

Childhood mentors have positive impact on career success

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Researchers evaluated surveys of more than 12,000 people, and found that having a mentor at a young age can put people on the path to career success. Credit: North Carolina State University

New research from North Carolina State University finds that young people who have had mentors are more likely to find work early in their careers that gives them more responsibility and autonomy – ultimately putting them on a path to more financially and personally rewarding careers.

"We wanted to look at the long-term impacts on mentees in naturally occurring mentorship relationships, rather than participants in formal mentorship programs," says Dr. Steve McDonald, an associate professor of sociology at NC State and lead author of a paper on the work. "And we found that having a mentor provides a clear benefit well into their working lives."

The researchers evaluated data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, which asked more than 12,000 people in their teens and early 20s if they had ever had a mentor. Six years later, those [young people](#) were surveyed again and asked about their work. But the researchers did more than just compare numbers from the survey.

"People from socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds are more likely to have [mentors](#)," McDonald says. "We wanted to find a way to determine which professional benefits stem from mentorship, as opposed to benefits that came from socioeconomic advantages."

The researchers did this by using a model that compared people from nearly identical backgrounds in which the only difference was whether they had a mentor. The researchers then examined how these different groups fared in the job market.

"We found that overall employment and compensation were about the same," says Joshua Lambert, co-author of the paper and a Ph.D. student at NC State. "But people who had mentors when they were younger had greater 'intrinsic' job rewards."

Intrinsic job rewards are things like authority and autonomy, which make work more personally fulfilling.

"The findings imply that mentees learn to place a higher value on jobs with more intrinsic rewards – and those same characteristics are associated with long-term career success," McDonald says.

More information: The paper, "The Long Arm of Mentoring: A Counterfactual Analysis of Natural Youth Mentoring and Employment Outcomes in Early Careers," is published online in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*: link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10464-014-9670-2

Provided by North Carolina State University

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