

**Understanding Mentoring Relationships during and after COVID-19 Restrictions from the
Perspective of Mentors: A Community-Engaged Participatory Approach**

by

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B.A.Sc. (Honours), University of Guelph-Humber, 2021

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We acknowledge and respect the lək'wəḡən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Amidst the unprecedented challenges and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, youth and young adults have experienced a great deal of stress and challenges. Youth mentorship has been an important resource for many youths and has been shown to be a protective factor against such troubling times. However, mentors' experiences during the pandemic and its impact on their ability to support youth remains unclear. By fostering resilience and positive outcomes in youth through mentorship, these efforts contribute to the overall well-being and empowerment of youth. This study aimed to understand the impact of COVID-19 on mentorships and mentor experiences, barriers and facilitators of mentorship and virtual mentorship, and the impact of inequity, compatibility, and diversity on mentoring relationships. In partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada, this qualitative study analyzed 20 mentors' perspectives and experiences within these relationships and how they navigated the pandemic personally and while supporting their young mentee. Five major themes were constructed based on these interviews including; how mentors and mentees maintained their relationships despite the challenges and changing circumstances of the pandemic, personal benefits of mentorship, technological limitations and disparities in access to technology that made virtual mentorship less preferable, how support from those outside of the mentorship including parents and the mentorship program can impact the relationship, and the crucial role of compatibility and cultural discussions in mentorship. These findings have important implications for mentoring organizations including guiding the development of adaptive programs and policies to better support mentors and mentees in navigating challenging circumstances.

Keywords: youth mentorship; COVID-19; virtual mentoring; qualitative analysis

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Introduction

The emergence of the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19), with subsequent public health interventions, has had a significant impact on the lives of Canadians, including adolescents and young adults. Indeed, research has shown increased rates of mental health issues and disruptions to social life and skill-building among youth during the pandemic (Craig et al., 2022; Dumas et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2021). One protective factor for youth mental well-being identified prior to COVID-19 is healthy relationships with adults (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). For example, research shows that youth with adult mentors can often build resiliency against negative outcomes (Sieving et al., 2017). However, many mentorship relationships were disrupted with the transition to online services and, more recently, the return to in-person services. Although preliminary research shows mentorship relationships continue to be protective in light of COVID-19, limited research has investigated how the pandemic impacted the mentorship relationship from the perspective of mentors (Craig et al., 2021). The present study builds on a partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada (BBBSC) to better understand how the pandemic has impacted mentorship relationships from mentors' perspectives. Using a qualitative research design, this study will identify how COVID-19 and associated stressors impacted the mentor's ability to support youth, identify barriers and facilitators of the mentorship relationship (including virtual mentorship), and assess the impact of inequity (e.g., compatibility of youth-mentor diversity) on youth mentorship relationships.

Participatory Research

Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada

BBBSC provides free mentorship services with over 100 agencies across Canada focused on promoting resilience through relationships by matching youth under 18 with an adult mentor

across 1,100 communities in Canada. BBBSC's mission is to "Enable life-changing mentoring relationships to ignite the power and potential of young people", and consists of over 20,700 volunteer mentors who support over 41,400 youth (BBBSC, n.d., "About Us"). BBBSC serves over 40,000 youth from over 200 ethnic identities, often with a history of adverse childhood experiences, including poverty, exposure to aggression, and bullying (BBBSC, 2019). The pandemic has amplified the need for this mentoring program, which has been shown to provide crucial support for youth from various backgrounds. However, BBBSC programming has had to adapt to online mentoring, with most programs moving online since the Spring of 2020 to maintain programming and increase accessibility. More recently, these relationships have returned to in-person. Although BBBSC has found that most mentees and mentors stayed connected online, there is a need to assess the impacts of online service delivery on the quality of the BBBSC relationship for youth and mentors. Given their diverse population, BBBSC also seeks to understand how inequities impact these relationships.

BBBSC volunteers (mentors) are typically young adults over 18 years of age, except for those volunteering for certain programs, such as their teen mentoring program, who are 15-18 years old (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., "FAQ"). Mentors are local community volunteers who express their interest in supporting a mentee. BBBSC offers group mentorship, conversation clubs, teen mentoring, in-school mentoring, mentoring for newcomers to Canada, and one-on-one mentoring, which was the focus of this thesis project (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., "Our Programs"). Once a prospective volunteer applies and chooses the type of mentoring program they would like to join, mentors undergo a screening process, interviews, and a background check. Mentors are then trained in a series of sessions on child safety and how to develop an effective mentorship with their mentees to create meaningful connections. For the

one-on-one mentoring program, a matching coordinator from the agency matches mentors with a mentee ages 7-18. When matching a mentor and mentee, the coordinator considers multiple factors, including the mentee's needs and adversities, interests, strengths, hobbies, personal identities, lived experience, and location (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., "Volunteer"). The matching coordinator aims to connect mentors with mentees with common interests and personality traits. Once matched, mentors and mentees meet once or twice every two weeks, and mentors must commit to a minimum of one year to this program (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., "Volunteer").

Mentors and mentees can choose from various activities to engage in throughout their relationship and are encouraged to find low to no-cost activities to lessen financial burdens. Some examples of the types of activities many matches engage in include playing sports, going to the movies, doing arts and crafts, or going for a walk and talking (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., "Volunteer"). Some agencies of BBBSC, such as the Big Brothers Big Sisters Peel/York region, also partner with the Black Community Advisory Council (BCAC) of the United Way of Greater Toronto, specifically dedicated to providing mentorship to Black youth. This division of the agency matches mentors and mentees who both self-identify as Black and provide and encourage these mentorships to engage in cultural activities and build a sense of community and greater cultural identity to the youth of colour (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., "Our Programs").

In order to include the voices of the population impacted by this project, we included a mentor youth advisory, agency leaders, and director representatives in the research design, recruitment, interpretation, and knowledge mobilization efforts. Our connections included the Senior Director of Program and Impact of BBBSC, agencies from different regions, as well as

self-selected members of BBBSC's National Youth Mentor Advisory Council (NYMAC) comprising a youth advisory (i.e., 6-8 BBBSC mentors; Youthprise, 2015). This participation is important for building a relationship with community partners and youth to build trust in our research and reflects relevant, meaningful information. This procedure is also in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which requires researchers to include youth perspectives on projects that relate to their well-being (O'Connor, 2013).

Community Engagement

In order to ensure this project engages with BBBSC throughout the research process, we have used principles of participatory action research (PAR) as a guide on how to collaborate and involve our community partners in a meaningful way. PAR is an approach that actively engages with community members and values their lived experiences to understand and resolve issues related to inequitable social systems (Cornish et al., 2023). PAR involves reflection and collaboration with participants and community partners in order to provide meaningful data and societal contributions to the community researchers are aiming to support (Guy et al., 2020). Hence, PAR is based on principles of social justice and collaboration with community members so that they are included in the research process. Cornish and colleagues (2023) outlined six key principles in PAR approaches which include building relationships, outlining work practices, understanding of the issue at hand, observation and developing materials, conducting analysis in a collaborative manner, and planning and taking action using the collected data. The action portion of PAR is a key element that can vary depending on the project but aims to engage, educate, and connect with the community you are collaborating with so that they are empowered and benefit from the research project (Guy et al., 2020). Therefore, frequent discussion and collaboration with our community partners from BBBSC were essential for this research project.

Our youth advisory and BBBSC agency leaders were involved throughout the research process, including developing research objectives, interview questions, interpretation of results, and knowledge mobilization strategies.

Mentorship and Mentorship Theory

Benefits of Mentorship and Mentorship Development

Mentorship has been shown to have a positive impact on youth mental health and well-being, including better development, social skills, and building a sense of community and support (Britner et al., 2006; Sieving et al., 2017). Positive youth development is often characterized by the type and amount of positive and strong relationships in the child's life (Lerner, 2004). Common sources of these relationships include parents, peers, teachers, or other adults and role models who provide guidance, support, and connection. However, for those who do not have such a network of support or the relationships they have with adults in their lives are dysfunctional or inadequate, mentorship can provide a means to fill this gap and act as a "corrective experience" (Erdem et al., 2016, p. 478). Mentorships have been shown to boost youth's support network, improve relationships, decrease aggression and depressive symptoms, deviant behaviours, and decrease substance use, even during the pandemic (Kaufman et al., 2022). Mentoring can also have long-term benefits in youth mental health and social development that last into adulthood, despite childhood adversities and stressors (van Dam et al., 2021). Mentorship can contribute directly to positive social behaviors as well. For example, perceived relationship quality has been shown to significantly predict improved social skills and work ethic in school and decreased involvement in bullying and lateness/absence from school (Sieving et al., 2017). Thus, mentoring programs can substantially impact those involved and

understanding more about these relationships can help programs learn how to facilitate this kind of positive development further.

Mentorships take time to develop and solidify, similar to other relationships (e.g., friendships). However, not all mentorships are successful or long-lasting. Mentorships may dissolve if either party is not motivated to continue or sees the benefit of doing so (Spiekermann et al., 2020). Research has shown that almost half of mentoring relationships end prematurely, mainly due to a lack of consistent or strong connection between both parties (Gilkerson & Pryce, 2021). A great deal of time and resources is placed when matching mentors to mentees, and these connections can be crucial for a child's development and well-being. Hence, it is important to learn how to prevent these relationships from breaking down, particularly in a vulnerable time, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also important to learn how to strengthen mentorships to avoid disruptions and discontinuity in these relationships that have been shown to be so crucial to youth development and wellness. Understanding what factors facilitate or strengthen the mentorship development process is important to identify areas of improvement in the mentoring relationship. It can also help us understand how to ease the transition to mentoring virtually and during the pandemic, and how to provide further support to mentors and mentees.

Characteristics of Mentorship

Mentorship programs that provide opportunities for interactions, resources, and a safe space for mentors and mentees to do activities together have been shown to facilitate greater contact and stronger bonds between mentors and mentees (Parra et al., 2002). Researchers have examined the type of activities or programming completed with mentees which has shown mentees feel greater satisfaction in mentorships if they are exposed to a variety of different activities (Keller, 2005b). Mentor relationships can be strengthened with frequent

communication and consistency between mentors and mentees (Erdem et al., 2008). For example, frequent meetings and communication between mentor and mentee have been shown to contribute to greater positive impact in the youth's life, and this consistency allows for the mentorship to be established as a long-lasting relationship (Dubois et al., 2002; Erdem & Aytemur, 2008, Parra et al., 2002). Studies have shown that engaging in activities can be important bonding opportunities that help solidify the relationship and provide the comfort mentees need for open communication (Britner et al., 2006). In addition, greater support from program coordinators and organizations and adequate training have also been shown to contribute to mentor confidence (Parra et al., 2002).

Other factors that have been shown to facilitate strong mentorships include healthy attachment, social support, feeling accepted by the mentor, perceived relationship quality and satisfaction, and the motivation and commitment levels of both parties (Britner et al., 2006; Keller, 2005a). Researchers and program coordinators can use these characteristics to understand and evaluate the mentorship as well as aid in matching mentors and mentees. These described factors have been identified as ways to initiate and maintain the mentor relationship during regular circumstances, but it is unclear whether such characteristics are vulnerable or impacted by the pandemic. What remains unclear is how these aspects of the mentor relationship apply in the context of the pandemic and the challenges associated with it.

Mentor Traits and Characteristics

Research shows a sense of trust, efficacy, security, and closeness facilitates communication and bonding (Keller, 2005a). These aspects have also been shown to predict greater perceived benefits of mentorship, a greater sense of bonding and connection, and the likelihood of the relationship continuing (Parra et al., 2002). Previous research has identified

mentor characteristics, including mentor self-efficacy, self-confidence, skills in establishing a good interpersonal relationship, and communication skills, are related to the mentor's likelihood to take the initiative and maintain frequent communication with their mentee and contributes to a positive and supportive relationship (Erdem et al., 2016). These traits also indicate a dedicated mentor to the youth, which also makes the mentees more motivated and engaged as a result (Parra et al., 2002). The mentor's internal thoughts and motivations are also important to understand as these can lead to mentor engagement, communication, and consistency in the relationship and allow for positive youth development (Erdem & Aytemur, 2008). How the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted mentors has yet to be analyzed in detail. For example, aspects that have not been focused on in research include the transition to online services, return to in-person services, mentor mental health, and what strengths and challenges were specifically experienced during this process. The current project draws on several theoretical frameworks (described below) to inform the research questions and methodology.

Keller's 5 Stages of Development of Youth Mentoring Relationships

Keller's (2005a) model of youth mentorship development describes five stages. The first is *contemplation* which consists of preparing for the relationship and the recruitment, training, and screening process when selecting potential mentors. Key aspects in this stage include motivation, goals of mentorship, and expectations. Once mentors and mentees have been matched, they can proceed to the *initiation* stage where individuals get to know each other, become comfortable with one another, and begin to build the relationship. Mentor traits that can be crucial for this stage and the subsequent mentorship building include patience, approachability, and similarity between mentor and mentee so they can build connections and find common interests to begin bonding (Spiekermann et al., 2020). Once a relationship has been

built, it can be sustained and foster further improvement in the *growth and maintenance* phase. In this stage, regular contact is crucial as well as consistency and finding activities that can facilitate their meetings. This phase can be maintained for as long as both parties want to continue the relationship and feel the benefits of the mentorship. Should this decline, Keller (2005a) proposes the relationship can start to break down and lead to the *decline and dissolution* stage. The relationship can start to dissolve depending on the mentor's approach to the relationship, their consistency in their communication and meetings with their mentee, their ability to address any challenges in the relationship or support their mentee, the mentor's mental health factors, and mentee contributions to the relationship. This can also occur if there is a lack of open communication, trust building, and satisfaction in the activities conducted in the mentorship meetings. However, should this occur, mentors and mentees can recover and resume their relationship undergoing the *redefinition* stage, or when new expectations and goals are set. Or, depending on the needs of the mentee and if the mentor is no longer available or able to continue in their role, the mentee can be re-matched, but this can often be discouraging and frustrating for the mentee, especially if they have already experienced inconsistency and instability in their lives which can also cause further repercussions in their development and wellbeing (Drew et al., 2020; Keller, 2005a).

The pandemic can cause any or several of these stages to be disrupted, resulting in the decline and dissolution phase. For example, the initiation stage can be difficult during COVID-19 as meeting virtually or sparingly can make it difficult to form a bond and build good communication. The growth and maintenance phase can also be difficult during the pandemic if this stage heavily relies on using common interests and activities as well as frequent communication to maintain a bond. Stress from the pandemic and other barriers, such as access

to technology during virtual mentorship, can also make this phase challenging, highlighting the importance of understanding and identifying aspects of the mentor relationship to prevent this breakdown of the relationship from occurring.

Socio-Motivational Mentorship Models

Another model of youth mentorship includes the socio-motivational model, which describes the links between key characteristics of mentor relationships, including motivation, goals, and outcomes of the mentorship (Britner et al., 2006). This model stresses the importance of the mentor's competence, relatability to their mentee, and sense of autonomy, as these have been shown to be moderators of the impact the mentorship can have on youth (Britner et al., 2006). Dubois and Karcher (2014) also developed a model of youth mentoring and a handbook on youth mentoring in which they describe how a mentor can greatly impact several facets of the youth's life, including socio-emotional well-being, identity development, and academic progress. This model further demonstrates the importance of mentorships, and that understanding the mentor's influence and how their characteristics affect the relationship is crucial to help support these individuals and optimize the relationship itself. This model shows that understanding the mentor's mindset and motivation and supporting them so they can help promote their mentee's wellness and development is crucial. It also highlights how a mentor approaches the relationship and caters to their mentee's needs can affect many different facets of the youth's life, including their personal growth and academic achievement. However, this model does not identify how the relationship impacts the mentor themselves and how they can benefit from the mentorship, despite external stressors such as the pandemic. Several stressors associated with the pandemic (e.g., financial issues, isolation, lack of resources) may have decreased mentors' motivation and

ability to emotionally support their mentees if they are also going through tribulations. These theories are important as they emphasize the role of the mentor.

Facilitated Attuned Interactions Model

A conceptual model that has been more recently applied to mentoring theories is the Facilitated Attuned Interactions or FAN model (Gilkerson & Pryce, 2021). This theory describes how mentor and mentee communication, interaction, and engagement can progress throughout the relationship. It has been shown to be especially helpful in the early phases of mentorship and even across various settings, including early interventions and healthcare (Gilkerson & Pryce, 2021). This model discusses five main aspects that may impact the relationship, including centering or calming oneself, listening to feelings, exploring ideas and thoughts together, supporting and facilitating action in the relationship (e.g., engaging in activities together), and reflecting on the relationship. This model highlights how these five aspects relate to expectations and needs of the mentor, mentee, and organization that facilitate the relationship (Gilkerson & Pryce, 2021). The model also outlines the importance of self-awareness, conscious effort being made in the relationship, and reflection. Hence, these aspects may be important for mentors in their mentorships especially during stressful situations like during the pandemic and programs can implement these models in their mentor training sessions to better the relationship between mentors and mentees and help mentors feel more prepared.

Impact of COVID-19 on Mentorships

The Role of Mentors

Mentorship can be mistakenly viewed as a unidirectional relationship in which the mentor provides emotional support and guidance for a mentee; however, the relationship can, in fact, be bidirectional in some respects. Bowers et al. (2016) assessed 415 pairs of mentors and

mentees in the US to understand the dyadic nature of mentorship, specifically in terms of the youth's development of self-regulating behaviours. While this study focused on self-regulation, researchers did find that the development of this trait is a bidirectional process and the mentoring relationship and youth's ability to self-regulate impact one another. However, it is unclear if other traits have bidirectional relationships with mentorship or if the mentorship itself is bidirectional in nature, with the mentor guiding and impacting the youth they are supporting and vice versa. Studies have shown that mentors also greatly benefit from this relationship in terms of their mental well-being, learning from their mentee, positive benefits from their altruism, and feeling a sense of community (Erdem et al., 2016). Given this potentially bidirectional nature of the relationship, mentors' stress and emotional problems can also impact the relationship and listening to their mentee's concerns and providing such emotional support may be draining if mentors are not given sufficient support (Drew et al., 2020; Erdem et al., 2016). This may be the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which mentorships have been shown to provide a crucial service that has helped ease the mental health concerns of both teens and young adults (van Dam et al., 2021). However, the specific impact of mentoring during the pandemic on the mentors has yet to be well understood. In addition, most research on youth mentorship has focused on the impacts on the mentees with little focus on how these relationships impact mentors (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; van Dam et al., 2020). This aspect of mentorship is particularly important given that mentors themselves may be susceptible to external stressors, including financial difficulties, health issues, mental health, access to care, and other COVID-19 related impacts (Samji et al., 2021). Understanding how these relationships have changed over the pandemic through mentors' perspectives will inform the development of supports and services for both youth and mentors.

Mentorships have continued to be an important means of support during the COVID-19 pandemic thus far, with many continuing their mentoring relationships through an in-person or online format (Kaufman et al., 2022). In the early stages of the pandemic (i.e., Fall 2020), Craig and colleagues (2021) conducted an online survey in collaboration with BBBSC to understand how COVID-19 has impacted mentees. Of the 684 youth in the survey, 170 identified as BBBSC youth (M age = 15.05, SD = 1.59). Among BBBSC youth, results showed that more frequent contact between mentor and mentee was associated with decreased depression, anxiety and substance use and feelings of greater connection and support from their mentor during the pandemic. Seventy percent of BBBSC youth reported regular contact with their mentors and feeling comfortable speaking with their mentor virtually (Craig et al., 2021). Given low response rates and high attrition over time, a qualitative follow-up study was co-developed to gain a more in-depth view of mentor and mentee experiences.

COVID-19 and Mentors

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, young adults have had less access to resources, education and job opportunities, support systems, and regular routines, all of which have shown to be strong predictors for healthy behaviours and mental wellness (van Dam et al., 2021; Samji et al., 2021). Mentors may be susceptible to external stressors that might impact their relationship and can also be affected by the relationship itself. Indeed, higher levels of depression in mentors have been shown to predict lower mentorship satisfaction and greater avoidance of engaging in the relationship (Preston & Raposa, 2020). A time of isolation such as the pandemic with social distancing rules in place, lockdowns and closures can significantly increase feelings of loneliness and limit a sense of connection with others or community. Young adults may also be taking on additional responsibilities including pursuing post-secondary

education, living alone for the first time, being a young parent with children, or living with and supporting their parents (Samji et al., 2021). Survey data has shown that teens and young adults have experienced a staggering decrease in mental health during COVID-19. For example, Hawke et al. (2020) sampled youth ($n = 622$) ages 14-28 ($M = 20.6$, $SD = 2.4$) from both clinical samples and in the general community in Ontario and found 68.4% of youth in the clinical sample and 39.9% in the community sample met screening criteria for internalizing disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety), 23.2% of youth in the clinical sample and 3% in the community sample met screening criteria for a substance use disorder, and 48.7% of the clinical sample and 10.8% of the community sample reported disruptions in their mental health care and services. Participants also reported increased suicidal and self-harm thoughts and unmet support needs. In addition, British Columbia (BC) research shows service utilization increased in the first months of the pandemic, with monthly visits to virtual healthcare services for youth ages 12-24 increasing from 24 to over 260. Almost 90% of youth stated that they were in a great deal of distress during their initial visits (Foundry, 2020).

In the context of mental health challenges, it may be difficult for mentors to continue to support their mentees effectively. Little focus has been dedicated to understanding how mentors have experienced the pandemic and what unique barriers or challenges they may have faced. Supporting mentors who provide such a crucial service and finding ways to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 is important in order to help these young adults as well as improve the quality of the mentor relationship (Galea et al., 2020). The first objective of this proposed study is to understand how COVID-19 impacted mentors and their ability to support their mentees. In order to achieve the first objective, we will examine mentors' experiences of the pandemic regarding

mental health and wellbeing and their perspectives on the potential impact to the mentorship relationship.

Transition to Virtual Mentorship

Public health guidelines, social distancing, and school closures caused mentoring programs to quickly adapt to an online format in order to maintain support during the pandemic (Haynes et al., 2020). For example, a British Columbia (BC) community-based mental health resource completed a report in 2020 to assess the number of youth accessing their mental health services and programs and surveyed 287 youth to get feedback on their experiences accessing these services. Reports showed a sharp increase in accessing mental health services from Foundry by young people ages 12-25. This centre implemented virtual services during the pandemic, and 92.7% of youth who accessed these options reported that they would use it again. Youth also reported difficulty accessing online healthcare services, including in the appointment-making process and the quality of care they were provided (Foundry, 2021). Youth who identified as gender diverse, homeless, immigrant or in low-income families had even more difficulty in this process and reported worsened mental health (Foundry, 2021). Online access may be further complicated for youth who may not have access to reliable internet or technology, have a safe space to communicate with their mentor/mentee, or feel that technology does not provide the same sense of connection as an in-person format (Kaufman, 2017). Virtual mentorship can also be difficult if there is a lack of planning and organization from the mentor and program that can help ease the transition to keep both individuals engaged.

Yet, some studies have shown that mentorships were able to successfully transition to an online format during the early period of the pandemic when mentors were given resources and virtual support from their mentoring organization to help facilitate these meetings (Kaufman et

al., 2022). For example, Kaufman and colleagues (2022) conducted six online focus groups with 39 mentors during the pandemic. Text responses were analyzed through thematic analysis. Kaufman and colleagues (2022) found that most mentors provided consistent and frequent support, especially during the beginning of the pandemic. Researchers also noted that mentors maintained the same level of communication as before the pandemic using different methods, including text and phone calls. Mentors also noted obstacles experienced with virtual mentorship, including access to technology and privacy concerns. During the pandemic, mentors were also greatly concerned for their mentee's well-being (e.g., mental health, academics, financial difficulties, and access to basic needs and resources), which added to their own stress (Kaufman et al., 2022). Virtual mentorship was a necessary change for many programs and services to maintain support during the pandemic and may continue to be used to increase accessibility and convenience. Therefore, the second objective of this study is to identify barriers and facilitators of mentorships during the pandemic, including how mentors experienced connecting virtually.

Compatibility and Mentorship

Inequity and Access to Resources

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted marginalized youth (Haynes et al., 2020). In this study, we define inequity as the “difference in distribution or allocation of resources between groups” (Klein & Huang, 2010; pg. 8). Low-income communities and those who identify as a racial minority have faced increased unemployment rates, lack of access to computers and internet, and difficulties working from home (Albert et al., 2020). In addition, young adults who identify as a racial/ethnic minority, sexual minority, or those with disabilities have experienced increased rates of loneliness, feeling different, and a lack of safe or positive spaces (Samji et al.,

2021). These inequities can have a direct impact on mentoring relationships. For example, research focusing on mentorship within minority communities has shown some evidence that sharing cultural identities with a mentor can be impactful and beneficial for mentees including building a greater sense of trust and companionship with the mentor (Darling et al., 2006). However, how the compatibility of shared cultural identities between mentors and mentees impacts the relationship remains unclear. There is also some evidence that differing cultural identity is not necessarily crucial or an inhibitor in mentorships. Other aspects of the relationship are also important, such as shared interests, respect, and mentor's ability to support their mentee (Grossman & Bulle, 2006). Therefore, the importance placed on shared race/ethnicity and how that impacts matches has yet to be conclusive as this has varied across research studies thus far as research has shown this aspect is helpful and can facilitate a relationship but is not always necessary or vital to a successful relationship.

The financial stress the pandemic has placed on individuals across different populations, particularly in minority communities, is also important to recognize as an impacting factor on mentorships (Tai et al., 2021). The transition to virtual mentorship emphasized the need for access to technology and a stable WIFI connection. There was also a greater need to find activities that can be done virtually to facilitate the virtual mentorship experience. This may create financial strain and added cost for families who may not have the technological devices and reliable internet connection needed to facilitate online interactions (Cortés-García et al., 2022). BBBSC often support youth from low-income families and encourages mentorships to find low to no-cost activities which may have been challenging during virtual mentorship (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., "FAQ").

Shared Interests

Fit and compatibility between mentors and mentees can be crucial for creating successful mentorships (Liang & Grossman, 2007). BBBS agencies have matching coordinators who are caseworkers that review volunteer mentor applications along with profiles of youth waiting for a mentor and try to match them based on compatibility, background, personality, what they are looking for in a mentorship, and similar interests and hobbies (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., “FAQ”). Though similar interests are not the sole determinant of a good match, it can often help facilitate and maintain a positive connection. Having some kind of common ground can help propel a conversation and relationship forward between mentors and mentees. Research has shown that mentorships can form quicker and easier if shared interests are identified (Grossman & Bulle, 2006). Shared interests are also one of the few aspects of a mentorship that have been shown to predict a mentorship’s ability to be maintained. Grossman and Rhodes (2002) examined 1138 young adults from urban areas (M age= 12.25) who applied to Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs. By comparing youth with and without mentors over an 18-month period, characteristics of the youth and mentor, compatibility, similarity in race, and shared interests predicted the duration and strength of these relationships. These findings suggest that shared interests can help at the initial stage of the mentorship development and in maintaining these connections over time. However, it is unclear if there is a greater sense of importance placed on shared interests over sharing other characteristics such as shared cultural identities and how compatibility in these areas affects mentorships.

Diversity

Diversity in this project was defined as the “range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class,

physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs” (Ferris State University, n.d.). Demographic factors such as race/ethnicity, disability, culture, interpersonal history, and developmental stage of mentors and mentees have been shown to moderate a mentor’s ability to facilitate a positive relationship and increase mentorship satisfaction (Britner et al., 2006; Rhodes, 2002). As such, there has been a great value placed on promoting diversity of mentors, with BBBSC and their NYMAC council promoting the importance of having mentors of colour and celebrating diversity in mentoring (BBBSC, n.d., “Celebrating Diversity in Mentoring”; BBBSC, n.d., “Modeling Black Excellence in Mentoring Relationships”). One agency of BBBSC in the Peel/York region in Ontario also has a Black Mentoring program which actively promotes Black mentors and matches them with Black youth (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., “Our Programs”). Although BBBSC agencies attempt to match mentors and mentees with similar backgrounds to foster greater connections, this is not always realistically possible, depending on the volunteers the agencies have and the youth who sign up for the program and youth of colour are often matched with a mentor who identify as White due to the lack of available mentors of colour in mentoring programs (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., “FAQ”; Spencer, 2007). This can have important consequences for the mentoring relationship.

For example, Raposa et al. (2019) analyzed data from 9803 Big Brother Big Sister matches in the United States, including information on the youth and mentors’ demographics, preferred activities and interests and reasons for closure if the match ended. The authors found that mentors and mentees of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds or a shared dislike of certain activities were more likely to have a longer mentorship. However, BBBSC has attempted to increase the number of mentors of colour through programs in some agencies that actively recruit

Black mentors to match with Black youth (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., “Our Programs”). There is limited data on the percentage of mentors who are racially or ethnically diverse in Canada. However, one agency of Big Brothers Big Sisters America reported that 72% of their mentees are individuals of colour, and only 15% of mentors are individuals of colour (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Mass and MetroWest, n.d.).

Diversity in mentorship, not only in terms of race or ethnicity but also in multiple social identities, can facilitate further understanding of issues related to the youth’s diverse backgrounds (Liang & Grossman, 2007). The images that young children see, whom they interact with, and the role models they have growing up can be immensely powerful modes of building their sense of identity and greater psychosocial functioning (Yancey et al., 2002). Mentors of diverse backgrounds including those who identify as people of colour can be especially helpful for youth of similar backgrounds so they can have a mentor they identify with, benefit further from their guidance, more familiar and understanding of the youth’s experiences, provide advice that is culturally aware, and understanding of barriers the youth faces and best ways to be of support (Spencer, 2007). Perceived similarities in identities between mentors and mentees has also been shown to increase satisfaction in mentorships from mentees (Liang & Grossman, 2007). A survey of 2838 youth across Canada found that compared to 39% of all participants, 54% of the Black youth participants had greater adverse life circumstances. Black youth in this survey who had mentorship as teens reported more positive mental health outcomes, earned a secondary school diploma, and had greater educational and occupational opportunities compared to Black youth who were without mentors (Mentor Canada, 2020). Hence, having diverse mentors available to youth and considering differing and similar identities

in mentors and mentees can be important for understanding the long-term outcomes of mentorship.

Differing backgrounds between mentors and mentees are also an important factor to consider in terms of compatibility, ability to find common interests and understanding mentees' concerns. Youth mentorships can involve mentees from vulnerable populations, including abused or neglected youth, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting teens, juvenile offenders, or students with academic difficulties (Britner et al., 2006). In addition, youth from racial and gender minorities are less likely to receive such supports or access to mentorship programs but those who do often report being satisfied with the relationship if it is consistent and provides positive development (van Dam et al., 2021). Mentees from these vulnerable populations are more likely to be concerned with being rejected by their mentor, worry about the mentorship ending early, and have insufficient support or understanding from their mentor (Britner et al., 2006). Hence, ensuring a good match, providing adequate training to mentors, and the mentor's ability to initiate and maintain the relationship is crucial.

Identifying inequities and unique challenges for racial and gender minorities is an important first step to addressing them. Qualitative research on youth mentorships with Indigenous youth has shown the long-term benefits of mentoring for both parties involved. This includes high reports of benefits to oneself, improved relationships with friends and family, and greater cultural connections (Coyne-Foresi et al., 2019). Marginalized communities in particular, such as those who identify as a racial or ethnic minority, have a long history of lack of access to resources and opportunities and can especially benefit from such community programs. Improving cultural connections and celebrating one's personal background and culture has been identified as a particular benefit to mentors and mentees who identify as a racial/ethnic minority

(Coyne-Foresi et al., 2019). It is important to identify any barriers or challenges these individuals faced, ways to lessen the sense of inequity they may have been feeling, as well as ways to support them. This information can help facilitate improvements to mentoring program, lessen attrition, and help maximize the potential benefits of mentorship. Therefore, a third objective of this project will be to address the impact of diversity (e.g., racial and gender minorities) and inequities (e.g., lack of computer or internet access) on mentoring relationships.

Overall, there is a limited amount of research that focuses on the mentor's experiences, especially in the context of the pandemic. Findings thus far have been general and limited in terms of what is known about the mentor's perspectives and experiences in the relationship. The research done thus far is largely theoretical in terms of modelling the mentoring relationship or discussing the impacts of mentorship on measurable outcomes for the mentee such as mental health and school performance. And although these are of course important areas of research that have also been crucial to the development of this project as well, there is still less of a focus on the mentor's experiences in mentorships as well as how a look at the qualitative context of what occurs in the relationships, what it is like, and feedback from the mentors on what has helped them develop their mentorships despite any adversities they experienced.

The Present Study

In partnership with BBBSC, the overall goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how and why COVID-19 has impacted mentoring relationships for youth and their mentors. My thesis explored three main objectives:

- 1) Understand how COVID-19 and associated stressors impacted the mentor's ability to support youth and the experiences as mentors
- 2) Identify barriers and facilitators of mentorship relationships during COVID-19

including virtual mentorship

3) Assess the impact of inequity on youth mentorship relationships, including the role of compatibility and diversity between youth and mentors

Method

Participants

In partnership with BBBSC, 20 mentors (ages 18+) were recruited to participate in qualitative interviews. In order to recruit a diverse sample, a brief survey (see Appendix A) was used for equitable representation of participants, particularly participants who identify as a racial or gender minority. A link to the brief recruitment survey was sent to BBBSC agency leaders to distribute to mentors from their region. Potential participants received a \$5 gift card for completing the brief recruitment survey. Eligible participants included those who have had an active mentorship and a relationship for longer than three months at the time they responded to the survey. To be able to ask about mentorship experiences during the pandemic, only participants who had a mentorship up to March 2022 were selected.

Purposive Sampling

Importance was placed on purposeful and representative sampling to allow for typically underrepresented communities to be included as much as possible. Purposive sampling allowed us to select participants with distinct experiences in their mentorships in order to provide variety in the kind of experiences and insights of interest in this study (Cherif et al., 2012). This type of sampling also allows us to attempt to be as representative in our sample as possible (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Attempts were made to include 50% of participants who identified as male and 50% female, and at least 50% non-White or racial and gender diverse individuals. In our first selection of participants, we randomly selected 10 mentors who identified as White and 10 who

identified as non-White to allow for representation of these communities. After allowing time for responses to our invitation to participate in the interview and follow-up emails, we continued with random selection from across our sample pool. Randomly selected participants were interviewed on a first come, first serve basis. Based on the survey responses, no participants identified as a gender minority and most potential participants identified as women which did not allow for purposive sampling based on gender.

Procedure

Participatory Research and BBBSC Partnership

Recruitment material was sent to four BBBSC agencies. Leaders from four agencies, along with the Senior Director of Program and Impact, met to discuss project goals and help develop interview questions in the Spring and Summer of 2022. These four agency leaders received compensation for support in developing interview questions and for advertising our study to their agencies. In addition, a youth advisory was created through BBBSC's NYMAC; a group of youth from across Canada who provide consultation and feedback on projects (Youthprise, 2015). The youth advisory team met in Summer 2022 to provide insight and feedback on drafted interview questions. The advisory reconvened following data collection in Summer of 2023 to aid in the interpretation of results and advise on how to disseminate findings (Bala & Houston, 2015; BBBSC, n.d., "Youth Advisory Council"). Meetings were conducted over Zoom and members of this advisory will be compensated \$100 for attending at least 75% of the meetings, including meetings in the future on the mentee data. These meetings help create a collaborative project to prioritize the needs and insights of participants and facilitators of BBBSC's mentoring program, reduce assumptions and bias from researchers in developing and implementing the research design, provide context and a unique understanding of the results of

the interviews as well as increasing the potential implications and meaningful impact of this study.

Interviewers

I contacted and corresponded with all potential participants through a secure UVic email address associated with the project. I also had the support of three research assistants, one from the University of Victoria and two from the University of Guelph who volunteered to support me in the interview process. As the lead Research Assistant on this project and to allow for consistency in all interviews, I was involved in all interviews with participants, but the volunteers led seven of the mentor interviews while I supervised and asked follow-up questions if needed. The volunteers were trained in the qualitative research and interview process (see Appendix C). Training material and procedures were created by myself and reviewed by my supervisors on this project; Dr. Ames and Dr. Craig as well as a professor from the University of Victoria who is an expert on qualitative research, Dr. Fred Chou. Dr. Chou also provided recommendations and guidance throughout the research process including developing interview questions, analytical approach, and interpretation of findings. While my focus was on the mentor interviews, I participated in all interviews with both mentor and mentee participants.

Data Collection

From January to February 2023, semi-structured interviews were developed in partnership with BBBSC agency members and the NYMAC youth advisory. Interviews were conducted with 20 mentors to gather qualitative information about their perspectives on how they felt COVID-19, virtual services and mentorship, and their overall well-being impacted their mentoring relationship (see Interview Questions in Appendix B). A sample of 20-30 participants is considered sufficient for saturation in qualitative research, and we also used purposive

sampling to ensure equitable representation (Mason, 2010). While that number of participants can be an aim for recruitment, we also recognize that saturation is not solely tied to the number of participants. What is considered saturation can vary depending on approach and interpretation of data, especially when considering a reflexive thematic approach focusing on discovery and meaning making (Braun & Clarke, 2021). All interviews were conducted over Zoom, which provides automatic transcription. Participants could choose to have their survey and interview conducted in French or English. Two research assistants were randomly assigned to review each transcript after the interviews were completed to ensure the accuracy of the verbatim scripts. Interviews were expected to take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour, and participants received a \$30 gift card as an incentive. The focus of this thesis is on the mentor interviews. The mentee interviews were conducted in conjunction with the mentor interviews and are still ongoing but were not included in the analysis for this thesis.

Ethics

Ethical approval for this project was provided by the University of Victoria's and University of Guelph's Human Research Ethics Boards (REB Approval Certificate #21-0231 and 22-10-022, respectively). Verbal consent was obtained from mentors before beginning the interview. This project was expected to be only minimal risk to participants and a debrief form was provided at the end of the interview containing mental health resources they can contact as well as contact information for the University of Victoria's Research Ethics Board and principal investigators Dr. Megan Ames and Dr. Stephanie Craig.

Measures

Demographics

A link to a brief survey was sent to the four collaborating BBBSC agencies (i.e., North Vancouver, Colchester, London, and Peel) to distribute to their email lists of mentors and parents of mentees. Two survey were sent out to mentors and parents of mentees which took approximately five minutes to complete (Appendix A). The survey for mentors included the informed consent form and demographic questions asking about age, ethnicity, gender, and education level. The survey described the study, including the interview and confirmed if they would be interested in participating. Items also included questions regarding location of BBSC agency they were from, length of relationship with BBBSC, and frequency of mentee-mentor contact in the past three months (ranging from more than once a week to once every two months). The survey for parents asked these same questions but they answered on behalf of their child and provided parental consent as well as youth consent to be contacted for an interview.

Interview Questions

Interview questions for mentees and mentors are presented in Appendix B. Interviews were semi-structured and asked about the virtual mentoring experience as well as their individual experiences during the pandemic, and experiences of supporting their mentees. Although the focus was on the questions to mentors, mentees were also interviewed. Mentees were also asked questions about their mentorship, perceptions of their relationships, and experiences with virtual mentorship and these discussions were considered in analysis of the mentor data in terms of how it might influence my interpretation and interviews with mentors but were not included in the development of themes in this study.

With the help of leaders from BBSC and youth advisory council, interview questions were developed to ask about experiences during COVID-19, what virtual and in person mentorship was like, and how they were able to adapt or still maintain their relationships. Questions at the beginning asked about the type of mentorship they have including how long they have been mentoring and if they had more than one mentee before to clarify if they are discussing more than one relationship or experience. If mentors did share in the interviews that they had a previous mentorship that ended, we then discussed with them what occurred to lead to that ending and how they felt regarding that. This distinction allowed us to understand if COVID-19 contributed to any relationships that ended or if there were other reasons that made the mentorships difficult to maintain. The order of questions was also important as we discussed the beginning of the relationship and their experience as a volunteer then followed with asking about when COVID-19 occurred and the transition. We then asked about individual experiences, strengths/challenges, and reflections on what they learned and wished they could have had in order to have a more successful mentoring relationship. We also asked about their mentees as well as their own personal experiences during COVID-19 and the impacts that had on themselves and their mentorships.

Analysis

Reflexive/Positionality Statement

Due to the nature of qualitative work and to conduct a reflexive thematic analysis, I wanted to position myself, my own lived experiences, and my perspective to provide context to this paper. I was born in Canada, and my parents immigrated to Ontario from Cairo, Egypt. I come from a traditional, religious family and was raised in an Islamic household but do not consider myself to be a conservative or religious person. I also want to acknowledge that I have

certain privileges as an able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual person who has been able to pursue post-secondary education. I have never had a mentor or have been a mentor myself. I view mentorship, especially youth mentorship, as beneficial as it provides important guidance to kids who may not have strong role models or support otherwise. I tried to enter a mentorship program during my undergraduate degree, but the potential mentor and I lost contact. In terms of my personal experiences with COVID-19, the pandemic began in the fourth year of my undergraduate degree, which became completely online. I was living with my family at the time and was able to continue working and going to school virtually. My family was extremely anxious and concerned about contracting the virus, especially due to my parents' pre-existing health issues. This concern resulted in my family, and I being isolated for a much longer period of time than recommended by public health guidelines at the time. I am personally pro-vaccine and ensured myself and my family received it as quickly as possible including multiple boosters when available. I was also very compliant with public health and safety protocols including social distancing and mask-wearing. As a visible minority myself, I believed that my background can also be considered a strength in how I conduct interviews and the subsequent analysis. There was a possibility that participants in the interview process may be more open about their lived experiences in seeing someone they can identify with and who may understand them conducting the interviews. There were, in fact, instances where mentors of colour discussed specific examples with me about their personal experiences as well as what it was like supporting a mentee of colour, which I believed contributed to the richness of the themes as well as depth and rapport in the interview process.

Although I did not have hypotheses in this qualitative approach, I recognized the possibility that my inherent assumptions or hopes of what we would find in these interviews may

impact my analysis. I assumed that the pandemic would have caused challenges in some way for all mentorships and was approaching this project from the lens that we needed to identify the issues and what needs to be worked on for the sake of these mentors and mentees. It was not until we reviewed our interview questions with our youth advisory that they pointed out how we should recognize and ask about their strengths and what went well during the pandemic. I also assumed that many participants would prefer in-person mentoring as there is usually a preference for an in-person connection, and many around me had felt exhausted from using online communication tools like Zoom during the pandemic, myself included. In discussions with our youth advisory and agency leaders, we kept the interview questions more neutral and open and also asked about aspects of the mentoring relationship they were interested in, such as what went well and what they learned about each other during this time. Hence, I do not think my previous assumptions skewed or impacted the interviews or theme development due to the guidance and consultation of our research partners.

Analytical Approach

Thematic analysis was chosen as it allowed for an exploration and subsequent refinement of emerging themes with the ability to interpret and infer meanings from what participants shared as well as code their direct discussion of experiences. This approach also allowed us to explore emerging themes both within and across participants to discuss commonalities and shared experiences while still being able to recognize individual lived experiences and perspectives (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Braun and Clarke's 2021 guide to thematic analysis was used which discusses the approach to conducting a reflexive thematic analysis and distinguishes it from other qualitative approaches. They also discuss ways to conduct this analysis in a meaningful way, considerate of how our own backgrounds and experiences may impact our work. In addition, due

to the exploratory nature of this approach and our understanding of how participants' discussion of mentorship can vary based on their social and cultural contexts, a constructivist lens will be used in the analysis. A descriptive review of the transcripts as well as content analysis, was done at the beginning in order to gain a better understanding and refamiliarize myself with the data to help develop the concepts and themes afterwards. Using a reflexive inductive approach, transcripts were reviewed again for emerging codes and themes. Codes and themes were then developed and reviewed with the transcripts. The major themes were also reviewed with our youth advisory and agency leaders in order to get their perspectives and interpretations of our findings. Though an inductive approach was used, interviews with mentees were also being conducted simultaneously with the mentor interviews. Hence, these interviews may have influenced how interview questions in this project were asked and how themes were developed.

Based on a review of the literature, our research team and Dr. Chou discussed the possibility of differential themes emerging between the interviews with mentors who identified as White versus mentors of colour. Differentiating between the various possible themes that could be constructed would also ensure the voices of participants of colour are highlighted and not subsumed in the general themes. In consultation with Dr. Chou, we decided that an appropriate course of action was to group the interviews into two sections; White and non-White mentors in the first review of potential themes in order identify any distinct themes between the two groups. If there were none, then the themes could be merged, and we could then discuss the themes that are formed as a whole. Using this approach, no clear differences in themes or discussion of experiences were found except for some variation in responses on culture with their mentees. Specifically, mentors shared how they could discuss their culture with their mentee because they had that in common, but this only occurred in a few of the interviews with mentors

of colour. The White mentors did not discuss anything related to culture or ethnicity except for one mentor who identified as White who shared that they had a mentee who identified as Black and discussed some of those experiences together, which are further discussed in the results section of this paper. Therefore, the themes were developed from the entire set of interviews and reviewed as a whole, rather than creating separate themes that were distinct across the two groups.

Transcribed interviews were then analyzed using Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis technique, which is a type of thematic analysis that organizes major themes in a structural and representational way (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Nowell et al., 2017). This type of analysis can identify main themes across interviews, such as the barriers and strengths seen in mentor relationships and the individual experiences of both mentors and mentees. Developing thematic networks allows us to identify the structure and connection across themes that arise from the interviews and provide a visual representation of how researchers arrive at major themes from the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). We analyzed responses to all of the mentor questions, including how they communicated and connected with their mentor, strengths and challenges they identified, how they experienced the mentorship during the pandemic, if they had similar values or interests with their mentor and how that impacted the relationship, what their connection with their BBBSC agency was like during the pandemic (see Appendix B). NVivo was used to facilitate this analysis.

To develop the thematic network, major principal codes that were present across interviews were identified and additional themes found in the interviews were also highlighted. Once themes were coded and extracted from interview transcripts, they were then placed in three different levels; basic themes which are then distilled into organizing themes, and finally global

themes (Rambaree et al., 2021). Figure 1 demonstrates how this network is developed. This technique allows us to systematically identify and report themes in our research and create visual representations of the interconnections and structure between themes (Rambaree, 2018). The developed themes and subthemes were reviewed by the youth advisory and agency leaders supporting our project to help with interpretation and understanding of the themes. This process provided important context and perspective which is extremely helpful in participatory research.

Results

Demographics

Although recruitment material was sent to four agencies across Canada, only two agencies participated in recruitment. The 20 selected participants ranged in age from 20 to 70, with a mean age of 33.2 ($SD = 12.4$). Thirteen participants (65%) identified themselves as White, four (20%) participants identified as Black and/or Caribbean, two (10%) identified as Middle Eastern, and one (2%) as South Asian. Participants were split evenly in terms of gender, with 50% identifying as men and 50% as women. No mentors identified as any other gender identity. One mentor had a high school diploma, while the remainder had post-secondary education, including college diplomas or undergraduate degrees.

Global Themes

After coding and developing a thematic network, five global themes were generated including a) impact of COVID-19, b) preference for in-person mentoring, c) benefits of mentoring, d) external supports, and e) compatibility which are discussed below along with subthemes and quotes from participants that illustrate the themes (see Figure 2). A table illustrating the full thematic network is also included in the Supplemental Materials section.

Theme 1: Impact of COVID-19

Mentoring relationships persevered over personal impacts and differing values of the pandemic (i.e. views on public health policies, mask-wearing, vaccines, etc.). Many mentors described their personal experiences and difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic but that they still felt their mentorships were strong and successful. Some examples included financial difficulties, educational disruptions, isolation, fatigue, stress, and mental health concerns. We also asked if mentors were aware of any personal impacts the pandemic had on their mentees and participants described how their mentees also had disruptions to their education, experiences of isolation and transition to online schooling. Mentors also noted difficulties with virtual schooling and some participants described how their mentees had a learning disability or were part of the neurodivergent community which made the lack of support with schooling and transition to online school difficult. Participants also explained how mentees were also facing a hard time with isolation and experienced mental health concerns such as anxiety as well as pandemic-related concerns such as fears of they or their families becoming ill. However, despite these concerns, mentors noted the resiliency they saw in their mentees and how seeing that trait that in the youth inspired mentors to overcome personal difficulties experienced during the pandemic:

“He [the mentee] definitely made a very good impression on me, and definitely was a big part of why I kinda got out of that funk, mental health-wise, 'cause he's just a very, very energetic kid, and just very, very nice. So, it was very hard for me to be down in the dumps when I was trying to engage with him. So, that was a very good thing.”-MO09

When asked about their and their mentee’s COVID-19 values (i.e. how each of them feel about social distancing, mask wearing, and vaccines), a majority of mentors felt they and their mentees’ values aligned. However, some mentors noted that their mentee adopted their parents’

and families' points of view regarding things such as mask-wearing and vaccines so some mentee and/or their families were not vaccinated or did not wish to wear face masks. Despite this difference in values, mentors explained how this difference was not felt to be an obstacle or cause of friction in their relationship. Having open conversations about how mentors and mentees each feel about vaccines and masks and respecting each other's decisions allowed them to move forward in their relationship:

"I was somebody who got the vaccine, was and really still am big on masking, and social distancing. And they [mentee's family] weren't. But they were very respectful of my decision, just as I was respectful of theirs...It was just something that we opened up conversation about, because I think that was really important, that everybody was just dealing with the pandemic in their own different way. And so just trying to be respectful of each other's decisions as much as possible." - MO18

Theme 2: Virtual Mentoring

There was a strong preference for in-person mentoring due to issues with virtual options and a lack of connection from the virtual experience. While it was understood that switching to virtual mentoring was a necessary transition during social isolation, mentors did notice that it was difficult to engage with their mentees and find ways to maintain their relationships virtually. It is worth noting that their perspective on virtual mentoring did vary based on whether they have a long-standing relationship with their mentee that became virtual temporarily or if they were matched during the pandemic and had the beginning or majority of their relationship online. For those who had known their mentee for a long time or with an older mentee, they felt that virtual mentoring was a temporary inconvenience that they were able to get through and return to in-person mentoring easily. Mentors who were matched with their mentees during the pandemic

noted they found it uncomfortable or difficult to meet their mentees for the first time virtually and find ways to engage with them through online means. Almost all of the mentors interviewed noted that they preferred in-person mentoring to virtual and would not wish to return to virtual mentoring. Some mentors did state that they would be fine with using virtual mentoring again if necessary, such as if they or their mentee were sick. One mentor explained that they currently use a hybrid option with their mentee as they have recently moved, so virtual mentoring provides them with the option to stay connected with their mentee more often than they would be able to otherwise.

As illustrated in the quote below, there appears to be value in engaging in in-person interactions and activities. Reasons for this preference for in-person mentoring over virtual included being able to connect better with their mentee in person, being able to perceive and use body language more easily to show they are listening and engaged, being able to participate in activities such as sports or attending events that they could not do virtually, and a lack of motivation and engagement when using virtual tools. Online activities such as video games were used, but mentors found they and their mentee often felt “Zoomed out” or fatigued from using virtual tools, especially during the pandemic when most or all of their other interactions with others were virtual as well such as school or connecting with peers:

“It was difficult because we could only communicate virtually. So, you couldn’t get that face-to-face interaction. We couldn’t go out and do things, and, you know, participate in activities in real life. We were limited to video games, or, you know, doing our projects through a computer screen. So, it was difficult.” -MO16

Another noted reason for the preference for in-person was difficulty accessing and using technology. Some mentors had difficulty using different virtual platforms or online games, which

further limited how they were able to connect with their mentees. Mentors also described how their mentees occasionally had difficulties accessing personal computers or phones and had an unstable WIFI connection. Some mentors explained how their mentee did not have their own laptops for use in schooling or their mentorship, and another explained how their mentee often broke their cell phones which inhibited them from communicating with one another. Other mentees used a shared computer in their household or did not have a private space. Mentors explained how it was sometimes difficult to connect and share on a deeper level in those situations as boundaries and privacy became an issue. For example, one mentor explained how their mentee's younger siblings often joined their video or phone calls. While they enjoyed meeting them and seeing how their mentee interacted with their family, the interruptions were difficult to adjust to at times and the mentor described how both they and their mentee felt they could not speak as openly as they would if they were in person. Another mentor felt that their mentee shared less when they were doing virtual mentorship out of concern of their parents overhearing them share things they only wanted to express to their mentor. Other concerns related to access/use of technology were a lack of activities they could easily do virtually and noting a difference between the level of engagement and motivation the mentees had when engaging in online activities versus in-person ones. The difficulties experienced with using the technology they had available unfortunately took time and energy away from the mentoring session and caused some frustration:

“There was a lot of disconnecting and reconnecting. So, it just kind of took the fun out of it. So, she was like, ‘you know what, I can't be bothered’. We ended up just wrapping our session early for that time. I think that even now, I know that's still an issue...I do feel that there's some issues with access” –MO07

Theme 3: Benefits of Mentoring

Mentors felt many personal benefits, especially during the pandemic and felt well-matched and strong bonds with their mentees. Several mentors described how they were able to benefit from the act of being a mentor. For example, how they learned something new from their mentees, such as a new online game/tool or life lessons, or how to stay positive and flexible during troubling times. Mentors noted how they saw their mentees overcome difficult experiences with the pandemic and demonstrated resiliency. Some participants described their mentorship as a “dual” or “symbiotic” relationship, demonstrating how they felt they are not only providing support to their mentee but the youth is also contributing something to the relationship, and the mentor feels personal benefits from this dynamic. Mentors also expressed that being a mentor was especially helpful when experiencing the mental health impacts of the pandemic. There was a noted closeness and connection felt by the mentors with their mentees. Many described how they felt like friends or family with their mentee and the mentee’s family. There were also mentors who explained that, although BBSC programming technically ends the mentorship once the youth turns 18 years old, some mentorships have continued past that age, and they are still in contact with one another. Those whose mentees are still below that age also described how they intend to stay in their mentees lives even after the mentee becomes an adult. This commitment and closeness demonstrates the strength in the mentoring bond and alliance developed and the long-term impact that positive youth mentoring can have. Although being a mentor during the pandemic was at times stressful, participants expressed that they found it beneficial and they were able to learn from their experience as illustrated in the quote below:

“Getting to see the way they would go about supporting somebody with something. I’m that person they’re supporting. That’s where I kind of see that dual relationship, it’s

mutually beneficial, they're teaching me something...if they're having a challenging time with math or something, and I can relate to that, and we can talk about challenges I had when I was in school, and how I overcame them. So, both of us are getting to learn from each other.”-MO39

“it's funny, like I'm supposed to teach him, but I learned so much from him. I probably learned as much from him than he has for me, which is the symbiotic relationship, which I love.” -MO33

Theme 4: External Supports

Findings suggested that support systems outside of the mentorship itself, including from caregivers and agencies, can be crucial for mentorship, especially in the beginning stages of and during the pandemic. While mentorship involves the mentor and mentee bonding and engaging in activities together, external support systems helped to facilitate and develop the relationship. Mentors discussed that their assigned matching coordinator from their BBBSC agency helped connect them to their mentee and would check-in frequently on the relationship. Participants described how their matching coordinators would keep in frequent contact with them and their mentees, especially during the pandemic:

“ [BBBSC] were really helpful. There was always a lot of communication, letting us know what the protocols were, what was happening with events during lockdown...and I felt that they were very communicative, which was very helpful. So, it wasn't radio silence. You didn't feel like you were on your own or anything” –MO08

Mentors also described how their BBBSC agency was not only keeping in touch with them regularly, but they also took initiative to provide even more support during the pandemic.

Some examples included increased communication from the agency, updates on public health regulations, ideas for virtual activities, and virtual events. Some also explained how BBBSC provided activity kits, such as art kits that the mentor picked up for themselves and also delivered to their mentee that they then used over Zoom. Mentors found these kits to be a great way to try something new that was not solely on the computer and that they could actively engage in together with their mentees even though they were virtual.

Other supports mentors discussed included the parents of mentees who mentors felt played an important role in the mentoring relationship. Mentors gave examples of how the parents would support the mentorship logistically by helping mentees set up virtual mentoring, find virtual or in-person activities, and remind mentees of appointment times. There was a sense of support and help in the initial phase of the relationship that the parents provided. Participants also found that having a good relationship with the parent was helpful in terms of having more information about their mentee and working together if the mentee was experiencing any difficulties. Some mentors gave examples of how their mentee was shy at the beginning or there were times they would not share if something was bothering them, and the parent helped them become more comfortable with each other or explain if the mentee was experiencing any issues:

“It’s been helpful [having the parent involved], they have often provided suggestions of things that we could do together. My mentee was very, very shy, especially in the beginning of our mentorship, and so the parent was helpful in being kind of a support or a bridge between the two of us to help me understand some of the things that are going on their life, but also kind of prompting my mentee to share some things with me, too, about like school or transitions in their life.” –MO39

Theme 5: Compatibility

Mentors and mentees who felt they had something in common or were similar reported that their relationship was strong and felt a bond with one another. Mentors explained that in the matching process, their coordinators try to match them with a mentee with at least some common interests or similarities. A few mentors described how they could pick from a list of a few mentee profiles that explained their interests and things they enjoyed, and they picked mentees who they felt were similar in some way. Hence, there was a priority for having a mentee they felt they were compatible with or shared similar interests. When asked how their shared interests impact their relationship, mentors discussed that it was often a helpful way of beginning the relationship by allowing them to find common ground, so that they could easily engage in conversation with their mentee and find an activity they would enjoy:

“It definitely made it a lot easier to connect. It felt like we, at least the first time we met online, we at least had like a starting point. So, I think in terms of, like, starting the relationship, that was really helpful. Because I sort of knew that her background was similar to mine. I knew kind of what perspective she was coming from before we were meeting, and that made it a lot easier to connect online.”-MO18

A sense of commonality or similarity with their mentee was felt not only from their shared interests but also from shared identities with their mentees, specifically similar racial or ethnic identities. Mentors who identified as a minority discussed this shared aspect and how both they and their mentees benefited from this kind of bond/commonality. Although we did not directly ask about race or ethnicity or how that impacted their mentorship in the interviews, participants of colour shared that they also had mentees of colour and could discuss their cultural identities and similar lived experiences. One mentor who identified as a person of colour shared

that their mentee was a refugee who recently came to Canada. The mentor supported them as they settled into a new city and shared their experiences with immigration in their first language. The mentor was also able to support their mentee by helping them learn English. Mentors were also able to use their experience to support their mentee if they were having experiencing issues or had similar lived experiences:

“When I first met her, she didn't like to wear her hair out. She has hair similar to you and I [curly]. So, it was like, always in a hood. And then I think when she saw that I was...confident with it she also started doing that, too. So, it's such a huge jump to see her from when I met her to now with embracing her natural curls, and just being herself and being happy with who she is.”-MO42

Additional Relevant Themes

The following were additional themes that were constructed based on the mentor interviews that were not directly related to the research questions for this project or were exceptions to the major themes that were formed but were still interesting to note and be aware of when understanding mentors' perspectives.

Benefits of Virtual Mentoring

While almost all participants had a strong preference for in-person mentoring over virtual, one mentor explained how they saw virtual mentoring as an opportunity to get closer to their mentee. The mentor noted that, when in-person, they often focused on the activity planned for the day and were not engaging in as many in-depth conversations with their mentee. However, once the mentorship transitioned to virtual, there were fewer activities they could or wanted to do virtually, so they spent more time talking. This was seen as an opportunity that allowed them to get to know each other on a deeper level and the mentor felt closer to their

mentee. Some mentors felt that virtual mentoring could still be an option for them to use with their mentee if needed such as if one of them was sick or they were too far away from each other. Hence, there can be some benefit to having a virtual option as a way to strengthen bonds in mentoring relationships and to have an accessible way to connect with mentees if in-person is not possible. Thus, although it was a necessary transition and the majority of mentors interviewed greatly preferred in-person mentoring, the potential benefits and use of virtual options should not be discounted.

Differing Interests

For mentors who felt they were different from their mentees in some ways including have very different interests, mentors noted that they were able to try new things and engage in new activities together rather than allowing those differences to divide them or dissolve their relationship. Being open to trying new things with their mentee allowed them to still engage in their mentorship, and some mentors found that they enjoyed activities that they would not have otherwise and found benefits to trying something new. Mentors described an openness to trying new things from both them and their mentees that allowed them to experience new things together even if they believed they would not like it at first and strengthened their connection as well.

Challenges

While mentors mainly discussed the positives and strengths of their relationships, there were also discussions on the challenges experienced during the pandemic and in their mentorships that are important to learn from. For example, although the focus of this study was on the experiences and perspectives of mentors, participants also described the personal impacts the pandemic had on their mentees that the youth either shared with them or they witnessed

themselves, including increased isolation and the impact on the emotional and social development of youth. Participants with mentees who were more isolated and were not able to engage with peers felt mentees were shy which mentors felt made it harder to engage in conversation and get to know each other at the beginning of their mentorship. However, mentors began to support youth by teaching them interpersonal skills and engaging in conversation to teach them social skills and practice so that they become more comfortable speaking with others. Other challenges experienced by mentors included maintaining consistent communication with their mentees over the course of the pandemic and finding activities they could engage in when in-person and virtually.

Lack of Pandemic Impact

While most shared that the pandemic was a difficult time in at least some ways, there were also mentors who shared that they felt no major changes in their lives or some who even enjoyed the isolation and changes that occurred during the pandemic. For example, some shared how much they enjoyed working from home, and one mentor also stated that they enjoyed the solitude and did not feel the pandemic changed much in their lives. It is important to consider that the mentors who experienced this noted that others around them did not have the same experiences and considered themselves “lucky” at times for not experiencing difficulties related to the pandemic. These mentors also noted that the lack of impact of the pandemic they experienced may be attributed to the fact that they were able to keep their jobs during the pandemic and that they were able to transition to a virtual format more easily. However, these mentors continued to note the personal impacts on their mentees’ lives and that the shift to virtual mentoring was still a transition they experienced with their mentee that was difficult at times.

Mentorship Ending

Although this study only sampled mentors who were in active mentorships, we wanted to recognize that this may not be their only or first mentoring relationship so we could learn more about any previous mentorships that ended and possible reasons for why that occurred. When asked about if there were any mentorships they were in that ended in the past, those who did have previous mentorships attributed the termination to a loss in contact with the mentee or the mentee moving away. One mentor also discussed how their mentee had a previous mentorship that ended due to the mentor changing locations and that was a difficult experience for the youth, highlighting the impact of mentorships that end prematurely.

Sexual Identity

Although we did not ask about gender or sexual diversity in our interviews, one mentor explained how they learned during the pandemic that their mentee was a member of the LGBTQ+ community. This mentor noted acceptance of this identity and added that it does not impact their relationship.

Partner Contributions

After analyzing the themes from the mentor transcripts, we consulted with our youth advisory in Summer 2023 for their input regarding interpretation of the findings. We also asked for their input on potential knowledge dissemination and mobilization strategies to ensure we can use this data fully and understand how to share this information with mentors. Two members of the advisory were consulted individually. These members of the youth advisory expressed that the themes aligned with many of their experiences. The youth provided input regarding organization of the themes, expressing preference to combine the BBBSC agency and parent codes into the theme of external support. The advisory also supported combining shared interests

and diversity themes into a major theme of compatibility. The youth advisory suggested various knowledge mobilization strategies, including utilizing agency email lists to distribute findings to parents and mentors, developing infographics, using social media, and adding findings to e-newsletters. Members of the youth advisory also suggested bringing these findings to their monthly mentoring meetings and training sessions so that other mentors can reflect on these findings and use them as discussion points and things to consider in their own mentorships.

We then met with agency leaders from the Peel/York and London sites from which we recruited our sample and the Senior Director of Program and Impact of BBBSC to share our preliminary findings. Agency leaders shared that the themes we presented resonated with them and that it was affirming and validating that their thoughts and experiences on what occurred with mentorship programs during the pandemic were felt by mentors as well.

Discussion

This study's overall objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on mentoring relationships between youth and their mentors. Specifically, the three main objectives of this project were to: 1) understand how COVID-19 and associated stressors affected mentors' ability to support youth and their experiences as mentors, 2) identify barriers and facilitators of mentorship relationships during COVID-19, including virtual mentorship, and 3) assess the impact of inequity on youth mentorships, including the role of compatibility and diversity between youth and mentors. Five major themes were formed: the impact of COVID-19 on mentoring relationships, the challenges and preferences associated with virtual mentoring, the benefits experienced by mentors, the importance of external supports such as agencies and parents, and the significance of compatibility and shared identities in fostering strong mentorship bonds. These findings demonstrate the importance of voicing the mentor experience in these

relationships, highlighting what mentors value in these relationships, and identifying factors that help facilitate positive mentorship experiences. Understanding the impact of the pandemic and what factors provided supported or challenges to these relationships can help in the development of supports for mentoring relationships, including identifying factors that create a strong match.

Objective 1: Understand the Impact of COVID-19 on Mentors' Experiences

Findings highlight that the pandemic has affected mentors and mentoring relationships in various ways (e.g., financial and mental health impacts). Mentors discussed difficulties in conducting virtual mentoring or providing support to mentees while also experiencing their own mental health difficulties and other COVID-19-related personal impacts. Although these factors can be disruptive and make mentoring difficult, especially for mentorships that began during the pandemic, mentors expressed that the strength of their relationship and the personal qualities of their mentee, including their resiliency, helped them continue in their role and maintain the mentorship. This study highlights the mentors' perspectives that demonstrate the personal benefits of being a mentor, including learning from their mentee and improving their mental health, in the context of the pandemic. There is also a sense of openness to new experiences from the mentors and respect for each other's opinions, such as COVID-19 values, and an easygoing nature from mentees that can help facilitate mentorships according to mentors' testimonies.

Present findings highlight how strong mentorships and connections can be maintained despite external stressors and large shifts in mentorship programs, including the need to adapt to online mentoring. Keller's (2005a) model of mentorship identifies the growth and maintenance phase of mentorship as a stage in which consistent communication and engagement in activities can help sustain the relationship. This phase also requires active participation from both the mentor and mentee to be sustained and both parties need to feel this relationship is beneficial. If

these aspects are not present, there is risk of termination as a potential end stage of mentorship that can occur when both mentors and mentees are not both actively participating in the relationship or if they are not able to resolve any issues that occur (Keller, 2005a). Rather than relationships stalling during the pandemic, mentors reported feeling motivated and invested in engaging with one another and felt that their relationships could continue and be of value.

Bowers et al. (2016) discuss the bidirectional process of mentorship and development of self-regulation in youth. Our findings demonstrate that other aspects are bidirectional in nature within mentorships as mentors described their relationships as “dual” or “symbiotic”, demonstrating the mutual benefit and effort that can foster mentor engagement and motivation. Hence, we find that mentors can also learn and develop skills from mentorship, highlighting that mentorship can be bidirectional in many ways. Previous theoretical research, such as Keller’s (2005a) mentorship model and the FAN model by Gilkerson & Pryce (2021), has typically viewed mentorship as a one-way relationship where the mentor supports the youth. However, the mentors’ reported experiences in this study demonstrate a duality that can facilitate the mentorship bond and potentially increase mentor motivation and engagement in the relationship, which has been shown to be important to maintaining mentorships (Britner et al., 2006; Dubois & Karcher, 2014). This study’s findings are consistent with previous research on mentors’ motivation for joining mentorship programs. For example, Shier et al. (2020) interviewed 22 mentors who identified as female who work in a variety of professional settings and were mentors of female youth who were 16 or 17 years old. Mentors in this study interacted with their mentees using a mix of virtual and in-person interactions and had a relationship for nine months which consisted of mentoring sessions as well as employment and skills workshops. Participants described personal propensities such as feeling a personal benefit and a sense of satisfaction with

supporting mentees as motivations to joining such programs. Findings add to previous research by noting the dual nature and additional benefits felt by mentors, including improved mental health, and learning from their mentees.

In addition, studies have examined how compatibility and similarities or similar interests are important factors in having a successful mentorship and matching coordinators consider such aspects greatly during the matching process (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel/York, n.d., “FAQ”; Liang & Grossman, 2007). Our findings demonstrate that similar interests can be helpful for starting and maintaining a relationship but also show that different interests are not necessarily a deterrent to the development of bonds between mentors and mentees. In fact, mentors discussed that being open to learning about and trying different activities can contribute to a successful mentoring relationship. Our results suggest that it is the willingness to engage and be active participants in the mentoring relationships and being open to trying new activities together that can allow mentors and mentees to bond further.

External support from BBBS agencies and parents of mentees were also seen as factors that helped mentors feel supported during the pandemic. This is consistent with past research that shows effective programming, as well as support from parents and other adults (i.e., teachers) in youth’s lives, to be important predictors of mentorship success and positive long-term outcomes (Keller et al., 2022; Larose et al., 2018). Parra et al. (2002) also found that greater support from mentoring programs and coordinators increased mentors’ confidence. Our study highlights the benefits of mentorships to mentors themselves and how confident they are in their ability to support their mentees once mentors themselves feel supported.

Objective 2: Identify Barriers and Facilitators of Mentorships and Virtual Mentorship

Mentors identified several facilitators for mentoring relationships in the context of the pandemic. For example, mentors discussed strengths in terms of personal characteristics of their mentee (e.g., resiliency, easy going nature) which helped maintain mentors' motivation and engagement in the relationship. This aligns with previous research which identified motivation, frequent contact, commitment, and personal traits such as trust and confidence of the mentor as indicative of successful mentorship (Erdem et al., 2016; Keller, 2005a). However, research on resiliency of mentees and its impact on mentors have not been discussed. Our findings also add that mentors identified personality traits of their mentees such as an easygoing or flexible nature that they learned from which can be a strength as it helps both parties adapt to new or uncertain situations such as the pandemic. Some personality traits such as patience, approachability, and similarity have been identified in past research as important aspects to consider when matching mentors with mentees (Spiekermann et al., 2020). Some participants also shared that they did not feel the pandemic made a noticeable impact on their personal lives or their mentorship, and it was seen as a temporary transition to virtual mentorship. This perspective may have reflected the established nature of the mentorship pre-pandemic which helped to maintain connection despite external stressors.

Mentors identified parents and BBBSC agency staff including matching coordinators supported the mentoring relationship. Indeed, parents were described as a helpful "bridge" to help facilitate the relationship in the early stages and provided information such as when the mentee was having trouble in school so the mentor was aware and could provide individualized support and guidance. BBBSC was also helpful in providing information such as public health guidelines and events, staying connected, and resources for activities mentors and mentees could

do both in-person and virtually. While mentorship models such as Keller's (2005a) mentorship model and the FAN model by Gilkerson & Pryce (2021) often characterize these relationships as solely involving the mentor and mentee in a one-on-one relationship. Our findings demonstrate the potential contributions external environment and support systems have on mentors' abilities to facilitate these connections which is consistent with research that focused on 13 parents of youth in mentorship programs (Spencer et al., 2011). Results showed that parents described that they had a role in the mentorship and they often worked together with mentors to help strengthen the mentorship, acted as a guide and support for the mentor, and/or mediated if the relationship was at risk of ending. In line with our findings, Spencer and colleagues (2011) highlight the important role that parents play in mentorship. Adding the literature, our findings suggest parents may be an especially important point of support and help in early stages of the mentorship.

Effective programming has also been shown to be crucial for successful mentorships. Research on the relationship between mentor and program staff shows that the strength in their relationship contributes to greater mentorship satisfaction and more positive outcomes in the mentorship (Parra et al., 2002). Mentor-staff relationship quality is associated with greater mentorship satisfaction, commitment, and greater feelings of support by the mentors (Keller et al., 2022). Our research demonstrates similar sentiments from a qualitative account of mentor experiences with program staff and also demonstrates feeling the strength and support in this dynamic can be especially helpful in stressful circumstances such as the pandemic. Therefore, our findings further acknowledge that there are other means of support for mentors and mentorship including by mentee parents and agency staff and they can be helpful aides in facilitating mentorship.

To understand more about barriers to mentorships, we asked mentors if they have ever had a mentorship in the past that ended and the reasons for that. Reasons for the ending of past mentorships that were shared in our interviews included distance (i.e., mentee or mentor moving away) or lack of contact by mentees. Our findings also suggest that new mentorships initiated during the pandemic were more difficult to establish, had greater difficulty engaging in mentorships and underwent more difficult transitions between in-person and virtual. Previous research on termination of mentorships have shown that 34% of mentorships experience early termination which has been associated with issues with the matching process such as mentees not feeling they were a good match with their mentor or had the opportunity to assess if they are a good match (DeWit et al., 2016b). Themes related to ending mentorships were limited, possibly due to the recruitment of mentors in active mentorships. However, mentors discussed early termination from mentorships in the past were for logistical reasons such as distance and lack of contact from their mentees. The reasons for this lack of communication are unclear, but virtual mentoring can perhaps be a means of preventing premature closures of mentorships in the future, as mentors and mentees can stay connected regardless of distance.

In terms of virtual mentorship, mentors reported increased challenges in maintaining regular communication and connection with their mentees. Virtual mentoring sessions often relied on online activities to help facilitate the session and conversation, including online games, which may have impacted the amount of discussion and face-to-face interaction (e.g., some online activities did not involve mentor-mentee contact or communication). Although necessary, the shift to virtual mentorship presented unique challenges, such as technological barriers and difficulties building rapport without in-person interactions. Maintaining engagement and motivation was also reported to be difficult during virtual mentoring. The absence of in-person

activities and outings was noted by mentors as a barrier to building and maintaining connections. On the other hand, mentors who were adaptable, creative, and resourceful in finding alternative ways to engage their mentees virtually reported more positive experiences. The importance of ongoing support and guidance from mentoring organizations in navigating the challenges of virtual mentorship was highlighted as a facilitator of successful relationships. Specifically, mentors described their matching coordinator from their BBBSC agency provided support by having frequent check-ins to update the coordinator on their mentorship and discuss any concerns. Mentors also explained that their agency contacted them frequently with updates on public health guidelines during the pandemic, hosted virtual events for mentors and mentees to connect with one another, and provided ideas for virtual activities and resources such as art kits. These findings demonstrate how mentorship programs were able to adapt during the pandemic and what mentors found to be helpful.

The present findings are consistent with previous literature on the barriers and facilitators of virtual mentorship, which shows that mentorship can be maintained virtually and technology can make mentorship more accessible (Kaufman, 2017). Though there is still limited research about the efficacy of virtual mentorship, preliminary research has shown some effectiveness, and an especially important benefit of increasing accessibility particularly for minority youth (Kaufman et al., 2022). Some mentors discussed how they first met their match during the pandemic and through virtual mentorship which was difficult and “awkward” especially when mentors and mentees first saw each other in person. As noted in the Keller’s (2005a) youth mentorship model, the initial stages of building a mentoring relationship can be crucial and difficulties experienced at this stage can result in a lack of engagement and potential termination of the mentorship (Keller, 2005a). The mentors in our sample consisted of those in active

mentorships, and although they noted these transitions and initial virtual meetings as difficult, they were able to maintain their connections. However, it is unknown whether this transition could have in fact, been too much of an ordeal for some mentorships, leading to relationships ending early as we did not sample anyone from inactive or terminated mentorships but it is still a possibility that could be explored further. Virtual options may still be used and have benefits if they are felt to be warranted and useful by mentors and mentees but it does not appear that it is ideal for long periods of time or for the initial phases of a new mentoring relationship. Though studies on virtual mentoring during the pandemic are limited, we can draw on findings of service providers using telehealth to communicate and connect with youth during the pandemic. For example, Neavel et al. (2022) found that online means for providing telehealth services such as online therapy have increased youth engagement for some but there was a clear disparity in access to technology and decreased access and engagement as a result. Building a long standing connection with mentees was difficult to do virtually due its limitations of activity options and lack of engagement as you would find in in-person mentorship.

Objective 3: Assess Impact of Inequity, Compatibility, and Diversity on Mentorship

The third aim of this project was to identify if there is inequity experienced within mentorships as well as the role of compatibility and diversity in mentoring relationships. No clear differences in themes or experiences were formed between mentors who identified as White and those who identified as people of colour, except for discussions of culture with mentees, which were more prevalent among mentors of colour. One mentor who identified as White discussed their experiences with a mentee of colour, and because we did not directly ask about race/ethnicity, it is unclear if the other White mentors had a mentee of a different racial/ethnic identity. The lack of differences in themes that were constructed between mentors

who identified as White versus those who identified as people of colour may suggest that the mentoring relationship can transcend differences between mentors and mentees, including racial or cultural differences, and it may also suggest that mentors place more importance on other qualities that affect their relationships with their mentees and other traits matter rather than race or culture.

When asked about similarities between mentors and mentees in terms of their interests and values, mentors shared that similar interests and characteristics helped them feel closer to one another, facilitate discussions, and find activities they can engage in and enjoy, similar to past research (Grossman & Bulle, 2006; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Similarities in terms of cultural backgrounds between mentors and mentees were also shared as an important commonality by some mentors. Cultural similarities have been shown in previous research as beneficial to mentorship as it allows mentors and mentees to have a greater understanding of one another and providing support to the unique experiences diverse youth may face (Liang & Grossman, 2007). One study assessing of 82,224 mentors and mentees over a four-year period demonstrated that mentors and mentees with similar racial/ethnic identities had a lower risk of experiencing early termination of their relationship (Lyons & Edwards, 2022). However, it is also important to note that mentors shared that similarities are not necessarily required to build a positive relationship. Differing interests in activities and differing values (e.g., COVID-19 public guidelines, vaccines) did not appear to cause friction in relationships. In fact, mentors emphasized the importance of openness to learning and trying new things as well as respect for one another. Our findings add to the literature in terms of understanding ways to mitigate potential barriers to developing strong mentoring relationships. Findings also highlight the importance of identifying positive mentor characteristics (e.g. openness) when recruiting and

training new mentors. Our findings also highlight the importance of diversity within mentorship, as corroborated by previous findings and demonstrate the importance of promoting diversity in mentorship programs (Liang & Grossman, 2007).

An inequity and barrier discussed by mentors included the availability and access to technology. For example, some mentors noted that mentees lacked the necessary devices or stable internet connection to engage in virtual interactions consistently. Such digital inequity was frustrating to experience and contributed to some disengagement in the activities and less frequent contact, which could have stalled mentorships from progressing. The limited research on virtual mentorship has shown that there is some greater accessibility and preference for virtual options by some groups, including those from minority communities who may not have access to an in-person mentor or may prefer virtual so that they can discuss sensitive topics (Keller et al., 2022). Therefore, while virtual options may increase equity in access to support services and guidance such as mentorships, our findings demonstrate the need for equitable access to the technology to reduce barriers and risks impacting mentoring relationships.

Limitations

Several limitations warrant attention. Although we originally partnered with four agencies to recruit participants and review findings, two agencies, unfortunately withdrew. As such, participants were only recruited from Ontario, limiting the scope of our findings. Second, we sampled participants in active mentorships that they felt were strong and had support (e.g., support of the mentee's parents). Many described the resiliency and capabilities of their mentees, but this may not apply to other mentoring relationships. Individuals with certain characteristics, including those who feel passionately about the strength and bond with their mentee and/or felt great benefit in their mentorship and were eager to discuss, may have been the majority of those

who volunteered for this study. This potential self-selection bias may have skewed the responses and themes from the interviews. More information regarding mentorships that have ended in the past would be important to understand the different types and dynamics of relationships and what contributes to challenges with facilitating mentorships.

In conjunction with these mentor interviews, interviews with mentees were also conducted. Although the mentee interviews were not included in this paper, it is possible that hearing their insights influenced how I interpreted and understood the mentor interviews. This thesis also discusses solely the mentor perspective on the relationship and their experiences during COVID-19. Although this has been an aspect that has not yet been analyzed or discussed in depth in the literature, only one side of a dual relationship is presented here. In terms of the mentor interviews as well, having two interviewers may have impacted the flow of the conversation with the mentor as well as building rapport with the interviewee, which may have influenced how forthcoming they were in their answers. Finally, interviews asked mentors to discuss their experiences in retrospect. The interviews were conducted in February 2023, over six months after most mentorships considered themselves out of the pandemic and back to normal. To recall these experiences after this long can be difficult. Some mentors shared that they were having a rough time recalling certain things that occurred or how they felt during the pandemic as it all seemed to ‘blur together’. Some participants also noted that they blocked out much of what occurred during the pandemic as it was a difficult time. While this may have allowed participants to reflect on their experiences, allowed for more time with their mentees, and to discuss the long-term impacts of the pandemic on their relationship, they may not have been able to recall everything in relation to the questions asked in this study.

Of note, there was a lack of discussion of sexual diversity throughout the interviews, despite mentors discussing other aspects of their mentees' identities. We attempted to recruit mentors with various gender identities to our sample; however, mentors identified as men and women only. However, our recruitment survey did not distinguish between cisgender and transgender identities when asked to identify as men, women, non-binary, or other gender identities (see Appendix A). Studies on the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in mentorships have shown that a vast majority have never had a formal mentor, and there is limited mentor programming that specifically caters to LGBTQ+ (Burningham, & Weiler, 2021). Gender and sexual diversity may be important aspects of a child's experiences and mentorship can be an essential means of support (Burningham & Weiler, 2021). Greater efforts can be made to develop programming and recruit mentors who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Hence, the lack of discussion in this area from our research and previous literature demonstrates the need for further work and study on this topic.

Future Steps

Future research can aim to gain additional insights from other important components of the mentoring relationship such as parents and matching coordinators who help facilitate these relationships. Some previous research has discussed the parents' roles, but it is unclear what supports mentors rely on if parents are not available or matching coordinators and other agency staff roles in mentorships after the initial matching is done (Spencer et al., 2011). Understanding the long-term impacts of the pandemic will also be important as the strengths and challenges faced during the pandemic can continue to influence mentoring relationships. Hence, a longitudinal study on mentorships can allow us to see how these relationships change over time, especially as mentees age and how they navigate challenges or transitions in life. This can also

provide important insights as to how mentorships can prevent premature endings or how they become long-term or lifelong relationships. Learning more about how mentorships end and why is also an important avenue for future research to understand how to prevent that from occurring. Some previous research has examined circumstances around mentorships ending early but not since or post-pandemic (Spencer et al., 2017).

Additional attempts to conduct a national study should be performed to understand the impact of COVID-19 on mentorships across different regions in Canada due to differences in public health policies, political views, and mentoring programming across different regions. Different mentor programs can be studied as well, including skills workshops, mentorships for newcomers to Canada, teen mentors, in-school mentors, and group mentorships. Future research should also increase the inclusion of mentors of other diverse backgrounds and identities, such as those mentors who identify as affectional and gender minorities.

Implications

Insights from mentors in this project can help inform mentor training and guidelines and inform agency staff on how to support mentorships during transitions, adverse life events, virtual mentoring, and ways to strengthen the relationship and prevent them from ending. The results can also improve services, including BBBSC programming directly informing mentor recruitment, training material, and the matching process. BBBSC can use the information gathered in this study on the personal benefits mentors' experience from their relationships as well as what helped them feel supported and engaged in future recruitment efforts of new volunteers and to develop intervention strategies to keep mentors motivated and engaged in the relationship. These sentiments can inform means of recruitment by highlighting these motivations and benefits for potential volunteers. Our findings on diversity and compatibility can

inform the development of recruitment material for mentors of different backgrounds, which may also help create more successful matches and support more youth looking for mentors and mentors they can identify with. Understanding how mentorships grew or overcame any obstacles faced during the pandemic and the differences in these relationships can help inform and prepare these services for such long-term impacts and future public health concerns. These findings also demonstrate how strong, positive mentoring relationships may be protective factors against stress or adverse life events and promote well-being as shown in discussions with mentors who felt their mentorships helped them through the mental health impacts of the pandemic. Mentoring programs can also use this information to develop new responsive services and programming to better prepare their network for any future reliance on virtual connections or potential stressors such as the pandemic.

Mentors who had relationships that began with or were completely virtual noted difficulty in terms of building a connection and in the transition back to in-person. Such findings can be useful when considering future matches that may need to start virtually or where a virtual relationship is required. Increased check-ins by BBBSC staff, more variety in activities to keep them engaged, or attempting to meet in-person as often as possible may help to maintain the match and prevent early termination. Characteristics of successful matches reported in our study, including openness, communication, and resilience, can be discussed in mentor training and should be considered when recruiting and interviewing potential mentors and matching. Mentor training can also develop ways to teach and increase these skills to help strengthen matches and help prevent mentorships from ending. Our collaboration with agency leaders and the youth advisory also increases the potential of this project leading to impactful change as we continue to

have ongoing open discussions on what mentors need and the support systems that can be put in place to strengthen their mentorships further.

This study also identified specific inequities in access to resources, including technology. Virtual mentorship or service delivery may remain an option and can help make such services more accessible for some individuals. It is critical for organizations such as BBBSC to understand the challenges faced by their youth and volunteers to pivot their services and address missed needs. Hence, our findings can be used to advocate for increased funding and resources for these mentoring programs to increase equity and develop alternative options if virtual mentoring is not accessible. Understanding compatibility and diversity within mentoring are also important to consider when creating future mentorship matches. Some mentors shared how their mentees had unique needs, such as those who were neurodivergent and had difficulties in school and with virtual mentoring. Hence, developing mentor training to support youth with learning difficulties and increasing psychoeducation on neurodivergences in youth can be beneficial. Potentially, neurodivergent mentors may want to be matched with youth who share this identity in order to support the youth's unique needs and have a mentor they can identify with. The pandemic's mental health impact was a common discussion point in the mentor interviews. These concerns may be ongoing and are important for mentorship programs to make note of to monitor their volunteers and increase support for them to prevent adverse personal effects and risk of disengaging from matches or leaving the program.

There is also a potential for broader impact of this research to other types of mentorships, including mentoring university students, occupational mentorships and so on. While youth mentorships have a relatively unique dynamic in which it is an adult and youth who engage in activities and cater their discussions to the youth's needs, understanding how these relationships

develop and make a meaningful impact on the mentee can apply to our understanding of how to build strength in other types of relationships and mentorships as well, especially when experiencing adversity or barriers such as the pandemic.

Conclusion

With support from BBBSC leadership, agency leaders, and our youth advisory, we gained a deeper understanding of mentors' experiences during the pandemic and how their mentoring relationships adapted. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities mentors faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although mentors reported difficulty in managing personal challenges and adapting to changes in mentorship over the course of the pandemic, mentors discussed the resiliency and strength witnessed in their mentees and the ways in which they were able to support them during these difficult times. Mentors also saw the personal benefits of being a mentor and a learning experience for them. There were also factors identified that made virtual mentorship more difficult for long periods of time or for the beginning stages of mentorships, especially if virtual options were not accessible. Other themes of value to mentors included the dual relationship of mentorship, the role of parents and BBBSC agency staff, and how similar interests and diversity can help facilitate the relationship. Though the pandemic's disruptions to traditional mentoring practices and the transition to virtual interactions have posed significant challenges, mentors who demonstrated adaptability, resourcefulness, and who had ongoing support from mentoring organizations maintained meaningful connections with their mentees. This research highlights the need to understand the mentor experience further and to develop supports and resources as mentors continue to provide this important service to youth in need.

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Figures

Figure 1.

Shown is a graphic of how a thematic network is developed and visually represented, based on description of thematic networks by Attride-Stirling (2001).

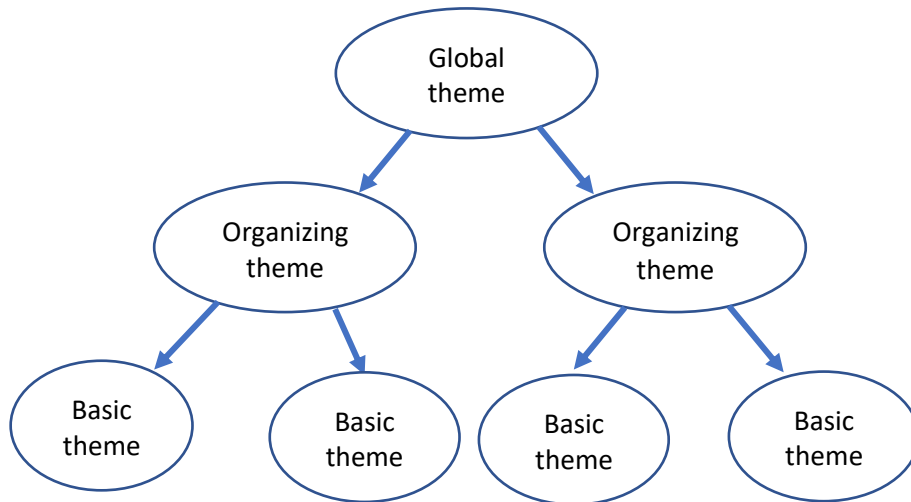
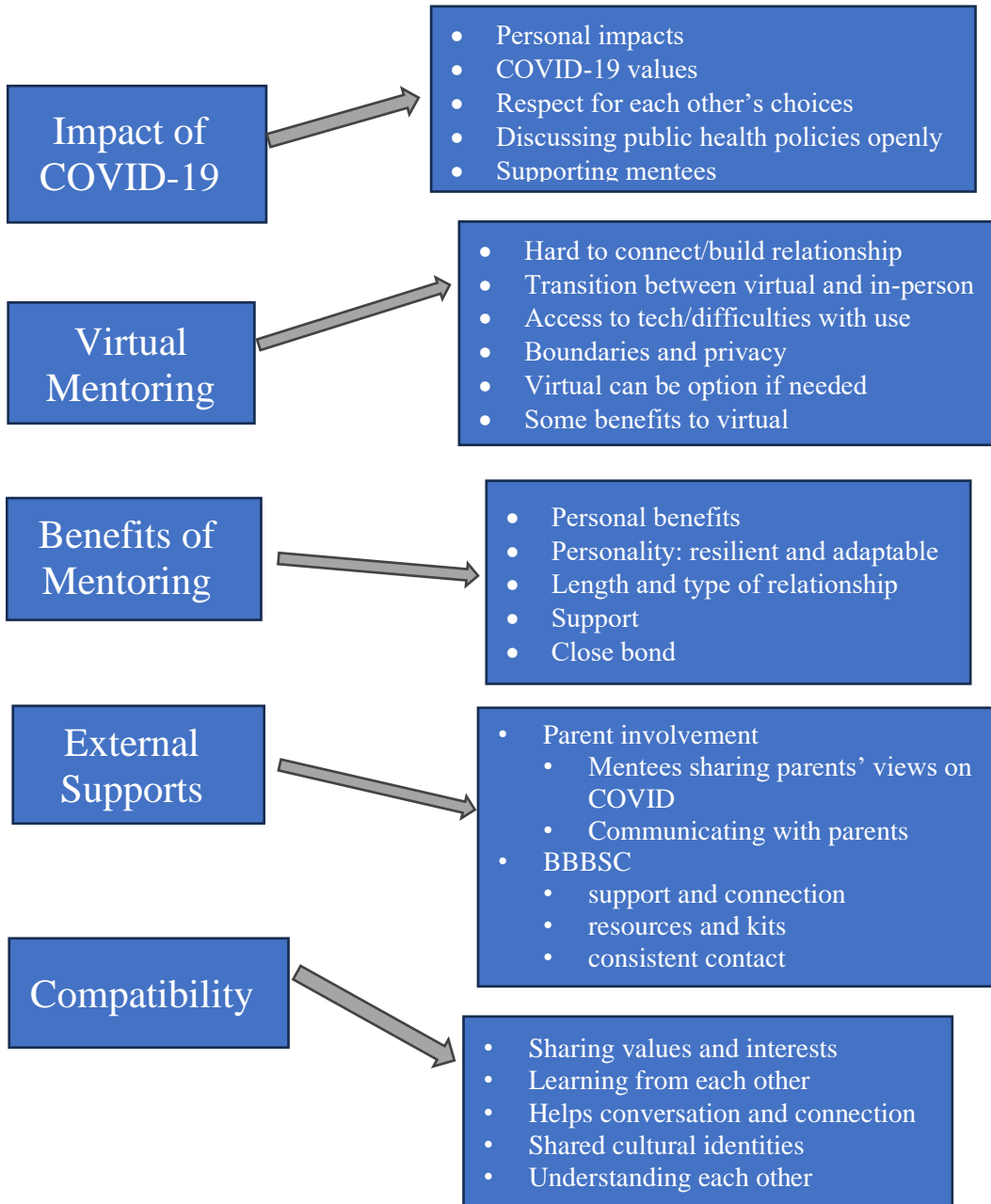


Figure 2.

Visual summary of the major themes and subthemes



Supplemental Materials

Thematic Network Table

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Impact of COVID-19	Relationship developed and persevered	Personal Impacts
		Mutual support
	COVID-19 values	Respect and adapted to differing COVID values
		Supported mentees' fears/anxiety about COVID
Virtual Mentoring	Difficult to connect/communicate	Virtual option if needed
	Preference for in-person	Limited virtual activities and interactions
	Access/issues with technology	Awkward transition
		Tech issues (WIFI, damage, disconnect)
		Boundaries and privacy
	Engagement/motivation	Some benefits to virtual (e.g. some talked more)
		"Zoomed out"/fatigue
Benefits of Mentoring	Personal benefits	Altruism, learning new things, inspired by mentee
		Mentors' struggles (e.g. with mental health)
		Mentorship helped them recover
	Strength of connection and relationship	Mentee resiliency
		Close bond over time
	Personality traits/characteristics	Mentees were resilient, easy going and adaptable to the impacts of COVID
		Open to new things (new activities and learning from mentee)
	Parental involvement	Mentees shared parents' COVID views

External Supports		Communicating with parent
	Effective programming and communication	BBBSC support (e.g., resources, kits, ideas)
		Constant contact and communication
		Mentors feel supported and connected to BBBSC
Compatibility	Similar identities	Cultural identity
	Shared interests	Understanding each other and their struggles
	Strengthening bond	Similarities allows them to connect
	Understanding each other	Openly discuss commonalities

Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Survey Informed Consent



**University
of Victoria**

**Informed Consent Form
(Mentor Survey)**

**UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH**

Study Name: Understanding Mentoring Relationships during and after COVID-19 Restrictions from the Perspective of Youth and Mentors: A Participatory Research Approach

Researchers:

Megan Ames, PhD, R.Psych
University of Victoria
Victoria, BC, Canada V8P 5C2

Stephanie Craig, PhD, C.Psych
University of Guelph
Guelph, ON, Canada N1G 2W1

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of why and how COVID-19 impacted mentoring relationships for youth. This projects aims to identify barriers and facilitators of strong mentorship relationships during COVID-19, understand how COVID-19 and associated stressors impacted the mentor's ability to support youth, and to assess the impact of inequity on youth mentorship relationships, including the role of compatibility in youth and mentor diversity.

Participant Selection: Study participants have been selected through Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada (BBBSC) agencies. Recruitment details were sent to agencies who distributed them to mentors and parents of youth. Those interested in participating will complete a consent form and a short survey. Eligible survey participants will be contacted via email by research assistants to set up an appointment for an interview (45-60 minutes).

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey (5 minutes) and you may be selected for an individual interview conducted via Zoom (45-60 minutes). In the survey, we will collect some information about you (e.g., age, gender, SES, ethnicity) and your mentorship including how long you have been a mentor. This should take about 5 mins to complete and you will receive a \$5 gift card to an online store of your choice (e.g., Amazon, Epic Games, Best Buy etc.). From this information, you may then be selected to complete an online interview over Zoom that will ask questions about your experience as a mentee, how COVID-19 related stress may be affecting you and you as a mentor, and what virtual mentorship was like for you. Participants who complete the interview will receive a \$30 gift card to an online store of your choice (e.g., Amazon, Epic Games, Best Buy etc.).

Risks and Discomforts: Participants may feel disappointed if they do not receive an invitation to complete the interview portion of this study. Other risk or discomfort during this survey is unlikely, but any point in time you can stop answering questions from the study or withdraw from participating.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: Your participation in this survey will provide the information necessary to select participants for interviews. If selected for the interview, you will have the chance to understand how you are feeling during COVID-19, and how it may be affecting you. Understanding your behaviours and feelings can be a positive coping tool in times of stress.

In addition, your participation in the research will provide us with important information on how mentorships have been impacted by COVID-19 and ways we can provide further support to both mentors and mentees. This information will be used to help inform mental health programs, policies, and the greater research community about the needs of teens and their mentors.

Dissemination of Study Results: The results of this study may be reported in a variety of settings including presentations at scholarly meetings, class presentations, national or international conferences, on the internet, in a dissertation/thesis, and in a published journal article or book. Findings will also be provided to BBBSC in aggregate form (i.e., anonymous) to inform development of potential supports their mentees and mentors, but no identifying information will be presented. BBBSC may wish to publish a report or infographics summarizing the findings on their website or provide in other formats to their community.

Study Funding: This study is funded by the University of Guelph through the SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer some questions will not influence the nature of your relationship with BBBSC or the researchers either now, or in the future. If you decide to stop, you will still be eligible to receive your gift card. If you do withdraw before completing the survey, the data you have entered will remain in our database and may be used in data analyses where possible. If you discontinue the survey before reaching the end, you will not be entered to receive a gift card and your data will not be able to be removed given it is anonymously collected.

Confidentiality: All responses to questions will be kept confidential (private) by the researchers. Your email from the survey will only be used to send your gift card, and, if selected, to schedule the follow-up interview. Your data will be safely stored in a secure laboratory in a password-protected and encrypted electronic file that can only be opened by one of our trained research staff. Identifying information will remain only with Drs. Ames and Craig. Your data will be stored electronically for ten years, at which point the data will be destroyed. All information we collect will remain confidential to the extent that the law permits. If the results are published or presented at conferences and similar events, you are never personally identified. Confidentiality

will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Your answers to the questions we have for you today will not impact your relationship with BBBSC or the researchers in any way.

Anonymized data may be shared with other researchers to support replication and/or secondary analysis of data. By completing this survey, you are providing your consent to the Research Team to share the anonymous data with other research teams, and for it to be used in future research.

The researcher(s) acknowledge that the host of the online survey (e.g., Qualtrics) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses.) Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Megan Ames by e-mail (mames@uvic.ca). This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, University of Victoria's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria ((250) 472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

I consent to participate in *Understanding Mentoring Relationships during and after COVID-19*

Restrictions from the Perspective of Youth and Mentors: A Participatory Research Approach by Drs. Stephanie Craig and Dr. Megan Ames. I have had the opportunity to read this consent form, and I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My mark below indicates my consent.

Mentor consent to complete survey:

- .. **YES**, I consent to filling out the survey
- .. **No**, I do not consent to filling out the survey

Recruitment Survey Questions

Mentorship Project Recruitment Survey-Mentor

Start of Block: Block 1

Q22 Informed Consent Form

Study Name: Building Bigger Connections: Qualitative Interviews

Researchers: Megan Ames, PhD, R.Psych University of Victoria Victoria, BC, Canada V8P 5C2

Stephanie Craig, PhD, C.Psych University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada N1G 2W1

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In addition, your participation in the research will provide us with important information on how mentorships have been impacted by COVID-19 and ways we can provide further support to both mentors and mentees. This information will be used to help inform mental health programs,

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- YES, I consent to filling out the survey (1)
- No, I do not consent to filling out the survey (2)

Page Break

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q3 Please enter your age in years

Q2 Which best describes your current gender identity?

- Man (1)
- Woman (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Indigenous gender minority identity (e.g., Two-spirit) (4)
- Other cultural gender minority identity (e.g., Hijra) (5)
- Something else (e.g., gender fluid, non-binary) (6)
- Prefer to specify: (7) _____
- Prefer not to say (8)

Q4 What is your race, cultural, or ethnic identity? Click all that apply.

- Black (6)
- Caribbean (5)
- East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese) (2)
- First Nations (7)
- Inuit (9)
- Métis (8)
- Middle Eastern (11)
- South or Central American (10)
- South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan) (3)
- Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Thai, Filipino) (4)

- White (1)
 - Prefer not to say (12)
 - Any other background (please specify): (13)
-

Q18 What province or territory do you currently live in?

- Alberta (1)
- British Columbia (4)
- Manitoba (5)
- New Brunswick (6)
- Newfoundland and Labrador (7)
- Northwest Territories (8)
- Nova Scotia (9)
- Nunavut (10)
- Ontario (11)
- Prince Edward Island (12)
- Quebec (13)
- Saskatchewan (14)
- Yukon (15)
- None of the above (16)

Q6 What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Less than high school (1)
- Highschool diploma (2)
- College diploma or certificate (3)
- Undergraduate degree (e.g., BA, BSc) (4)
- Master's (e.g., MA, MSW) (5)
- Doctorate (e.g., PhD) (6)
- Other: (7) _____

Q7 Which Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Agency are you a part of?

- North Vancouver (1)
- London (2)
- Peel (3)
- Colchester (4)
- Other: (5) _____

Q8 When did you first join BBBS?

Q9 How often have you contacted your mentee in the past 3 months?

- More than once a week (1)
- Once very two weeks (2)
- Once a month (3)
- Once every two months (4)
- Other: (5) _____

Q16 How have you been connecting with your mentee since the beginning of COVID-19?

- Virtually (1)
- In-person (2)
- Hybrid (virtually and in-person activities) (3)

Q19 Which languages would you prefer to speak during the interview?

- English (1)
- French (2)
- Other (please specify) (3) _____

Q29 If interested in participating in an interview, please provide your email address below

Q20 If invited to participate in an interview, please select which language you would prefer to conduct it in

- English (1)
- French (2)

Q30 Please provide the email address you would like to have your 5\$ gift card sent to

End of Block: Block 2



UNDERSTANDING MENTORSHIP STUDY

CONDUCTED BY DR. STEPHANIE CRAIG AND DR. MEGAN AMES



**PARTICIPATE IN AN APPROX
1HR ONLINE INTERVIEW ABOUT
YOUR MENTORSHIP
EXPERIENCE TO EARN A \$30
GIFT CARD!
AND A \$5 GIFT CARD FOR
COMPLETING OUR BRIEF
ELIGIBILITY SURVEY!**

IF INTERESTED, PLEASE COMPLETE A
SHORT SURVEY TO
CONFIRM ELIGIBILITY
[HTTPS://UVIC.CA1.QUALTRICS.COM/JFE/FORM/SV
_5CB4UXAWW6VKNHM](https://uvic.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/sv_5CB4UXAWW6VKNHM)

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact
teensathomestudy@uvic.ca

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA REB#21-0231
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH REB#22-10-022

Youth Advisory Recruitment Poster

NYMAC: WE WANT YOUR INPUT!



Who:

- 6-8 youth (ages 17-30)



What:

- A research-focused youth advisory
- Provide insight into how to ask mentees and mentors about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted mentorship relationships
- Brainstorm useful ways to share our findings

Where/When:

- Virtually (via Zoom) once in June 2022, February/March 2023, and May/June 2023
- First meeting is **Sunday, June 12th 6-8pm EST**
- Receive a \$100 e-gift card for attending at least 2 of the meetings throughout the year

Interested or have questions?

teensathomestudy@uvic.ca



Appendix B: Interview Materials

Interview Questions

Mentors

1. How long have you been a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor? Did you have a mentee during the pandemic? Did you have more than one mentee during the pandemic? How long did your mentorship(s) last? (If ended) Please tell us about your experience of the mentorship ending.
2. Tell me about your reasons for becoming a BBBS mentor?
3. During the pandemic, how did you connect with your mentee (i.e., in-person or virtually)? In what ways do you usually communicate with your mentee? Who takes the lead in scheduling and organizing activities (i.e., mentor, parent, or mentee)?
4. How was the transition to virtual mentoring? Did you experience any difficulties connecting with your mentee related to technology?
5. Did the use of technology impact boundaries with your mentee and in what way? (clarification: boundaries as in personal boundaries, communicating more often than agreed, meeting in person, etc.)
6. How was your mentee impacted by COVID-19 (e.g., restrictions, strain). Did that impact the mentoring relationship? In what ways did you support your mentee?
7. How were you impacted by COVID-19?
8. Please discuss your experiences with your match during the pandemic. What were some strengths and challenges you experienced if any? (clarification: e.g., restrictions, financial strain, mental health)

9. Did you learn anything new about your mentee during the pandemic? How did meeting virtually build or change your perspective on your mentoring relationship?
10. Do you feel you have similar values and interests with your mentee? How does that affect your relationship? How about when it comes to COVID-19 (e.g., mask wearing, protective measures, vaccines)?
11. What was your connection with your Big Brothers Big Sisters agency like during the pandemic? Is there anything that Big Brothers Big Sisters could have done differently to provide you with greater support during the pandemic?

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Mentees

1. How long have you been a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentee? Did you have a mentor during the pandemic? Did you have more than one mentor during the pandemic? How long did your mentorship(s) last? (If ended) Please tell us about your experience of the mentorship ending.
2. Tell me about your reasons for joining BBBS.
3. During the pandemic, how did you connect with your mentor (i.e., in-person or virtually)? How do you usually communicate with your mentor? (If applicable) How was your experience in terms of connecting with your mentor using technology?
4. How were you impacted personally by COVID-19 (e.g., restrictions, strain)? Did that impact your relationship with your mentor?
5. Please discuss your experiences with your mentor during the pandemic. What about with virtual mentorship. What were some strengths and challenges you experienced if any?

6. (If applicable) What was one thing that you learned from your virtual relationship that you weren't expecting or didn't get from in-person mentorship?
7. Is there anything that your mentor could have done differently to provide you with greater support during the pandemic?
8. Did you feel your level of responsibility in the match changed due to the pandemic? If so, please describe. What were the strengths and challenges of virtual mentoring?
(Clarification: booking appointments, obtaining technology, planning activities)
9. What are some activities you enjoyed during virtual mentoring? Would you prefer to have a completely virtual, in-person, or mixed format and why?
10. (If applicable) How was the transition back to in-person mentoring?
11. What are some suggestions if you had to meet your mentor virtually again for a longer period of time?
12. Did you feel you had similar values and interests with your mentor? How did that affect your relationship? What about when it comes to COVID-19 (e.g., mask wearing, protective measures, vaccines)
13. What was your connection with your Big Brothers Big Sisters agency like during the pandemic? Is there anything that Big Brothers Big Sisters could have done differently to provide you with greater support during the pandemic?
14. If you could tell your mentor one thing, what would it be?

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C: Consent and Debrief Forms

Verbal Assent to Participate in Research Interview

Thank you for your interest in participating in our research project on understanding the mentorship relationship and the impacts of COVID-19. We will be asking you some questions about your experience of COVID-19, mentorship, and what virtual mentorship was like for you.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You can stop or withdraw your participation in this study at any point in our interview or afterwards. If you agree to participate, we will ask you a series of question in this interview. Participation will take a total of about 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis afterwards, but your contributions will remain confidential, and you have the option to turn off your camera. The recording will be erased after the interview is transcribed and de-identified for use in our analyses. This interview is taking place on an encrypted and secure computer and records are also stored on a secure network. Any files or information used that pertains to data collection will be kept for a maximum of 10 years after which it will be completely erased.

This study is voluntary. You can choose if you want to participate and you can change your mind at any time during the interview and you can choose not to answer specific questions. If you wish to withdraw at any point during our session today, please let me know and we can stop. If you no longer wish to participate in the study after completing the interview you can let me know by email me to ask to have your data withdrawn. You will still receive and be able to keep the gift card even if you wish to withdraw from the project. As a token of our appreciation, you will be given a \$30 gift card to an online store of your choice for your participation in this study. The gift card will be sent to you by email after completion of the interview.

Confidentiality is an integral component of this research. Information about you will not be shared, except in cases of a valid court order/subpoena, or if there is a perceived risk of:

- imminent danger to yourself or others
- current abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant or regarding this study, you can contact the Chair of the University of Victoria's Research Ethics Board or the Principle Investigators Dr. Megan Ames and Dr. Stephanie Craig. Contact Information will be provided at the end of the interview.

Do you have questions about anything that we've talked about so far?

Do you consent to proceeding with the interview today?



**University
of Victoria**

**UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH**

Informed Consent Form (Interview)

Study Name: Understanding Mentoring Relationships during and after COVID-19
Restrictions from the Perspective of Youth and Mentors: A Participatory Research Approach

Researchers:

Megan Ames, PhD, R.Psych
University of Victoria
Victoria, BC, Canada V8P 5C2

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Please note, interviews will be audio and video recorded for transcription and analysis afterwards, but your information will be de-identified, you will have the option of turning your camera off, and we will not link your email address or other personal information to your answers.

Risks and Discomforts: There is a small chance that answering questions about your mental health and relationship with your mentee as well as experiences during COVID-19 may make you feel upset or uncomfortable. At any point in time, you can stop answering questions from the study or withdraw from participating. If you feel uncomfortable, you may follow the links we provide links to resources for local and national mental health support following the interview.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: By completing this interview, you will have the chance to understand how you are feeling during COVID-19, and how it may be affecting you,

and your experiences of mentorship. Understanding your behaviours and feelings can be a positive coping tool in times of stress.

In addition, your participation in the research will provide us with important information on how mentorships have been impacted by COVID-19 and ways we can provide further support to both mentors and mentees. This information will be used to help inform mental health programs, policies, and the greater research community about the needs of teens and their mentors.

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Confidentiality: All responses to these questions will be kept confidential (private) by the researchers. You will be assigned a unique code. This code will be used to de-identify your interview. Your data will be safely stored in a secure laboratory in a password-protected and encrypted electronic file that can only be opened by one of our trained research staff. Identifying information will remain only with Drs. Ames and Craig. Your data will be stored electronically for ten years, at which point the data will be destroyed. All information we collect will remain confidential to the extent that the law permits. If the results are published or presented at conferences and similar events, you are never personally identified. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Your answers to the questions we have for you today will not impact your relationship with BBBSC or the researchers in any way.

Confidentiality is an integral component of this research. Information about you will not be shared, except in cases of a valid court order/subpoena, or if there is a perceived risk of:

- imminent danger to yourself or others
- current abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult

As your data will remain confidential and private, we will not be able to contact you should we have concerns with your responses. We want to make sure you have access to help should you

need it. Therefore, we will provide a list of mental health and crisis lines via email at the end of the interview (e.g., Kid's Help Phone etc.) that you can contact should you need it.

Anonymized data may be shared with other researchers to support replication and/or secondary analysis of data. By completing this survey, you are providing your consent to the Research Team to share the anonymous data with other research teams, and for it to be used in future research.

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Thank you for completing in our study!

We know answering some of these questions can be stressful. If after completing the interview you feel you have been affected by any of the issues discussed and need access to mental health support, please consult the Government of Canada's guide to accessing services [here](#), contact your doctor/health professional, or contact one of the following services:

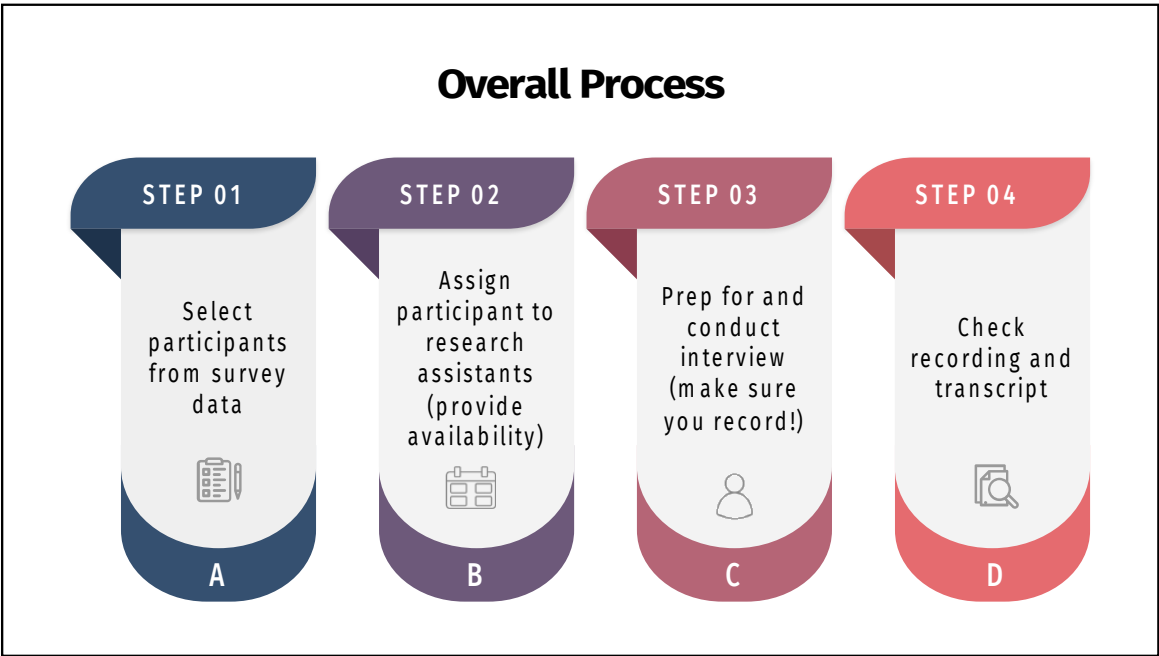
- **Kid's Help Phone** <https://kidshelpphone.ca/> 1-800-668-6868
Text Services: Text "CONNECT" to 686868 (also serving adults)
Chat Services: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/live-chat/>
- **Youthspace.ca** (*NEED2 Suicide Prevention, Education and Support*)
Youth Text (6pm-12am PT): (778) 783-0177 Youth Chat (6pm-12am PT): www.youthspace.ca
- **Crisis Services Canada** Toll Free (24/7): 1 (833) 456-4566 Text support (4pm-12am ET daily): 45645
- **Canadian Crisis Hotline** 1 (888) 353-2273
- **Better Help** www.betterhelp.com Online access to professional counsellors on the web, and available for iPhone and Android users
- **The LifeLine App** www.thelifelinecanada.ca Direct access to phone, online chat, text, and email crisis support
- **Crisis Services Canada** <https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/looking-for-local-resources-support/>
- **Canadian Mental Health Association** <https://cmha.ca>
- To find a suicide prevention crisis centre phone number or website in your province, visit the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention's webpage at <http://suicideprevention.ca/need-help>.
- 211 is a free service that provides referrals for community, government, and social services. Dial 211 or visit the 211 webpage at <http://211.ca> for more information and availability.
- You can download a list of resources for your province or territory [here](#).

Contact Information:

For any questions or concerns, please contact the principal investigator Dr. Stephanie Craig (stephanie.g.craig@uoguelph.ca) or Dr. Megan Ames (mames@uvic.ca). If you have any concerns about this research or how it is being conducted please feel free to contact the principal investigator or the University of Victoria's Research Ethics Board (ethics@uvic.ca).

How To Conduct Qualitative Interviews

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Using Zoom

1. Cloud recordings
2. Audio recordings
3. Transcript generator
4. Saving and checking its all there

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Using Zoom

User

1. Sign in to the Zoom web portal.
2. In the navigation menu, click **Settings**.
3. Click the **Recording** tab.
4. Click the **Cloud Recording** toggle to enable or disable it.
5. If a verification dialog appears, click **Enable** or **Disable** to verify the change.
Note: If the option is grayed out, it has been locked and must be changed at either the group or account level. Contact your Zoom administrator for assistance.
6. (Optional) Select any **additional basic and advanced cloud recording settings** as needed, such as save chat messages, display participants' names in the recording, or add a timestamp to the recording.

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Using Zoom

How to enable or disable audio transcription at the user level

To enable the audio transcript feature for your own use:

1. Sign in to the Zoom web portal.
2. In the navigation menu, click **Settings**.
3. Navigate to the **Cloud recording** option on the **Recording** tab and verify that the setting is enabled.

Notes:

- If the setting is disabled, click the Status toggle to enable it. If a verification dialog displays, choose **Turn On** to verify the change.
 - If the option is grayed out, it has been locked at either the Group or Account level, and you will need to contact your Zoom administrator.
4. In the **Advanced cloud recording settings**, click the **Audio transcript** check box to enable it, then click **Save** to confirm the change.

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Using Zoom

Settings

General

Video

Audio

Share Screen

Chat

Background & Effects

Recording

Profile

Statistics

Keyboard Shortcuts

Accessibility

Local Recording

Store my recordings at:

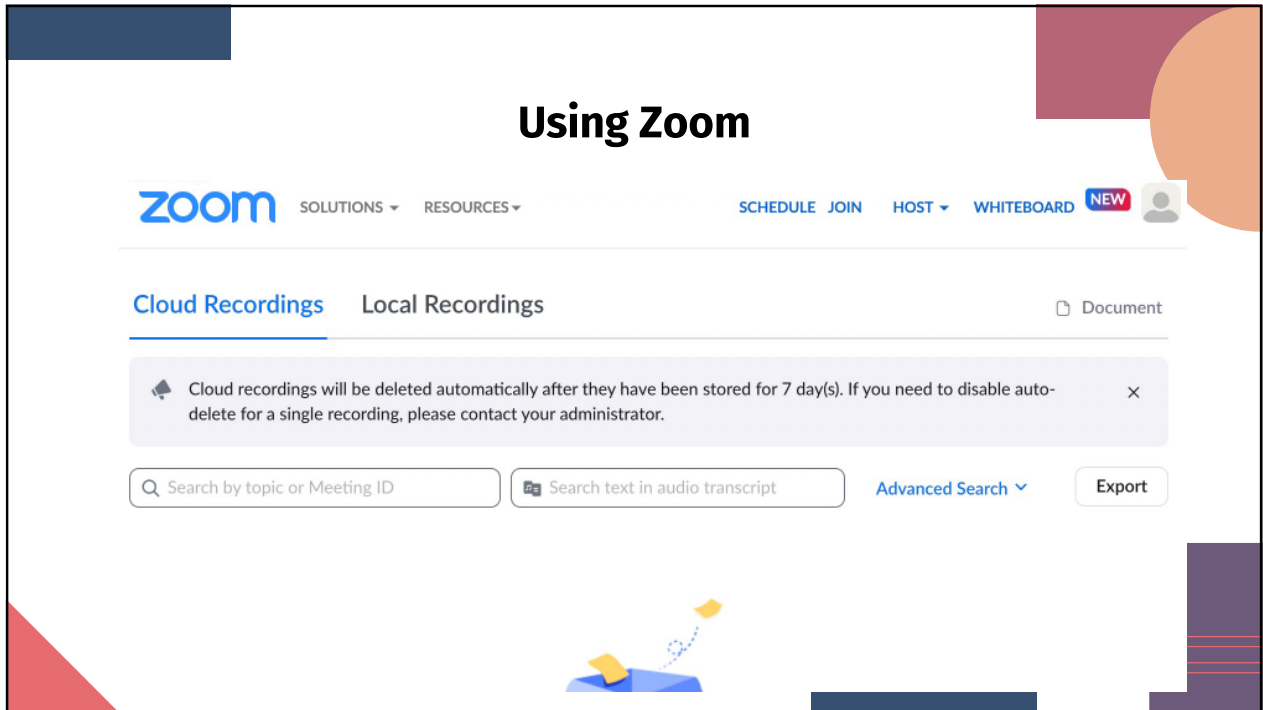
116.63 GB remaining

- Choose a location to save the recording to after the meeting ends
- Record a separate audio file of each participant ?
- Display participants' names in the recording
- Optimize for 3rd party video editor ?
- Add a timestamp to the recording ?
- Record video during screen sharing
 - Place video next to the shared screen in the recording
- Keep temporary recording files ?

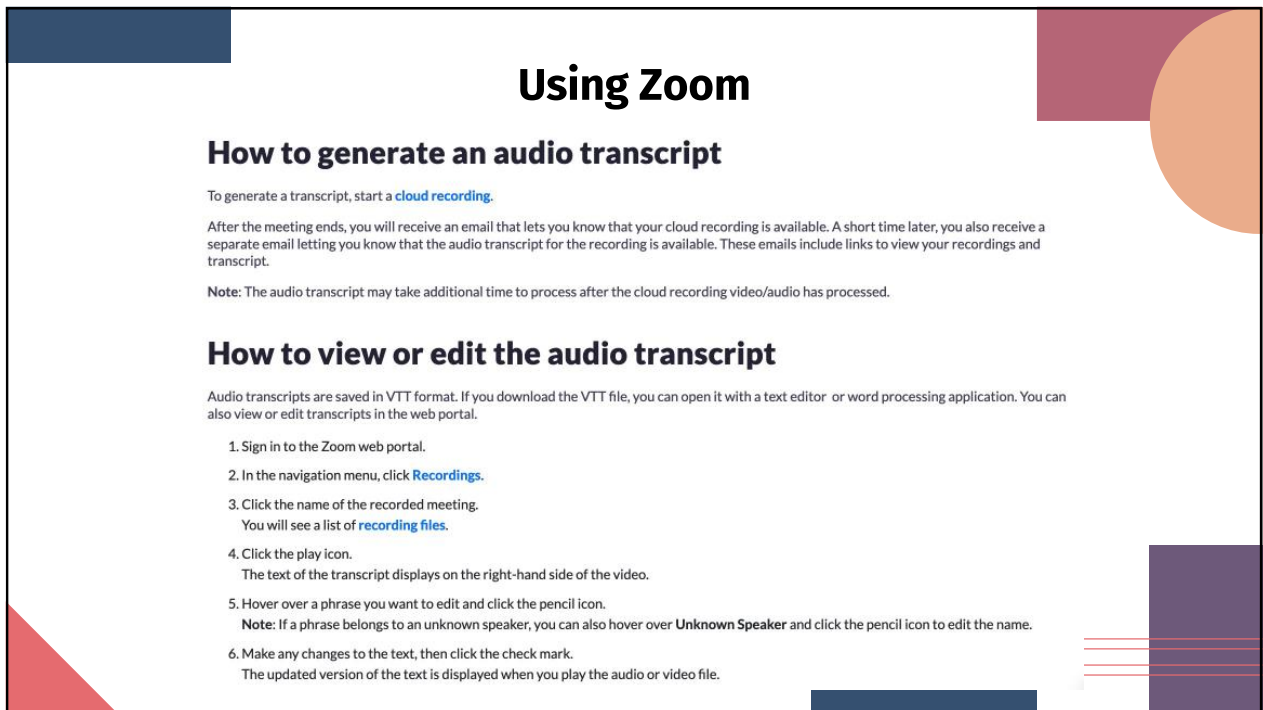
Cloud Recording

- Show notification when a new recording is available

8

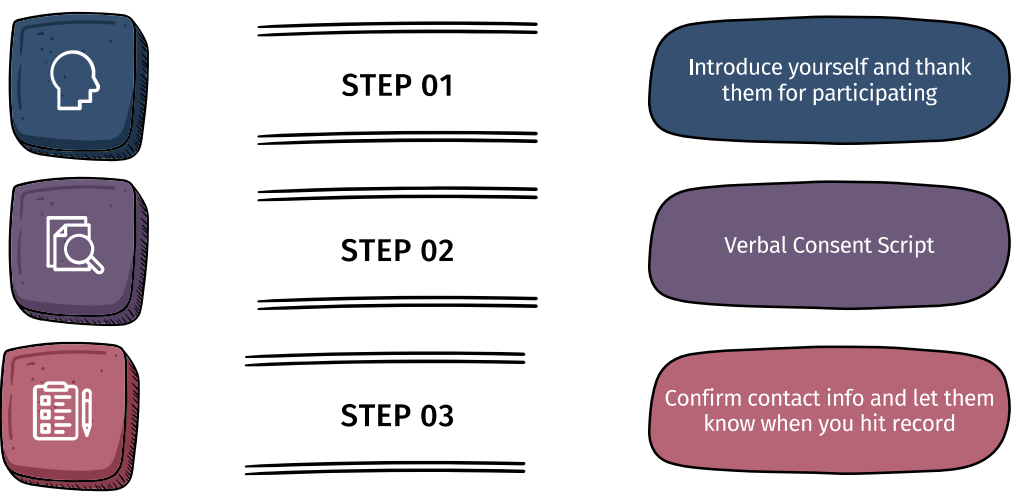


9



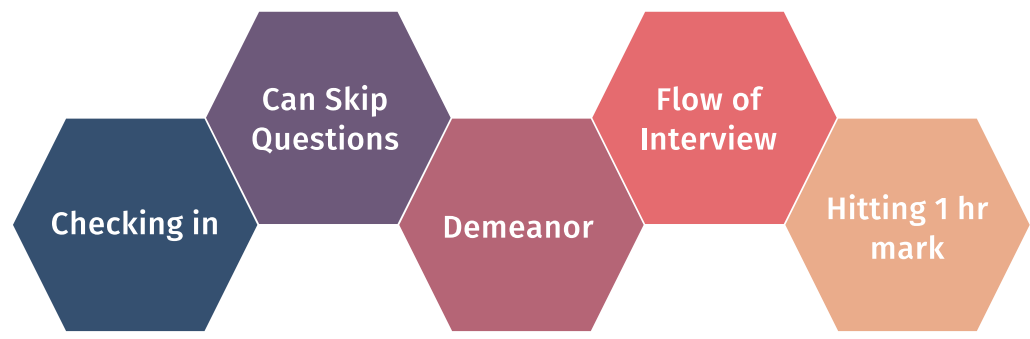
10

First Steps in the Interview



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During the Interview



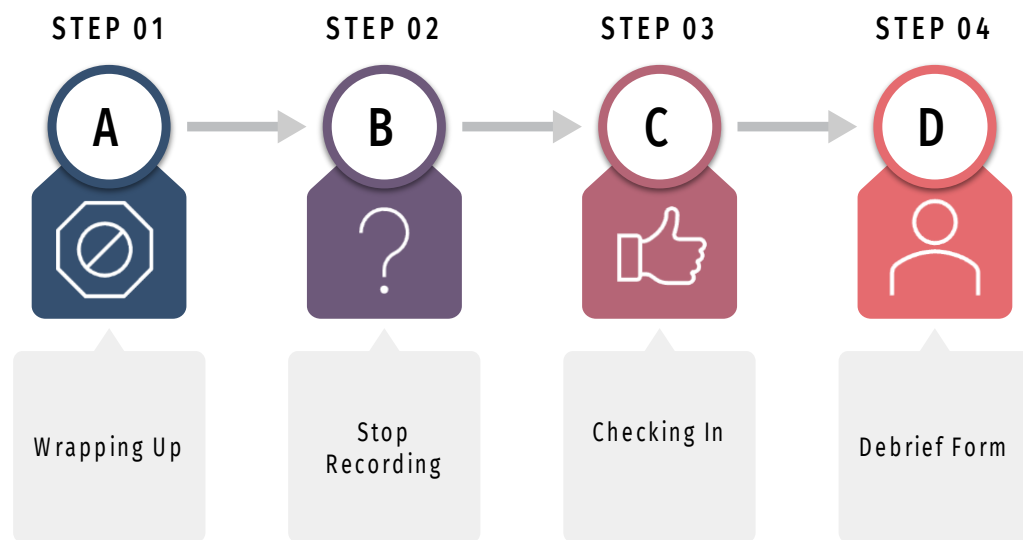
12

Additional Points on Conducting Interviews

1. Follow up Qs
2. Elaboration
3. Reacting to answers
4. Clarifying Qs
5. Being Present
6. Body Language and Tone
7. Feedback

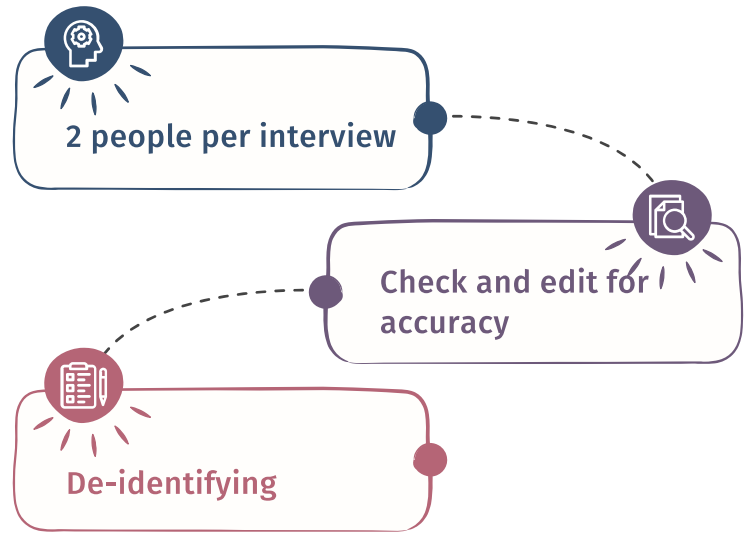
13

Debrief



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Transcript Checks



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Questions?

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Interview Questions

Mentors

1. How long have you been a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor? Tell me about your reasons for becoming a mentor?
2. During the pandemic, how did you connect with your mentee (i.e., in-person or virtually)? In what ways do you usually communicate with your mentee? Who takes the lead in scheduling and organizing activities (i.e., mentor, parent, or mentee)?
3. How was the transition to virtual mentoring? Did you experience any difficulties connecting with your mentee related to technology?
4. Did the use of technology impact boundaries with your mentee and in what way? (clarification: boundaries as in personal boundaries, communicating more often than agreed, meeting in person, etc.)
5. How was your mentee impacted by COVID-19 (e.g., restrictions, strain). Did that impact the mentoring relationship? In what ways did you support your mentee?
6. How were you impacted by COVID-19?
7. Please discuss your experiences with your match during the pandemic. What were some strengths and challenges you experienced if any? (clarification: e.g., restrictions, financial strain, mental health)
8. Did you learn anything new about your mentee during the pandemic? How did meeting virtually build or change your perspective on your mentoring relationship?
9. Do you feel you have similar values and interests with your mentee? How does that affect your relationship? How about when it comes to COVID-19 (e.g., mask wearing, protective measures, vaccines)?
10. What was your connection with your Big Brothers Big Sisters agency like during the pandemic? Is there anything that Big Brothers Big Sisters could have done differently to provide you with greater support during the pandemic?

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Interview Questions

Mentees

1. How long have you been a mentee with Big Brothers Big Sisters? Tell me about your reasons for joining.
2. During the pandemic, how did you connect with your mentor (i.e., in-person or virtually)? How do you usually communicate with your mentor? (If applicable) How was your experience in terms of connecting with your mentor using technology?
3. How were you impacted personally by COVID-19 (e.g., restrictions, strain)? Did that impact your relationship with your mentor?
4. Please discuss your experiences with your mentor during the pandemic. What about with virtual mentorship. What were some strengths and challenges you experienced if any?
5. (If applicable) What was one thing that you learned from your virtual relationship that you weren't expecting or didn't get from in-person mentorship?
6. Is there anything that your mentor could have done differently to provide you with greater support during the pandemic?
7. Did you feel your level of responsibility in the match changed due to the pandemic? If so, please describe. What were the strengths and challenges of virtual mentoring? (clarification: booking appointments, obtaining technology, planning activities)
8. What are some activities you enjoyed during virtual mentoring? Would you prefer to have a completely virtual, in-person, or mixed format and why?
9. (If applicable) How was the transition back to in-person mentoring?
10. What are some suggestions if you had to meet your mentor virtually again for a longer period of time?
11. Did you feel you had similar values and interests with your mentor? How did that affect your relationship? What about when it comes to COVID-19 (e.g., mask wearing, protective measures, vaccines)?
12. What was your connection with your Big Brothers Big Sisters agency like during the pandemic? Is there anything that Big Brothers Big Sisters could have done differently to provide you with greater support during the pandemic?
13. If you could tell your mentor one thing, what would it be?

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