

**The Bond Between Risk Factors and Youth Mentorship**

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Under the Supervision of

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An Honours Project submitted

in partial fulfillment

of the Degree requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts – Criminal Justice (Honours)

Mount Royal University

Date Submitted: April 2020

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**Abstract**

Youth that are deemed at-risk to commit crime typically have experienced one or more factors that put them at risk. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the factors that put youth at greater risk of engaging in criminal behaviour. Then through the lens of Professor Travis Hirschi's social bonding theory, examine existing research on the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs in building resiliency. Through the social bonding theory and the development of bonding elements, it is determined that youth mentorship programs that follow certain criteria can be effective in reducing risk factors among youth. With the research obtained, this thesis then compiles the criteria that contribute to an effective youth mentorship program, and forms a rubric.

### **Dedication and Acknowledgments**

I would first and foremost like to thank my supervising professor Doug King for not only supervising my Honours thesis, but also encouraging me to complete an Honours thesis since the first class I had with him in first year. Without your enthusiasm and support, I know my university experience would look a lot different than it does now. I would also like to acknowledge Ritesh Narayan for your encouragement throughout my degree and Scharie Tavcer for providing a reference that helped me get hired on at Hull Services, working with the very youth I chose to write about.

Thank you to my parents who have not only supported my degree financially but also through their constant praise and enthusiasm. Thank you for providing me with the time and environment that allowed me to focus on my degree. I would also like to thank my boyfriend for the consistent high-fives and excitement every time I finished a project or got a good grade on an exam. Furthermore I would like to thank my friends Dallin Lyons, Prab Sohi and Carter Pyke for your constant love and support throughout the four years of my degree. No matter what life has thrown at me over the years, you three have been by my side ready to do anything to help me succeed in not only school but in life. I really couldn't have done any of this without you!

Finally I'd like to thank the Calgary Stetson Showband for the privilege of teaching youth for the past five years. Your organization gave me the passion to pursue working with youth and has taught me many invaluable lessons over the years.

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### **The Bond Between Risk Factors and Youth Mentorship**

As of 2014 in Canada, youth made up 7% of the Canadian population but were 13% of the individuals accused of crime (Allen & Superle, 2016). There were almost 101, 000 youth accused under the Criminal Code and those accused outnumbered adults accused by 1.8 times (para. 21-22). According to Statistics Canada, the most frequently occurring offences among youth included theft under \$5000, mischief, and common assault (para. 2). Between 2014 and 2018 around 16,000 to over 20,000 youth have received a correctional sentence (Statistics Canada, 2019, table 35) with 8,000 to over 12,000 of those youth's receiving community sentences.

Individual factors like drug use, mental health problems, and difficulties at home, (van Der Put et al., 2014, p. 1035) as well as friend's participation in delinquent behaviour and academic engagement (Spruit, 2018, p. 1540), can play a role on youth's development and predisposition to engage in activities that put them at risk of becoming involved in crime. "An early onset of delinquency prior to age 13 years increases the risk of later serious, violent, and chronic offending" (Loeber & Farrington, 2010, p. 737).

For those youth who do end up involved in the criminal justice system, "[c]ommunity correctional sentences are administered to more juvenile offenders in North America than any other judicial sentence" (Bouchard & Wong, 2018, p. 1509). The purpose of this research is to determine if community programs and mentorship programs are effective at mitigating individual factors that put youth at risk of committing crime and reducing recidivism from the perspective of Travis

Hirschi's social bonding theory. Through secondary data analysis, this paper will explore existing research that focuses initially on the individual factors that put youth at risk of committing crime and reoffending. Then it compares and contrasts those findings with research focused on community programs designed to reduce criminal ideation and the role of mentoring in preventing delinquent behaviour before it occurs.

### **Methodology**

The aim for this thesis is to determine the effectiveness of community mentorship programs in reducing factors among youth that put them at risk. Through the use of the qualitative method of meta-analysis, the thesis examines multiple scholarly articles and studies from around the world concentrating mainly on Canada and the United States that focus on at risk youth factors, community programs and the impact of mentorship in reducing delinquency, criminal activity and recidivism amongst youth. Using different search engines such as ProQuest, Sage Journals, the Criminal Justice Data Base and other related databases as well as scholarly textbooks, the information collected for this thesis was obtained.

Key words used within the listed databases included at risk youth, at risk factors, juvenile delinquency, community programs, and youth mentoring. The University of Southern California (2020) states that "A well-designed meta-analysis depends upon strict adherence to the criteria used for selecting studies and the availability of information in each study to properly analyze their findings" (para. 14) and therefore it is important to define the terms used within the thesis.

**Definition of At Risk**

At-risk youth can have multiple definitions within society and around the world as youth can be at risk of many things such as medical problems, graduating from school, domestic abuse, and engaging in criminal behaviour. According to Morrissey (2013), “definitions of the term ‘at-risk’ vary depending on the field of inquiry and the issue under examination” (p. 2). Furthermore, she defines at-risk youth from a criminal justice perspective as “youth who have a higher likelihood of engaging in offending behaviour and interacting with the criminal justice system” (p. 2). This thesis will focus on the criminal justice perspective of at risk youth and engage in accessing research that follows a similar definition therefore refining the scope used within the methodology.

**Youth and Youth Mentoring**

While data collected for this thesis is not limited to Canada, the majority of articles collected and analysed followed the Canadian definition of youth, which is seen as “any person between the ages of 12 and 17 is considered to be a youth or young person,” (Bradley, 2018, p. 11). With the definition of youth comes the definition of youth mentoring or mentorship. Butera (2014) defined youth mentoring as someone who “is an adult who... provides a young person with support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement and a constructive example” (p. 3). This definition allows for a broad range of mentorship relationships to be examined as it doesn’t limit the scope to only mentorship programs but allows for the investigation into community programs as well.



**Community Programs**

The types community programs that are designed to reduce recidivism and help prevent delinquency among youth are the programs that are examined throughout this thesis. They are intended to “[alleviate] logistical and economic pressures while holding offenders accountable for their actions and maintaining public safety” (Bouchard & Wong, 2018, p. 1511). These programs are based on certain aspects of youth who engage in delinquent behaviour. While not all community programs focus on all the needs of a young person, the main areas of focus include “psychological problems, physical problems, sexual abuse, violence, family problems and deviance, educational deficits and problems related to peer association” (Thompson & Bynum, 2010 p. 415).

**Individual Factors Relating to Delinquency**

Individual factors that put youth at risk of committing crime and engaging in delinquent behaviour can encompass many different areas and aspects of a youth’s life. These risk factors do not show causality however they introduce youth to situations that present more danger or higher risk activities that can then develop into criminality. According to Ward et al. (2010) some of these risk factors are “intelligence, sensation seeking, social skills, alcohol and drug use, depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, suicide attempts, and delinquent peers as well as parental psychopathology, criminal family members, and broken family” (p. 1282).

Farrington, Gaffney and Ttofi (2017) argue that risk factors among youth can be broken down into sub-categories, explanatory factors and non-explanatory factors. Explanatory factors are those factors that are outside of anti-social behaviour. This includes the risk factors already mentioned above like family factors, low intelligence, attention-deficit, and so on. Whereas non-explanatory factors are those that have anti-social behaviour as the underlying cause such as aggression, bullying and gang membership (p. 24). Many studies have looked at specific risk factors and the prevalence of criminality among youth that have experienced these influences.

Many of the risk factors above are similar in the aspect that they all contain a social element. Problems with family, peers who engage in delinquent behaviour, and school are all related to social situations and learning. Examining these factors through the lens of the social bonding theory, which will be discussed later in the thesis, can allow for the further analysis of community programs and mentorship programs. Identifying the impact and roles of these risk factors already determined in other research provides the framework for the meta-analysis of the rest of the thesis. These findings will also provide the foundation for suggestions of further research and changes in future programming. For this reason it is also important for this thesis to review the differences in risk factors among the genders as well.

### **Parental Influence**

Many studies have been done on the effects of parenting and delinquency among youth. A study done by Frisell, Lichtenstein, and Langstrom (2011) found that families and parents who have a history of violent offence are more likely to

have children that will then also engage in violent offences do to antisocial behaviour learned. They established that based on parents being a role model for their children, if a mother was engaged in violent behaviours, there was a significantly higher risk for her daughter to also engage in violent behaviours. However this study also found that there was a greater risk for this pattern in families that possessed a lower socio-economic status than those who were able to regularly make ends meet.

Another study done by Rivera-Mercado (2019) found similar findings to the previous study in which the role of the parents drastically impacted their child's involvement in criminal and delinquent behaviours. She revealed "deviant behaviour will occur due to a lack of bonding between an individual, their parents and other family members, and ultimately their peer group" (p. 38). This concept relates directly to the social bonding theory, which will be discussed later in this thesis. Rivera-Mercado also found that another risk factor; poor academic performance, was also a result of parenting and attachment. She found that poor presentation in school and delinquent behaviour shown from youth is a result of problematic behaviour from another aspect of their life typically home life. She also suggested that parenting styles, like school performance can also relate to a youth's involvement in drug use, as it is often a learned behaviour and used as a coping skill when they aren't getting what they need from their parents.

The majority of studies found related to parental influence on deviant and delinquent behaviour among youth that puts them at risk of criminal activity found similar findings. While there are many factors that put youth at risk, parental

involvement or the lack there of, as well as the level of attachment a youth feels towards their parents is a significant influence on the path a youth takes in their life. This knowledge provides a framework for social science theories such as social bonding theory and allows for the exploration of possible prevention techniques and practices.

### **Peer Delinquency Influence**

Peer groups have a great impact on an individual's life. As groups spend more time with each other they begin to adopt similar behavioural traits and personalities. Many studies have discovered that peers can influence a youth's behaviour. However, a study done by Reynolds and Crea (2015), found peers can have an even greater impact in youth. They found that not only does a peer's delinquency have an effect on a youth's delinquency, but also that a peer's depression can have the same impact on delinquency. "Adolescents become vulnerable to their peers' depressive symptomatology when engaging in extended discussions of their problems and negative feelings with them" (p. 84). They then linked depression of a peer to a youth's delinquent behaviours determining, "that depression in early adolescence is more predictive of later delinquency than early delinquency is for later depression" (p. 84). As previously noted, depression is considered to be a risk factor for youth delinquency and crime and was able to be connected to peer depression and delinquency. This link between the two factors shows a social influence that can also potentially be swayed by mentorship and community programs.

**School Attachment**

As school attachment and academic achievement can influence an individual's future in providing them with the opportunity of furthering their education or getting a good job, it can also have the opposite effect if it is on the lower levels. Poor school attachment can contribute to youth delinquency and crime as "[a]ttachments are imperative in a youth's life, in that these connections are how they learn to act in society" (O'Neil, 2016, p. 12). Without these specific attachments formed within a youth's life, negative and delinquent behaviours can develop.

Some studies have found that there is no statistically significant data showing that there is a correlation between poor academic achievement and delinquency, however "feeling a close attachment to school is associated with higher academic achievement, increased positive behavior in school, and less reports of substance abuse" (O'Neil, 2016, p. 13). A study done by Kivivuori (2012), found that "for an institutional setting to become an effective source of social bonding, the interactions and activities associated with the setting must be experienced as meaningful and rewarding" (p.55). Without some form of social bonding, youth "are not expected to restrain antisocial lifestyle choices" (p.55) and therefore are more likely to turn to crime as a result.

**Alternative schools for youth.** School involvement helps form invaluable social bonds and attachment to help prevent youth from engaging in criminal activities. For those who have already committed a crime, attending school can become a challenge. Fine et al. (2018) found that "justice system contact significantly reduces youth's odds of completing high school or enrolling in college" (p. 1327). For this reason, alternative

schools were created for those who've had involvement in the justice system and need some accommodations in completing their education. However Fine et. al (2018) and other studies found that:

“School instability, or movement between schools, is associated with decreased academic performance, increased probability of high school dropout, higher truancy and suspension rates, more problem, delinquency, and increased likelihood of adult arrest “ (p. 1328).

The study concluded that while these alternative schools are meant to help youth who have been involved in the justice system complete school, that youth who attend these schools are more likely to reoffend for a number of reasons.

Stigmatization and labelling theory as well as social learning –observing other delinquent youth and repeating their behaviour – are all explanations they provided as an explanation (p.1342).

### **Are Risk Factors Gendered?**

While there are differences in crimes that both males and females commit, it would be understandable that there would also be differences in the factors that put youth at risk of committing crime. The majority of studies done on risk factors that affect a youth's likeliness to engage or reengage in crime often focus on generic risk factors as mentioned previously. However, according to van der Put et al. (2014) “most risk factors for delinquency are the same for both sexes... [but] *girl-specific* risk factors for recidivism were found” (p. 1048). They found that these risk factors were more closely tied to the family domain and were the greatest predictors for recidivism among females.

This information is confirmed in another study completed by Herrera and McCloskey (2001) in terms of the impact of familial problems having a greater influence of females than males. They found that while risk factors remained the same for both boys and girls, girls who experienced some kind of abuse in their home whether it be sexual or physical, were more likely to be arrested for violent offences. This was in comparison to boys who had the same or similar abuse histories. The study concluded that, “these findings suggest that it takes more severe abuse to prompt violence in girls than is necessary to explain boys’ violent offending” (p. 1038). While the risk factors for both males and females are the same, these studies show that the impact of specific factors can greatly impact boys and girls differently. With the impact being different, and causing different outcomes for youth, the treatment and prevention techniques should also then show differences for the genders.

### **Social Bonding Theory as an Explanation for Delinquency**

Despite the factors for youth that put them at risk of committing criminal acts being unique and independent of each other, they all have one major similarity. They all reflect some sort of social bond, or more accurately the lack thereof. Whether the bond is with a youth’s parent, peer and friend group, or school, the lack of attachment or the negative bonds formed can greatly influence a youth’s potential to commit crime. Social bonding theory was developed by Professor Travis Hirschi, and states that most humans are capable of committing crime. However, it is the bonds formed with our “conventional entities” already mentioned that socialize us

into non-deviant behaviours (Tibbetts, 2019, p. 174). The likeliness that a youth engages in deviant and criminal behaviour according to the social bonding theory is based on their development in four different bonding elements. These elements are:

1. Attachment
2. Commitment
3. Involvement
4. Moral belief

Hirschi's theory of the social bond asserts that the most important factor that had the greatest influence on an individual's predisposition to engage in crime was attachment (Tibbetts, 2019, p. 175). He found that this was the most important factor because this formed the foundation for the other factors and helped influence a person's conventional values. The second element of commitment was based on the person's obligation to conventional society. This in turn forces someone to weigh their options of committing a crime, and how much they have to lose if they get caught.

Once attachment and commitment are developed, involvement in society and in activities is the next element of social bonding theory. The theory proposes that more time spent in activities means that there would be less time that can be diverted to criminal activities and therefore less opportunity to commit a crime. The last element of moral belief is the idea that the other elements form a person's values and beliefs and therefore if an action contradicts what an individual sees as right, they are less likely to engage in that action (Tibbetts, 2019, p.175). This would theoretically mean that if a youth has been socialized by their parents, peers, and



school positively, and taught that it is wrong to shoplift, then that youth would be less likely to engage in shoplifting. Nevertheless, it also could predict the opposite in saying that if a youth doesn't have a close attachment to those influences, or has a peer group that does engage in shoplifting, they would therefore be more likely to shoplift as well.

### **Social Bonds, Gender and Delinquency**

Just as there is gender difference in individual factors that put youth at risk of committing crime, the relationship between gender, social bonds and delinquency also exist. As criminology has developed, so have studies and research that focus on the difference between female and male delinquency. However, the studies that focus on the female perspective still need more dedication in research. Few studies have looked at Hirschi's social bonding theory and how or if his four elements of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief impact females differently than males. As many theories in criminology focus on a general aspect of crime, they typically overlook the differences in male and female offending. However, some studies have researched this topic from the position of the social bonding theory.

Özbay and Özcan (2008) considered the differences of gender in relation to Hirschi's four elements. Their findings showed "[a]mong males, school commitment, family supervision, belief, and attachment to delinquent friends are the most consistent variables" (p. 155). This shows that these factors play a greater role in shaping male youth's perspective and belief of delinquency more than Hirschi generally stated. "For females, respect for police, family supervision, belief, attachment to delinquent friends... are the most consistent variables (p. 155).

Despite these findings, they were able to conclude that there were very few differences between the effects of male and female attachments and established that Hirschi's social bonding theory was able to explain delinquency for both genders.

In contrast to the above research, Van Gundy-Yoder (2007), found that "women are socialized and treated based upon the subordinate position in society that they have traditionally held" and therefore argues that "traditional criminological theory must be tested and modified accordingly in order to address the gender gap in crime and discover predictors and treatment specific to females" (p. 54). Based on her study and other studies examined, Van Gundy-Yoder found result opposite of Özbay and Özcan. "[R]esults... showed that social bonds, in the forms of living with a spouse, attending school, and having a job, affected male and female probationers in two distinct ways" (p. 55) These factors significantly reduced males likeliness of engaging in crime whereas she was able to conclude that the factors had little influence on women. The opposing studies and views around the generality of crime and delinquency between the sexes and how Hirschi's four elements impact the predisposition has not had enough studies to conclude that there is a distinct difference. Nevertheless, the fact that social bonding theory does not explain the difference between male and female offending can be seen as a critique of the theory.

### **Critiques of Social Bonding Theory**

While many of the great and lasting theories have countless strengths, no theory is free from weaknesses and critiques. Hirschi's social bonding theory has been "the most influential social control theory" (Tibbetts, 2019, p. 174) and had an

enduring impact on the field of criminology as an explanation for why individuals commit crime. Despite its positive influence, Hirschi's theory has still had its number of criticisms. A review of social bonding theory done by Farmer (2018), highlighted many different criticisms including the idea that "Hirschi took for granted that the motivation was the same for everyone and that all people need restraint to prevent acts committed out of greed and selfishness set loose by a free rein" (p. 73). Farmer also looked at the fact that while Hirschi titled his theory *The Causes of Delinquency* (1969), it didn't show the cause of delinquency instead showed a correlation and focused more on why people don't commit crime instead of why they do (p. 72-73).

Furthermore, other studies concluded that the "elements of the bond were more predictive of less serious forms of deviance than they were of more serious forms" (Thompson & Bynum, 2010, p. 164). Not only did some studies find that his theory was more predictive of less serious forms of deviance, some also criticized that his theory didn't explain why once engaged in deviance, why some people continue and intensify in their offending (Tibbetts, 2019, p. 175). However, the prevalence of critiques and criticisms are important in helping shape policies based on the theory, as it allows policy makers to understand the areas that lack sufficient theoretical depth.

### **Social Bonding for Intervention and Crime Prevention**

Linked to social bonding theory's focus on attachment, commitment, involvement and moral belief, early development of these bonds is key in reducing and preventing criminal behaviour among youth. With this knowledge, the social

bonding theory can be used to help inform and shape certain youth programs in a proactive nature. Boyes, Hornick and Ogden (2011) have found that “Crime prevention models have included early intervention components for years, but it is only recently that a developmental perspective has been applied to crime prevention models” (p.98). They suggest that “a child’s actual developmental trajectory or the potential developmental pathways open to him or her as a matter... of how children exist within or move between the various contexts in which they are found” (p. 101).

A reoccurring theme throughout research has found that the absence of the aforementioned risk factors can serve as protection from negative experiences and how resilient a youth is in those adverse situations. However that also makes the opposite true. This can be used to then shape intervention and prevention strategies in the sense that “programs aimed to reduce stress, enhance family functioning, and promote child development were the logical first step in implementing theoretical developmental models (Boyes, Hornick & Ogden, 2011, p. 105). The key to helping reduce and negate risk factors is the idea of early intervention.

In order to test this theory, a Healthy Families demonstration project was started across Canada to launch successful programs to help combat delinquency among Canadian youth (Boyes, Hornick & Ogden, 2011, p. 107). The goal of the Healthy Families programs was to “optimize the development of young at-risk children and their families to increase the children’s opportunities for later success by early screening, assessment, and intervention” (p. 107). The establishment of these programs and data collected found that “the programs were successful at

achieving some but not necessarily all of their stated objectives” but they were successful in helping “clients to cope with the crises of everyday life and had, as well, helped the clients achieve goals” (p. 107).

As every at-risk youth experiences their own individual set of factors that increase their likeliness to engage in deviant and criminal behaviour, they also need an individualized social bonds to help mitigate those risk factors. The use of community programs and youth mentorship programs allow for creation of these individual social bonds while also allowing for effective teaching moments within a youth’s life.

### **Youth Mentorship as Crime Prevention**

Prevention and early intervention are themes highlighted throughout much of the literature that discusses youth crime. With many of the factors that put youth at risk of committing crime are linked to poor and underdeveloped social bonds, creating new and positive social bonds could be productive in reducing deviant behaviour. For this reason “mentoring has... been enthusiastically embraced as a remedy for misconduct and delinquency among at-risk youth” (Miller, Barnes, Miller & McKinnon, 2012, p. 441). The idea behind youth mentoring is to foster growth and change in a youth’s social and emotional wellbeing, and in their attitude towards aspects like relationships, school and other positive influences in their lives (p. 442). This notion is one that aligns very closely with Hirschi’s social bonding theory.

In order to illicit this type of change within a youth, a program and mentor need to develop the youth’s social skills. The Youth Justice Board in the United

Kingdom developed a program based on this very idea. “The Youth Inclusion Program (YIP)... is expected to reduce crime and antisocial behaviours by helping youth acquire new skills, take part in social activities and get help with their studies” (Public Safety Canada, 2018, para. 20). The YIP program has also been implemented in three different provinces in Canada, and includes “one-on-one sessions that address individual needs along with group activities, which can include academic support, recreational activities, mentoring, and life skills training” (para. 20). Another program developed in Canada is Life Skills Training (LST). “The program draws on strength-based approaches to working with youth, by reinforcing functional behaviour and emphasizing building skills that can be utilized in all areas of a youth's life” (para. 21). Both of these programs have a focus of developing skills in youth who are at risk for delinquent behaviour. YIP was designed to diminish antisocial behaviour as well as crime, whereas LST was designed specifically to reduce drug use among youth (Public Safety Canada, 2018, para. 20-22).

Mentoring programs around the world are becoming more popular and frequently used in an attempt to improve resiliency factors among youth, which then results in reducing criminal ideation. According to Tolan et al. (2013), “[m]entoring is one of the most widely used approaches for such problems with over 5,000 organizations in the United States offering some form of this approach” (p. 180). In their study, Tolan et al. (2013) was able to determine that mentoring as a form of crime prevention had positive outcomes for youth who were engaged in deviant and criminal behaviour. Furthermore, they were also able to suggest that this type of mentor-mentee bond was also productive in preventing aggression and

poor academic achievement on top of drug use and deviance (p. 198). In addition to the bond created from a mentoring relationship of a significant relationship, another study also determined that “[e]ffects tended to be stronger when emotional support was a key process in mentoring interventions, and when professional development was an explicit motive for participation of the mentors” (Tolan, Henry, Schoeny & Bass, 2008, p. 5).

A well-known youth mentoring program around the world is Big Brothers Big Sisters youth diversion programs. Their goal in mentoring is to strengthen youth resiliency factors and therefore reduce the level of youth that engage in delinquency. A report done by Murphy and Brady (2018), found that the type of mentoring offered through Big Brothers Big Sisters, had many positive impacts on youth already involved in the justice system in crime prevention and reducing recidivism (p. 1). Some of their key findings included, youth attitudes towards crime changed, they felt supported by their mentor, they were able to develop a greater self-worth and sense of purpose, mentoring improved youth mental health, and it increased youth’s levels of confidence (p. 2). Their report found that based on Hirschi’s social bonding theory, “the placement of one good adult in the life of a young person, had an influence on the four elements that strengthen young people’s bonds with society” (p. 3). With this one bond being formed with someone who is viewed as a positive role model to a youth, the likeliness of criminal behaviour occurring was diminished. However, if certain measures are not taken, the effect of mentorships may have the opposite result.

### **Effective Youth Programs**

Youth mentorship and community programs emphasize a focus on the relationships that youth develop with individuals in their lives and strive to help them foster positive relations with an adult who can be seen as a positive role model. The progression of these types of relationships can be extremely difficult depending on the youth's life and specific risk factors already discussed. If a youth has had a negative home life or dealt with some type of abuse, then that individual might have a hard time trusting an adult in a position of authority. According to Butera (2014):

Mentoring relationships can be formal (IE. mentor and youth are matched by a third party) or informal (IE. mentor/youth relationship evolves on its own without outside intervention). They can take place within a range of contexts (IE. school, workplace, community setting, faith-based organizations, youth justice settings, virtual community), take many forms (IE. one-on-one, group, team, mixed, peer/cross-age mentoring), and target different groups of youth (IE. youth in foster care, academically at risk students, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth who have learning disabilities) (p. 1).

Based on the different types of mentorship programs the criteria of what makes a successful mentorship can have a wide range of variety. For the purpose of this thesis the focus is going to be placed on formal mentoring relationships. While community programs have a different structure than youth mentorship programs, those employed within community programs serve to become mentors to the youth



involved in their program. The bond created between mentors and youth can play a major role in the prevalence of deviant or criminal behaviour engaged in.

While different youth mentorship programs and community programs have alternative preferential outcomes in terms of specific skills learned from the relationship that is formed, the pathway taken to form a trusting and efficient relationship should relatively remain the same. Reviewing literature on youth mentorship programs while also reviewing the recommendations and procedures pre-existing youth programs have in place allow for the examination specific criteria required to determine effective programs. After determining the criteria needed, this thesis will then compile that information and form a grading system for these programs and discuss implementations that could be incorporated into new and existing programs.

### **Training Mentors**

Programs for youth can be very diverse in focus for those who are matched with a mentor or a community program and therefore those who are employed or volunteer need to be knowledgeable about the types of youth that they work with. For this reason the amount of training and types of training individuals receive need to be thorough and distinct. In a study looking at school mentorship programs found that 81% of school programs and mentorship programs were offering programs that were specified towards high-risk students had teachers and mentors who were untrained in the population they were dealing with and were teaching universal programs (Fagan, Hanson, Hawkins & Arthur, 2008, p. 257). The study also found that those who fail to receive adequate training are more likely to lose the interest of

the youth they work with and are less effective in teaching youth (Fagan, Hanson, Hawkins & Arthur, 2008, p. 257-258). “Mentors who received more training and support after being matched, spend more hours a month with their mentees, and report stronger relationships” (Rodriguez, 2011, p.26).

Cultural competency is another important area within youth mentorship that requires extensive training. Nguyen (2014) found that “[s]tudies have shown that transitional age youth participants would have positive success when mentors are well trained and knowledgeable in providing them with support and opportunities for professional and personal growth and able to encourage and inspire the youth to achieve their goals” (p. 2). Youth who require or, are referred to a mentor, often come from different backgrounds and different life experiences and therefore diversity training among mentors is extremely important for building relationships and social bonds with the youth they work with. Nguyen also found that when “mentors are adequately trained and prepared to work with this vulnerable population, mentors are more likely to continue the mentor-mentee relationships longer” (p. 1). Furthermore, extensive and diverse training is required “so that all people understand the social circumstances youth come from, as well as how to respond to their challenges” (Bradley, 2018, p. 58). Effective training, when paired with a time commitment to the youth an individual is mentoring is another aspect of effective youth programs.

### **Commitment**

Training and cultural competency are extremely important aspects in building a relationship with a youth mentee; however, for vulnerable and at risk

youth, trust does not come from training. Built trust and rapport are facets that develop over time through repeated positive experiences. Butera (2014) found that the ongoing commitment from a mentor to a youth allows for greater development of a relationship by providing opportunities to incorporate the mentor into the youth's life by engaging in constructive activities (p. 8). This type of ongoing relationship shows a greater impact the longer it goes on as "[m]entoring relationships lasting one or more years showed improvement in academic, psychological, social, and behavioural characteristics" (p.8).

Another study done found that "[y]outh in particularly short matches actually demonstrated decrements in both self-worth and scholastic competence" (Lakind, Eddy & Zell, 2014, p.706) While the preferred time commitment among most research has found that for a beneficial relationship to occur takes around one year, the frequency of meeting throughout the year varies. A youth mentorship program through Big Brothers Big Sisters, suggests that throughout a year relationship with a youth mentee, the mentor should commit 6-8 hours per month (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2020). Whereas, recommendations from Anastasia, Skinner and Mundhenk (2012) state that committed mentors should meet with youth more than once a week (p. 42). There is no exact number of hours per week that has proven to be the most effective in developing a relationship with youth however, most research presents that frequent meetings is more beneficial in the end.

**Previous Experience**

Many mentorship programs are developed for youth who are at risk of crime or for those who have already committed crimes. One program in Alberta is the Calgary Youth Justice Society that supports youth, who are sentenced to community service hours by overcoming barriers that may otherwise prevent them from completing those hours (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, n.d., para. 7). As previously mentioned, these youth may have many risk factors that can be difficult to overcome in order to create a positive mentoring experience. “Although not essential to successful mentoring, prior helper training can be beneficial” (Anastasia, Skinner and Mundhenk, 2012, p. 41).

With training being essential in productive mentorships, it does not provide an individual with the preparation of how to deal with stressful situations that comes with previous experiences. For those without the previous experience within a similar field to youth mentoring, “[p]airing mentors who have not been formally trained with mentoring peers who have been trained may be one way to address this disparity” (p. 41). The opportunity to see how another, more experienced, individual handle stressful or unpredictable situations that they may find themselves in when dealing with at risk and high risk youth could greatly benefit those with lack of experience.

**Integration of Family, Class, Culture, and Interests**

An important area to cover in training is cultural competency. The ability to not only have the knowledge about certain cultures, but also to find a way to incorporate it into the mentorship can have extreme benefits. Culture, family and

class can be important areas of self-concept for a youth and therefore lack of respect for the mentee's background in mixed race, class, and gender relationships can lead to early termination" (Anastasia, Skinner and Mundhenk, 2012, p. 42). While respect for a youth's background is extremely important in fostering a positive relationship, in some circumstances, matching a youth to a mentor who comes from the same background can have positive impacts. One study found that "matching based on common experiences such as being a refugee or a new immigrant can be beneficial in promoting trust and connectedness" (Butera, 2014, p. 10).

As previously discussed, parents are a youth's first and main influence and role model in their life. One study found that "[r]eceiving the help of parents to support the youth mentoring relationship has shown to assist in youth developing the trust of the mentor and ensuring goals are sought with the approval of parents" (Bradley, 2018, p. 58). "Moreover, for some cultures it is necessary to include the family so that further support is provided to all aspects of the youth's social system" (p. 58).

Another integral aspect to incorporate into activities and programs with youth is their own personal outlook and interests. While youth may need a push to try new activities in order to develop new skills, it is "important that each youth mentoring plan be designed based on goals and needs as defined by the mentee" (Anastasia, Skinner and Mundhenk, 2012, p. 42). Additionally, Bradley, (2018) found that "[a]llowing the youth to be a contributing member of the relationship and developing goals collectively can help youth feel involved and motivated to seek out new opportunities and openly disclose things to their mentor" (p. 61). If the

activities and programs planned by the mentor do not meet the goals defined by the mentee, then the risk is run of the mentee losing interest in the mentoring relationship and can be subject to early termination, which was previously identified as being potentially detrimental to youth.

### **Relationship Building Through Activities**

Many formal mentorships focus on life skills teaching and development. Some mentorship programs in and around Alberta, Canada are known as Youth Transitioning to Adulthood (YTA) programs and “acts as a transitional, life skill development program for youth who have had long-term involvement with Children and Youth Services and for those with exceptional circumstances requiring intervention” (Enviros, n.d., para. 7). This would include types of activities like “how to open a bank account/budgeting, navigating the court system, finding supports to manage mental health and addiction, finding employment, an apartment, or even budgeting for and shopping for groceries” (para. 4). As beneficial as these types of activities can be, activities that the youth find enjoyable are also extremely beneficial in helping to build the relationship between mentor and mentee. Anastasia, Skinner and Mundhenk (2012) found that this type of activity is more effective than discussing concerns in relationship building (p.42). These activities can include, going to a movie, working out at the gym, etc. as these types of activities can help build a relationship.

**Provides Match Closure**

While there are many beneficial outcomes of youth mentorship programs, eventually the mentorship must come to an end. A study established that “endings are a normative part of the mentoring process” and that “the separation phase is thought to optimize the benefits of mentoring (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2013, p. 3). Whether the youth ages out of the program, or the mentor or mentee need to leave for some reason, providing the youth with a match closure is essential. Studies have found that transparency in terms of a match closure is important and “it has been suggested that mentors and youth be informed of their options for ending their mentoring relationships from the beginning” (Butera, 2014, p. 11).

Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonico (2013) determined that “[e]ngaging in a closure process can model healthy endings for youth who have experienced poorly handled endings in prior relationships with adults” (p.2). When the closure of the mentoring relationship is anticipated, the type of match closure that can be used is some sort of celebration of the relationship. However, when it is more or less unexpected for the youth, Butera (2012) suggests that a process to re-matching the youth to another mentor be in place (p. 11). Many relationships may end in an individual’s life, and with a youth who may have trouble trusting adults, the type of closure received is extremely valid in maintaining the trust built through a mentoring relationship.

**Access to Supports**

Mentoring at-risk youth can lead to the potential of the mentor being involved in high-risk situations involving the youth that can cause the mentor

significant amounts of stress. Studies have found that a “strong support system for the mentor is essential to maintaining a long-term relationship” (Anastasia, Skinner and Mundhenk, 2012, p. 42) in a youth mentorship. In dealing with potentially high-risk situations, Butera (2014) suggests that ongoing support and supervision paired with ongoing training allows supervisors to “support mentors with ongoing advice, problem, solving support and training opportunities” (p. 11). Rodriguez (2010) found that “[p]roviding mentors with ongoing supervision and training can contribute to the adaptation of the agency's values and goals, and increase positive and social behaviours” (p. 32).

While mentors may access family, friends and natural supports in their lives to help cope with some of the stress that accompanies working with at risk youth, it is also important for the organization to provide access to other types of supports. These types of supports may include “expert advice from staff or other professionals, access to publications, referrals to other programs and services, other mentors” (Butera, 2014, p. 11). It has also been determined that having these types of supports in place for the mentor contributes to positive outcomes for youth through fewer match closures and the ability to build stronger relationships with their mentor (p. 11).

### **Mentorship Program Rubric**

Grounded on studies and information retrieved from Butera (2014) and Anastasia, Skinner and Mundhenk (2012), as well as evidence from other sources mentioned throughout the thesis, a rubric evaluating the effectiveness of a youth



mentorship program can be proposed. It focuses on how the mentor creates and maintains a relationship with a youth and the training and supports that they receive. For each category, a program can receive a maximum score of 4 and a minimum score of 1 for the purpose of this proposal rubric. With a score of 28 being the most a program can receive, mentorship programs should strive to receive a score of 18-22 to ensure that they are delivering a beneficial and meaningful relationship to the matched youth while also ensuring that the mentor is receiving the support they need. Despite the formation of the rubric based off of current research, the evaluation of programs critically examined through the rubric cannot be taken at face value, as there are many different aspects and challenges within different types of mentoring programs. Diverse criteria may be required for formal and informal programs as well as the requirement of different policies of community programs as there is typically more than one person interacting with youth.

<b>Points</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Training</b>	Provides mentors with on-going and diverse training to develop skills involving different risk levels among youth	Provides diverse initial training to mentors with yearly refreshers	Provides generic initial training to mentors with no refreshers	Provides no training to mentors

<b>Commitment</b>	Mentor can commit to 4+ hours a week and relationship lasts a year or longer	Mentor can commit to 6-8 hours a month and the relationship lasts a year or longer	Mentor can commit to under 4 hours a month and the relationship lasts less than a year	Mentor's commitment is inconsistent and limited and the relationship lasts less than a year
<b>Previous experience</b>	Mentors hired have had over a year of previous experience in care giving/formal helping roles	Mentors hired have had a year of previous experience in similar roles	Mentors hired have had less than a year of previous experience in similar roles	Mentors hired have had no experience in similar roles
<b>Incorporates family, class, culture and individual interests</b>	Mentor respects and incorporates youth's culture, family, class and interests into practices and activities effectively	Mentor respects youth's culture, family and class and incorporates youth's interests into practices effectively	Mentor lacks understanding for youth's culture, family, and class but incorporates their interests into practices	Mentor lacks understanding for youth's culture, family and class and doesn't incorporate their interests into practices
<b>Relationship building through activities</b>	Engages youth in multiple, fun and diverse types of activities that help build the youth's skills and develops their relationship	Engages youth in fun activities with some diversity that help build the youth's skills	Engages in similar activities that don't help youth build skills or their relationship	Doesn't engage in activities

<b>Provides match/relationship closure</b>	Has procedures in place for match closures. Expected closures have a celebration, unexpected closures have a process for finding a new mentor	Has procedures in place for unexpected match closures. Expected match closures are at the discretion of the mentor	Has procedures in place for unexpected match closures	Doesn't have any procedures in place for match closures
<b>Mentors have access to supports</b>	Supervisors check in monthly with mentors and provide access to other sources to help cope with stress	Mentors are provided with opportunity to access outside sources or supervisors when experiencing stress	Mentors are only able to meet with supervisors when experiencing stress	Mentors are not provided with any supports

### Discussion and Future Research

Human beings are social creatures and therefore the bonds created can have a tremendous impact on the lives of individuals. With a lack of positive influences in the life of a youth, and low levels of attachment to society, a youth may gravitate towards a deviant lifestyle in order to meet their own needs. The introduction of a mentor into a youth's life can have a dramatic impact on a youth's sense of purpose, self-worth and confidence leading them away from crime. However, as many programs are volunteer driven and may not receive adequate training, mentorship programs may have adverse effects on youth. More research needs to be conducted into the types of training mentors need, as well as the impact previous experience

and professional mentors have on the effectiveness of mentoring as a form of crime prevention.

Furthermore, little research was found on the impacts that mentoring youth has on the mentor and therefore there was limited research in terms of the types and levels of supports that were needed in order to ensure that a mentor remains successful in their goals. Despite the lack of research in certain areas of youth delinquency and mentoring, there is a vast amount of knowledge around the factors that push youth to commit crime. As the majority of youth attend school and school attachment has been shown to have an impact on youth's lifestyle choices, those employed at schools; with greater training and knowledge on how to create meaningful relationships with at risk youth may also show more positive impacts on youth. As youth are seen as a vulnerable population and need to be protected, the type of extensive research needed to be conducted to obtain significant knowledge is limited. However, with the knowledge about the importance of social bonds within a youth's life, more proactive measures should be taken within justice systems to help prevent youth from engaging in crime.

Finally, the rubric proposed in this research to assess mentorship programs is in need of some empirical testing. However, it would be very feasible to conduct a program review using the rubric and correlating it to measures of program effectiveness. The proposed rubric is rooted in existing research but can be a useful tool in future program evaluations of mentorship programs.

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