A Review of Research on Mentoring Program for Adolescents in Korea

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Abstract

Objectives: To examine research trends of mentoring programs for adolescents in Korea in order to understand current status of research and suggest directions for future research. Methods/Statistical Analysis: For this purpose, this study reviewed domestic articles about mentoring program for adolescents that are registered (or nominated to be) in the National Research Foundation of Korea. Using content analysis, these studies were analyzed according to subjects of research, research themes and the methodologies used. Findings: According to the results of the study, the subjects of research in the area of mentoring program for adolescents were mainly mentees participating in the programs. Major themes found in this study were the effects of mentoring programs, factors affecting outcomes of mentoring programs and subjective experiences of mentor or mentee. With regard to methodologies used, quantitative methodology was used frequently and qualitative methods showed steady increases. Improvements/Applications: For future research, findings of this study suggested needs for conducting research using more sophisticated rigorous methodology. Extending research themes would contribute to the future literature as well.

Keywords: Adolescents, Mentee, Mentor, Mentoring, Mentoring Programs

1. Introduction

Mentoring has been of great interest to policy makers, community service providers, intervention researchers and administrators as a way to prevent delinquency and foster healthy development of young people1. Community- and school-based mentoring programs have been growing at a rapid pace and they are one of the most widely used approaches for such purposes mentioned above in the United States and the United Kingdom. For instance, the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America school-based mentoring program quadrupled in size between 1999 and 20062 and over 5,000 organizations in the United States offer some form of mentoring approach3. In Korea, mentoring was emerged in the late 1990s when the number of youth experiencing hardships had rapidly increased due to the economic crisis of 1997 and it has become increasingly popular4.

Youth mentoring can vary on a multitude of dimensions (e.g. duration, intensity, integration with other services, target populations). However, mentor-mentee relationship is the core of mentoring and four processes can be identified as central to mentoring: 1. Identification of the mentee with the mentor that helps with motivation, behavior and bonding investment in pro-social behavior and social responsibility; 2. Provision of information or teaching that might help the mentee better manage various challenges of life; 3. Advocacy for the mentee in various systems and settings; and 4. Emotional support and friendliness5. These processes are often mentioned

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as reasons to expect that mentorship will be particularly beneficial to adolescents who exhibit psychological vulnerability and instability considering developmental stage. Mostly within a social support framework, provision of social support through mentoring may improve youth functioning and mentors can serve as role models, with whom youth might identify, leading to increased socially appropriate behavior. A strong attachment with a caring mentor may provide resilience as well. In addition to these reasons mentioned, the fact that compared to other professionally delivered interventions mentoring is inexpensive makes it popular and attractive.

The topic of youth mentoring has been widely studied in the United States and mounting research has focused on examining effectiveness of mentoring programs. While some of study results support the efficacy of mentoring in promoting better social, academic, psychological and behavioral outcomes, there are also some discrepant findings about it. Process-related topics (e.g. identifying mediating or moderating effects) have also been researched in this field and such factors as the quality of mentor-mentee tie and gender were tested. With increased interest in mentoring program for adolescents in Korea, there has been a growing body of research. However, there appears to be a dearth of published scholarship focusing on analyzing research trends in this field. Considering positive impacts of youth mentoring programs and potentiality of research interest growth in the future, examining current status of research on mentoring program for adolescents in Korea is timely needed as a way to apprehend research trend to date and suggest directions for future research in this field.

Acknowledging the importance of mentoring for adolescents, the topic of mentoring for adolescents has come to be of interest in Korea. Majority of past research have focused on testifying impacts of mentoring programs on adolescents’ psychological aspects (e.g. problem-solving ability, dealing with negative emotions, self-efficacy, self-control, self-respect), academic and career path-related aspects (e.g. maturity regarding one’s career path, academic ability) and social aspects (e.g. social skills, adaptation to peer relationship). Results of research generally indicate that mentoring for adolescents can have positive outcomes with young people. For example, mentoring was found to be effective in increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy of adolescents and help adolescents’ adaptation to school.

While these studies have made an important contribution to our knowledge of mentoring program for this population, scholastic effort to explore overall understanding of research in this field is needed. Despite increased attention to the topic of mentoring program for adolescents in Korea and the value of identifying trends of current research, no research has attempted to provide an overall picture of research in this field up to date. Thus, research effort to analyze research trends of mentoring program for adolescents in Korea is scholarly valuable in the sense that it would add further research insights and potentially form the basis for research and practice.

2. Methodology

For the purpose of analyzing research trends in mentoring programs for adolescents in Korea, this study reviewed domestic articles only that are registered (or nominated to be) in the National Research Foundation of Korea up to date. The time period for selection of articles was not particularly set in this study because this study is the first research effort to review domestic articles on mentoring programs for adolescents in Korea. The search was then filtered for articles that include “mentoring”, “mentoring programs” or “adolescents” as key word. For classification of category of the articles selected in this study, this study referred to that of past review research. As a result, the articles were analyzed according to subjects of research, research themes and the methodologies used.

3. Results

A total of 45 studies were found through computerized search. However, 5 studies were excluded from the analysis due to the lack of relevance to the research topic. Using content analysis, the present study finally analyzed a total of 40 domestic articles. The results of the analysis are described in the below.

3.1 Subjects of Research

The Table 1 shows results of analysis on research subject (note that there is no research subject used in 6 literature
reviews and thus it makes total numbers 34). The majority of research subjects were mentees participating in the mentoring programs. 16 studies examined impacts of mentoring program on mentees or investigated internal experiences of mentees during participation in mentoring programs. Mentors and mentees were included together in 10 studies. As an effort to increase understanding of mentoring programs, some research was conducted using multilateral approach which included mentors, mentees and significant others related to mentoring programs (e.g., parents of mentees, staff of mentoring agency, teacher of mentee) as subjects. For example, a study\textsuperscript{12} included 104 mentees, 97 mentors and 97 mentee’s parent in order to investigate outcome of mentoring for children and adolescents in low-income family in mentees’ various psychosocial aspects including impulse, depression, school life, grade, interpersonal relationship, etiquette and vision about future. 6 studies investigated effects of mentoring programs on mentors or explored mentors’ subjective experiences during mentoring process. Across these studies, mentees were mostly disadvantaged or troubled adolescents. For instance, subjects used in majority of the studies were adolescents of low-income\textsuperscript{12–16}, single-parent\textsuperscript{14,15} or grandparent-grandchildren\textsuperscript{17} family, runaway youth\textsuperscript{18} or adolescents having the problem of maladjustment to school\textsuperscript{19}. Mentors were mostly university students and office workers participating in corporate social contribution programs were included in some studies.

### 3.2 Research Themes

The Table 2 demonstrates results of analysis on research themes. The present study categorized research in mentoring for adolescents into four different themes: Examining effects of mentoring programs, factors affecting outcomes of mentoring programs, mentor or mentees’ subjective experiences during mentoring process and suggesting practice - and/or policy-related implications based on the analysis of mentoring programs abroad or domestic. First of all, among them, evaluating effectiveness of mentoring program for various groups of adolescents was the research theme that most frequently appeared and 20 studies were conducted for this purpose. Most studies provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Mentoring was effective in increasing pro-social norms, future assurance capacity of the positive development capabilities\textsuperscript{8}, self-esteem, self-competence, positive connectedness to school\textsuperscript{9,10,14,17} and social support including family- and friend-support\textsuperscript{18}.

Secondly, exploring subjective experiences of mentor or mentee through qualitative research methodologies was another major theme of interest. Experiences during

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<th>Table 2. Research Themes</th>
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mentoring were examined from mentee’s perspectives. For example, by16 examined the way emotional relationship between a mentor and mentee in a tutoring process and indicated ‘dramatic success’, ‘gradual progress’, ‘achievement oriented change’, and ‘resistance to change’ as the main type of mentoring experiences from mentee’s views. Mentors’ inner experiences were explored in several studies19,20. In a study20 on experience of mentors of long-term mentoring program for teenagers of low income families, in-depth interview results described tuning, sprout and mutual growth as the core characteristics of mentoring relationship. More specifically, the mentor’s experiences of making mentoring relationship were described as ‘coming closer’, ‘enduring through’ and ‘walking together’.

Third, there were also studies that attempted to investigate factors to affect outcomes of mentoring programs and 4 studies were done for this purpose. In21, for instance, identified the factors associated with the effects among socio-demographic traits of the participants, structural features of mentoring program and relational characteristics between mentors and mentees. Study results showed that mentee-mentor similarity and mentors’ sincere attitudes toward mentees were positively associated with mentoring effects perceived by mentees. The factors related to mentoring effects perceived by mentors were mentors’ faith in them as good mentors and mentees’ positive attitude toward mentors as well. Other studies in this area tapped into mentor’s empathic ability22 and supervision-related variables23,24.

Lastly, several studies inquired practice- and/or policy-related implications based on analysis of mentoring programs run domestically or abroad. For example25 analyzed youth mentoring policies and practices in England and discussed implications. Other studies conducted analysis of cases of youth mentoring in German26 and domestic and foreign mentoring system for mal-adaptive youth27.

3.3 Research Methodologies
The Table 3 shows results of analysis on research methodologies. The results of the analysis revealed that the most of the studies used quantitative methodologies. 19 studies were conducted using quantitative methodologies and these methodologies were employed for the purpose of investigating effectiveness of mentoring program. Such quantitative methodologies as T-test, ANOVA, ANCOVA, regression and Wilcox on matched-pairs signed-ranks test were used frequently. Some studies used more sophisticated quantitative methods to examine relationships among measurement variables. For example, using structural equation modeling, by9 investigated the mechanism through which youth school-based mentoring program impacts mentees’ psychological and school-related outcomes and found that the effects of program participation were mediated by proximal changes in connectedness to role models and development of help-seeking orientation. More sophisticated methodology as such can contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this area. Qualitative studies seem to be steadily conducted in this area and 11 studies have explored inner experiences of mentors and/or mentees. Mixed methodologies were also found. 4 studies employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to provide empirical evidence and rich knowledge on mentoring. 6 literature reviews were done with the object of providing suggestions for mentoring programs and systems.

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4. Conclusion

The present study reviewed research articles in the area of mentoring programs for adolescents with a purpose of examining research trends in this area. Several issues were emerged as a result. First of all, this study revealed that research in this area lack empirically intensive research methodology. Studies in this area examine effects of mentoring programs by pre-program versus post-program comparisons of the same group of adolescents or by comparisons between one group of adolescents receiving mentoring and another group nor receiving mentoring. Majority of the studies reviewed provided empirical support to demonstrate positive effects of mentoring programs across various domains of adolescents. However, these results need to be interpreted with caution due to the methodological weaknesses. For example, a number of empirical studies relied on self-report indices; used nonrandom assignment to experimental versus control groups or reported the effectiveness of mentoring programs without control groups. More sophisticated and rigorous methodology is needed to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring programs.

Second, the scope of research themes appeared limited. Main focus of past research in this area has been on such research topics as mentee, problems of mentee or the effectiveness of mentoring programs. More extensive research endeavor to identify and examine diverse research themes would be beneficial in order to develop more accurate and comprehensive understanding of mentoring for this population. For example, future research could examine mentoring programs in more diverse populations of adolescents. This study revealed that very few studies conducted research on adolescents other than at-risk youth. Only two studies could be located and the effects of mentoring programs were tested for prostitute and adolescents moved from North Korea in these studies. Future research should also expand discussion on various forms of mentoring programs in depth and testify the effects of those programs. The effects of mentoring programs are likely to differ depending on various features including operation methods. For instance, group mentoring can have different issues compared to formal one-to-one mentoring programs and these features need to be considered. Or cyber mentoring can be different from traditional face-to-face contact mentoring in some aspects. Thus, research on these diverse forms of mentoring would add further insight into this topic. This study also revealed that little research has been devoted to examine specific ways or variables to improve effects of mentoring programs. For example, previous research found that duration of mentoring relationship is a key determinant of effectiveness of mentoring programs and to date, there has been less focus on empirically investigating such topics mentioned above. In the similar vein, there is a lack of studies investigating how mentoring affects outcomes. Future trials on testifying moderating or mediating effects of certain variables on mentoring outcomes would be useful to understand more about mechanism of mentoring process and help practitioners and policymakers establish more realistic goals regarding various features of mentoring programs. Finally, this study found that there is a paucity of meta-analyses. In fact, only one meta-analysis was recently done to provide comprehensive empirical evidence to the current knowledge on the effectiveness of mentoring programs. As mentioned previously, mentoring programs can vary in many aspects and this variation can affect outcome of mentoring program. For this reason, meta-analysis on effects of various mentoring programs has been vigorously conducted abroad and these analyses have permitted researchers to empirically summarize the results of mentoring across multiple studies and to determine the strength of program-related effects. Thus, comparison across various studies on mentoring for adolescents through rigorous meta-analytic approach would enhance the current state of knowledge.

5. References

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