

# **The Effects of Informal Mentoring on Adolescent Development**

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Doctor of Education**

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## **Certificate of Authorship/Originality**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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# Abstract

Teens growing up through the stormy adolescent years have found refuge in adults who have been available to give guidance and practical help to them. Previous research has demonstrated the positive effects of formal mentoring on various areas of adolescent growth. Informal or natural mentoring relationships which have been in operation for centuries have received less attention.

The present study investigates the impact of informal mentoring on adolescent development at an international school in Hong Kong by using both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The research questions included whether or not growth in adolescents correlates with having experienced informal mentoring relationships, and if so, which areas of adolescent growth are affected. Additionally, the processes, qualities, and contents of informal mentoring that makes it work are explored. Participants ( $n = 163$ , aged around 18) self-selected into groups ranging from 'much mentored' to 'not mentored'. The variables representing positive growth were peer relations and parent relations, measured by the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), perception of scholastic competence measured by the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA), actual academic achievement, and global self worth also measured by the SPPA. Descriptive data on the development and nurturing of mentoring relationships were collected through a questionnaire completed by students and extensive interviews conducted with seven participants.

Correlations were found between having experienced informal mentoring and positive relationships with parents, while no significant differences were found for the other variables. Teenagers who were mentored had better relationships with their parents as they demonstrated higher attachments to mother and father, less alienation from mother and better communication with both parents. This study confirmed that informal mentoring makes a positive difference in the development of young people. Most of the participants were able to access one or more informal mentors through their natural network, and both the adult and youth were responsible for starting and developing the relationship. Informal mentors, including parents, aunts and teachers, helped teens in various areas of growth. Findings of the study support some of the existing theories on key mentoring processes including empathy, authenticity, instrumental mentoring, cognitive development and other interrelated processes proposed by researchers such as Rhodes, Karcher and Spencer.

Implications for youth, adults, and program policies were explored. This study also began to discuss the relationship between Chinese (Asian) culture and the processes of informal mentoring, introducing further opportunities for research on culture and mentoring.