psychosocial functioning and strengthen the research.

Keywords: Natural mentors, psychosocial functioning, resilience theory

Introduction

Natural Mentors and Mentoring Relationships

“What is a Natural Mentor and how can they have a positive impact on one's life?” someone may ask. A “Natural Mentor” can be defined as an adult (non-parental figure and/or parental figure) who provides emotional support, advises, and advocates for the youth. Additionally, “Natural Mentor-mentee relationships” are known as relationships that form organically between the youth and older individuals within their existing communities—relationships can form through community programs (Boys and Girls Club, after-school programs, etc.), groups, or with a significant individual by natural selection. Natural Mentors can act as a support for young Black girls in helping them have a vision for their life, build connections, utilize acquired skills as well as and provide these girls with accessible opportunities. Mentor-mentee relationships can also influence factors relating to one’s psychosocial development including one’s personal beliefs, emotions, relationships, and societal structures that may tend to affect one’s social and mental health wellness (Hurd et al, 2008; 2010).

Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory

While determining the relationship between the impact of engagement with natural mentors on African American adolescents aged sixteen to eighteen psychosocial functioning, researchers can apply Erikson’s psychosocial development theory to this study. Erikson’s theory includes eight different stages of the life cycle that build on the previous stage for continued development. Each stage is distinguished by two opposing factors including trust vs. mistrust (birth-eighteen months), autonomy vs. shame/doubt (two to three years), initiative vs. guilt (three

to five years), industry vs. inferiority (six to eleven years), intimacy vs. isolation (nineteen to forty years), generativity vs. stagnation (forty to sixty-five years), and lastly, ego integrity vs. despair (sixty-five years to death). It is believed that in these stages, the people and environment one is surrounded by play a significant role in one's self-awareness, development, and identity (Cherry, 2022).

Erikson's most important concept is that if each stage of development is achieved according to the normal range then one will acquire a sense of mastery and autonomy and peace as the ego uses strengths to overcome barriers. To the contrary though, if one does not progress through each stage, normally, then a sense of inadequacy, shame and doubt can development. His theory, and other similar theories, demonstrate how external factors such as natural mentors and one's social environment can have a significant impact on one's overall psychosocial functioning (Cherry, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Africans Americans in the United States have to overcome more barriers in life as compared to their white counterparts and/or individuals of other cultures. One may wonder how can Black children and adolescents be expected to overcome these barriers. This study extends previous research by evaluating the true impact of engagement with natural mentors on the psychosocial functioning of African American adolescent girls from sixteen to eighteen years of age. Mentorship may well be at least part of the answer since creating positive relationships is important. Having someone to look up to, confide in and then feel safe is important, especially as a young Black girl in America today. This study highlights factors that play a significant role in adolescents' psychosocial functioning as they engage with natural mentors. An awareness to the

topic is significant to the growth and development of young black girls. The subject of natural mentors is not a “broad” topic when discussing African American adolescents (Hurd et al., 2008; 2010; 2013).

Literature Review

There are several factors that relate to the impact of natural mentorship on psychosocial functioning. For instance, natural mentoring is discussed in the article entitled, *Does Natural Mentoring Matter?* where a multilevel meta-analysis on the association between natural mentoring and youth outcomes is presented. Researchers tested their hypothesis and research question through a qualitative meta-analytic review that examined relationship between natural mentoring and youth outcomes within four different domains. Each domain highlighted several factors such as (1) academic and vocational functioning. Two separate meta-analyses were conducted on the presence of natural mentors and the quality of natural mentoring relationships, including thirty different studies beginning in 1992. Because most studies used to complete the meta-analysis focused strictly on the quality of a natural mentor, researchers chose to complete a second meta-analysis to assess the relationship between the quality of natural mentorship and youth outcomes. Next, the researchers explored the correlation between the quality of mentor relationships and youth outcomes (Bailey, 2023).

The three different hypotheses for this study were: (1) the presence of a natural mentor, compared to having no mentor would be positively associated with youth outcomes; (2) the quality of natural mentoring relationships would be positively associated with favorable youth outcomes; and (3) the involvement of non-familial mentors, particularly natural mentors with a helping profession background would result in stronger associations with positive youth outcomes than involvement of kin mentors. Following the meta-analytic reviews were

completed, and researchers sought to control for publication bias resulting in a small significant relationship between the presence of natural mentors and youth outcomes ($r = .106$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, results indicated that “the presence of natural mentors was modest, but significantly associated with positive youth outcomes. In this study, risk-status/factors did not show a relation between natural mentor presence and youth outcomes. However, the overall findings did highlight the importance of natural mentoring relationships which seem to have a connection to positive youth outcomes (Van Dam et al., 2018).

In another study, *Violence Exposure and Sexual Risk Behaviors for African American Adolescent Girls: The Protective Role of Natural Mentorship and Organizational Religious Involvement*, researchers aimed to investigate how violence exposure, organizational involvement, and natural mentoring effects sexual risk behaviors for African American Adolescent girls. This qualitative research was based on resilience theory. Resilience theory provides a framework for understanding the protective role of religious involvement and natural mentorship within the context of violence exposure within communities. Participants of this study included 273 African American adolescent girls. The researchers studied participants in a longitudinal study that began in 1994 in Flint, Michigan. After researchers assessed the problem they hypothesized that higher levels of violence exposure would predict increases in sexual risk behaviors. Hope et al. reported on organizational religious involvement and natural mentorship where a moderate association between violence exposure and sexual risk behaviors was observed. In other words, Hope and his team believed that among African American adolescent girls, natural mentoring relationships and organizational religious involvement could play a protective role in steering these girls away from exposure to violence and/or risk behaviors. Building on previous research related to the variables of the study, researchers conducted their

study to examine the true association between natural mentoring and sexual risk behaviors. Also, this study found that natural mentorship modifies the protective influence of organizational religious involvement within the context of violence exposure. Violence exposure was associated with increases in sexual risk behaviors among African American adolescent girls; and higher levels of organizational religious involvement, when associated with natural mentorship, and supportive relationships to be beneficial (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2019; Hope et al, 2019).

In a third study, *It's Going to Help Me in Life: Forms, Sources, and Functions of Social Support for Youth in Natural Mentoring Relationships*, researchers tested both their hypothesis and research question through a qualitative study that examines the source, forms, and functions of social support youth receive from natural mentoring relationships. The population sample included 40 adolescents who answered questions regarding the different types of support they received from adults within their community, natural mentor presence, who may be a natural mentor to them. Here, researchers believed that social support is associated with positive physical and psychological health outcomes for the youth. They thought that social support could come from natural mentoring relationships, where the mentor is a teacher, coach, and even a parent. The objective of this study was to highlight how different sources and/or figures vary in their approach to offering certain types of social support to needy youth, and emphasize how this support can affect youth outcomes. It was suggested that social support and mentoring are variables that have a function with each other. Support figures were found providing multiple types of support, that may differ from the other figures' support. For example, teachers can provide more than instruction but also validation to students as well as empathy. When referring to the minoritized youth in particular, researchers emphasize the need for more informational and instrumental support and the need for access to non-familial figures. Socio-economic factors

should be part of this mentoring-support formula. (Hurd & Sellers, 2013; Sanchez, 2019; Varga et.al, 2023).

Discussion

These literature reviews consist of qualitative and quantitative research with a focus on the need for others to help adolescent black girls to develop strong as they progress throughout their lifespan. Questions about how both, external factors and people could play a significant role in one's personal development were included in these investigations. Additionally, they showed the protective role natural mentors have and highlighted both negative and positive outcomes for the youth. Findings from each study emphasized the importance of natural mentors on children's and adolescents' psychosocial functioning. Whether natural mentors influence an adolescent's academic performance, emotional regulation, or mental wellness, stronger-healthier psychosocial functioning is more likely to occur. However, adolescents must engage with positive support figures to avoid negative outcomes. The researchers of these literature reviews saw promising results of the impact of engagement with natural mentors on the psychological functioning of children and adolescents (Nakanishi et al, 2019; Peck et al, 2022).

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of engagement with natural relationships on the psychosocial functioning of African American female adolescents. Most importantly, it explored how interactions with natural mentors influence psychosocial development and growth. Adolescents benefit the most from interactions with positive "role models" and/or natural mentors. Further research on this topic is crucial for understanding the unique psychosocial development of adolescents and investigating the significant role that mentors play in fostering positive development.

Limitations

The sample size of 40 in one study may be too limiting to generalize the findings. Moreover, other age groups may have natural mentor figures that do not qualify as natural mentor due to the researchers' cultural perspectives. Still, some participants may not have been 100% honest about their answers when completing the psychosocial questionnaires/scales. Lastly, researchers noted that some participants may not have selected true race or ethnicity.

Implications for the School Counselor

School counselors should be culturally competent and have the skills and knowledge to employ counseling programs such as individual and group counseling and classroom lessons that will promote academic, social, and emotional support for all students. Informal assessments and referrals students are necessary to ensure student success. The role of the school counselor include seeking mentors for some students to help within the school or from the community. Seeking natural mentors can be a daunting task but students' parents can help with this work. Finally, school counselors should take advantage of participating in professional development training on the engagement of natural mentors and support for students' psychosocial development.

References

- Bailey, A. (2023, September 23). *Understanding psychosocial development*. Verywell Health. <https://www.verywellhealth.com/psychosocial-development-5220563>
- Cherry, K. (2022, August 3). *Understanding Erikson's stages of psychosocial development*. Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development-2795740>
- Hope, M. O., Lee, D. B., Hsieh, H., Hurd, N. M., Sparks, H. L., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2019). Violence exposure and sexual risk behaviors for African American adolescent girls: The protective role of natural mentorship and organizational religious involvement. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 64(1–2), 242–255. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12341>
- Hurd, N. M., & Sellers, R. M. (2013). Black Adolescents' Relationships With Natural Mentors: Associations with academic engagement via social and emotional development. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 19(1), 76–85. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031095>
- Hurd, N. M., Zimmerman, M. A., & Xue, Y. (2008). Negative adult influences and the protective effects of role models: A Study with Urban Adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(6), 777–789. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-008-9296-5>
- Hurd, N., & Zimmerman, M. (2010). Natural mentors, mental health, and risk behaviors: A longitudinal analysis of African American adolescents transitioning into adulthood. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1–2), 36–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9325-x>
- Nakanishi, M., Yamasaki, S., Endo, K., Ando, S., Morimoto, Y., Fujikawa, S., Kanata, S., Takahashi, Y., Furukawa, T. A., Richards, M., Hiraiwa-Hasegawa, M., Kasai, K., & Nishida, A. (2019). The association between role model presence and self-regulation in early adolescence: A cross-sectional study. *PLOS ONE*, 14(9). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0222752>
- Peck, L., Connolly, M., Endres, K., Musser, L., Shalaby, M., Lehman, M., & Olympia, R. P. (2022). The impact of role models, mentors, and heroes on academic and Social Outcomes in adolescents. *Cureus*. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.27349>
- Sánchez, B., Anderson, A. J., Carter, J. S., Mroczkowski, A. L., Monjaras-Gaytan, L. Y., & DuBois, D. L. (2019). *Helping me helps us: The role of natural mentors in the ethnic identity and academic outcomes of Latinx adolescents*. PubMed. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31855014/>
- Van Dam, L., Smit, D., Wildschut, B., Branje, S. J. T., Rhodes, J. E., Assink, M., & Stams, G. J. J. M. (2018). Does Natural Mentoring Matter? A multilevel meta-analysis on the

association between natural mentoring and youth outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 62(1–2), 203–220. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12248>

Varga, S. M., Yu, M. V., Johnson, H. E., Futch Ehrlich, V., & Deutsch, N. L. (2023). “it’s going to help me in life”: Forms, sources, and functions of social support for youth in natural mentoring relationships. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(8), 3289–3308. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.23045>