

SOCIAL NETWORKS OF AT-RISK YOUTH

Social Support from
Bonding and Bridging Relationships



Lois Schenk

**SOCIAL NETWORKS OF AT-RISK YOUTH:
SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM BONDING AND BRIDGING
RELATIONSHIPS**

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ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM

Colophon

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Design & layout: Lois Schenk

Printing: Ridderprint | www.ridderprint.nl

ISBN: 978-94-6416-504-3

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BONDING AND BRIDGING RELATIONSHIPS**

Sociale netwerken van risicojongeren: Sociale steun van bindende en
overbruggende relaties

Proefschrift

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de
Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
op gezag van de rector magnificus
Prof.dr. F.A. van der Duijn Schouten
en volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties.

De openbare verdediging zal plaatsvinden op
vrijdag 23 april 2021 om 13.00 uur
door

LOÏS SCHENK
Geboren te Nunspeet

The logo of Erasmus University, featuring the word 'Erasmus' in a stylized, cursive script.

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CHAPTER 1

General Introduction

Transitional Periods: Adolescence and Young Adulthood

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical transitional periods for later health and wellbeing. Transitional periods can provide youth with opportunities for change, resulting in a good fit between individuals and their social context. For example, more competence and independence may provide youths with the possibility to choose schooling, employment and relations that fit their needs and interests. However, with increasing independence, autonomy, responsibilities and the exploration of social roles, consequent risks may come along. Social changes and the appeal to autonomy and independence may have the consequence of not meeting the societal expectations linked to these stages (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For adolescents for example, staying in school and meeting the expectations of being a high school student, and the establishment of a social identity are one of the most important tasks during this time (Eccles, 1999; Kroger, 2006). Young adults enter a time where finding employment and navigating different social environments

with parents, peers, and romantic relationships are major developmental tasks (Arnett, 2004).

For many youths the family remains the primary source of social support during these transitional periods. Parent-child attachment, warmth, encouragement, and family cohesion are commonly associated with resilience in young people (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). During adolescence and young adulthood, however, youths form relations with other adults. Youths become actively engaged in networks with people outside their family, being peers, neighbours, and institutions such as school, the labor sector, and the judicial system. These individuals and institutions are becoming partly responsible for youths' development by providing support. Social support from this broader social network is known to play a critical role in youths' wellbeing during their transition to adulthood (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

The experiences of social support may be of particular importance for youths growing up in urban areas. Higher levels of social and economic inequalities are present in urban areas and can contribute to segregation, isolation, and negative social relationships (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Social support seems key for youths during transitional periods, in particular for adolescents and young adults in urban areas for whom meeting developmental and societal expectations is hard. This dissertation explores the role of the social network in supporting urban at-risk youths.

The backdrop of this dissertation is Rotterdam, as it offers a context of a cultural and social dynamic urban area in the Netherlands.

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Rotterdam is the second largest city in the Netherlands with almost 650,000 inhabitants, of which 33% is younger than 27 years (Erdem, de Haan, Stoorvogel, & Wiering, 2019). With approximately 170 different nationalities, Rotterdam is considered a superdiverse city (Vertovec, 2007). 50.8% of all youths in Rotterdam have a migration background (38.2% non-Western, 12.6% Western migration background) (Erdem et al., 2019). In some neighbourhoods in Rotterdam more than 50% of the youth population is of second-generation immigrant background and there is no longer an ethnic majority in those areas (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013). This group of migration youth itself is diverse in terms of educational levels, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds. In addition, compared to other cities in the Netherlands, Rotterdam has a relatively high level of youths who do not have employment, education or training. This is referred to as NEET-youth (neither employment, education nor training). Having employment, education or training is an important indicator of participation in society, so it is alarming that 11.4% of youth in Rotterdam are NEET-youth (Monitor AOJ, 2017). Moreover, in Rotterdam are approximately 7200 youths at risk, defined as young people between the ages of 12 and 27 years old who pose a risk to themselves and/or society due to an accumulation of problems with work, school, health, and/or security (therefore also referred to as *multi-problem youth*) (Scheidel, 2016). To provide youths growing up in Rotterdam with opportunities to participate in society and reach their full potential, a focus on their access to and perceptions of social support is needed.

In the remainder of this introduction I will introduce my main research questions as well as the four studies included in this dissertation. I will first elaborate on which youths are considered at-risk. Subsequently, I will describe characteristics of social networks that are considered important in studying social support and the relation between social support and youths' wellbeing. Lastly, the role of mentors is considered and the extent to which they are able to provide additional social support to at-risk youths.

At-Risk Youths Defined

During adolescence and young adulthood, the fit between individual characteristics and social environments is essential for healthy development. A misfit between the two can influence behaviour and mental health (Eccles, 1999). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) illustrates how individuals are nested in different levels of an ecological environment, affecting individuals' development in four ways. The definition of 'at-risk youths' is based on the presence of risk factors in these various levels that together may hinder the development of youths. First, the *macrosystem* entails a belief system in the form of politics or religion. For example, beliefs on conformity, individuality, and success differ between Western and non-Western societies, and shape individual behaviour. Second, youths' development is affected by events in settings they do not directly participate in (the *exosystem*). This can be parents' employment, mass media, or policies. For example, an economic crisis may have a negative impact on individuals' development, directly and indirectly through, among others, parental unemployment. Third, the

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innermost circle represents the immediate settings surrounding youth (the *microsystem*), for example family, school, and street settings. Finally, the interaction between different settings (the *mesosystem*) influences individuals' development. This influence depends on the social interconnections between settings, such as the presence of information about different settings. For example, young adults' experience in and prior knowledge of entering the labour market will affect their behaviour and development in the new setting.

Youths living in the Netherlands are more or less part of the same macro and exosystems regarding policies, politics, and mass media. Some social groups, however, are affected more by the prevailing beliefs and policies than others. At the macrolevel, educational inequality, societal polarisation, and discrimination on the labour market are contextual influences that some youths in the Netherlands are more subject to than others (Ministerie OCW, 2020; NJi, 2017). The exosystem entails the legal framework which, among other things, in the Netherlands involves that at the age of 18 compulsory education stops, youths need to get their own health insurance, and it marks the end of the possibility of provision of youth care. This is accompanied by the belief that, at that age, youths should be able to provide for themselves regarding various life domains, such as income, housing, mental health, social network, and community involvement (Fassaert et al, 2014). Functioning on an acceptable level in these domains is referred to as *self-sufficiency* and includes the aspect of being able to organize and reduce the need for professional help. A such, self-sufficiency addresses individuals' and their networks' responsibility to compensate for, sometimes

complex, problems. Risk factors at the microsystem are, for example, a lack of social support from the social environment, lack of social cohesion in the neighbourhood, and family poverty (Ince & Meij, 2013). Lastly, intra-individual characteristics that are important factors in healthy development are, amongst others, individuals' personality factors, type of education, social and emotional skills, and life events (Ince & Meij, 2013; Nji, 2017).

This dissertation focusses on youths who experience multiple problems on different levels and (therefore) are likely to struggle with becoming self-sufficient. Risk factors can accumulate in the various systems around an individual. Zijlmans et al. (2020) recently showed the clustering of various problems in multiproblem young adults, based on childhood indicators and current functioning. Internalizing and externalizing problems, personal and friends' delinquency, and alcohol and cannabis use were co-occurring very often but to various degrees of severity. Young adults in the more severe groups had more adverse childhood experiences (ACE's; such as emotional and physical abuse), and alcohol and drug use in the family, and currently presented higher levels of antisocial behaviour (such as aggression), and in turn, showed higher numbers of committed violent crimes. This research indicates the accumulation over time of intra-individual and environmental obstacles and problems. Therefore, youths who are experiencing intra-individual challenges *in combination with* environmental challenges in the micro, exo, or macroystem, are considered *multi-problem youths* in this dissertation.

Experiencing multiple problems is also considered a *self-enforcing process of deprivation* (Schuyt, 1995). Multi-problem youths are likely to

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profit less from social care institutions and are more likely to experience the interference of controlling and sanctioning institutions (e.g., probation service and police). This way, problems in the macro and exosystem can transfer to other domains, enforcing deprivation (Schuyt, 1995). Experiencing problems may also influence the social environment, for example, displaying behavioural problems may elicit less social support from the environment. This interaction between individuals' characteristics and their context is known as *deviation amplifying processes* (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). Having multiple problems in one domain, thus, entails a risk of developing problems in other domains. Experiencing multiple problems in combination with insufficient counterbalancing protective factors, is an indicator of increased risk of not being able to participate in society and not reaching one's potential. In this dissertation, therefore, I refer to these youths as *at-risk* to emphasize the interactional character and possible (long term) consequences of experiencing multiple problems.

Social Support

Especially for at-risk youths, social sources are necessary to support them in their transition to adulthood. A successful transition to a new setting or social role (e.g., entering a new school or becoming more self-sufficient) is dependent on whether someone navigates the transition on its own or in the company of familiar peers and adults, and whether this person (and its family) is provided with information or experience about the new context. First elaborated on by Bourdieu (1986), the access to relevant social resources is defined as *social capital*. Bourdieu used the

concept of social capital to explain the reproduction of inequality; having an association with someone from a different class provides new information and examples of prevailing norms and values of that social class (Savage, 2015). This way, access to education and work, via increasing cultural capital (e.g., learning ways of talking, norms, and values) and economic capital (e.g., by access to different types of work) can be powered by social connections. Having a social tie with someone with different levels of these types of capital, can increase someone's social capital. Thus, social capital is the totality of resources that individuals can activate in the social networks they are part of. Social capital can be studied in terms of activated social capital, which can be described as social support. Social support contains the social provisions that individuals seek in their relationships with others (Weiss, 1974). It seems logical to assume that the more diverse a social network is in type of contacts and types of support, the more an individual can profit from this network, and the more activated social capital the individual has.

To describe the diversity of social networks, a distinction in types of contacts and types of social support must be made. Firstly, types of contacts can be described in terms of bonding and bridging social capital. *Bonding social capital* refers to relations between individuals who share a social identity (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital for youths mainly entails frequent and trusting contacts with parents, siblings, other family members, and peers (Bassani, 2007; Bottrell, 2009; Raymond-Flesch, Auerswald, McGlone, Comfort, & Minnis, 2017). This type of network is characterized by similarity, trust, and frequent contact between its members (Stanton-Salazar & Spina,

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2005). *Bridging social capital* is social capital that arises from relations between individuals from different networks. Bridging social capital, therefore, is characterized by less similarity and less frequent contact in social relations, but also by providing sources that or not present in the existing (bonding) social network. Secondly, a distinction in types of social support can be made using House's typology of social support (1981). It distinguishes three types of social support including instrumental support, emotional support, and informational support. *Instrumental support* consists of concrete aid such as offering time and skills, lending money or other tangible things. *Emotional support* involves offering care and comfort, motivating and encouragement. Lastly, *informational support* consists of providing advice and guidance, for example on applying for jobs, or navigating the educational and institutional environment. These types of support during adolescence and young adulthood can be provided by parents, friends, teachers, or other significant individuals in youths' lives. Certain types of contacts, however, are more likely to provide specific types of social support. As a result of the frequency and trust in the relation, emotional support arises mainly from bonding social capital (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). The relational distance between bridging contacts (less similarity and less frequent contact) leads to the assumption that bridging contacts are less likely to provide emotional support. The dissimilarity, however, results in additional knowledge and tangible support. Bridging social contacts, thus, are more likely to provide informational and instrumental support. In sum, bridging and bonding social contacts, and instrumental,

emotional, and informational support are characteristics used in this dissertation to describe the social networks of youths.

Social support is especially salient in times of social change, such as adolescence and young adulthood. Having relationships with people who offer social support is understood to be a basic determinant of wellbeing (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Seligman, 2012). Unlike the term 'health' to describe individuals' condition, wellbeing refers to interconnected dimensions of not only physical and mental, but also social wellbeing (Naci & Ionnadis, 2015). Youths facing adversities, thus, can still experience a sense of wellbeing when they have sufficient social resources (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). The most prominent model explaining the relation between social support and wellbeing is the *main-effects model* (Rook, 1990). This model asserts that social support is directly associated with wellbeing. There is extensive evidence that social support is related to positive wellbeing, and that the lack of social support is related to negative wellbeing (Campos & Kim, 2017; Rook, 2015; Rook, August, & Sorkin, 2011). An alternative model is the *stress-buffering model*. This model takes life-stress into account and posits that social support protects against the negative effects of stress on wellbeing. For this model too, there is considerable empirical evidence, sometimes with mixed findings (Cohen & Wills, 1988; Raffaelli et al., 2013; Santini, Koyanagi, Tyrovolas, Mason, & Haro, 2015; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Zapert, & Maton, 2000). In this model, social support reduces the negative effects of stress, which ultimately prevents isolation, depression, and aggression (Taylor, 2011; Vaux, Burda, & Stewart, 1986). Having low levels of social support, on the contrary, is known to have possible

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negative consequences for the wellbeing of at-risk youths. Most likely, these processes are interactional and deprivation amplifying. For example, adolescents with depressive symptoms tend to isolate themselves from peers, and youths with aggressive behavior can elicit negative behavior from parents and peers. Vice versa, receiving little social support may result in developing more depressive or aggressive symptoms. A healthy social network, therefore, is considered to consist of ties with people who provide emotional support, encouragement, guidance, and access to information and resources (Thompson & Goodvin, 2016). A less healthy or problematic social network arises from, for example, youths having hindering contacts (i.e. deviant peer affiliations), living in social isolation, and lacking family contact (Jong-Gierveld, van Tilburg, & Dykstra, 2006; Walen & Lachman, 2000).

Ideally, healthy networks are, thus, diverse in terms of the presence of both bonding *and* bridging social capital, providing emotional, informational, *and* instrumental support. For at-risk youths, bridging social capital could be particularly important since it provides them with richer alternative resources to support them in transitional stages of education and work, and this is likely to result in higher levels of wellbeing (Bassani, 2007; Bottrell, 2009; Ellison, Wohn, & Greenhow, 2014).

Research Question 1: Social Support and Wellbeing of At-Risk Youths

Previous research on adolescents has consistently shown that adolescents' social networks are related to their wellbeing (for reviews

see Gallupe et al., 2019; Sijtsema & Lindenberg, 2018; Spendelow et al., 2017). Wellbeing is likely to increase with the transition to adulthood, since this developmental stage allows for greater self-selection of contexts, relations, and activities (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). For young adults who are considered at-risk to an accumulation of problems, however, this period of increased independence, drop in institutional structure, and contextual changes may cause additional risks and lead to a decrease in wellbeing. The relation between social networks and wellbeing during young adulthood has received less attention in scientific research compared to these relations during childhood and adolescence. Moreover, the most prominent models on the relation between social support and wellbeing do not take the reciprocity of both constructs into account. Thus, there is reason to study if and how young adults' existing problems and social networks are leading to so called *deviation amplifying processes* using longitudinal models (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). Having a supportive network is likely to prevent the accumulation of multiple problems, but youths also need to be able to identify supportive contacts. Previous research on the willingness of support seeking has highlighted various barriers and facilitators, such as problem recognition, self-reliance, and beliefs of helpfulness (Gulliver et al., 2010; Rickwood et al., 2005). These barriers and facilitators are strongly linked to the availability of sources (i.e., social capital) in at-risk youths' networks. Studying *received* social support instead of *perceptions* of available social support is likely to be the main reason of mixed findings on the stress-buffering model (Santini et al., 2015). Relations between social support and wellbeing are most likely to be observed when focusing on

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perceptions of social support because the perception of the availability of social support is a better predictor of wellbeing than actual received support (Santini et al., 2015). Putting youths' perspective central will produce more knowledge on youths' perceptions of their social network and the sources to activate in their network. As such, the first research question in this dissertation is: What is the association between network characteristics of at-risk youths and their wellbeing?

To answer this question, two studies were conducted. The first study (chapter 2) set out to examine the relation between at-risk young adults' social network and their wellbeing. Using data of 696 multi-problem young adult men (age 18-28), I test whether problematic social networks are related to declines in their wellbeing over time. Vice versa, I test if a decline in wellbeing is related to more problematic social networks over time. I approach youths' wellbeing in this study in terms of levels of psychopathology, distinguishing between internalizing and externalizing problem behavior. Indicators of problematic social networks were assessed with the self-sufficiency matrix, focusing on the presence of family contact, isolation, and hindering peers.

The second study (chapter 3) aims to provide insight in the wellbeing of at-risk youths regarding the extent to which social support sources meet their needs. Using the concept of *help-seeking orientation*, I studied the individual needs and beliefs of youths regarding social support in their social network. The perceived availability of resources in youths' networks was studied using the bonding and bridging social capital framework. This distinction served to examine how various sorts of contacts provide youths with emotional, instrumental, and

informational support and its relation with wellbeing. This qualitative study was conducted in a sample of 22 at-risk youths (age 15-25).

Mentors as Additional Support for At-Risk Youths

Next to studying the characteristics of at-risk youths' social networks and its relation to wellbeing, is the need to explore the possibilities of how to additionally support these youths. From adolescence on, the social network of youths starts to broaden from a strong focus on the primary caregivers and family, to peers and friends, to teachers, co-workers, and employers in young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Youths start to form relations with adults outside their family, for example sports coaches, teachers, and religious leaders. These so called *non-parental adults* are thought of as particularly influential during late adolescence and young adulthood. Especially for at-risk youths, non-parental adults have the ability to offset potential individual and contextual risks by offering resources that are not present in the family or peer network (Raposa et al., 2019). However, not all youths have the same access to supportive non-parental adults (Raposa et al., 2019; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Youths who already possess a wealth of social resources, including intra-individual resources, are more likely to have a supportive non-parental adult (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009). More specific, youths with higher social skills and higher levels of wellbeing are generally better connected with non-parental adults (Hurd, Varner, & Rowley, 2013). Furthermore, youths with highly involved parents are more likely to report the presence of a supportive non-parental adult, because these parents are more likely to provide their

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children with skills and motivation to develop healthy relations with non-parental adults out of the home (Bowers, 2014). In addition, youths who have a diverse social network have greater opportunities to develop a relation with a supportive non-parental adult than youths with a less diverse social network (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005).

Youths who could profit the most from additional support, also seem to have the least access to it. To prevent the occurrence of a self-enforcing process of deprivation, alternative ways to support at-risk youths are needed. Giving youths access to supportive non-parental adults through formal programs is one way to provide these youth the support they need. Youth mentoring is an approach that aims to link at-risk youths to adults outside the family. The mentor is most often a volunteer, not acting in a professional capacity (e.g., teacher or therapist), who establishes a relationship with a younger, less experienced, person. These relationships are expected to sustain over some period of time, involve certain mentoring activities, and these activities take place on a regular basis (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). The mentor is expected to put the youth's needs central and offer advice and support. This way, a mentor can become the supportive non-parental adult in lives of youths that don't have access to these actors in their existing social network. The potentially positive results of mentoring can be found in three areas and ways. Firstly, mentors can improve youth's social and emotional wellbeing by offering positive experiences in social relationships. Offering trust and emotional support can be a corrective experience of negative experiences and views of relationships with other adults (e.g., parents). This corrective experience, and increased social competence as

a result, may lead to improvements in other social relationships (Keller, 2005). Secondly, youths' cognitive development can be stimulated by mentors providing new opportunities for learning, intellectual challenge, and guidance. Mentoring is therefore often used to increase academic engagement and outcomes. Lastly, mentoring is believed to promote positive identity development via mentors' role modeling and advocacy. By observing and comparing mentors' skills and occupation, youths can experience and strengthen their belief in new possibilities. Mentors can also help youth navigate institutional settings by advocating for them. In sum, mentors are believed to increase youths' social capital by enabling youth to participate in society, show educational and occupational opportunities, and expand their social network and construct new close and supportive ties (Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; McLaughlin, 2000; Sterrett, Jones, McKee, & Kincaid, 2011; van Dam et al., 2018). This mobilizing and providing of access to new and valuable information makes mentors an example of bridging social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004).

Mentoring appears to moderately improve youth's school, cognitive, health, psychological, and social outcomes. Based on the most recent meta-analysis, the average effect size of mentoring is 0.21 (Raposa et al., 2019), which is consistent with previous meta-analyses on youth mentoring (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). The contribution of mentors to youth's wellbeing is highly dependent on various factors, such as the quality of the program, characteristics of the mentor, and characteristics of youth. A factor that is likely to influence mentoring

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outcomes is the quality of the relation between the mentor and youth. An earlier meta-analysis showed that higher relationship quality increased psychosocial and instrumental support, and that relationship quality is one of the most important predictors of successful outcomes (Eby et al., 2013). To illustrate, effect sizes of mentoring programs increased from 0.22 to 0.33 when the relationship quality was taken into account (DuBois et al., 2011). This means that positive outcomes are higher for youths who experience a high quality relation with their mentor, compared to youths with lower relationship quality. Moreover, studies show that a low relationship quality could even lead to negative effects, such as misconduct of youths (Lyons & McQuillin, 2019). For youths to be able to connect with a non-parental adult outside their existing network, thus, at least a moderate level of relationship quality in mentoring seems needed.

Relationship Quality in Mentoring

As with naturally occurring relations with non-parental adults, a positive relation is needed to establish opportunities and benefits from the mentoring relation. Relationship quality in the mentoring literature is generally defined as a close, mutual trusting, and intimate relation (Rhodes, 2005). Higher relationship quality in mentoring is correlated with longer relationships and greater frequency of contact (De Wit, DuBois, Larose, Lipman, & Spencer, 2016; De Wit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, & Lipman, 2020) and ultimately, with greater positive developmental youth outcomes. However, youth behavioral and environmental risks are found to be predictive of lower relationship

quality (Raposa, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2016; Weiler, Boat, & Haddock, 2019). As at-risk youths are often exposed to both environmental risks (e.g., stressful environments at home and school) and intra-individual risks (e.g., poor academic performance and less social skills), relationship quality for at-risk youths is possibly lower than non at-risk youths.

For a long time, the *friendship model* of mentoring remained the dominant mentoring approach aiming to improve a broad range of developmental outcomes with a strong focus on closeness to define relationship quality (Rhodes & Dubois, 2008). Mentors and mentees becoming friends seemed the ultimate indicator of good relationship quality in mentoring. Activities to foster this growing friendship, therefore, are often focused on mentors and youths spending time together and getting to know each other. However, in response to the small effects of mentoring on youth outcomes, scholars have started to reconsider the concept of relationship quality in mentoring. Some argue that not closeness of the bond alone is the mechanism of change in mentoring, but increasing youths' skills by goal-setting and giving constructive feedback (Christensen et al., 2020; Lyons, McQuillin, & Henderson, 2019). Instrumental mentoring (as compared to the friendship model) facilitates space for setting and pursuing goals, and the mentor's behavior in this approach is aimed at helping youths to reach these goals. Setting goals in mentoring yields better youth outcomes (Christensen et al., 2020), but closeness is still considered to be of particular concern in being able to profit from a mentor's guidance. Lyons et al. (2019), therefore, suggest a hybrid model of mentoring, where activities are based on both increasing skills and competence, *and*

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activities based on increasing relational closeness. Elaboration of this model has started to gain attention in science and practice since, but still needs to consider many details. Since it may be harder for at-risk youths to establish high relationship quality with a mentor, further study on what a supportive mentoring relationship comprises, and how at-risk youths' characteristics are related to relationship quality, is required.

Research Question 2: Relationship Quality with a Mentor

Non-parental adults can have a positive impact on youths' development by providing social support. However, many at-risk youths have limited access to non-parental adults in their existing social networks. Constructing a relation with a non-parental adult outside the existing social network in the form of a mentor, is a way to provide youths with bridging social capital. However, factors that make these youths 'at-risk' (being exposed to individual and environmental risks in combination with insufficient protective factors), are also likely to influence the relationship quality with their mentor. The final two studies of this dissertation, therefore, focus on relationship quality between mentors and at-risk youths in formal mentoring programs. The second research question I formulated to gain insight in the role of social networks in supporting at-risk youths is as follows: which intra-individual factors are associated with relationship quality between mentors and at-risk youths?

To answer this question, I conducted two studies in two mentoring intervention programs. The third study in this dissertation (chapter 4) focusses on how youths' intra-individual characteristics are

related to relationship quality in youth mentoring. Mentors offer youths experiences in social relationships, and mentoring is therefore believed to increase youths' social competence (Rhodes, 2005). However, having the ability to construct a relationship with a mentor, seems to need such competences prior to the relationship. As such, in this chapter I study how youths' social skills before mentoring are related to relationship quality during mentoring. Second, I study how this relationship quality is related to youths' social skills after mentoring. Data were used of a two-wave study that assessed relationship quality and social skills before and after one semester of mentoring of 390 secondary school students (age 11-19) in a school-based peer-mentoring program in the South of Rotterdam.

The fourth study (chapter 5) examines the needs of young adults in a community-based mentoring program. At-risk young adults may be best served by an instrumental mentoring approach, focusing on practical needs. How relationship quality is perceived within this type of mentoring, by this population of youth, remains unclear. In this chapter I examine how instrumental mentoring serves at-risk young adults (age 18-28) in their instrumental needs and how relational closeness develops. I applied a mixed-methods design, using quantitative data from a study of an instrumental mentoring program in Rotterdam, the Netherlands ($N = 53$), and qualitative data from a subsample of participants ($N = 10$). Semi-structured interviews were used to illustrate the role and development of closeness for youths, and three cases are presented.

At-Risk Youths in Rotterdam-Based Interventions

The studies in this dissertation are conducted in the *Vulnerable youth in major cities* program. The program aims to study youth in their context and seeks to collaborate with local parties and existing networks in Rotterdam in order to bridge the gap between science and practice. For this reason, I studied existing intervention programs in Rotterdam that were addressing at-risk youths' needs and where social support was an evident indicator of youths' challenges and/or was part of the intervention.

In three studies, at-risk young adults (18-28 years old) were part of the sample. Participants for my research were found at the Rotterdam municipal agency for young adults (Dutch: Jongerenloket). At this site, young adults can get legal support when they, for instance, want to go back to school or apply for social welfare. Signals of multi-problem situations at this site are seen when young adults have difficulties to function in various life domains such as income, addiction, justice, daily activities, social network and mental health problems. Those who are seen as multi-problem can get referred to an intervention program such as New Opportunities (Dutch: De Nieuwe Kans; chapter 2). New Opportunities is a multimodal day treatment program for young adult men. Next to various obstacles in life domains, these young adults are also characterized by high levels of internalizing and externalizing problems (van Duin et al., 2019). Youths with less severe problems get introduced to mentoring at Rotterdamse Douwers (chapter 5). Rotterdamse Douwers is a community-based mentoring program for at-risk young adults. Here, both male and female multi-problem young

adults with specific requests regarding their self-sufficiency, can get accessible support from a voluntary mentor. For my qualitative research (chapter 3) we recruited youth at the municipal agency for young adults as well, but in addition to (younger) youths. These youths were in formal care- or support systems, identified by Rotterdam based professionals in the juvenile criminal justice system, youth care sector, or school attendance officers. After identification, these youth's eligibility for the study was assessed, based on their multi-problem and at-risk status. Having multiple problems in multiple domains, with a lack of protective factors, thus, was an indicator for being at-risk and determined inclusion in the study.

Lastly, I conducted a study under pupils in the Mentors of Rotterdam program (Dutch: Mentoren op Zuid; chapter 4). This is the largest school-based mentoring program in the Netherlands, aimed at high-school students in the South of Rotterdam. High-schools in the South of Rotterdam are characterized by an uneven distribution of pupils along ethnic and social lines. Attending schools that are highly segregated with lower levels of socio-economic status, is believed to be related to lower academic achievement (Sykes & Kuyper, 2013). Also, youths in the South of Rotterdam have lower school results compared to the national level, and there is more drop-out and unemployment. I consider these characteristics of Rotterdam South as an indication of the relative at-risk population of these schools.

These various types of urban at-risk youths all were under some kind of contextual risk and were part of the studies presented in this dissertation. I assume that urban at-risk youths, irrespective of their

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specific risks and contexts, are all favored by strengthening their social networks and support. I aim to study how and to what extent processes of self-enforcement put these youths possibly at risk for various negative outcomes.



This chapter has been submitted as: Schenk, L., Sentse, M., Marhe, R., van Duin, L., Engbersen, G., Popma, A., & Severiens, S. (submitted). The Longitudinal Interplay between Social Network and Psychopathology in Multi-problem Young Adult Men; Separating Within- and Between-person Effects.

CHAPTER 2

THE LONGITUDINAL INTERPLAY
BETWEEN SOCIAL NETWORK AND
PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN MULTI-
PROBLEM YOUNG ADULT MEN;
SEPARATING WITHIN- AND
BETWEEN-PERSON EFFECTS

Abstract

Young adulthood is characterized by many life changes which, especially for multi-problem young men, may entail obstacles. Incidences of psychopathology increase during young adulthood and at the same time important shifts in social networks – such as changing relations with peers and parents, isolation, or deviant peer affiliation – take place. The present study examined the longitudinal interplay between psychopathology and social network characteristics over the course of one year in multi-problem young adults, at both between-person and within-person level. A sample of 696 multi-problem young adult men (age 18-27) participated in this three wave study. We used traditional cross-lagged panel models (CLPM) to examine how social network characteristics and psychopathology are related at the between-level, and random intercept cross-lagged panel models (RI-CLPM) to examine within-person links. Between-person associations between internalizing problems and social networks were bidirectional, and externalizing problems were related to problematic social network characteristics, but not vice versa. At the within-person level, no such cross-lagged paths were found. Overall, results indicated that in multi-problem young adults, social network characteristics and psychopathology are related. However, looking at within-person processes this relation is not reciprocal.

Introduction

Young adults' lives are generally marked by the end of education, declines in parental support, and more self-sufficiency. For young adults (18-28 years) the drop in institutional structure and more independence from expected social roles, may result in increased well-being (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). However, at the same time young adulthood is marked by increased incidences of psychopathology which often co-occur with disadvantages and limited resources in multiple domains (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006; Bodden & Deković, 2016). Research shows that for so-called multi-problem young adults, problems across different life domains are present, such as delinquent friends, mental health problems, addiction, and personal delinquency (Zijlmans et al., 2020). For these multi-problem young adults, a growing emphasis on self-sufficiency can be overwhelming and may reveal a mismatch between individual needs and contextual resources, which makes the transition to adulthood challenging (Pettit et al., 2011a).

Psychopathology in childhood and adolescence has been studied extensively in its co-occurrence with family- and peer related characteristics of social networks (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2005; Fryers & Brugha, 2013; Kochel et al., 2012; Maes et al., 2019; Parker et al., 2006; Wentzel & Feldman, 1996). During young adulthood, however, social networks may be different from social networks during adolescence. Young adults often move out of the family home, with implications for parent-child relations, friendship networks become smaller but more intensive, and newly formed romantic relationships become part of social

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networks (Furman et al., 2002; Parker et al., 2006). A healthy social network consists of contacts with people providing emotional encouragement, guidance, and access to information and resources (Thompson & Goodvin, 2016). Having hindering contacts, living in social isolation, and lack of family contact are indications of less healthy, or problematic social networks (Jong-Gierveld et al., 2006; Walen & Lachman, 2000). These proximal indicators of social networks in young adulthood can offer both protection and risk for psychopathology (Schulenberg et al., 2004).

There are various types of social relations, of which peers and parents are known to be most proximal and most important for healthy development in adolescence and early adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Guan & Fuligni, 2016; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Relations with parents and peers affect one's development in unique ways, but are similar in that they both can provide social support which serves as a protective factor among multi-problem individuals (Schumm et al., 2004). In the present study, we will address young adult men's social network as a global concept that includes resources as well as risk factors of social support, both from parents and peers. Using this global concept, we study the interrelation of social networks and psychopathology among multi-problem young adult men.

Explaining the Interrelation between Psychopathology and Social Networks

There are three models plausible for explaining the interrelation between psychopathology and social networks: (1) the interpersonal risk

model, stating that social networks predict psychopathology; (2) the symptoms-driven model in which psychopathology predicts social networks; and (3) the transactional model in which psychopathology and social networks influence each other over time. The first two models differ from each other in the direction of relations, and research has shown that social networks and psychological health are mainly related through processes of socialization (the interpersonal risk model) and selection (the symptoms-driven model). There is also evidence for reciprocal selection and socialization processes, described by the transactional model. The three models, including theoretical foundation and empirical evidence (mainly derived from adolescent samples), will be discussed below.

The assumption underlying the *interpersonal risk model* is that psychopathology arises in young adults' social environment, for example, when youths live in social isolation or have hindering contacts. Socialization is one of the processes explaining this model, and most consistent associations in this regard are explained by the differential association theory (Matsueda, 2001; Sutherland, 1947). This theory states that being part of a group with favourable attitudes towards delinquency provides a context to learn these skills and may encourage this behaviour in return. Studies repeatedly show the association between deviant peer affiliations and externalizing problem behaviours through socialization processes (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2000; Haynie, 2002; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011), also after controlling for selection effects using dynamic social network studies (for a review, see Sijtsema & Lindenberg, 2018). Additionally, socialization of depression seems to arise through

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processes of co-rumination (for a review, see Spendelov et al., 2017) and failure anticipation (Van Zalk et al., 2010a). Social isolation, that is having a lack of ties or attachment with family and friends (Haynie, 2002) as predictor of psychopathology, is explained by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1954). This theory asserts how belonging is a prerequisite human need that needs to be fulfilled in order to achieve a sense of self-worth and psychological health (Saunders et al., 1998). Living in social isolation, thus, is likely to be a significant stressor that undermines the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Saunders et al., 1998). Ultimately, this can lead to or escalate psychopathology in young adulthood (Bennett et al., 2019; Holt et al., 2018; Matthews et al., 2019; McLewin & Muller, 2006). In sum, theoretical basis and empirical evidence of the interpersonal risk model is reflected in studies that associate social network characteristics during childhood and adolescence with subsequent psychopathology.

As opposed to the interpersonal risk model, the *symptoms-driven model* proposes that young adults' psychopathology precedes the characteristics of their social network (Kochel et al., 2012). The underlying assumption is that individuals with certain characteristics select companionship of similar others. Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) suggests that adolescents with weak ties to society prefer to associate with friends who are similar to themselves in this. There is a body of research showing that due to self-selection and de-selection, depressive and deviant youths cluster together (Dishion & Patterson, 2015; Franken et al., 2016; Prinstein, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2019; TenEyck & Barnes, 2015; Van Zalk et al., 2010b). Eliciting negative

interactions is, next to selection, a way how individuals (unintentionally) shape their own environment. Youths who show depressive symptoms or levels of aggression may elicit negative interactions from their relatives and peers so that relationships cannot be maintained or lead to rejection (Tseng et al., 2013). Social deficits may enhance these confrontations, as depressed youths demonstrate lower levels of pro-social behavior and more aggression, compared to non-depressed youths (Rudolph et al., 2008). Findings from qualitative research among young adults who experience depression underlined the proposed consequences of psychopathology for social networks. Concerns of not meeting parents' expectations, feelings of failure, being misunderstood, and not wanting to be a 'downer' friend, led to social withdrawal and isolation of many (Kuwabara et al., 2007). To conclude, the relation between psychopathology and subsequent social network characteristics can be explained by the symptoms-driven model. Evidence for this model comes from mechanisms of social deficits, eliciting negative interactions, withdrawal, and self-selection.

Lastly, a combination of the interpersonal risk model and symptoms-driven model is captured by a *transactional model* in which psychopathology and social network characteristics are reciprocally related over time. This model takes interrelations among dynamic systems, such as psychological and sociological systems, into account (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). An implication of this interdependency is that manifestations of psychopathology depend on youths' social network on the one hand, but that youths' characteristics partially determine the nature of their network as well. Youths who are socially

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isolated may be at increased risk for psychopathology, and in turn, experience more depressive symptoms, leading to even more isolation. Similarly, youths with deviant peer affiliations may be at increased risk for displaying more aggression, and in turn, select more deviant peers or trigger more negative interactions, aggravating their psychopathology. These deviation amplifying processes of both selection and socialization (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003), are consistently found in studies on offending behavior among adolescents (for a review, see Gallupe et al., 2019). A growing body of literature considers these reciprocal processes when studying the longitudinal development of psychopathology in childhood and adolescence (see Leve & Cicchetti, 2016). These studies generally focus on early predictors and outcomes of psychopathology, taking into account family and peer systems during childhood and adolescence. As such, these studies have largely ignored characteristics of social networks during young adulthood. Research that did focus on social network characteristics during young adulthood (proximal characteristics) found mixed results and focused only on peer affiliations (Jones et al., 2016; Samek et al., 2016), or internalizing problems, and was based on a general population sample (Pettit et al., 2011b; Taylor et al., 2014). How proximal indicators of social networks and psychopathology of multi-problem young adults are interrelated over time, remains relatively unclear.

To study psychopathology and social networks in a transactional model framework, both pathways should be studied simultaneously. The aim of the current study, therefore, is to test the direction of effects between young adults' social networks and psychopathology in the

period of 1 year. Since there are different findings on how internalizing and externalizing problems are linked to social networks, we test separately for these two dimensions of psychopathology.

Simpson's Paradox

Studying the interrelation between young adults' social networks and psychopathology will often lead to proposed inferences on the individual level. For example, transactional associations between youths' antisocial behavior and parental monitoring are translated in suggestions that prevention and intervention programs should not only focus on parenting behaviors, but on youths' behaviors as well (Wertz et al., 2016). Similarly, Jones et al. (2016) interpret their findings on the link between psychopathology and social environments as support of the importance of intervening in social environments. However, these findings are based on analyses of traditional cross-lagged panel models (CLPM); youths' rank-order positions, i.e., their scores relative to the group's mean score, are used to study the relation between two or more constructs. With social networks and psychopathology known to be relatively stable within individuals (Ferdinand & Verhulst, 1995; Sarason et al., 1986), it seems important to consider trait-like individual differences as well. On a within-level, therefore, youths' scores relative to their own expected scores can be used to examine interrelatedness of the two constructs. Traditional cross-lagged models do not take the distinction between these two levels (between- and within-person) into account. The strength of associations found in these traditional models is therefore strictly speaking incorrect as a basis for inferences or conclusions at the

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individual level. Hamaker et al. (2015) proposed a random intercept cross-lagged panel model (RI-CLPM) instead to disentangle the between- and within-person variance in the concepts under study.

Between- and within-level analyses are suitable for two different types of research questions. Analysis on the between-level (i.e., the traditional CLPM) will provide insight in the average associations between psychopathology and social networks for a given sample of individuals (e.g., *“Do young adults with more than average problematic social networks also have higher than average levels of psychopathology?”*). When the aim is to identify groups of people who are at risk for psychopathology or problematic social networks, this is a suitable question that can be answered with traditional between-person analysis. Practical implications, however, cannot be drawn from this analysis, since it does not answer the question of how the two constructs are related *within* individuals, where the causal processes actually take place (Keijsers, 2016). To draw accurate inferences for interventions and thus to study mechanisms on the individual (within) level, an alternative (RI-CLPM) model is needed that can answer questions such as: *“If young adults, over time, experience an increasing amount of problems in their social network, do their levels of psychopathology then also change accordingly, and vice versa?”*. Previous research has shown that the two questions and associated analytic strategies often result in different outcomes (e.g., Barzeva et al., 2019; Keijsers, 2016). For example, Keijsers (2016) demonstrated that the association between parental control and youths’ delinquency is only present at the between-person level, but not at the within-level. Others even found a reversed association; associations at the between-level are

positive, whereas associations at the within-level are negative (e.g., Ousey et al., 2011). This phenomenon is referred to as *Simpson's paradox*, which means that causal inferences drawn from the population level may not be true for subgroups or intra-individual changes (Keijsers, 2016; Kievit et al., 2013). Traditional CLPM models and RI-CLPM models, therefore, should be used appropriately to answer the question at hand.

The Present Study

The current study will investigate the interrelatedness of psychopathology and social networks in a sample of multi-problem young adult men. Adolescent and young adult males have distinct health risk profiles from females. Moreover, men experience more unmet mental health needs resulting from stigma, cultural expectations, and disengagement with health service (Rice et al., 2018). In order to adequately support these multi-problem young adult men, more knowledge is required on their social network in relation to their psychopathology. To test if and how social networks and psychopathology are related among multi-problem young adults, we will apply traditional cross-lagged panel models (CLPM), separately for internalizing and externalizing problems. In addition, to test if these links are also present at the individual level, and as such may form a starting point for intervention or prevention, we will apply random intercept cross-lagged panel models (RI-CLPM) (Hamaker et al., 2015). The focus on proximal indicators of young adults' global social networks, and the use of recent methodological advances, make this study exploratory in nature. For each model (between- and within-level, and for externalizing

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and internalizing problems) we will test if the results are in line with the *interpersonal risk model*, *symptoms-driven model*, or *transactional model*.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample comprised 696 multi-problem, ethnically diverse, young adult males between 18 and 27 years old (mean = 22.05, SD= 2.44). Previous research on this sample revealed the high prevalence of (borderline) clinical dysfunction of participants; 42% of the sample reported (borderline) clinical internalizing problems, and 29.9% reported serious externalizing problems (Van Duin et al., 2019). Participants were recruited in 2014-2016 at the municipal agency for young adults (18-27) (in Dutch: Jongerenloket) and at a multimodal day treatment program, both in Rotterdam, The Netherlands (for details on the recruitment and the multimodal day treatment program, see Luijks et al., 2017 and Van Duin et al., 2019). The first site of recruitment, the municipal agency, is where young adults can apply for social welfare and, if needed, can be referred to a treatment program. Young adults at this site were eligible for participation in the study if they were male, aged between 18 and 27 years, and met the criteria of a multi-problem young adult. Participants' multi-problem status was assessed by the Self-Sufficiency Matrix – Dutch version (Fassaert et al., 2014). Eleven life domains are scored ranging from 1 'acute problems' to 5 'completely self-sufficient'. Participants were considered multi-problem when they met the following criteria: a) a score of 1 or 2 on the domains Income and Daily activities, b) a score of 1, 2 or 3 on at least one of the following domains: Addiction, Mental

health, Social network, Justice and c) a score of 3, 4 or 5 on the domain Physical health (Luijckx et al., 2017). The second site of recruitment, the multimodal day program *New Opportunities* (in Dutch: De Nieuwe Kansen, DNK), is a program specifically developed for multi-problem young adult males. Participants could have been referred to the program by the municipal agency for young adults, youth care, probation services, or social organizations, or could have entered the program on their own initiative. Young adults recruited at this site were in any case eligible for participation, since the program was aimed at the same target population as the research. 177 participants were recruited at this second site and 519 participants were recruited at the municipal agency. The recruitment places did not indicate any specific treatment; most of the respondents were in some sort of treatment program (about 20 different ones) but these programs were not explicitly aimed at either social networks or psychopathology. As such, all 696 respondents were part of our one sample of multi-problem young adult men.

After providing oral and written information by one of the researchers, individuals could decide if they wanted to participate. When they did, participants gave written informed consent. Trained researchers provided participants with questionnaires which they orally assessed or, in the case of sensitive topics such as delinquency or childhood trauma, participants were offered to fill out those questionnaires themselves. The confidentiality of the respondents was maintained throughout the study. There were four waves in which interviews were conducted with the participants. For the first wave, interviews were conducted within the first four weeks after intake at the municipal agency or in the first two

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weeks after start of the day treatment program. The second, third and fourth wave were conducted two to four months after baseline, 6 to 8 months after baseline, and 12 to 14 months after baseline, respectively. These interviews were conducted at the municipal agency, the day program, the research site, juvenile justice facility or detention centre, at a participant's home, or at a public space. Consistency in interview contexts between researchers and waves was taken into account by extensive training and observation. Of the 696 participants at the first wave, 73% ($n= 513$) participated in the second wave, 70% ($n= 485$) in the third wave, and 78% ($n= 542$) in the fourth wave. Based on our selection of measures, the present study will only use data of the first (here: T1), third (here: T2), and fourth (here: T3) wave. 64% of all participants in the first wave was present at all three waves, 19% was present at two waves, and 17% was present at only one wave. On average, participants with missing values on T2 did not significantly differ in their social network scores at T1 from respondents to T2 (difference $-.03$, 95% CI $[-.15 \text{ } -.08]$, $t(1063) = -.57$, $p = .570$). Neither did they differ from T2 respondents in externalizing problems scores on T1 (difference -2.52 , 95% CI $[-5.76 \text{ } -.71]$, $t(1067) = -1.53$, $p = .126$). Participants with missing values on T2 did differ from T2 respondents in their internalizing problem scores on T1. They had lower internalizing problem scores ($M = 65.40$, $SE = 1.38$) than respondents on T2 ($M = 69.16$, $SE = 1.03$). This difference of -3.76 was significant (95% CI $[-7.14 \text{ } -.39]$, $t(857) = -2.19$, $p = .03$). This would indicate a possible underestimation of internalizing problems in our sample. Participants who did not fill in T3 did not differ on any of the studied T1 variables compared to

respondents to T3 (T1 Social network scores (difference $-.08$, 95% CI $[-.20 - .05]$, $t(1063) = -1.18$, $p = .238$), T1 internalizing problem scores (difference $-.08$, 95% CI $[-5.87 - 1.25]$, $t(1067) = -1.27$, $p = .203$), T1 externalizing problem scores (difference $.02$, 95% CI $[-3.46 - 3.50]$, $t(1067) = .01$, $p = .990$). We included all 696 participants in our study irrespective of whether they provided data at all these three waves (see Analyses).

The design of this study has been approved by the Medical Ethical Review Committee of the VU University Medical Center (registration number: 2013.422 - NL46906.029.13).

Measures

Psychopathology. Psychopathology was assessed by the Adult Self Report (ASR; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2003). The ASR comprises 123 items rated on a 3-point scale ranging from *not true* to *always true*, measuring psychological health outcomes and social adaptation. Internalizing and externalizing problems are two distinguished dimensions. The internalizing scale consist of three subscales: somatic complaints, anxious/depressed, and withdrawal. The externalizing scale consists of the subscales: intrusive, rule-breaking and aggressive behavior. Total problem scores for both scales are calculated by adding up individual item scores. These broadband scales internalizing and externalizing problems were used as outcomes measures. The internal consistency of the questionnaire is good, with a Cronbach's α of 0.85 for internalizing problems and α of 0.88 for externalizing problems. The ASR was administered at T1, T2, and T3.

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Social network. Social network was assessed by the Dutch version of the Self-sufficiency matrix (SSM-D), filled out by the researcher (Fassaert et al., 2014). The SSM is often used as an assessment tool of acceptable functioning in several domains, expressed in levels of self-sufficiency (Bannink et al., 2015). In terms of convergent validity, the SSM-D correlates significantly and positively with two measures of mental and social health: HoNOS; Health of the Nations Outcomes Scale and CANSAS; Camberwell Assessment of Needs Short Appraisal Schedule (Fassaert et al., 2014). Social support in the social network domain was measured by a single item, rated on a five point scale: 1 = ‘acute problem’, 2 = ‘not self-sufficient’, 3 = ‘barely self-sufficient’, 4 = ‘adequately self-sufficient’, and 5 = ‘completely self-sufficient’. *Lack of necessary support from family / friends and no contacts other than possibly deviant friends or serious social isolation*, was rated as ‘problematic’, whereas ‘completely self-sufficient’ implied a healthy social network. See Appendix A for the full scale. The SSM was completed by researchers at the end of the test-battery so that the information of the prior questionnaires could be used to validly assess the SSM. The SSM was administered at all four waves, of which we used T1, T2, and T3.

Analyses

Our research questions were examined through cross-lagged path modeling in Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). First, we applied traditional cross-lagged panel models. Second, to differentiate between- and within-level relations, we used random intercept cross-lagged panel

models, as suggested by Hamaker et al. (2015). For the latter we created within-person centered variables per construct per wave and random intercepts for psychopathology and social networks, to take stable differences into account (Hamaker et al., 2015). For both analytic strategies we conducted analyses separately for internalizing and externalizing problems. We kept both models as equal as possible in terms of constraining, which allowed us to compare the models and to attribute possible differences to the random intercepts. As a sensitivity check, we used Satorra-Bentler difference tests to see whether model constraints (in groups of paths) would lead to significant differences in model fit. Fully constrained models were favored in terms of model parsimony. This fully constrained model had the following constraints: autoregressive stabilities were fixed to be the same across the three waves for psychopathology, and also for social networks; the cross-lagged paths from psychopathology to social networks were fixed to be the same across the waves, and the cross-paths from social network to psychopathology too. Within-time co-variances between psychopathology and social networks were constrained to be equal for all three waves. We evaluated final model fit on the basis of Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Little, 2013). CFI higher than .95, RMSEA below .06, and SMRS below .08 are indicative of a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). We estimated the stability in our variables, the within-time correlations, the bidirectional (cross-lagged) paths, and the intercepts of psychopathology and social networks.

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To handle missing data and to account for somewhat skewed distributions of psychopathology, we used the Maximum Likelihood with Robust errors (MLR) estimation, in so that all available observations of the total sample are being used.

To split the variance of constructs into between-person and within-person, sufficient variance at the within-level is necessary. Therefore, we calculated intra-class correlations (ICC) of each variable. ICC of internalizing problems was .56, which indicates that 56% of the variance in the three measurement points is explained by between-person differences, and the remaining 44% by within-person fluctuations. ICC of externalizing problems was .65, and for social network .26. A substantial part of the variance in internalizing and externalizing problems is due to stable between-person differences, but still 44% and 35%, respectively, is due to individual fluctuations over time. For social network this is even 74%. This is sufficient reason to apply both the traditional and random intercept models. We compared the fit between the two types of models with the Satorra-Bentler scaled χ^2 difference test.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of all study variables, for all three waves. Social network scores in general increased, but the healthiest reported social network was at T2. Internalizing problems were higher than externalizing problems at all time points. Both internalizing and externalizing problems decreased over time.

Bivariate correlations among the variables are displayed in Table 2. Internalizing and externalizing problems were each significantly and negatively correlated with social network at all three time points: lower social network scores were associated with higher internalizing and externalizing problems. Internalizing and externalizing problems were significantly positively correlated with each other at all three time points.

Cross-Lagged Path Models

To be able to compare the traditional and RI-CLPMs, we kept model constraints equal between models. Models were run and compared for internalizing and externalizing problems separately. As a sensitivity check, we tested whether freeing the paths across and within the time points would increase model fit, but this was not the case. For internalizing problems, freeing the cross-lagged, stability, or concurrent paths did not lead to a significantly better model fit in the traditional models (respectively, $\chi^2(2) = 1.57, p < .01$; $\chi^2(2) = .63, p < .01$; $\chi^2(1) = 1.57, p < .01$), and neither in the RI-CLPM ($\chi^2(2) = 2.00, p < .01$; $\chi^2(2) = 2.48, p < .01$; $\chi^2(1) = 1.67, p < .01$, respectively). For externalizing problems, freeing the cross-lagged, stability, or concurrent paths did not lead to better model fit either in the traditional models (respectively, $\chi^2(2) = 1.66, p < .01$, $\chi^2(2) = .53, p < .01$, $\chi^2(1) = 1.44, p < .01$), or in the RI-CLPMs ($\chi^2(2) = 1.06, p < .01$, $\chi^2(2) = 4.49, p < .01$, $\chi^2(1) = 2.27, p < .01$). Our fully constrained traditional models showed acceptable model fit, for both internalizing and externalizing problems (see Table 3). Our fully constrained RI-CLPM showed good model fit for both internalizing problems and externalizing problems.

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations of Social Network and Psychopathology.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min- Max</i>	<i>n</i>
Social Network T1	3.35	.95	1-5	690
Social Network T2	3.62	1.00	1-5	475
Social Network T3	3.57	.91	1-5	447
Internalizing problems T1	68.88	26.55	2-99	692
Internalizing problems T2	61.33	29.67	2-99	477
Internalizing problems T3	60.12	29.85	2-99	534
Externalizing problems T1	65.08	25.86	2-99	692
Externalizing problems T2	59.18	27.79	2-99	477
Externalizing problems T3	57.43	28.50	2-99	534

Table 2. Correlations between Social Network and Psychopathology.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Social Network T1								
2. Social Network T2	.33**							
3. Social Network T3	.32**	.32**						
4. Internalizing Problems T1	-.31**	-.28**	-.22**					
5. Externalizing Problems T1	-.23**	-.26**	-.20**	.64**				
6. Internalizing Problems T2	-.26**	-.36**	-.27**	.67**	.48**			
7. Externalizing problems T2	-.17**	-.33**	-.19**	.50**	.72**	.69**		
8. Internalizing Problems T3	-.25**	-.30**	-.34**	.62**	.42**	.75**	.54**	
9. Externalizing Problems T3	-.16**	-.23**	-.27**	.44**	.67**	.52**	.76**	.65**

Note. Spearman's rho * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Satorra-Bentler comparisons of the traditional and RI-CLPM models revealed significant differences in model fit. The model including random intercepts fitted the data significantly better than the traditional model, for internalizing problems ($\chi^2(3) = 31.22, p < 0.001$) and for externalizing problems ($\chi^2(3) = 46.86, p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Fit indices for traditional and random intercept cross-lagged path models.

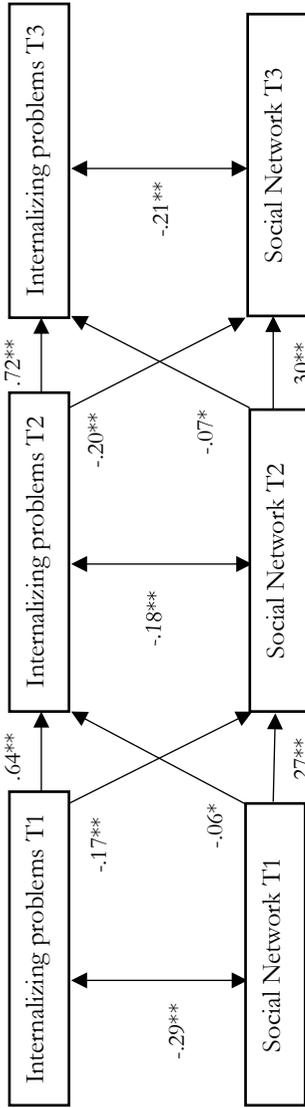
Model	RMSEA [90 % CI]	CFI	SRMR
Internalizing problems			
Traditional CLPM	.071 [.050 - .094]	.955	.045
RI-CLPM	.000 [.000 - .049]	1.000	.025
Externalizing problems			
Traditional CLPM	.088 [.067 - .110]	.94	.052
RI-CLPM	.009 [.000 - .051]	1.000	.029

RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual.

Internalizing Problems

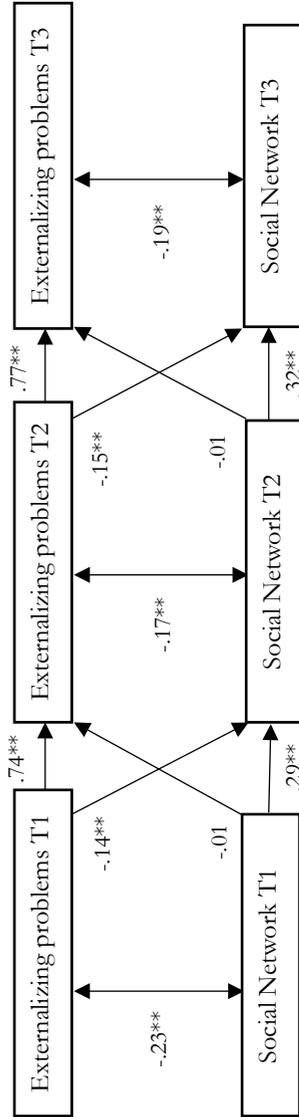
Traditional CLPM. All stability paths were significant and positive, and concurrent associations between social network and internalizing problems were significant and negative, indicating that better social network scores were related to lower levels of internalizing problems (see Figure 1). Small negative cross-lagged effects were found in both directions between internalizing problems and social network; higher levels of internalizing problems at T1 and T2 were predictive of more problematic social networks at T2 and T3, and more problematic social networks at T1 and T2 were predictive of more internalizing problems at T2 and T3.

RI-CLPM. At the between-person level, there was a strong negative correlation between stable-traits of social networks and internalizing problems ($\beta = -.53, p < .001$) (see Figure 3). Young adults with more problematic social networks across the three waves also reported higher levels of internalizing problems across the three waves. At the within-person level, stability paths were only significant for internalizing problems. That is, young adults' individual deviation in the level of internalizing problems is predicted by their prior deviation from their internalizing problems scores. The social network stability paths were not significant, indicating intra-individual changes over time. There were no significant concurrent associations between one's social network and internalizing problems at T1. Concurrent associations at T2 and T3, however, suggested that young adults reported higher levels of internalizing problems when their social network scores were low. Moreover, there were no cross-lagged effects between internalizing problems and social network. That is, within-person change in internalizing problems was not predicted by scores on social networks assessed 6 months earlier, and vice versa.



Note. T = Time. $^{**} p < .001$ * $p < .01$

Figure 1. Standardized associations between Internalizing Problems and Social Network in traditional model.



Note. T = Time. $^{**} p < .001$ * $p < .01$

Figure 2. Standardized associations between Externalizing Problems and Social Network in traditional model.

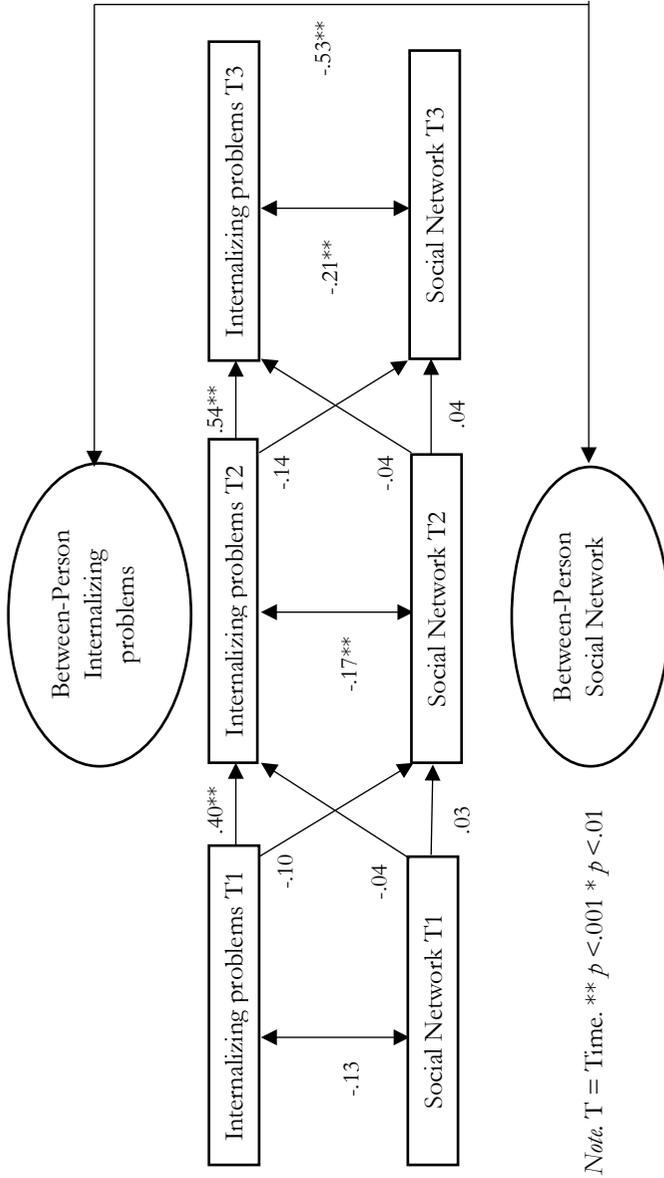


Figure 3. Standardized associations between Internalizing Problems and Social Network in RI-CLPM.

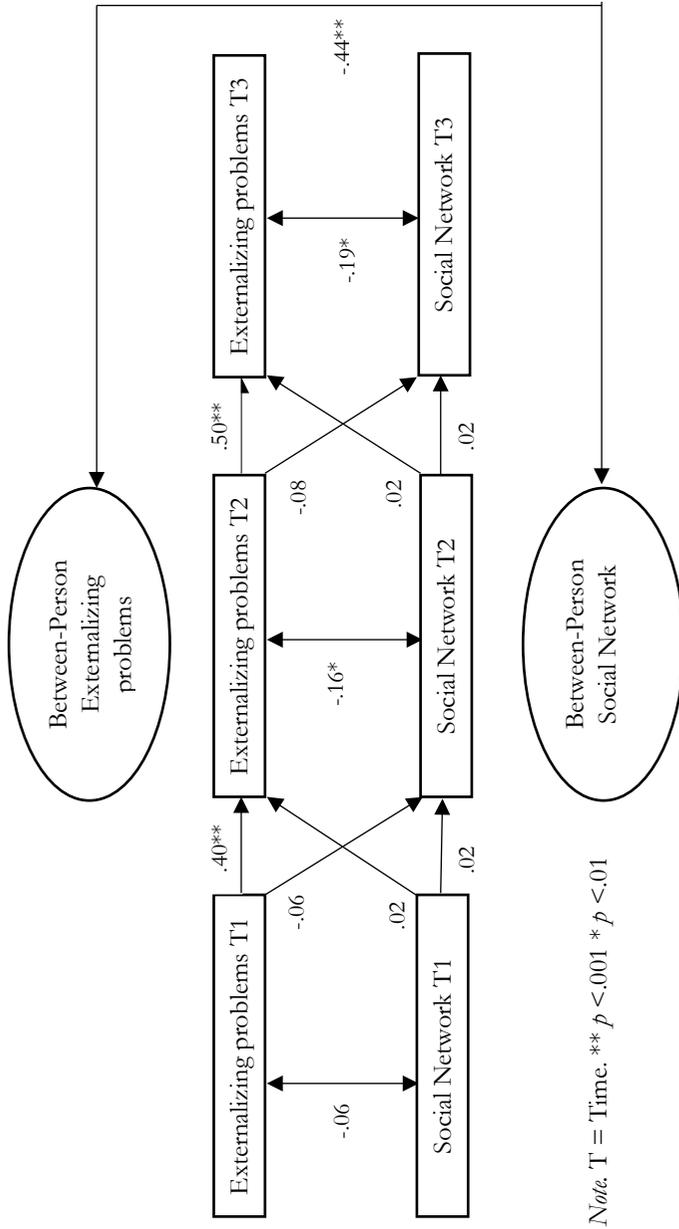


Figure 4. Standardized associations between Externalizing Problems and Social Network in RI-CLPM.

Externalizing Problems

Traditional CLPM. All stability paths were significant and positive, and concurrent associations between social network and externalizing problems were significant and negative (see Figure 2). Negative cross-lagged effects were present from externalizing problems to social network, but social network did not predict externalizing problems over time. Higher levels of externalizing problems, thus, were predictive of more problematic social networks 6 months later but not vice versa. These effects, however, were relatively small.

RI-CLPM. Correlations between the random intercepts, the between-person effects, were significant. That is, young adults with healthier social networks across the three waves reported lower levels of externalizing problems ($\beta = -.44, p < .001$) (see Figure 4). At the within-person level, stability paths were only significant for externalizing problems, not for social networks; Young adults' individual deviation in the level of externalizing problems is predicted by their prior deviation from their own (expected) externalizing problems scores. Concurrent associations at T2 and T3 suggested that young adults reported higher levels of externalizing problems when their social network score was low. There were, however, no significant concurrent associations at the within-person level between social network and externalizing problems at T1. Moreover, in accordance with our findings on internalizing problems, there were no cross-lagged effects between externalizing problems and social network. In other words, within-person change in externalizing problems was not predicted by scores on social networks assessed 6 months earlier, and vice versa.

Discussion

Given the importance of the transition to adulthood, the current study investigated the interrelatedness of psychopathology and (un)healthy social networks among multi-problem young adult men. We tested three theoretical perspectives on this interrelation over time, using two analytic strategies. First, we applied traditional cross-lagged path models (CLPM) to assess the interrelatedness of social network and psychopathology at a group (between-person) level. Second, we applied random intercept cross-lagged path models (RI-CLPM's) to disentangle within-person associations from between-person associations. Overall, our results indicated that for multi-problem young adults, social networks and psychopathology are related, but there is no reciprocal relation within individuals.

To study the relation between psychopathology and social networks in multi-problem young adults, we first applied traditional CLPM. In line with previous research, psychopathology and social networks appeared to be stable over time (Ferdinand & Verhulst, 1995; Sarason et al., 1986), and were negatively associated at all three time points. For internalizing problems, we found evidence for the *transactional model* where internalizing problems and social networks were reciprocally related over time; young adults with higher levels of internalizing problems, had more problematic social networks 6 months later than those with lower levels of internalizing problems. Vice versa, young adults with more problematic social networks reported higher levels of internalizing problems over time than those with more healthy social

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networks. For externalizing problems, we found evidence for the *symptoms-driven model* in which externalizing problems preceded (un)healthy social networks, but social networks did not predict externalizing problems 6 months later.

Using RI-CLPM, we took stable between-person differences into account when testing for within-person processes. Psychopathology was stable over time, but social networks were not. Most importantly, there were no cross-lagged effects at the within-person level, indicating that social networks and psychopathology were related, but change in one construct at the individual level, did not predict change in the other construct. Looking at the within-person level, thus, no evidence was found for any of the three suggested theoretical perspectives regarding the link between psychopathology and social network. In other words, even though there is a co-occurrence of psychopathology and social network, there is no reciprocal relation between the two constructs within persons.

Our results from the traditional models are consistent with previous studies, showing the longitudinal link between social environments and psychopathology (see Leve & Cicchetti, 2016). Previous studies mainly focused on younger age groups, predicting psychopathology and social networks from childhood to adolescence or young adulthood. The present study adds for multi-problem young adults, taking proximal indicators of their social networks into account, that these relations appear to be true as well. However, these relations could not be explained by the transactional and symptoms-driven model. That is, when looking at within-person changes in psychopathology and

social network, our study showed that individual processes did not occur as the proposed theories suggested.

Finding different associations on population level and individual level, referred to as Simpson's paradox (Kievit et al., 2013), has been demonstrated several times in studies that analyzed social environments (e.g., parenting, social support) and individual characteristics (e.g., posttraumatic stress, social anxiety) (see i.e Birkeland et al., 2016; Keijsers, 2016; Mastrotheodoros et al., 2019; Nelemans et al., 2019). These findings hint on the more complex nature of psychopathology and social networks in itself, and their association. The longitudinal association between social networks and psychopathology may be best explained by stable individual differences in psychopathology, rather than reciprocal processes within persons. One explanation of this finding may be that individual change in social networks or psychopathology needs more time to develop. In our study, the two time lags comprised 6 months each, and 1 year in total. We did additional analyses to see if T1 constructs predicted T3 constructs, but this was not the case. It may be that the within-person effect of change in social network on psychopathology, and vice versa, takes longer than 1 year. Another explanation may be that omitted variables explain both constructs. For example, parental psychopathology influences both children's psychopathology (biological/genetic; direct/indirect) (Faro et al., 2019; Gregory & Eley, 2007) and the level of positive affect young adult men hold toward their parents (Walker & McKinney, 2015). Additionally, multi-problem young adults are characterized by high levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and ACEs such as emotional

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abuse, may also explain both young adults' psychopathology and relations with their parents (van Duin et al., 2019). Psychopathology and social networks then do not influence each other, but they may be both explained by parents' psychopathology or ACEs. Also, maybe early maladaptation has led to both psychopathology and problematic social networks during young adulthood, a case of multifinality (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). In this case not proximal indicators of social networks are predictive of psychopathology, but early life predictors are leading to various expressions of adaptational outcomes during young adulthood.

The stability of one's psychopathology compared to the group tends to be moderate to high between adolescence and adulthood (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). In our study, young adults' psychopathology was moderately stable over time and stability at the individual level was small to moderate. Noteworthy is the non-stability of young adults' social networks on the individual level; social network was not related to social network 6 months later. This is supported by the calculated intraclass correlation, which indicated a large part of the variance in social networks lays within individuals, rather than between persons. Consistent with the numerous changes during young adulthood, our results indicate that multi-problem young adults' social networks are subject to change during this time.

Strengths and Limitations

The main strengths of the present study include the high number of participants and the longitudinal design which enabled us to study both bidirectional paths simultaneously. The use of proximal indicators

of social networks of this developmental stage provided new insights in the link between psychopathology and social network in this specific sample. We used recent methodological insights to separate within- from between-individual processes.

However, when reviewing the results of this study some limitations must be kept in mind. First, we used a global conceptualization of social networks. The presence of family support and the presence of deviant peers were taken together in one score, and as such could not be separated. It is possible that family support and deviant peer affiliations are differentially linked to psychopathology. It is therefore also hard to interpret the non-stability in social networks. In addition, social networks are not only defined by the presence or absence of contact, but also by the quality of these contacts. In future research a more comprehensive measure of social support should also include an index of perceived social support. Acceptance, empathy, and support are of great importance during young adulthood (Aquilino, 2006), and this goes beyond how we measured social networks. Furthermore, the sample in this study comprised young adults from diverse ethnical backgrounds and diverse risk profiles (Zijlmans et al., 2020). Future research should evaluate these factors as cofounders of the associations under study. For example, research shows that parent-child differences in acculturation lead to more parent-child stress and conflict, and that this, in turn, is related to ethnic minority adolescents' psychopathology (Gonzales et al., 2018). Therefore, differences in ethnic diverse backgrounds and the role of cultural gaps between parents and children need to be considered in follow-up research. Finally, designs studying longer periods of time (i.e.,

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more than 1 year) may offer new insights into how psychopathology and social networks are related. It may very well be that these constructs need more time to develop, especially with increasing age.

Practical Implications

Regarding practical implications, our study showed the importance of taking into account the co-existence of problematic social networks and psychopathology in multi-problem young adults. In most interventions treating psychopathology in young adults, not much attention is given specifically to social networks. To address social support of parents, peers and partners during young adulthood, Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and multidimensional family therapy (MDFT) could be of great importance. Both have been found effective in reducing internalizing and externalizing psychopathology during adolescence by taking social relations in multiple systems into account (Alexander et al., 2013; Van der Pol et al., 2017). Assessing interaction patterns, family structure, and underlying values in relevant systems should be incorporated in the treatment of psychopathology in young adults, but to date, studies of these approaches in young adults are scarce (see Livesey & Rostain, 2017).

Young adults' mean scores on social networks were low, indicating that many did not have networks which were considered healthy (i.e. supportive contacts and no hindering contacts). In becoming self-sufficient, social networks play a considerable part and need attention. The decline of institutional structure during young adulthood may demand more attention for young adults experiencing either

problematic social networks, or psychopathology. Mentors may provide these young adults with additional support. For older youths aging out of care, the presence of a non-parental adult (e.g., a mentor) is believed to improve psychosocial and behavioral outcomes and may as well serve multi-problem young adults (Thompson et al., 2016). The interrelation of problems at multiple life domains is becoming more evident, but still needs more research to support these young adults effectively. Traditional models show the co-occurrence of multiple problems, therefore integrated interventions that address multiple domains are necessary (Bannink et al., 2015; Osgood et al., 2010). However, as our research partly illustrated, individual mechanisms of the emergence and development of multi-issues should not be neglected in interventions.

Conclusion

The current study provided insight in the relation between proximal indicators of young adult men's social networks, and their psychopathology within the time span of 1 year. Psychopathology and social network characteristics such as contact with family, isolation, and deviant friends, are interrelated in multi-problem young adult men. Associations between psychopathology and problematic social networks, however, are mostly due to stable between-person differences. Although the patterns shown in the current study support the idea that more problematic social networks elicit psychopathology, and vice versa, this association cannot be explained by individual processes. Therefore, future research should study wider time frames and include third variables that may explain the co-existence of unhealthy social networks

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and psychopathology within persons. Whereas young adulthood offers increasing opportunities for a person-context match for most young adults (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006), limited resources and opportunities are present for multi-problem young adult men. Problematic social networks may not be the cause of psychopathology, but healthy social networks do play a role in healthy development and a successful transition to adulthood. Emotional and material support are needed to enhance the young adult's life chances (Aquilino, 2006). These insights require a review of present policies and interventions that emphasize the role of social networks and self-sufficiency in general of young adults.

Appendix A. Social Network Domain Self-Sufficiency Matrix (SSM-D; Fassaert et al., 2014)

Social Network domain	Acute problems	Not self-sufficient	Barely self-sufficient	Adequately self-sufficient	Completely self-sufficient
- Serious social isolation	- Few family contact	- Some family contact	- Sufficient contact with family	- Healthy social network	
- Lack of family contact	- Barely no supportive contacts	- Some supportive contacts	- Sufficient supportive contacts	- Many supportive contacts	
- Lack of necessary supportive contacts and no other than possible bad friends	- Many hindering contacts	- Few hindering contacts	- Barely no hindering contacts	- No hindering contacts	



This chapter has been published as: Schenk, L., Sentse, M., Lenkens, M., Engbersen, G., van de Mheen, D., Nagelhout, G.E., & Severiens, S. (2018). At-risk youths' self-sufficiency: The role of social capital and help-seeking orientation. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 91, 263-270.

CHAPTER 3

AT-RISK YOUTHS' SELF-
SUFFICIENCY: THE ROLE OF
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND HELP-
SEEKING ORIENTATION

Abstract

Youths' help-seeking orientation on the individual level, and the presence of bonding and bridging social capital at the contextual level, are important factors in explaining at-risk urban youths' self-sufficiency. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 at-risk youths aged 15–25 years in an urban area, to study youths' perceptions of help-seeking and social capital. Consequently, we attempted to uncover the associations between these concepts. The results indicate that only few youths had positive help-seeking orientations, irrespective of their preference for self-reliance. Sources of help that youths feel comfortable to activate in their immediate environment are limited, but support is also found in extended family members. Bridging social capital is mainly provided by professionals and comprises instrumental and informational support. Many youths believe they can be understood only by individuals who are similar to them, but simultaneously indicate a need for additional support from significant others.

Introduction

For many individuals, adolescence is a period characterized by changes such as cognitive and social developments. When there is a good fit between the needs of adolescents and support in their social environments, these developments will usually result in opportunities for growth and more independence (Arnett, 2004; Eccles et al., 1993). At the same time, young people are expected to take more responsibility for their own lives. There is a growing emphasis on self-sufficiency, which has been referred to as “Big Society” in the United Kingdom and “Participation Society” in the Netherlands (The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 2014). Self-sufficiency requires both the capability of insight into one’s situation and the availability of sources of help when one is not capable of handling challenges (Lauriks et al., 2014).

As the previous definition shows, self-sufficiency depends on two conditions. First, self-sufficiency requires insight in one’s situation and needs. Previous research on this dimension of self-sufficiency focuses on perceived barriers and facilitators in help-seeking, known as help-seeking orientation (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000; Tolsdorf, 1976). Help-seeking orientation is the perception of help which is shaped by one’s belief of influence, need, and expectations of the usefulness of a network (Tolsdorf, 1976; Vaux, Burda, & Stewart, 1986). The second dimension of self-sufficiency relates to the availability of sources of help, also known as the social capital of an individual. Social capital is the product of social support based on generalized or interpersonal trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation in social networks (Putnam, 2000). Given the societal emphasis on self-sufficiency, when judging its

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feasibility both factors need consideration. For example, if youths have insight into their situation and needs, but lack the appropriate sources for help, they will more likely struggle to become self-sufficient. Conversely, when youths have access to supportive resources but do not think they need support, the question rises if they are self-sufficient enough. The expectation of youths who are transitioning to adulthood to become self-sufficient ignores the fact that youths might perceive their situation in a different way than adults or professionals do. It also ignores the fact that resources to support self-sufficiency might be limited for some youths.

Studying factors that influence youths' opportunity for self-sufficiency at multiple levels (i.e. perceptions on the individual level and social capital at the contextual level) contributes to the expanding body of knowledge of positive youth development (Jenson & Fraser, 2015). Conditions that young people need if they are to develop optimally include factors that make youths more resilient, more resistant to stressful conditions, and more likely to grow into healthy adults. Positive perceptions of one's situation (e.g. optimism, control, responsibility) are individual protective factors when they empower youth to solve problems (McCrae & Costa, 2003; Rotter, 1966; Rutter, 1987). However, these protective factors interact with risk factors in the environments of youths. Growing up in an urban area is an important contextual factor in studying the perceptions of youth. Social support and social embeddedness have been identified as relevant protective factors on the contextual level (Groenendaal & van Yperen, 1994; Jenson & Fraser, 2015; Ungar, 2015). However, many youths in urban areas live in low-

income families and disadvantaged neighborhoods. Consequently, they may experience closed-opportunity structures which can hinder social support and social embeddedness (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). In interaction with personal risk factors, these youths are at risk of negative outcomes, such as academic failure, substance use, or unemployment (Jenson & Fraser, 2015). Therefore, protective factors at the individual level become relevant in the context of the urban environment. As such, how at-risk youths perceive their situation and whether they need help is shaped by both individual beliefs and the availability of social support at the contextual level. The aim of this study is to elucidate how at-risk urban youths cope with the societal emphasis on self-sufficiency by exploring their own perceptions of their situation and social capital. These elements have separately been found to be related to self-sufficiency, but they have not been examined in relation to each other (Barwick, de Man, & McKelvie, 2009). Since we assume that it is not actual support which shapes youths' opportunities for self-sufficiency, but rather their perceptions and willingness to use support resources (Goodwin-Smith et al., 2017; Vaux et al., 1986), we conducted qualitative research to gain insight into this.

Beliefs and Preferences Concerning Self-Sufficiency

Previous research has focused on youths' help-seeking orientation as one of the indicators of self-sufficiency. Help-seeking is seeking help in terms of understanding, advice, information, treatment, and general support (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005) from informal sources (e.g. friends, family, and mentors) or formal sources

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(e.g. teachers, youth workers, mental health services). Beliefs of helpfulness, problem recognition, and the availability of sources of help are related to a positive help-seeking orientation (Rickwood et al., 2005). A review of both quantitative and qualitative research into barriers to, and facilitators of help-seeking resulted in a classification of reasons for seeking or not seeking help (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010). Motivators for seeking help included having had positive past experiences of the care that was provided, positive relationships with service staff, and social support. The barriers identified in this review included preferring other sources of help, not wanting to burden someone else, and reliance on oneself (Gulliver et al., 2010).

Research on the help-seeking behavior of youths has mainly focused on help-seeking with regard to resolving emotional or behavioral problems. Staying in school and finding employment are examples of equally important issues for at-risk youths. Research on college students asking for academic and career help, for example, also showed self-reliance as a barrier, in addition to a perceived unavailability of adults who they needed support from (Schwartz, Kanchewa, Rhodes, Cutler, & Cunningham, 2016). In addition, beliefs about one's control over their life has been consistently linked to help-seeking orientation, and plays a major role in becoming self-sufficient (DePaulo, Fisher, & Nadler, 1983; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). For example, self-reliance - the preference to solve problems on one's own- has been found to be a coping strategy that reduces the use of both formal and informal support (Ortega & Alegría, 2002; Scott, McMillen, & Snowden, 2015).

Social Capital and Help-Seeking Orientation

In summary, help-seeking is considered part of adolescents' and young adults' establishment of self-sufficiency. A positive help-seeking orientation is fundamental to resiliency (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). The role of self-reliance and the availability of others appear to be important factors in barriers to, and facilitators of, help-seeking among adolescents. To investigate the elements necessary for self-sufficiency of at-risk youths, it is important to start with the beliefs, preferences, and expectations of at-risk youths concerning help and support.

Social Capital

The above-mentioned barriers show that not only past experiences and beliefs about one's control are of importance in help-seeking, but also the presence of, belief in, attitude toward and expectations concerning the usefulness of one's network (Tolsdorf, 1976; Vaux et al., 1986). Social networks are sources of social capital and have been studied as another indicator of self-sufficiency.

Social capital can be divided into two types: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital refers to trusting and co-operative relations between members of a network who perceive themselves to be similar in terms of their shared social identity (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). For youths, this consists primarily of relationships with parents, siblings, other family members, and peers (Bassani, 2007; (Bottrell, 2009; Raymond-Flesch, Auerswald, McGlone, Comfort, & Minnis, 2017). Networks consisting of individuals with a shared social identity are characterized by frequent contact, and therefore this type of network mainly provides emotional support

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(Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). Bridging social capital refers to resourceful relations with people who do not share a common social or socio-demographic identity and who provide access to new and valuable information (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). For youths, bridging contacts could be teachers, counselors, healthcare providers, and other adults in their community (Resnick et al., 1997). The primary purpose of these relations is often instrumental, providing guidance, advice, and tangible assistance that is not present in the bonding social network.

Bridging social capital could be particularly important for at-risk youths because it provides them with richer resources and alternative perspectives on, among other things, education and health (Bassani, 2007; Bottrell, 2009; Ellison, Wohn, & Greenhow, 2014). However, previous research found that American adolescents from low income families and/or neighborhoods had less access to bridging supportive adults compared to adolescents from higher income families (Raposa, Erickson, Hagler, & Rhodes, 2018). If they did have access to a supportive nonparental adult, this adult often appeared to be a family member, instead of a bridging contact.

Ferguson's (2006) meta-analysis showed that family structure (single-parent versus two-parent households, the presence of a paternal figure), social relationships, supportive social networks, and links to local organizations and institutions are indicators of the social capital of young people. However, in accordance with Putnam's view of social capital, we want to pay attention to the fact that not all resources are considered capital. Scholars have stressed that only in positive and active relations,

Social Capital and Help-Seeking Orientation

resources can be mobilized in order to serve as capital (Bassani, 2007; Portes, 1998). Additionally, claiming something to be social capital because it is valued by privileged groups in society does not address the needs of at-risk youths (Yosso, 2005). Positive relations will also be shaped by cultural capital, examples of which are language and appearance. These indicators of cultural capital will contribute to youths' perceptions of others' social identity. Youth, in turn, may perceive these social identities as either shared or non-shared. Therefore, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1986) has a significant contribution to studying bonding and bridging social capital.

Previous qualitative research on the bonding and bridging social capital of adolescents has been done among urban girls in Australia and youths in rural settings in the United States. In a sample of American youths, bridging social capital emerged from civic engagement, volunteering activities, and going to church (Ellison et al., 2014). Studies on youths dealing with disadvantage, however, demonstrated that youths felt the need for other adults to provide them with help to navigate structural systems in education, employment, and healthcare. The bridging capital that was present usually comprised contact with community agencies rather than informal providers of support (Bottrell, 2009; Raymond-Flesch et al., 2017). Although scholars have emphasized the necessity of studying help-seeking orientations regarding access to the networks of minority adolescents, little research has been done to investigate the links between types of social capital and the help-seeking orientation of at-risk urban youth (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). The relevance of social capital in relation to formal and informal sources of

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help has been shown in a recent study among 589 American rural adolescents. Adolescents with higher levels of bonding social capital were more willing to seek informal help and, in turn, were more willing to seek professional help (Hedge, Sianko, & McDonell, 2017). Seeking help will be less difficult when supportive relationships are established and knowing who is available will make adolescents more capable of seeking informal help when needed. Subsequently, the friends and family of adolescents may encourage them to seek professional help by providing information and instrumental support. It is therefore relevant to study the sources of social capital that at-risk youths perceive as helpful in becoming self-sufficient.

The present study further explores the relation between help-seeking and social capital as conditions for self-sufficiency. Past research has identified barriers and facilitators relating to adolescent help-seeking, which often relies on social relationships. However, it remains unclear how these conditions for self-sufficiency are experienced by at-risk urban youths and how different social networks provide different kinds of support. For this reason, we have used a qualitative method to study youths' perceptions of their situation, needs, and social support.

Method

Participants

A sample of 22 vulnerable youths from Rotterdam participated in semi-structured interviews. Rotterdam is the second most populous city in the Netherlands. It is known for its relatively poor and ethnically diverse population, as well as its high youth unemployment rates.

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Rotterdam has approximately 7,000 youths at risk, defined as young people between the ages of 12 and 27 years who pose a risk to themselves and/or society due to an accumulation of problems with work, school, health, and/or security (Scheidel, 2016). To gain information on youths' experiences of formal help-seeking, we only included youths in our sample who were or are in formal care- or support systems. At-risk youths in this research refers to young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years ($m = 18.3$ years) who have been identified by professionals in the juvenile criminal justice system, youth care sector, or school attendance officers. Seventeen of the respondents were receiving support at time of the interview (in a judicial institution, or by a social or probation worker), while five of them had experienced problems in the past but were receiving no formal help at the time of the interview.

Consistent with the population of the city of Rotterdam, a relatively large portion of the sample was from an ethnic minority. Seventeen youths were born in the Netherlands, 20 respondents were of non-native Dutch descent (using the definition of Statistics Netherlands, which considers a person to be of native Dutch descent if both of his or her parents were born in the Netherlands). Of the 20 non-native Dutch participants, five had a Moroccan background, eight a Caribbean background, and seven had other ethnic backgrounds. The professionals had more boys than girls in their caseload, and therefore only two girls were included in the sample. For this reason, the results will apply mainly to at-risk boys and statements about gender differences cannot be made.

The recruitment of participants took place between March and November 2016 through contacts with professionals working in youth

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care, schools or the criminal justice system (e.g. psychologists, youth coaches, social workers, school attendance officers). The researchers also joined activities in which potential respondents could be found, such as meetings between school attendance officers and youths who had played truant, outreach workers doing their rounds in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Rotterdam, and hearings of the sub-district court with truant youth. A third sampling strategy was snowball sampling, which is a beneficial technique to gain access to vulnerable populations such as at-risk youths (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010).

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted by the first and third authors of this paper. They took place at locations to which the respondents could easily travel and at which they would feel comfortable, such as the central library. In the case of closed facilities for youth care or imprisonment, the interview was conducted on location.

All the participants signed an informed consent form, and extra assents (tacit) were obtained from the parents of participants under the age of 16. The participants were interviewed individually by one of the two researchers and were asked to provide pseudonyms under which their interview would be transcribed. All the interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each. Participation was voluntary, and the participants were compensated with 15 Euros after the interview was conducted. The study was not subject to the Medical Research (Human Subjects) Act. This qualitative research was part of a broader research project on at-risk youths in Rotterdam, conducted by

the Erasmus Urban Youth Lab, and had an explorative character (see also Lenkens et al., 2019). The focus of the topic list was the lives and perceptions of youths regarding barriers and support in multiple life domains.

Questions were related to the participant's perceptions of their situation and included the youths' views on their current situation and beliefs about the causes of their situation and support. For example, "*Are you satisfied with the situation you are in?*" followed by "*Why is this the case? Who is responsible for this?*" Perceived social support was used as an indicator of social capital. To gain insight into the youths' social capital, topics such as perceived support of friends, family, and other important adults were addressed. Examples of questions include: "*How is your relationship with your parents?*" and "*Who else is important to you?*" Finally, to gain information about the youths' help-seeking orientation, the perceived need for support and formal care and the perceived quality of past support and care were addressed. Examples of questions are: "*What do you think of the help and support you receive(d)?*" and "*Do you think that you need help right now?*"

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and coded in the qualitative data software NVivo. We analyzed the data using thematic content analysis, identifying the major themes regarding self-sufficiency from our data (Baarda, De Goede, & Teunissen, 2005). During this process themes regarding social capital and help-seeking orientations were identified. Next, more focused coding took place, with social support divided

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according to the type of social capital and person (e.g. bonding and bridging relating to the father, mother, aunts, and friends), positive and negative perceptions, and type of support, such as emotional, informational, and instrumental support. Perceptions around help and support were divided into positive and negative experiences. Next, we checked the applicability of the resulting coding scheme to the rest of our data. Last, we assessed the importance of the main codes in relation to our central research questions (Baarda et al., 2005). The second level of analysis consisted of classifying and synthesizing codes, looking for patterns between concepts. The coding was carried out by the first author of this paper, in consultation with the second and last author. To ensure similar interpretations of the quotes used to illustrate the claims in this paper, they were translated, presented, and discussed with the second author.

Results

The youths in our sample had received several forms of informal and formal support, but youths emphasized the role that they themselves played in their lives. Indications of self-reliance and self-blame as barriers and facilitators of help seeking were most strongly present in the observed data, which will be presented below.

Perception of Situation: What Happens To Me Is My Own Doing

Not having a diploma, having trouble with (new) relationships, using drugs, and ongoing police contact are examples of problems the youths said they had encountered in their lives. Initially, they blamed

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themselves for these problems. For example, they did not feel motivated enough to quit using drugs, or they felt they could not resist going somewhere with friends instead of going to school. Milan thinks his biggest problem is not having a school diploma. When asked why these problems existed, he answered:

Milan (19): It's my fault [that I have no diploma...]. Maybe 10 to 20 % of it is because of others, but mostly because of myself. [Those 10 to 20% are] my parents not chasing me up and friends who keep asking me to hang out with them when I have to do homework. It is distracting, but in the end it's my own fault, because I again choose to [hang out with them].

The above quotation illustrates the primary reaction of many of the respondents. Like Milan, the youths blamed themselves when asked who was responsible for their problems. They thought it was their own fault that the problems they mentioned existed or had not been solved yet. However, as the above quotation indicates, they did not think the problems were entirely their fault. This is observed with notable nuance: the youths blame themselves for the situations they are in, but also indicate external factors that influence their situation. Negative events, distracting friends, and unsupportive parents are part of the youths' explanations of why things happened.

Blaming oneself also seemed to have a positive or activating aspect, since in multiple interviews it appeared to be a motivator of change. Sometimes the situation had to become worse before they realized that things had to change. Karim, for example, had been institutionalized in order to be rehabilitated from his drug addiction two

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years before, but was not motivated enough and left after two weeks. After another negative life event, he was more motivated and he thus quit using drugs independently of supervision. Additionally, when asked what would work best for people in the same situation, the respondents frequently said to “leave them alone” (Jovani, 19) and “let them finish playing” (Travis, 21). This suggests that they thought people in the same position as them had to find out ‘the hard way’ that something had to change.

Self-reliance. Youths first and foremost preferred to rely on themselves, rather than seeking support from their social network or instances. “You have to want it yourself”, “you have to learn it by yourself”, “you have to make decisions by yourself”, “you should be able to do it yourself”, are statements many respondents made in response to the question about why certain support in the past did not work or would not work in the future.

A reason for this tendency towards self-reliance could be the assumption that others will not understand them since the youths feel that they are different from others. Ravi, having trouble to stay in school after a year of absenteeism, said he did not like people giving their opinions when they were not in the same situation as he was. He explained this in his answer to the question about whether the opinions of other people were important to him:

Ravi (19): No, not at all. In the end I am the one who makes my own money and pays my own bread, so the opinions of others don’t matter to me. If they were in my shoes, maybe then it would [matter to me].

Bonding Social Capital: Parents and Non-parental Adults

All the youths stated that they had friends with whom they spent a lot of time and who were important to them. Remarkably, when asked who was important for support during changes in their lives, friends played a significantly smaller role. Because of this finding, the focus of this section will be on parents and other (extended) family members.

With respect to family structure, only six of the 22 participants were living in two-parent households. The other youths (16 of the 22) were living without their fathers. The focus of these results will therefore be on the bonding social capital that their mothers provided, since parental support was mostly received from mothers.

Not wanting to burden their mothers. Most youths reported a good or even strong relationship with their mothers. They spoke of their relationships with their mothers in terms of being close and sharing a lot. This illustrates the type of support they perceived receiving mostly from their mothers, namely emotional support. While others described their relationships as good in the sense that “we do not have problems” or “she is my mother, I have only one of her”, most of the respondents stated that they had good relationships with their mothers because they were close, they could talk and share feelings, or they felt understood. A distinctive finding was the fact that a large portion of the respondents felt uncomfortable about asking their mothers for help. Even though the youths described their relationships with their mothers as good and said they could easily talk to them, they mostly stated they did not have the need to do that. They often replied, “Oh, I don’t feel the need to talk about my feelings to my mother”.

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Apart from this ambivalence, some youths also indicated they had the possibility to talk and share feelings with their mothers, but they felt they were a burden to them. Some respondents described the difficult conditions in which their mothers were living and therefore did not want to worry them. Johnny, who was living with his mother even though he had two children with his girlfriend, said he was very close to his mother. However, he did not want to burden her with his problems.

Johnny (26): I rather don't talk to my mother [about feelings]. My mother is very sensitive. I'd rather not bother her with my problems. She has her own problems and I'd rather let her live peacefully, without knowing my problems.

Support from aunts. Aunts were mentioned multiple times (in 10 out of 22 interviews) as important sources of support. In three of these cases, the so-called aunts were not blood relatives, but a friend of their mother or a former stepmother. Likely, they were considered as aunts because of their age and the structural presence in their lives. The reason for which the youths identified these aunts as significant in their lives was mostly that they offered emotional support. In multiple cases an aunt offered a place to stay for a time out until calm was restored at home. For example, Carlos, who was in juvenile rehabilitation two years ago, sometimes lives with his aunt when there is an argument at home:

Carlos (20): I am living at my aunt's place right now, because I had troubles with my dad; therefore [I live at my aunt's place now...]. I have stayed at her place often. My aunt is very important to me. She's very close to me.

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Remarkably, it was not only the youths who reported a lack of emotional support from their own parents who emphasized the role of aunts in their lives. This indicates that emotional support from aunts is additional and not a substitute. From the youths' perspective, aunts are more able to relate to them. Karim's parents are both from Morocco. His parents have not received formal education, and they currently are not in paid employment. Karim has a very close relationship with his parents, but also emphasizes some qualities of his aunts:

Karim (25): My aunts are important. They are good, spirited aunts. Sometimes they understand me better and this makes me more open. They understand what I am dealing with and they explain things to me. They speak Dutch very well. They have a higher education and they speak different than 'normal' Dutch. They speak 'educated Dutch', so to speak.

In other words, Karim seemed to feel understood by his aunts because they had studied in the Netherlands and therefore might have understood his bicultural identity more than his parents did. Moreover, Karim seemed to imply that speaking Dutch on a 'higher level' had certain advantages that enabled his aunts to support him. Also, in other cases, aunts were appreciated because they seemed to provide additional support, over and above that of the parents. A respondent mentioned his 'smart' aunt as important, because for example, she advocated for him when his teacher recommended a level of high school that was lower than the results of the standardized CITO test indicated.

Bridging Social Capital: Key Role of Professionals from Formal Institutions

Eight youths reported having bridging social capital contacts, of which only one reported informal bridging contacts. The other reported bridging social contacts were professionals. The interviews revealed certain key elements of what youths felt was helpful in terms of various types of help and support received from these contacts outside their bonding network. Mo for example, was thankful for the help that two youth coaches in his district offered before he was in detention.

Mo (18): I just met them on the street and they helped me. They're really of value to me and they call me weekly too [now that he is in detention].

Interviewer: What did they help you with?

Mo: I wanted to work, they helped me search. I dunno, man, [they helped me] with little things, but still I'm grateful. They took me to places, or they helped my mother – my mother is illiterate – reading letters that I didn't understand myself.

In the quotation above, Mo states that he appreciates the ways that youth coaches helped him and his mother with so-called 'little things'. This was the kind of support that many respondents mentioned as helpful. This 'simple' help was extremely important to them. Other examples of individuals who helped them were school career coaches helping with organizing agendas, teachers looking for suitable solutions for specific situations, social district team employees who were always available, juvenile probation officers who were helping them with handling fines, and supervisors in general who 'arranged things'. As the above quotation

of Mo illustrates, youths appreciate bridging contacts who offer them instrumental support.

Conditions for receiving support. A condition that appeared to be important in order for bridging contacts to be of help was approachability, or the easy accessibility of the support. All the individuals who were labeled as helpful were praised because of their accessibility. Seeing someone on a regular basis reduced the barriers to communication.

A second condition under which respondents found it easier to receive support was that of similarity between the youth and the person offering support. To build a trusting relationship and receive support, the youths found it important that these people knew what they were talking about concerning the disadvantaged neighborhood the youths were living in and their cultural background. Both Mo and Johnny stressed the importance of similarity when asked how and why certain professional caregivers in their lives were of value.

Mo (18): The coach also grew up in a bad neighborhood. He's really very relaxed. He just felt us, because he's from the same neighborhood [...]. You can tell he has life experience. You can just tell. Johnny (26): It's more like [being an] immigrant; there is a connection. You understand me, you know [...] you definitely have a couple of nephews on the streets as well, you just know [...]. You have to be familiar with street culture. That's also important.

The youths frequently expressed the need to feel understood by others but also showed a level of frustration that people who tried to help them

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could not understand them. People who they did feel would understand them were perceived to be similar in certain respects, such as cultural and migrant background, familiarity with street culture and so-called 'life experience'.

Help-Seeking Orientation: No Need for Formal Support or Care

Questions about the beliefs of the youths in our sample about the effectiveness of the formal help and support they had received yielded a relatively consistent picture. Most of the youths were negative or neutral about this. They either explicitly mentioned why they did not like the received care, or they accepted the care but did not find it useful, as the following quotation illustrates:

Milan (19): It was just nonsense. She [the therapist] only wanted to talk to me and that was it. Well, I didn't benefit from it that much. I think psychology is nonsense. I thought so before [I started therapy]. What would it help if someone talks to you?

The perceived need for support and care was very low, including the reasons mentioned above, such as not believing in the effectiveness of offered support. The youth indicated that they would rather rely on themselves.

In order to explore patterns in the youths' help-seeking and social capital we analyzed in more detail the transcripts of five youths who indicated that they were in need of help and had a positive help-seeking orientation. These youths, like the majority of our sample, showed certain degrees of self-reliance but, uniquely they did not point out external factors that they felt were influencing their lives in a negative

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way. In addition, they also indicated they had positive experiences of the care they had received in the past. Finally, an age pattern appeared under youths with a positive perception of help. Youths with a positive help-seeking orientation were in early adulthood (ages above 18 with a mean age of 21.4 years), whereas youths who indicated a negative perception of help were predominantly adolescents (with mean age of 17 years). No patterns were observed for type of risk, social capital, or ethnic descent.

In sum, the lack of assigning negative external factors as a barrier, having positive perceptions of past care, and older age seem to be prerequisites for youths to have a positive help-seeking orientation. The combination of the presence of these factors were unique for the youths with a positive perception of help, but some factors were present in other youths as well. This indicates that these factors are necessary, but not sufficient for a positive help-seeking orientation of at-risk youths.

Discussion

In this study we set out to explore the perceptions of at-risk urban youths regarding their help-seeking orientations, insofar as these were shaped by their needs and social capital. Based on qualitative analyses of interviews with 22 at-risk youths in an urban city, this study illustrates the conditions for self-sufficiency: the presence of social capital and positive help-seeking orientations. Self-blame and self-reliance were important factors in youths' perception of their situation. Youths indicated that their bonding social capital was sufficient, but also indicated limitations and the need for other resources. Instrumental support by bridging contacts is mostly provided by formal resources,

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which seemed to be appreciated more when the youths perceived the professional to be similar in terms of cultural background and neighborhood. Only five at-risk youths had a positive help-seeking orientation.

Youths' Perceptions of their Situation and Needs

The strong tendency towards self-reliance among youths in our study corresponds with previous findings of higher levels of self-reliance among youths facing adversity than those in normative sample (Gulliver et al., 2010). The present study shows that it can also be referred to as a coping style to deal with situations that are outside an individual's control, which has been labeled *survivalist self-reliance* in previous research (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). A possible explanation for this self-reliance may be that the youths do not want to burden their families with their problems, mainly because their biggest sources of emotional support (their mothers) are already in challenging situations. Another possible explanation may be that the youths feel they can only be understood and helped by people who have had similar experiences to them. Since people who might give additional instrumental and informational support are mostly professionals who do not have a shared background, the youths do not think of these people as resources of support and therefore tend to prefer to be self-reliant.

Social Capital

Youths stated that they received enough support from their parents, which was mostly in the form of emotional support from the

mothers. Although youths did not make this explicit, their social capital might be limited due to the absence of a paternal figure. Non-parental adults, such as extended family members, appeared to contribute to the emotional support of at-risk youth. Especially for youths growing up in single-parent households, non-parental adults seem to be an important source of providing bonding social capital (Raymond-Flesch et al., 2017). The findings on the importance of aunts are also consistent with previous research on Caribbean families in the Netherlands. These families have matrifocal systems, in which fathers are relatively frequently absent and female members support each other (Distelbrink, 2000). This could explain the significant role aunts play in the lives of many at-risk youths in our sample.

Our findings show the need for support from adults who have more knowledge or experience, for example about the school system and other formal organizations. The youths in our study distinguish between the emotional support they receive from their mothers and the emotional support they receive from their aunts. Research into the educational achievements of successful second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands indicates that these youths value *informed* social support (Rezai, Severiens, & Crul, 2017). This type of support is given by people who are more educated, familiar with the education system, and are also aware of the experiences and challenges these youths face. The present study suggests that this category of social support is not only applicable to educational achievement, but to adjustment of at-risk youths in general.

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The literature suggests that bridging social capital is of immense importance for at-risk adolescents, since bridging actors can provide them with instrumental and informational support, as well as access to institutional resources (Bottrell, 2009). However, the current research shows that bridging social capital for many at-risk youths is present in a limited way. The bridging social capital that youths consider helpful comes from individuals affiliated with formal institutions, such as youth care or school, which is in accordance with previous research on bridging capital of youths in Australia and the United States (Bottrell, 2008; Raposa et al., 2017; Raymond-Flesch et al., 2017). The most distinctive feature of individuals providing bridging social capital is that they do not share a common social or sociodemographic identity with the youths (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). The youths in our sample, however, emphasized the importance of the similarity of helpful others regarding migration background and living conditions. These perceived similarities seem to refer to Bourdieu's notion of 'embodied cultural capital' (1986). One's language or accent, specific skills, and dispositions are examples of embodied cultural capital. The youths in our sample have a preference for helpful others whose embodied cultural capital is close to them. The preferences of these at-risk youth concerning support offer reflections on the theoretical value of bridging capital for at-risk youth which have, to the best of our knowledge, not been found in previous research.

Help-Seeking Orientation

Most youths have negative perceptions of past care, and do not articulate the need for further support. They think that talking about

problems or other forms of therapy are not useful to them, especially when offered by someone they feel will not understand their situation. Concerning informal help, they indicate that they do not want to burden their mothers and therefore do not ask for emotional support (cf. Gulliver et al., 2010). Our findings indicate the importance of instrumental and informational support offered by extended family-members and professionals who are perceived as similar to these at-risk youths.

The present study aimed to explore at-risk youths' perceptions of help-seeking in the context of their social support. Youths who do have a positive help-seeking orientation have had or are having positive experiences with present or past care, and do not cite external factors as the cause of their problems. This finding is partly consistent with the existing literature; individuals with an external locus of control tend to have a less positive attitude towards seeking professional help (Barwick et al., 2009) and individuals who have had positive experiences of care in the past have a more positive attitude towards seeking help (Gulliver et al., 2010). The combination of these two factors as conditions for seeking help highlights the need to consider youths' attitudes toward help-seeking. Additionally, youths with positive perceptions of help were the oldest in our sample. Possible explanations include older individuals being less likely to endorse social roles of strength, or having more life experience teaching them that seeking help is of value (Mackenzie, Gekoski, & Knox, 2006). It remains unclear, however, if and how age is an indicator of positive perceptions of help.

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It is also important to note that self-reliance in previous research has been identified as a barrier to seeking help (Gulliver et al., 2010; Ortega & Alegría, 2002; Scott et al., 2015). Youths in our sample appeared to be self-reliant, but self-reliance was not absent among youths with a positive help-seeking orientation. Although self-reliance can be a source of risk, since it can indicate a difficulty to make connections with others and ask for support when needed, the present study did not always find this to be the case. Several youths indicated being both self-reliant and having a positive help-seeking orientation. Being self-reliant can also be a motivator to seek help. Self-reliance is related to having an internal locus of control, and the belief that change and improvement is possible may result in seeking help as an opportunity for improvement (Funch & Marshall, 1984).

Further research is required on how the social capital of at-risk youth is related to their perceptions of help, since the current sample did not show much variation in bonding and bridging capital. We did not find evidence for the findings of Hedge et al. (2017) that the presence of bonding social capital increases help-seeking. The present study gives reason to further study the conditions under which at-risk youth have a more positive help-seeking orientation.

Implications

The findings of our research concerning the social capital of at-risk youth emphasize the role of non-parental adults in providing additional emotional, informational, and instrumental support. Additional emotional support was provided by familial adults such as

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aunts, but instrumental and informational support was often received from non-familial adults as well. At-risk youths may need more bridging sources of help in their network that are able to provide them with additional social capital. Therefore, we recommend interventions aimed at increasing the bridging social capital of at-risk youths. An example of such an intervention is mentoring. To expand social capital, mentors from outside the youths' networks can serve as bridging contacts. This research also indicates the need for youths to perceive bridging contacts as relatively similar to them. It is therefore important to explicitly identify the needs (emotional, instrumental, or informational support) of at-risk youths to match them with an appropriate mentor.

At-risk youths who have access to bridging capital may not want to activate it because of the beliefs they have concerning the effectiveness and the competence of these individuals. For example, the present study indicates that the youths have access to emotional support from their mothers, but that they are hesitant to activate this. The same applies to support from professionals such as psychologists. Further research should therefore include a focus on the distinction between access to and activation of social capital (Lin, 1999; Smith, 2005), and how this is shaped by youths' network orientations (Vaux et al., 1986).

Recent research on an intervention that includes both mentoring and activation of capital, offers relevant directions for implications. A program designed to discuss barriers in help-seeking and the identification and activation of social support with youths appeared to be beneficial for first-generation college students. The program significantly influenced the students' college attitudes and behaviors

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related to the cultivation of social capital (Schwartz et al., 2016; Schwartz et al., 2018). Normalizing help-seeking behavior and framing it as a necessary component of development, rather than as a lack of self-reliance, allowed youths to engage in help-seeking (Schwartz et al., 2016). While promising, future studies are necessary to study the effectiveness of this intervention outside a school context, after assessing the expressed needs of at-risk youths.

The overrepresentation of males in our sample might explain the main finding that at-risk youths had a negative help-seeking orientation. Previous research on the help-seeking of adult males found that they tend to have more negative attitudes toward psychological help than other forms of assistance, which was related to their traditional masculine ideologies (Berger, Levant, McMillan, Kelleher, & Sellers, 2005; Scott et al., 2005). Whereas male adolescents rely more heavily on stress reduction and diversion, female adolescents mobilize their social support more often (Copeland & Hess, 1995). This suggests that support should be reconsidered for at-risk male youths. Researchers suggested that treatment (formal help) could focus more on thinking rather than on feeling, and that this would change perceptions of help seeking among males (Berger et al., 2005). How this would impact at-risk male youths' perceptions needs further attention in future research.

Limitations of the Present Study

There are several limitations to this study that require consideration. These include the gender balance of our sample, which consisted of 20 boys and two girls. Although relations between

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perceptions of their situation, social capital, and perceptions of help did not differ for the two girls in our sample, the results might be only generalizable to at-risk boys in urban areas. The qualitative nature of our study provided valuable insights into the perceptions of at-risk youths. However, youths may have felt less understood by interviewers with a different societal status and ethnic background, which could have affected their responses. The researchers' personal biases could also have affected their analyses. We attempted to mitigate these limitations by presenting ourselves as independent from the systems that youths were in for support or care, emphasizing their anonymity, and using multiple researchers to conduct the interviews and analysis.

Conclusion

This research was conducted to explore youths' social capital and help-seeking orientations within a context of societal expectations of self-sufficiency. Our findings suggest that at-risk youths' preference for self-reliance may be both a barrier to and facilitator of seeking help. Their need for self-reliance must be considered in the light of their limited bonding social capital, and their preference for similarities in their bridging social capital. Only when taking into account at-risk youths' preferences, past experiences, and expectations in seeking help, self-sufficiency can be expected.



This chapter has been published as: Schenk, L., Sentse, M., Lenkens, M., Nagelhout, G.E., Engbersen, G., & Severiens, S. (2020). An Examination of the Role of Mentees' Social Skills and Relationship Quality in a School-Based Mentoring Program. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 65 (1-2), 149-159.

CHAPTER 4

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE
OF MENTEES' SOCIAL SKILLS AND
RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IN A
SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING
PROGRAM

Abstract

Research on youth mentoring highlights the importance of the relationship quality between mentor and mentee; mentoring results in more positive outcomes when the mentee perceives the relationship as satisfying and trustworthy. Research on relationship quality shows that social skills are important for constructing new relationships. However, whereas improved social skills are often one of the main goals of youth mentoring, little is known about the importance of social skills for relationship quality in youth mentoring relations. In this study, we examined whether mentee's pre-intervention social skills were related to mentor-mentee relationship quality as perceived by the mentee, and in turn, if relationship quality was associated with post-intervention social skills. We additionally examined possible gender- and age differences in these associations. Data were used of a two-wave study that assessed relationship quality and social skills before and after one semester of mentoring of 390 secondary school students in a school-based mentoring program. Results indicated that relationship quality was positively associated to post-intervention social skills. However, only for young mentees pre-intervention social skills were associated with better relationship quality. Moreover, only for young mentees, relationship quality mediated the association between pre- and post-intervention social skills.

Introduction

Supportive relations during adolescence are important for youths in their transition to adulthood. Many adolescents have a network in which supportive adults and peers are present, but for some adolescents the existing network is not strong or diverse enough to help navigate through the social and academic challenges in their lives (Raposa, Erickson, Hagler, & Rhodes, 2018). In these cases, mentors can serve as additional sources of support and guidance. Indeed, mentoring-based interventions are widely used and have become increasingly popular in improving academic, behavioral, and health domain outcomes. Via mentoring, youths' social networks are expanded by the commitment of someone other than their parents, who is willing to meet on a structural basis, and who ensures that the mentee's well-being is central to the relationship.

Whereas most relationships with adults arise through organic social connections, such as with family friends and neighbors, many adolescents have reduced access to these connections and may benefit from formal mentoring programs (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Raposa et al., 2018). Schools provide a primary context to foster mentoring relationships outside of the youth's family. School-based mentoring is one of the fastest growing forms of mentoring, in which volunteers meet their mentee regularly in a school-setting. It is a low-cost way to support disadvantaged students by providing a positive tie, and this relationship may be helpful when students experience social and academic difficulties (Herrera & Karcher, 2013). A major advantage of school-based mentoring is that it reaches youth who otherwise are less likely to take

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part in a mentoring program, for instance because their parents are not able or willing to take initiative to sign up their child for a community-based mentoring program (Herrera & Karcher, 2013).

In Rhodes' (2005) proposed model of youth mentoring, positive outcomes of mentoring take place in three developmental areas; socio-emotional, cognitive, and identity-related. To illustrate, as part of social and emotional development, mentees' social skills may increase through mentoring. Positive experiences in a mentor relationship, and mentors providing a model of effective communication, may enable youth to interact more effectively with parents and peers. In this way, mentoring furthers youths' socio-emotional development including their social skills. However, beneficial effects in these areas are only expected when there is a strong relationship characterized by mutuality, trust and empathy between mentor and mentee. In this model, both a strong relationship and the pathway of this relation to positive outcomes, are conditioned by mentees' individual and contextual influences. Mentees' interpersonal history and social competencies for example, are theorized to affect relationship quality, but also affect the way relationship quality leads to positive youth outcomes.

Although mentoring is becoming a widespread intervention, it still leaves room for improvement. Meta-analyses of mentoring programs revealed only small to modest effects of mentoring on emotional, behavioral, and educational domains (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Eby et al., 2013). However, in both community- and school-based mentoring, an important facilitating condition to increase effect sizes, is mentor-mentee relationship quality

(DuBois et al., 2011; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007). Further research is necessary to gain more insight into how and for whom relationship quality is important in mentoring interventions.

Mentoring-related improvements may have far-reaching effects. Developing social skills, for example, is one of the main goals of mentoring (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002) and can result in more competence to construct new supportive relationships with peers, parents, and other adults. Yet, as proposed in Rhodes' conceptual model (2005), in order to build and benefit from a supportive mentor relationship, one can reason that some minimal level of social skills is required from the mentee. For example, being able to formulate one's needs is necessary to receive the right support, also known as 'proto-professionalism' in healthcare (De Swaan, 1990). Not surprisingly, it has been shown that mentor-mentee relationship quality is one of the main factors that facilitate positive outcomes of mentoring (Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois, 2013; Eby et al., 2013; Rhodes, 2005), such as improved social skills. However, it is unclear to what extent mentee's social skills before mentoring are related to mentor-mentee relationship quality and how the latter is related to social skills after mentoring. If it is true that relatively high levels of social skills prior to mentoring are necessary for youths to benefit from mentoring, then the mentees with relatively low levels of social skills who might need mentoring the most, needs consideration. As such, in this study we investigate the possible mediating role of mentor-mentee relationship quality between mentees' social skills before and after mentoring, elucidating how and for whom mentoring can be potentially more successful.

Quality of Mentoring Relationships

It seems unlikely that positive dynamics unfold in a mentoring relationship without the feeling of connection. For mentees to learn, imitate, and share feelings with their mentor, relationship qualities such as trust, empathy, sensitivity, and attunement should be present (Rhodes et al., 2006). When a close and trusting relationship does not develop, youth and mentors may both disengage from the match before the appearance of positive outcomes. Even when the relationship does continue, it hinders the way mentees can open up, share, and learn from their mentor. Other definitions of relationship quality in the mentoring literature include mentees' feelings toward the mentor, satisfaction with the relationship, and liking (Eby et al., 2013), perceived mutuality (Rhodes et al., 2006), and affinity and closeness (DuBois et al., 2011). Eby et al.'s meta-analysis (2013) showed that higher relationship quality in mentoring increased psychosocial and instrumental support, and that it was one of the most important predictors of successful outcomes.

In particular, research on school-based mentoring shows similar results. The benefits of school-based mentoring were assessed in a randomized-controlled trial of over 1,000 students (Bayer et al., 2013). Evidence was found for a close mentoring relationship being the key to effectiveness in school-based mentoring. Surprisingly, school-based mentoring programs that focused solely on academic outcomes, had similar effects on academic outcomes as relationship-only programs, illustrating the major role of relationship quality for a broad range of mentoring outcomes. Moreover, a recent evaluation of the effects of school-based mentoring in the United States showed not only that higher

mentor-mentee relationship quality led to desired outcomes, but also that when relationship quality was low the opposite was true, i.e., it was associated with harmful effects such as misconduct (Lyons & McQuillin, 2018). Studying possible determinants of relationship quality in mentoring thus seems to be of considerable relevance for improving mentoring research and practice, because it is one of the critical components of effective mentoring.

Social skills and Interpersonal Relationships

In this study, social skills are studied as one of the possible determinants and outcomes of relationship quality. Social skills pertain to interacting with others in an appropriate and effective way (Segrin, 1992). Individuals with social skills attract social attention, are more liked due to interpersonal attraction, provoke more positive responses, and are more active and effective in social interactions (Segrin & Taylor, 2007). As a result, social skills are strongly related to the establishment and maintenance of positive and supportive relations with others (Segrin & Taylor, 2007).

Social skills are also an important factor in decreasing risk behaviors. For youths being at risk due to economic disadvantage or emotional and behavioral problems, social skills are an individual characteristic found critical in counteracting negative effects of risk exposure (Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017). Moreover, social skills become more important during adolescence. Whereas in childhood and pre-adolescence parents fulfill children's social needs, the focus in adolescence redirects to friends. This demands more

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interpersonal competencies in more mature forms of close relationships. Research showed that social competence and relationship quality in friendship among adolescents are consistently related and appear to be of great importance for adolescents (Buhrmester, 1990; Cillessen, Jiang, West, & Laszkowski, 2005).

Theories that explain the relation between social skills and the quality of relationships merely focus on these factors in relation to psychological distress. Irrespective of this context, the theories offer useful insights in how social skills and relationship quality are related. The *social skills deficit vulnerability model* for example, theorizes that individuals with poor social skills are more vulnerable to the development of psychological distress because they have less protective social support (Segrin, McNelis, & Swiatkowski, 2016). The lack of effective mechanisms for coping with stress may contribute to the development of psychological distress, whereas individuals with well-developed social skills experience more protection during difficulties. This relation between social skills and psychosocial problems is assumed to be mediated by the access and deployment of social support (Segrin et al., 2016).

Social skills allow for positive interpersonal relationships, and in line with the above, the possession of social skills may also be beneficial in constituting relationships for youths in mentoring relations. Research suggests that relationship quality in mentoring depends on mentees' ability to form a close relationship (e.g. DuBois et al., 2011; Eby et al., 2013; Rhodes et al., 2006). Although in several studies it was found that mentees with more relational experience report higher relationship

quality (Bayer et al., 2013; Eby et al., 2013), other research fails to find an association between relational experience and perceptions of mentees' relationships with their mentors (Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, & Herrera, 2011). From these studies it also remains unclear whether relational experience is related to youth's social skills or to their limited access to supportive others, or both.

Besides the association between social skills and relationship quality, relationship quality can be, subsequently, associated with mentoring outcomes. Mentees with social skills are expected to be able to derive more benefits from their mentor relationship than less socially skilled youth (DuBois et al., 2011). To illustrate, a study on a school-based mentoring program showed that youths with moderately strong relationships at baseline had greater improvements in overall academic performance and classroom effort from mentoring, compared to relationally vulnerable mentees (Schwartz et al., 2011). Expecting mentees' higher baseline social skills to be related to better outcomes of social skills through higher relationship quality, raises an important issue in mentoring. The phenomenon that individuals with the richest resources are to benefit most from new experiences and also at a faster rate, is referred to as the Matthew Effect (Merton, 1988). Youths with previous experiences of close relationships with a non-familial adult, are likely to develop more social skills compared to youths who lack this experience. These socially skilled youths then, are able to leverage their social skills to establish a high quality relationship in mentoring. Consequently, through this high relationship quality, these youths will profit the most from mentoring, that is, their social skills increase more

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and faster compared to less socially skilled youths. This cumulative advantage eventually, may lead to a wider gap between students with poor and excellent social skills (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006). As such, social skills is hypothesized to positively influence the mentor-mentee relationship quality, which in turn should lead to a further improvement in social skills. To date, however, empirical evidence of the proposed relation between social skills of mentees and the relationship quality with their mentor seems absent in the mentoring literature.

Age and Gender

Research has extensively focused on age and gender differences in mentoring outcomes, however, little research has focused on the age and gender differences in the process of mentoring (Liang, Bogat, Duffy, 2013). Based on developmental and social psychology literature, we explore possible differences in the proposed relations between social skills and relationship quality according to age and gender of the mentees.

Social skills increase as a consequence of neurological maturation during adolescence (Crone & Dahl, 2012). Older mentees will therefore have higher levels of social skills. Subsequently, due to faster neurological maturation for girls and western socialization patterns, gender differences in social skills increase in adolescence (Silberman & Snarey, 1993). In addition to gender differences in adolescents' social skills, appreciation of mentoring relationships differ among boys and girls as well. These differences may influence the way boys and girls perceive the quality of their mentoring relationship. To illustrate, in a sample of 1138 youths in a Big Brother Big Sister mentoring program,

girls in short (1-6 months) and medium (7-12 months) lasting mentor relationships were less satisfied with the relationship than boys. In long term relationships, however, girls were more satisfied than boys (Rhodes, Lowe, Litchfield, & Walsh-Samp, 2008). Given that our sample is drawn from a short term mentoring program, we expect girls to be less satisfied with the relationship quality compared to boys.

As for the associations between social skills and relationship quality, there may be differences as well. For boys, engaging in activities is a way to establish relationship quality, whereas for girls, self-disclosure is considered as a sign of relationship quality (Pollack, 1999). Social skills, therefore, seem to be a more likely precondition to establish relationship quality for girls than for boys. Additionally, research suggests that for girls, the quality of a relationship is more likely to be related to outcomes than for boys. Girls may both benefit from or be harmed by the relationship quality in mentoring. To illustrate, Karcher (2008) found girls in school-based mentoring to benefit from mentoring, only when there was high relationship quality. In our study, relationship quality may be a stronger predictor of social skills outcomes for girls than for boys. Based on this, we explored possible gender and age differences in the associations between social skills and relationship quality.

The Present Study

Social skills research showed that more social skills allow for more satisfying and trusting relationships. How this is the case in mentoring relationships, remains unclear, while insight in the role of individual characteristics in establishing high quality mentoring

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relationship is necessary to improve mentoring outcomes. In doing so, existing mentoring programs can take the mentees' social skills into account while matching, or pay more attention to the skills needed to develop positive relations prior to the start of a mentoring relation. The overall aim of the present study is to see how social skills before mentoring, relationship quality, and social skills after mentoring are related in a school-based, short-term mentoring program. We will formally test the mediating role of relationship quality between pre-social skills and post-social skills and hypothesize that (a) mentees' pre-social skills are positively related to relationship quality of mentoring relationships and that (b) better relationship quality, in turn, is related to more post-social skills. We will additionally examine whether these associations differ between ages and gender.

Method

Participants

Participants were drawn from the Mentors of Rotterdam program, which is the largest school-based mentoring program of the Netherlands. The program provides mentors from The Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences to classes at seven high schools in Rotterdam South. This area has the highest ethnic and cultural diversity, the lowest social economic status score, and the largest concentration of young people in the city of Rotterdam (Van den Berg, Schouten, Smit, & Van Veelen, 2014). In the Netherlands, and in large cities such as Rotterdam in particular, migration has changed the ethnic landscape, resulting in so-called minority-majority cities, also described as

‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec, 2007). For example, in many neighborhoods, more than 50% of the youth population is of second generation immigrant background (Crul, Schneider, Lelie, 2013). This group of migration youth itself is diverse in terms of educational levels, socio-economic backgrounds, religion, et cetera. Ethnicity in this sense, is no longer relevant in describing the population. The mentoring program adopts this idea of superdiversity, and therefore does not approach diversity in terms of ethnic and cultural differences only. Aside from the diversification of diversity, growing up in a superdiverse context such as Rotterdam South, is often still a risk factor for youths who are vulnerable for, among others, school dropout and school absenteeism (Vertovec, 2007). The composition of this area is reflected in the pupil population of the schools. In addition, in Rotterdam South a high level of school segregation is present (Sykes & Kuiper, 2013). This means that children in Rotterdam South whose parents are higher educated than the rest of the population, and/or are native Dutch, go to schools in different parts of the city. This leads to an uneven distribution of students along ethnic and social lines at schools in Rotterdam South. Attending schools with lower levels of socio-economic status on average is related to lower academic achievement (Sykes & Kuiper, 2013). Accordingly, youths from high schools in Rotterdam South have lower school results compared to the national level, and higher percentages of school dropout and youth unemployment (De Boom, Roode, van Wensveen, & de Graaf, 2017). We consider these characteristics of the area as an indication of the relative disadvantaged population of the schools in our study. Schools in the Netherlands are no longer allowed to register ethnic

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background of their students. Therefore, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, at school and individual level in our sample were not available.

Mentors were second year students from the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (most students are 18 or 19 years old at this time), who could serve as a mentor in the program as an optional course during their course program. They came from a broad range of programs (e.g. social sciences and math). Given the diverse student composition of this university, we assume that the mentor population was ethnically/culturally diverse, and that the age difference between mentor and mentees was no more than six years (Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, 2015). One-on-one matching was done based on common interests and attitudes; factors proven to be essential for an effective match (Sipe, 2002). Mentors and mentees filled out a form relating to personal characteristics, hobbies, and qualities. Teachers then matched mentors and mentees based on these forms. Mentoring activities were fun-focused (playing games, cooking, sports), academic-focused (planning and homework, career guidance) and interpersonal-focused (talking about personal lives). The aim of these activities was to improve grades, offer career guidance, and support social emotional development, through a trusting bond, role modeling, successful experiences and study skills. Mentoring took place one-on-one, once a week for an hour, at school. In a few cases, not enough mentors were available, so that mentoring took place one on two. Mentors received training prior to the mentoring program, and had weekly intervision and supervision meetings.

Procedure

In the first school year (2015/2016) a total of 240 students from 16 classes were assigned a mentor and received mentoring for at least one semester. In the second year of the program (2016/2017) 356 students from 21 classes were assigned a mentor. All students of the selected classes received mentoring, this was a total of 596 students (mentees). Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Mentees filled out a *student survey* at baseline (the start of the semester) and at follow-up (six months later). Questions in this student survey addressed mentees' self-efficacy, school belonging, social skills, and career orientation. Additionally, mentees filled out a survey about their mentoring relationship afterwards (*mentee survey*). In this survey, relationship quality was assessed.

The present study focused on social skills as measured in the student survey, and its association to relationship quality as measured in the mentee survey. Data from both years were merged in one dataset ($n=596$). A few students, however, received mentoring in two semesters and were duplicate cases ($n=28$). We only included the data of the first mentoring semester of these students. Students were included when they filled in the survey at baseline and at follow-up. A total of 390 mentees fulfilled these conditions (45.65 percent boys; $M_{\text{age}} = 13.19$ years, $SD = 1.47$). Mentees who did not meet these criteria were compared to the final sample, in order to assess possible sample bias. T-tests revealed that these groups did not differ significantly in pre-social skills and relationship quality, $t(387) = 0.78$, $p = .44$ and $t(466) = 0.78$, $p = .44$, respectively. However, students who completed all the surveys had

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significant higher post-social skills than students who did not, $t(457) = -2.34, p = 0.02$.

Measures

Social Skills. Social skills of mentees were assessed by twelve statements that mentees were asked to rate according to the level of agreement. Scores ranged from 1 ('not true at all') to 5 ('totally agree'). Six out of the twelve items were formulated negatively, thus these items were recoded. The items of these scales were very similar to the Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters containing various aspects of social skills (Matson, Rotatori, & Helsel, 1983), and was previously used in research on mentoring in the Netherlands (Klooker & Boswinkel, 2013). Aspects of social skills were peer acceptance (e.g. "Most classmates like me"), dealing with conflict (e.g. "I often argue"), and pro-social behavior (e.g. "I have a chat easily"). We took the mean of these twelve items to create scale scores for social skills.

Social skills were measured at baseline and at follow-up. This resulted in two variables we called 'pre-social skills' and 'post-social skills'. The first variable refers to social skills before the mentoring, the second to social skills after mentoring. Cronbach's α of social skills variables at the two measurements were .75 and .79. Higher scores on these variables reflect higher levels of social skills.

Mentoring Relationship Quality. The relationship quality scale was developed for the present study, and contained six items corresponding to trust (e.g., "I trust my mentor") and role modeling (e.g., "I consider my mentor as an example") in the mentoring relationship.

Mentees completed the relationship quality measure. Scores ranged from 1 ('not true at all') to 5 ('totally agree'). We used the mean of the scores to construct the relationship quality variable. Cronbach's α of this scale was .90, and higher scores on this scale reflect higher relationship quality.

Analysis

We used *T*-tests to examine possible age and gender differences in the mean levels of our study variables. Bivariate associations between the variables were explored with Pearson correlations. Then, we estimated a series of mediation analyses to test for the direct and indirect paths between social skills and mentor-mentee relationship quality.

First, we tested a mediation model for the overall sample, using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2015). We tested whether relationship quality mediated the association between social skills pre and post mentoring. This model was run with age and gender as covariates. Second, we examined differences between age and between gender in this model. More specifically, we tested "the when of the how" (Hayes, 2015). This means we looked at the mediating role of relationship quality (how), separately for boys and girls, and separately for younger and older mentees (when). As such, two additional mediation analyses were run with age and gender as moderator, respectively. To determine the age and gender differences in the conditional indirect effects we generated bootstrap confidence intervals. To interpret interaction effects, we used simple effect tests in PROCESS for each group of the moderator.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 contains the means and standard deviations of the study variables for the overall sample and for boys and girls separately. *T*-tests showed that boys and girls did not significantly differ in pre-social skills ($t(370) = 0.08, p = .94$), but girls reported slightly more social skills post mentoring than boys ($t(377) = -2.13, p = .03$). There were no significant gender differences in mentor-mentee relationship quality ($t(377) = -1.53, p = 1.28$). When mentees were compared on age with a cutoff on the mean age (not in tables), younger (than mean age) mentees reported significantly more pre-social skills as compared to older mentees ($M = 4.09, SD = 0.48, M = 3.97, SD = 0.47$, respectively), $t(370) = -2.46, p = .01$. The same differences were found in post-social skills, with social skills of younger mentees ($M = 4.02, SD = 0.45$), being significantly higher than those of older mentees ($M = 3.92, SD = 0.46$) $t(377) = -2.13, p = .03$. No significant differences were found in relationship quality for younger and older mentees ($M = 3.88, SD = 0.78, M = 3.79, SD = 0.87$, respectively) $t(377) = -1.10, p = 0.27$. Results of the Pearson correlations in the overall sample indicated a significant positive association between mentor-mentee relationship quality and both pre- and post-social skills, ($r = 0.11, p < .05$, and $r = 0.19, p < .01$, respectively). For girls, pre- nor post-social skills were correlated with relationship quality. For boys, relationship quality was significantly positively correlated with pre-social skills ($r = 0.17, p < .05$), and with post-social skills ($r = 0.28, p < .01$). For older mentees (age > 13.19), there were no significant correlations between the study variables. For

Social Skills for Relationship Quality

younger mentees (age < 13.19) however, relationship quality correlated with pre-social skills ($r = 0.21, p < .01$), and relationship quality correlated with post-social skills ($r = 0.28, p < .01$).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and t-tests.

Variable	All (n=390)		Girls (n=206)		Boys (n=173)		Gender differences	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i>
Age	13.19	1.47	13.16	1.49	13.23	1.45	0.46	.65
Relationship Quality	3.86	0.82	3.91	.81	3.78	.83	-1.53	.13
Pre-social skills	4.05	0.48	4.04	.49	4.04	.46	0.08	.94
Post-social skills	3.98	0.46	4.02	.44	3.92	.47	-2.13	.03

Mediation Analyses

Overall sample. First, we tested for the overall sample whether the relation between social skills pre and post mentoring was mediated by mentor-mentee relationship quality, while controlling for gender and age. The results of this mediation analyses are reported in the first column of Table 2. The results show that the path from pre-social skills to relationship quality was not significant. Relationship quality, however, was significantly related to post-social skills, indicating that higher relationship quality was related to higher social skills post mentoring. Gender was significantly related to post-social skills, which means that girls had higher social skills after the intervention compared to boys. Relationship quality did not mediate the relation between pre- and post-social skills, that is, there was no significant indirect effect of pre-social skills on post-social skills via relationship quality in the overall sample, $b = 0.009$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.0003, 0.03].

Moderated mediation with gender. Although no mediation occurred for the overall sample, we tested if mediation was present under certain conditions, i.e., for a specific subsample. As such, we performed a conditional process analysis to assess the moderating role of gender in the direct and indirect paths between social skills and relationship quality, while controlling for age. The results of this conditional mediation analysis are reported in the second column of Table 2. As in the overall model, there was a significant positive association between relationship quality and post-social skills, but not between pre-social skills and relationship quality. There were no gender differences in these associations. Additionally, with the other paths being similar to the paths

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in the overall mediation analysis, gender did not moderate the indirect path from pre-social skills to post-social skills via mentor-mentee relationship quality, indicated by the confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation that included zero ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.08, 0.006]).

Moderated mediation with age. Lastly, we ran the previous conditional process analysis with age as the moderator, while controlling for the effects of gender (see third column of Table 2). Pre-social skills, again, were not associated with relationship quality, but age moderated this path ($b = -0.115$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .02$). Simple effect analyses showed that pre-social skills were significantly associated to relationship quality for younger mentees (as defined by 1 SD below the mean, 55% of the sample), $b = 0.33$, $t(367) = 3.05$, $p = .002$, but not for older mentees (1 SD above the mean age) (see Figure 1). Relationship quality, then, was significantly related to post-social skills. Moreover, also the path between relationship quality and post-social skills was moderated by age, $b = -0.049$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .01$. Simple effect analyses showed that the association between relationship quality and post-social skills was only significant for younger and not older mentees, $b = 0.21$, $t(374) = 4.55$, $p = <.001$ (see Figure 1). Lastly, the overall mediation model showed that there was a significant indirect effect of pre-social skills on post-social skills, via relationship quality for younger mentees, ($b = 0.043$, $SE = 0.019$, 95% CI [.013, .090]) but not for older mentees ($b = 0.0001$, $SE = 0.005$, 95% CI [-.009, .011]). Thus, for younger aged mentees, the association between pre- and post-social skills is mediated by relationship quality.

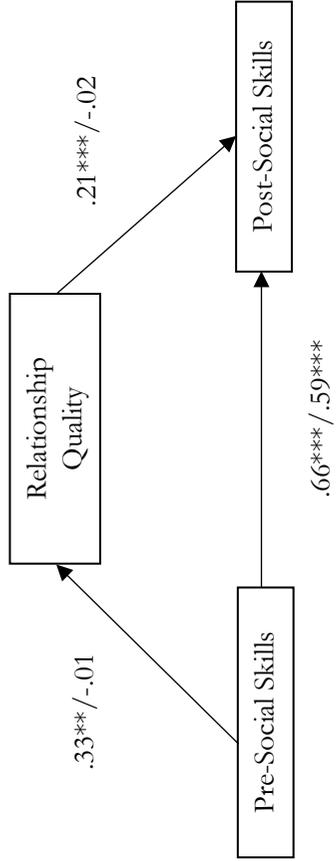


Figure 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the mediation paths, controlled for gender. Before the dash for younger mentees (one SD below the mean) and behind the dash for older mentees (one SD above the mean). * <.05, ** <.01, *** <.001

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Table 2. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the mediated path models of Social Skills and Relationship Quality

	Overall mediation	Moderated mediation Gender	Moderated mediation Age
	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>
Paths to Relationship Quality			
Pre-Social Skills	0.16 (0.09)	0.17 (0.10)	0.16 (0.09)
Age	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)*
Gender (1 = girls)	0.12 (0.08)	0.12 (0.09)	0.12 (0.08)
Pre-Social Skills x Age			-0.12 (0.05)*
Pre-Social Skills x Gender		-0.21(0.19)	
Paths to Post-Social Skills			
Relationship Quality	0.06 (0.02)**	0.06 (0.03)*	0.06 (0.02)*
Pre-Socials Skills	0.61 (0.04)**	0.61 (0.05)**	0.60 (0.05)**
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.1)	-0.02 (0.01)
Gender (1 = girls)	0.10 (0.04)**	0.10 (0.04)**	0.10 (0.04)**
Pre-Social Skills x Age			-0.01 (0.03)
Pre-Social Skills x Gender		0.10 (0.11)	
Relationship Quality x Age			-0.05 (0.02)**
Relationship Quality x Gender		-0.05 (0.05)	
	R ² =0.45	R ² =0.47	R ² =0.47

Note. **p* <.05 ***p* <.01

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore how mentees' social skills before mentoring, mentor-mentee relationship quality, and social skills after mentoring are related in a school-based mentoring program. Results suggest that only young mentees' pre-social skills are associated to mentor-mentee relationship quality. There was, however, a significant positive association between mentor-mentee relationship quality and post-social skills for the overall sample. Relationship quality did not mediate the association between pre-social skills and post-social skills in the overall sample, but for younger mentees, relationship quality did partially explain the association between pre-social skills and post-social skills.

Pre-Social Skills and Relationship Quality

We found support for the hypothesis that mentees with higher pre-social skills also report higher relationship quality with their mentor, but this was only true for young mentees (age 11-13). For younger mentees, this finding is in accordance with theories and research on the relation between social skills and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Segrin & Taylor, 2007; Segrin et al., 2016). The findings of this study show that for young mentees in school-based mentoring, their social skills are related to relationship quality. For older mentees (age 13-19), we did not find this association. Although there were no significant mean differences in perceived relationship quality between younger and older aged mentees, different predictors of relationship quality for both groups may be at play. Youths' developmental life stage is likely to play

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a part in determining different needs in mentoring (Allen & Eby, 2007). Qualitative research on the perceptions of mentoring of early to mid and late adolescents, revealed differences in how mentees in different developmental stages draw support from their mentor. Younger mentees, for example, were looking up to their mentor, whereas older mentees emphasized mutuality and a need to be on equal footing with their mentor (Liang, Spencer, Brogan, & Corral, 2008). It may be that older mentees' social skills are less predictive of relationship quality, because of their developmental stage and associated needs concerning mentoring.

Relationship Quality and Post-Social Skills

Subsequently, we tested the associations between relationship quality and post-social skills. We found significant associations between relationship quality and post-social skills and this association was even stronger for younger than older mentees. The finding that higher relationship quality is associated to higher post-social skills, is consistent with our hypothesis. Previous research on mentoring identified relationship quality as a key factor in mentoring in general (Eby et al., 2013), and in school-based mentoring in particular (Bayer et al., 2013). That mentor-mentee relationship quality is related to social skills outcomes in school-based mentoring specifically, confirms the status of relationship quality as a key factor, and is a valuable addition to the extant mentoring literature. One of the measured aspects of relationship quality, role modeling, might explain the relevance of relationship quality for social skills. Research shows that when adolescent peers display prosocial

behaviors, adolescents are likely to respond in a prosocial manner. This, in turn, might lead one to engage in cycles of prosocial exchanges (Bukowski & Sippola, 1998). Due to the relatively small age difference between mentor and mentee, the mentor may serve as a role model of skills which explains the association between relationship quality and social skills outcomes.

Mediating Role of Relationship Quality

Lastly, to explain the mechanism underlying mentoring, we tested the mediating role of mentor-mentee relationship quality in social skills before and after a mentoring program. In the overall sample, relationship quality did not explain the association between pre-social skills and post-social skills. The same was true for the model where we tested gender differences, meaning there were no significant differences between boys and girls in the mediating role of relationship quality. However, looking at different age groups, the mediating role of relationship quality varied across age. For younger mentees, relationship quality partially explained the association between pre- and post-social skills. Thus, our results imply that one of the key aspects of mentoring, i.e., high relationship quality, may be particularly important for younger mentees, as compared to older mentees. One of the main developmental tasks during adolescence is moving away from parents and developing a new social network (Eccles, 1999; Segrin et al., 2016). For the youngest mentees in our study (i.e. early adolescents aged 11-13), the mentoring intervention might be one of the first times they are developing a one-to-one relationship with an older, non-familial member. With that in

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mind, having a satisfying and trusting relationship may be, not surprisingly, of greater importance for them as compared to older mentees to accept the mentors' guidance, role modeling, and direct instructions. As a result, their mentee-mentor relationship quality partially explains the way they develop their social skills along the mentoring program.

Age and Gender Differences

The results presented above suggest that for younger mentees, relationship quality is important in mentoring related changes in their social skills. The proposed gender differences in the associations between social skills and relationship quality were not present. Social skills were not more important for girls' relationship quality compared to boys (cf. Pollack, 1999) and neither was girls' relationship quality more important for post-social skills compared to boys (cf. Karcher, 2008). Despite the finding that there are no differences in associations between the study variables for boys and girls, we did find some mean differences in social skills. Girls reported higher social skills after the mentoring intervention compared to boys. This finding is consistent with our hypothesis and other research on gender development, stating that due to faster neurological maturation and gender role identification, adolescent girls may have higher social skills than adolescent boys (Silberman & Snarey, 1993). Interestingly, inconsistent with studies that showed neurological maturation during adolescence to be linked to increased social skills (Crone & Dahl, 2012), in the current study younger and not older mentees reported higher social skills. Research showed that for boys,

although their interpersonal competence is increasing with age, they tend to engage in less social behavior due to their gender role ideology becoming more stereotypically (Flannery & Smith, 2017). This might explain the lower scores on social skills for older boys, which refers to either their actual behavior or the way they self-reported their behavior. Additionally, we expected girls to report lower relationship quality than boys, given the short-term character of the mentoring program. However, girls did not report lower relationship quality in the current short-term school-based mentoring program, in contrast to previous research on gender differences in relationship quality in community-based mentoring (Rhodes et al., 2008). Despite the short-term character of the mentoring program in our study, the structured one-to-one, weekly meetings between mentor and mentee, may lead to higher relationship quality for girls compared to community-based mentoring. At the start of the mentoring intervention, mentees were asked to formulate goals, and this could have stimulated girls to formulate more instrumental goals. This may then result in more realistic expectations of girls' mentoring relation, and lead to higher relationship quality. Future research should test this assumption.

Strengths and Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. Firstly, creaming may have occurred in the selection of classrooms to enter the mentor program (Lipsky, 2010). Classrooms were not randomly assigned to the mentoring condition, but schools decided which classrooms were entered in the mentor program. It could be the case that schools assigned

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classrooms in with students who were more open to mentoring to the mentor condition, which, therefore, were more likely to succeed. Secondly, as the majority of the mentoring took place in the intended one-on-one situation, we ascribe found effects to this particular type of mentoring. However, the effect might be somewhat distorted by the fact that some mentees occasionally received group mentoring (1 mentor, 2 mentees). For example, perceived relationship quality might be depending on the fellow mentees' social skills instead of on the mentees' own social skills. Thirdly, mentees who were part of our final sample had higher post-social skills than mentees who did not complete all the surveys. However, mentees did not differ in pre-social skills and mentor-mentee relationship quality, but it could still indicate that our subsample was somewhat more "successful" in terms of desired mentoring-related outcomes (i.e., social skills). Lastly, we used self-reported measures of social skills. This may give an inaccurate impression of youths' actual social skills. On the one hand, mentees could have overestimated their social skills due to a lack of self-insight or social desirability. On the other hand, for boys, social skills might increasingly become less desired with increasing age, and therefore self-reports might give an underestimation (Flannery & Smith, 2017).

Despite these limitations, the current study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to examine a school-based mentoring program in the Netherlands, taking into account age and gender differences. We focused on social skills as a facilitating factor of relationship quality, contributing to the base of knowledge of mentoring. Our results imply that school-based mentoring is most beneficial for younger students and

that their mentor-mentee relationship quality is important in developing social skills.

Implications for Future Research

More knowledge is necessary on which subgroups of youths are more likely to benefit from school-based mentoring. Since this study showed that young mentees' social skills were related to mentor-mentee relationship quality, further research is needed on what factors are related to relationship quality in mentoring for older mentees. The present study only used youth characteristics in explaining relationship quality, but mentor characteristics have been found to partially account for relationship quality as well. To illustrate, mentors' self-disclosure, self-efficacy, goal-setting, feedback, previous involvement with youths, and mentors' experiences with the program are related with relationship quality (Dutton, 2018; Lyons, McQuillin, & Henderson, 2019; Raposa, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2016; Weiler, Boat, & Haddock, 2019). The structured content of the evaluated mentoring program guided mentors and mentees in their activities. In many mentoring practices, however, programs only provide general guidelines of how to develop a constructive relationship. This might influence the way mentors and mentees establish a fruitful relationship, and as a result, their relationship quality. Therefore, further research is needed to see whether the finding that young mentees' social skills are related to relationship quality is also true for other school-based mentoring programs, and for community-based mentoring.

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Relationship quality in general appeared to be related to social skills. Therefore, before future research is able to identify individual characteristics that influence relationship quality, school-based mentoring programs should focus on providing the right conditions to increase this relationship quality, such as facilitating weekly meetings and opportunities to interact outside a large group setting (Bayer et al., 2013).

Conclusions

In sum, this study showed that higher relationship quality is related to higher social skills after mentoring, and that only for younger students, social skills pre intervention are related to relationship quality. Finally, mentor-mentee relationship quality explains the relation between young mentees' pre- and post-social skills. These results suggest that, for social skills to improve, school-based mentoring programs should pay close attention to mentees' abilities to develop positive (mentoring) relationships.



This chapter has been accepted for publication as: Schenk, L., Sentse, M., Lenkens, M., Nagelhout, G., Engbersen, G., & Severiens, S. (in press). Instrumental Mentoring for Young Adults; a Multi-Method Study. *Journal of Adolescent Research*.

CHAPTER 5

INSTRUMENTAL MENTORING FOR
YOUNG ADULTS; A MULTI-
METHOD STUDY

Abstract

Closeness between mentor and mentee is previously defined as an important indicator of relationship quality in youth mentoring, but whether this is the case in instrumental mentoring for young adults remains unclear. This is an exploratory study examining how instrumental mentoring serves young adults in their instrumental needs and how relational closeness develops. We applied a mixed-methods design, using quantitative data from a study of an instrumental mentoring program in Rotterdam, The Netherlands (N = 53), and qualitative data from a subsample of participants (N = 10). Two statistically distinctive clusters of closeness were found; 49% of the mentees reported high levels of closeness, and 51% reported low levels of closeness in their mentor relationship. MANOVAs showed that the cluster with high levels of closeness was correlated with *instrumental compatibility*, *satisfaction*, and *perceived attitude similarities*. Semi-structured interviews were used to illustrate the role and development of closeness for mentees in both clusters, and three cases were presented. Experiencing closeness seemed a result of receiving instrumental support, not a precondition. Mentees' previous experiences might in some cases explain the lower levels of closeness, but this did not always hinder mentees to profit from their mentors' support.

Introduction

Positive relations with supportive adults are considered essential in youth development (Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; Theokas & Lerner, 2006). However, youths who experience both individual and environmental difficulties, in combination with insufficient protective factors, are considered at risk for various negative outcomes, such as school dropout, unemployment, or mental health problems (Jenson & Fraser, 2015). These risks may hinder youths to reach their full potential and effectively participate in society. Moreover, these youth's networks are often overburdened, or not able to provide specific forms of support (Schenk et al., 2018). Pairing youth with a caring, non-parental adult who puts the youth's need central, and meeting regularly, is assumed to be a preventive way of supporting youths. Mentoring programs are mainly focused on children and youths up to 18 years old. Young adults (age 18-28), however, may profit from mentoring too. Increasing calls upon self-sufficiency may be extra hard for this age group with multiple problems and a limited social support network. A mismatch between young adults' needs to become self-sufficient and the necessary contextual resources to do so, may be bridged by the support of a mentor.

Most mentoring research is based on mentoring programs that use a developmental approach which emphasizes a close, long-lasting relationship as the primary mechanism of mentees' development (Rhodes, 2005). Mentees' self-esteem, for example, is believed to increase through the presence and affirmation of a mentor (Rhodes, 2005). A close relation between mentor and mentee, therefore, is essential to mentoring with a developmental mentoring approach. For this close

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bond to arise, spending time together and having fun, are the primary ingredients of developmental mentoring. Empirical research, indeed, shows that in this type of mentoring, close mentor relationships are associated with better youth outcomes (Cavell & Elledge, 2014; Kanchewa, Yoviene, Schwartz, Herrera, & Rhodes, 2016; Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002). Although a close bond seems necessary to profit from mentoring, it is suggested that a relationship-based approach alone may not adequately address certain youth's needs (e.g., Bowers, 2019; Rhodes, 2019). Additionally, outcomes of a recent meta-analysis showed that relationship-based programs yield smaller effect sizes than more targeted approaches (Christensen et al., 2020). The instrumental mentoring approach, unlike the developmental approach, facilitates space for these insights. The focus in this approach is on setting, pursuing and achieving goals, such as improving mentees' competencies or school grades (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). The mentor's behavior then, is aimed at helping a mentee reach those goals. In this approach, goal-focused mentoring activities are perceived as equally important as the development of a close bond. It is very well possible that this is especially advantageous for young adults in mentoring programs. It may be that mentors who guide young adults through the obstacles that may accompany their transition to adulthood fit their needs better than mentor relations aimed at emotional development exclusively.

To date, research on instrumental mentoring is limited, and in particular for young adults (Balcazar & Keys, 2014). The central purpose of this study is to examine how goal-focused activities and relational

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closeness affect relationship quality in instrumental mentoring for young adults. We start by describing the features of instrumental mentoring and how this approach may be better suited for young adults, and thereafter will focus on the role that closeness may play in this type of mentoring.

Instrumental Mentoring for Young Adults

Whereas increased competencies and skills may be a result of the growing interpersonal mentor-mentee relationship in developmental mentoring, in instrumental mentoring increasing competencies and skills is the primary goal. In instrumental mentoring, the mentor supports the mentee to accomplish particular goals (e.g. increasing academic skills or building career knowledge) by providing advice, guidance, explanations, or suggestions (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Instrumental mentoring is often related to domains that are key to increase self-sufficiency, such as education, work, and mental health (Bannink, Broeren, Heydelberg, van 't Klooster, & Raat, 2015). Youth in formal mentoring programs often experience individual and environmental difficulties, which hinders them to become self-sufficient (Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013). Aiming for an effective match with the labor market, reducing debts, or addressing health problems are examples of important issues for young adults in mentoring programs. In instrumental mentoring, important goals are made explicit which allows for greater intentionality and definable structure of the mentoring, instead of spending time together to form a close bond. Advice and support from mentors can result in more knowledge, access to social resources, and self-confidence and eventually, increased self-sufficiency.

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Instrumental mentoring may not only be more suitable for mentees with personal and environmental challenges, it also seems more appropriate to the developmental stage young adults are in. Setting clear, common goals in mentoring is emphasized as a promising starting point for young adults (Darling, 2005; Noam, Malti, & Karcher, 2014). Young adulthood (also referred to as emerging adulthood) is characterized by more transitory and inconsistent states and requires youth to become active agents to construct their future lives (Arnett, 2004; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). Young adults, thus are more likely to benefit from working on concrete, common goals in their transition to independence, compared to younger mentees (Darling, 2005; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005; Musick, 1999; Noam et al., 2014). It is more effective for young adults to develop a relationship around these shared goals than to have relationship development as a separate, primary starting point (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005). For young adults experiencing multiple obstacles in life, thus, instrumental mentoring seems to better address their needs that come with their developmental stage and challenges than developmental mentoring.

The Role of a Close Bond in Instrumental Mentoring for Young Adults

Closeness between mentor and mentee is often how relationship quality in mentoring is specified (e.g. De Wit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, & Lipman, 2019; Lyons, McQuillin, & Henderson, 2019; Raposa, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2016; Rhodes, 2005). Closeness in this sense, refers to mentees' feeling of a close bond with their mentor, and of being able to

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share (negative) experiences and concerns. Rather than relying on developing closeness alone, instrumental mentoring aims to combine goal-directed and relational activities to establish relationship quality. Research suggests that it is often the combination of goal-orientated activities *and* mentor-mentee closeness that is most effective in instrumental mentoring. To illustrate, Nakkula and Harris (2010) found the combination of goal-focusing and sharing thoughts and emotions to correspond to the greatest degree of mentees' satisfaction with their mentor in a Big Brothers Big Sisters program. In fact, the focus on goals solely, without the sharing aspect of the relationship, compromised the relationship quality.

The assumption that involving activities to develop a close and lasting relation in instrumental mentoring is most effective was tested in a school-based mentoring program (Lyons et al., 2019; McQuillin & Lyons, 2016). Results showed that a combination of instrumental approaches along with the development of a close relationship had the largest effects on mentees' outcomes. Another study showed that how mentors support their mentees is strongly related to the close bond mentees report (Lyons & Perrewe, 2014). The authors conclude that even though a close bond and mentoring support behavior are two distinct constructs, they are hard to separate. This so-called sweet-spot of instrumental activities and the development of a close bond (Lyons et al., 2019), and the finding that perceived support and affective perceptions coincide (Lyons & Perrewe, 2014), provides new evidence for using hybrid models of mentoring. However, studies on this hybrid model are scarce and based on school-based mentoring programs

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(McQuillin & Lyons, 2016; Lyons et al., 2019) or postgraduate students (Lyons & Perrewé, 2014). Other relevant research on closeness in mentoring has been done by Liao and Sanchez (2019) and Hurd and Zimmerman (2014). Both studies showed how closeness is associated with various outcomes. The presence of relational closeness was a precondition for young adults to perceive benefits on psychological outcomes (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014). Close and growth-oriented relationship profiles were associated with various outcomes such as motivation, aspirations, and grades (Liao & Sanchez, 2019). However, both studies are based on natural (informal) mentoring relations, where youths identified someone other than their parents who provides additional support. By definition, these are people they already know. Second, natural mentoring often refrains from setting goals. The establishment and content of a relationship thus, is different from formal mentoring programs that use an instrumental approach.

Constructs that make up Relationship Quality

Although relational closeness is likely to remain an important indicator relationship quality, there are additional aspects of relationship quality that need consideration in instrumental mentoring, such as mentees' satisfaction with the mentors' effectiveness in supporting their mentee in goal attainment. A construct that is often associated with a close mentor-mentee bond, is *perceived similarities* between mentor and mentee. Shared characteristics have been linked to relationship quality in general (Byrne, 1971), and in mentoring relations in particular (Allen & Eby, 2003; Raposa, Ben-Eliyahu, Olsho, & Rhodes, 2019). To illustrate, in a

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developmental mentoring program similar racial and ethnic backgrounds of mentor and mentee were predictive of longer lasting mentoring relations (Raposa et al., 2019). In practice, mentoring programs frequently match higher-class position mentors with low-income youth from minority-backgrounds (Tierney & Grossman, 1995). With few background similarities between mentor and mentees, bridging these differences might hinder the development of a close bond. Within the field of instrumental mentoring, however, research on perceived similarities is scarce. With shifting point of views on the role of a close bond in instrumental mentoring, the question arises how important perceived similarities are. In other words, working on set goals in the instrumental approach might not be hindered by differences between mentor and mentee.

In contrast, mentees' perception of the supportive role of the mentor might be more important than similarities and levels of closeness for their satisfaction with the relationship (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005). Whereas open discussions and problem solving skills seem important for younger youths, the need for structured and meaningful activities grows increasingly important in late adolescence and young adulthood (Larose, Cyrenne, Garceau, Brodeur, & Tarabulsky, 2010). Mentors need to be able to provide these activities. In addition, a study in an academic context showed that perceived effectiveness of the mentors' support leads to increased levels of satisfaction with the relationship (Lyons & Perrew, 2014). Thus, with increasing age, the way a mentor can contribute to and support the mentee's goals, may lead to satisfaction in the relationship. Satisfaction and compatibility in this way,

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might also be better indicators of relationship quality in instrumental mentoring for young adults. Another feature of instrumental mentoring may be that a close bond does not precede effective support of a mentor, but conversely, by working on goals, a close bond between mentor and mentee can arise (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005). Satisfaction and the perception of how mentors contribute to the set goals in this way, might be a better indicator of the mentor relation, than the presence of a close bond.

Young adults who have been in contact with many social workers and who find it hard to trust new people, may have negative expectations or may be resistant to develop a close bond (Barnhoorn et al., 2013; DiGiuseppe, Linscott, & Jilton, 1996; Lenkens et al., 2019). Indeed, Raposa et al. (2016) found that youths' multiple stress factors at the individual and environmental level affect their ability to form a close and lasting bond with their mentor. Also, risk factors such as behavioral problems or drug use predict lower levels of satisfaction in the mentor relationship, and early match closure (Kupersmidt, Stump, Stelter, & Rhodes., 2017; Raposa et al., 2016). For older youth with direct needs regarding self-sufficiency moreover, meaningful activities seem to be a more fulfilling and natural way of interacting with a mentor instead of spending time together in fun-focused activities (Larose et al., 2010). Taking into account young adults' characteristics may offer new insights in how young adults perceive their mentors' effectiveness. Furthermore, more knowledge on the role of a close bond as a requirement of mentoring, or the result of effective mentoring, is needed.

The Present Study

Young adults' needs and developmental characteristics should be taken into account when studying mentoring. This exploratory study examines how instrumental mentoring serves young adults and how relational closeness develops together with goal-focused activities. To do so, we apply a multi-method approach. First, we study the levels of experienced closeness and how these levels of closeness are related to relationship indicators such as satisfaction, perceived compatibility and similarities. Additionally, we provide three case studies to illustrate the development of closeness and how youth experience various levels of this closeness. As the instrumental approach of mentoring yields better results than developmental mentoring practices (Christensen et al., 2020), it is relevant to examine the role and development of relational closeness in instrumental mentoring, as it seems understudied in former research. Additionally, the developmental status and direct needs of youths may influence their perceptions of closeness with their mentor. Gaining more insight in what the sweet-spot of relational and instrumental activities might entail for young adults, may have implications for mentoring programs with this target population.

Method

Design

We adopt a mixed-methods design, using both quantitative and qualitative data to study instrumental mentoring for young adults. Adding qualitative interviews to quantitative data allows for participants' perspectives on relationship quality that the deductive methods do not

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take into account (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). More specifically, by using cluster analysis we investigate whether we can differentiate different subtypes of mentoring relations. We then illustrate the validated clusters by presenting case studies, based on interviews with mentees. We have selected three participants whose interviews were rich enough to vividly demonstrate their perception of the development of their mentoring relation.

Participants

Mentees were recruited from a local mentoring program in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The program is aimed at young adults (age 18-28), who are mainly referred to the mentoring program at the municipal agency for young adults (in Dutch: Jongerenloket). At this site, young adults can get legal support when they, for instance, want to go back to school or apply for social welfare. Young adults' self-sufficiency in the most important life domains such as income, daily activities, addiction, justice, social support, housing, mental health, and employment, is assessed. When there are multiple problems in one or more of these domains and no protective factors in their immediate environment, young adults are considered at-risk of a variety of outcomes that hinder them to participate in society or reach their full potential. These young adults are introduced to the mentoring program and can choose to sign up to enter the program voluntarily and for free. Many participants have received professional assistance in their current and past lives, but the mentoring program is distinct in that it is based on young adults' voluntary involvement, their own formulated needs, and

Relationship Quality in Instrumental Mentoring on volunteers (cf., professionals). The mentoring program adopts an instrumental approach for young adults with a specific request for support in self-sufficiency, such as reducing debts or finding employment. Support is provided through one-on-one mentoring whereby a mentor is linked to a young adult to meet and support the mentee on a regular basis. The mentoring program recruits mentors who are highly educated and are highly active in working life. Mentors are initially screened by the program staff, and then matched with mentees based on personality and shared interests. Mentors receive a neuro-linguistic programming training and information session on practical subjects such as debt restructuring. At the start of the relation, mentor and mentee set goals to work towards together. The program supports mentors and mentees through digital contact along with face to face interactions.

Participants' mean age at the time of the quantitative data collection was 23.74 years (SD = 3.40). More men than women participated (64.2% and 35.8%, respectively). Participants identified themselves as Dutch (43%), Antillean (16%), Surinamese (11%), Turkish (6%), Moroccan (4%), or other (20%).

Interviews were conducted with a subsample of participants in the quantitative study and included ten participants. At the time of the interview, participants' mean age was 25.3 years. Five participants identified as men, six as Dutch, two as Antillean, one as Moroccan, and one as Surinamese. Scores on the relationship quality measures did not differ between the qualitative subsample and main sample. Characteristics of both samples are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mentee characteristics samples.

Characteristics	Quantitative Sample N (%)	Qualitative Sample N (%)
Gender		
Men	34 (64.2)	5 (50)
Women	19 (35.8)	5 (50)
Total	52	10
Ethnicity		
Dutch	23 (41.8)	6 (60)
Antillean	9 (16.4)	2 (20)
Surinamese	6 (10.9)	1 (10)
Moroccan	2 (3.6)	1 (10)
Turkish	3 (5.5)	-
Other	18 (32.7)	-
Domains set goals		
Housing		4 (40)
Income		4 (40)
Mental health		6 (60)
Physical health		1 (10)
Social network		4 (40)
Community involvement		6 (60)
Addiction		2 (20)

Procedure

All mentees enrolled in the program were contacted by a researcher. The researchers provided information about the study and invited mentees to participate in the quantitative study. Mentees who did not respond within two weeks received a reminder email, and a second after another week. After informed consent, participants could fill in the online questionnaire on their mobile phone, computer, or tablet, on their own preferred time and place. Participants were compensated with 15 euro after completion of the questionnaire.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with a small sample of mentees who filled out the online survey. All participants of the quantitative study were eligible for participating in our qualitative study. They were contacted several times via email and invited for an interview for another 15 euro compensation. Ten mentees responded and were interviewed. Interviews took place in a separate room of the mentoring programs' office, a central place that most of the mentees were familiar with, or in the central library. An interview protocol was designed with guidelines for the structure of the interview and information for the interviewees. Written informed consent for the interview and use for scientific purposes was obtained and the interviews were audio-recorded after verbal consent. The purpose of the interview was described, as was the confidential character of the interview. Participants were told that they could (temporarily) stop the interview when necessary, or that they could leave a question unanswered. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by a research-assistant and the first author, and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes each. Participants were asked to come up with a

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pseudonym for themselves and their mentor under which the interviews were transcribed and presented in the current study. Approval of the design of the study was obtained from the institutional ethics board.

Instruments

Closeness, Instrumental compatibility, and Satisfaction were adapted from the Match Characteristics Questionnaire for college mentees (MCQ, Harris & Nakkula, 2018), and translated to Dutch. See appendix A. All questions in these scales were rated using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “I totally disagree” to “I totally agree”.

Closeness. The level of closeness that mentees perceive was measured with five items from the scale ‘Closeness’ and ‘Personal Support’ from the Match Characteristics Questionnaire for college mentees (Harris & Nakkula, 2018). Items included for example, “My mentor and I have a close bond” and “We talk about negative or stressful things that were happening in my life”. A mean score was created based on these items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of closeness. Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was .74.

Instrumental Compatibility. How mentees perceived their mentors to be compatible with their needs, was measured with the scale ‘Instrumental compatibility’ from the MCQ (Harris & Nakkula, 2018). This scale consists of three items such as, “My mentor is well-suited to help me with the most important challenges in my life”. A mean score was created based on these items, with higher scores indicating more instrumental compatibility. Cronbach’s alpha was .63

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Satisfaction. Mentees' satisfaction with their mentor is measured by the 'Satisfaction' scale of the MCQ (Harris & Nakkula, 2018). It includes four items, for example, "This year would have been much harder for me if I had not had my mentor." A mean score was created based on these items, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha was .59.

Perceived Similarities. How mentees perceived similarities between them and their mentor, was measured using the Homophily Scale (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006). The questionnaire consists of two scales. The *background homophily scale* ($\alpha = .71$) consists of six items questioning the similarities in background (economic and social status), such as "My mentor has a different background than me". The *attitude homophily scale* ($\alpha = .81$) consists of 15 items, such as "My mentor and I share the same values". Questions were rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Totally disagree" to "Totally agree". A mean score was created based on these items, with higher scores indicating more perceived similarities.

Interviews. The first author and a research assistant conducted the interviews. Both were trained in doing interviews, and the first author was experienced in conducting interviews with this target group in particular. We had no prior relationships with participants before the interviews. We used semi-structured protocols with questions designed to elicit perceptions of relationship quality. Topics addressed in the interviews were how mentees experienced the beginning of their mentor relationship, the development of the relation over time, reasons for having a mentor, goals, goal attainment, and similarities and differences

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between them and their mentor. Interviewers asked open-ended questions, followed by follow-up questions. Participants were as well provided with the opportunity to talk about negative aspects of their relationship in a hypothetical way, to avoid participants' tendency to mainly talk about positive aspects of their relationship. For example, "Suppose you are the director of this mentoring program, what would be your main concern in matching mentors to mentees?", and "Describe what you in general think is a good mentor".

Data Analyses

A concurrent mixed-method design was used to answer our research questions (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). To find clusters of observations with similar values on the close bond items (see Appendix A), a cluster analysis was carried out using *IBM Statistical Package for Social Scientist* (SPSS 24). This way, clusters are created such that the within cluster differences are as small as possible, and differences between clusters are maximized (Pastor, Barron, Miller, & Davis, 2007). We followed a two-step cluster analyses (Gordon, 1999). In step one we used agglomerative hierarchical techniques for small sample sizes and Ward's method for combining clusters (Rapkin & Luke, 1993; Ward, 1963). We determined the cluster solution based on the number of cases within clusters, stability of solutions, interpretability, and distinctiveness of the clusters (Rapkin & Luke, 1993). In step two, we validated the clusters found in step one, using non-hierarchical k -means clustering. Here we enter the cluster centers as determined in step one and used Euclidean distance as similarity measure. Additionally, to see if the clusters were

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significantly different from each other, we conducted an ANOVA. After the determination of the number of clusters and their distinctiveness, we conducted chi-square tests and MANOVA's to see how participants in the clusters differed from each other in gender, socioeconomic status, educational level, instrumental compatibility of the mentor, satisfaction, and perceived similarities.

To explore mentees' views and experiences of the mentor relation in instrumental mentoring, interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using ATLAS.ti. Using sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006), the first author and a research assistant independently identified themes present in mentees' descriptions of relations with their mentor, and how they valued their mentors' characteristics in the context of their practical and emotional needs. The first two transcribed interviews were open-coded independently by the two researchers, and similarities and differences in coding were analyzed. This resulted in a coding scheme, used to code the remaining interviews. Minor adjustments were made in the coding scheme based on the following two interviews, but was fully applicable to the final five interviews. Axial coding was applied, making connections between categories, split and merge codes. This was followed by selective coding, to identify relations between the themes (Straus & Corbin, 1998). During the process of analyzing, memos were made to make expectations and assumptions of the researchers explicit and these memos were discussed to see if the researchers were not led by implicit assumptions not reflected in the data. From these analyzed interviews, we purposively selected three cases that represent the

identified main themes in the clusters. Each case study stresses the role of closeness and the related constructs.

Results

Cluster Analyses

To identify different subtypes in mentoring relations regarding levels of closeness, we performed a cluster analysis. We used mentoring relationship quality items indicating a close bond in the mentoring relation to create the cluster groups (see Appendix A). First, we performed a hierarchical cluster analysis, to study how many relationship quality profiles could be identified based on items indicating a close bond. A two cluster solution appeared to be the best fit. Second, we used non-hierarchical k -means to determine whether the clusters represent meaningful subtypes. The first cluster ($n = 26, 49\%$) is characterized by high scores on closeness. The second cluster ($n = 27, 51\%$) differed from the first cluster in lower levels of closeness. We used the label 'High closeness' for cluster 1, and label 'Low closeness' for cluster 2. We conducted an ANOVA to compare and validate the two relationship profiles. Mentees in the High closeness cluster had a significantly closer bond ($M = 4.43, SD = .68$) than mentees in the Low closeness cluster ($M = 2.42, SD = .77$). The profiles significantly differed on levels of closeness ($F(1,51) = 102.36, p < .001$), showing the distinctiveness of the two clusters.

How do Clusters differ Based on Mentees' Characteristics?

To see how mentees' characteristics such as gender and mentoring experiences were associated with the two relationship profiles, we conducted several analyses. Participants in both profiles differed significantly from each other in their scores on instrumental compatibility ($F(1, 51) = 25.77, p = <.001$), satisfaction ($F(1, 51) = 48.43, p = <.001$), and perceived attitude similarities with their mentor ($F(1, 51) = 7.08, p = .01$) (see Table 2). Mentees experiencing higher levels of closeness (High closeness cluster) reported higher levels of satisfaction, experienced their mentor to be more instrumentally compatible, and experienced more similarities with their mentor in attitude than mentees with lower levels of closeness in their relation (Low closeness cluster). Using Chi-square test of independence, we found no associations between gender, SES, educational level and the relationship profiles.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and MANOVA's for the two cluster solution.

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	F	p	Min-Max
	High Closeness	Low Closeness			
	<i>N</i> = 26 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> = 27 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			
Instrumental	4.78 (.95)	3.20 (1.29)	25.77	<.001**	1-6
Compatibility					
Satisfaction	4.75 (.70)	3.27 (.84)	48.43	<.001**	2-6
Perceived similarities (background)	3.12 (1.03)	2.82 (1.08)	1.09	.303	1-6
Perceived similarities (attitude)	4.07 (.83)	3.5 (.71)	7.08	.01*	2-6

Note * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Case Studies

The cluster analyses revealed two meaningful subtypes of closeness in mentoring relationships. To illustrate the background, thoughts and feelings of mentees in both clusters, we present three case studies. Results from interviews with mentees from the High closeness cluster were relatively uniform in how mentees experienced closeness. Therefore, we present one case that illustrates the role of a close bond the best. Maira's case is illustrative for most of the mentees in this cluster; perceiving instrumental support makes mentees feel they are not alone and this results in the feeling of a close connection. In the Low closeness cluster, there was variability in how mentees perceived the lower levels of closeness. We, therefore, present two cases from this cluster. Daniel and Laura both indicated to have a less close bond. From the interview it became apparent that for Daniel this is exactly the way he likes his relationship with his mentor to be. Undertaking activities together without talking too much about private issues was a catalyst for him to bring change in other life domains. For Laura, however, the lack of closeness seems problematic, since she does indicate the need for more closeness. Characteristics of these three case studies are presented in Table 3.

Maira (High closeness): “My mentor is helping me 100% and she doesn’t even know me”: How instrumental support leads to a close connection.

We speak Maira about nine months after she entered the mentoring program. Maira is 24 years old. She was referred to the mentoring

Table 3. Match characteristics case studies.

	Relationship duration at time of interview	Mentor gender	Mentor age	Mentor occupation	Domains of set goals
Maira	8 months	Female	58	Teacher	Finance; Community involvement; Mental health
Daniel	10 months	Male	68	Retired	Addiction; Community involvement; Physical health
Laura	16 months	Female	36	Translator	Finance; Community involvement; Mental health

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program at the municipal agency for social welfare. Maira dropped out of school, experienced mental health issues, and had no income. She also had debts at five or six agencies. One week after sending an email, Maira was invited to the mentoring program's office to meet the program staff and had an interview with a potential mentor, Vanessa. They set up a meeting right away and during that meeting they decided to look for the right study for Maira, while working on her financial debts and looking for a job.

Maira felt there was an instant connection after the first meeting. Since Vanessa has experience in guiding college students and also has a lot of contacts at the municipal agency, Maira feels that Vanessa knows exactly how to support her. They meet regularly, and then create a to-do list. When Maira finishes the to-do list, she contacts Vanessa to set up another meeting. Vanessa would never tell Maira what to do, but offers suggestions, or helps putting Maira's needs and wishes into words. By making to-do lists, Vanessa helps Maira putting things in perspective and get her going. Regarding similarities between her and Vanessa, Maira thinks that they are on the same page because they both want to get things done. Maira, however, is sometimes stuck in analyzing too much, things can get blurry in her head, whilst Vanessa is good at ordering and prioritizing.

Even though all of the support that Maira describes to receive from her mentor is instrumental, she experiences a close bond with Vanessa. "[...] in that period of time I was clueless and I felt like me against the world. But with her help it became more easy for me to confront what was happening in my life at that time." It is the feeling

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that Vanessa understood her situation so well, was able and available to provide support, that means a lot to Maira. “Her support, the way she came to me, she was like a 100% interested in me and she didn’t even know me. 100% helping me. So actually by her actions she was telling ‘hey you’re not alone, we’re going to get this done’”. This indicates that perceiving instrumental support stimulates the formation of a close bond. While still struggling with her mental health, Maira found a job as a house cleaner, paid off her debts at four agencies, and enrolled in a study program.

Daniel (Low closeness): “We are too down-to-earth for that”: How undertaking activities together appears sufficient for growth in multiple life domains.

Daniel is a 26 year old young adult, living in Rotterdam. At the time of the interview he has had a mentor for almost seven months. His mentor is Jord, a retired entrepreneur. Daniel was involved in multiple reintegration programs, but after three months or so, this ended and would leave Daniel sitting at home again with no job or daily structure. This, together with changing contact persons from the involved agencies, frustrated him. According to Daniel, he lived in social isolation and was addicted to drugs at the time of entering the mentoring program. His wish was to be able to take better care of himself by cooking, having a job, and daily structure.

When Daniel and Jord met, they hit it off right away, according to Daniel: “For us it was actually there right from the start, because, yeah, you have common grounds, you like cycling, you like other sports, he also went to [the same sort of] school, he told me right away when we

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met. So you immediately have things to talk about.” Jord and Daniel share the experience of attending a certain school and using drugs. For Daniel these similarities made it easy to connect with Jord when they first met. Jord being retired might indicate a generation gap, but it also leaves him with a lot of spare time to invest in Daniel. Jord is able to see Daniel very regularly, and sometimes also joins Daniel last-minute during important appointments with institutions.

At the start of their relationship, Jord and Daniel mostly spend time together on their racing bikes, at least once, and sometimes twice a week. For Daniel this was much better than the emphasis on goal-setting that he saw in other mentoring couples. He felt annoyed when he was asked to set up goals and felt like others were telling him what to do. Daniel has an aversion of talking about “emotional stuff” and thinks he and Jord are too “down-to-earth” for that. Also, his experiences have led him to prefer a certain distance; “Look, I have seen one hundred care providers come and go so to speak, well, I do think it’s one hundred. Well, and it doesn’t immediately incite you to think ‘I am going to explain my whole story and express my emotions etcetera’”. For this reason he would rather not talk about too many private issues with his mentor. However, as his social isolation was one of his reasons to sign up for the mentoring program, spending time with Jord through cycling was making him feel better already. During these rides they do not talk a lot according to Daniel. Only after a while Jord would ask Daniel “Come on, what are you waiting for?”, referring to Daniel’s growing insight in the need to stop using drugs in order to get that daily structure and a job.

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Daniel is very satisfied with the way that Jord does not push him too much, but makes him realize that change is necessary. After a couple of months Jord asked Daniel explicitly what Daniel expected him to do in their relationship. Daniel then told him to take a step back regarding some issues, but concerning withdrawal from drugs, Daniel asked Jord to chase him more about the registration at a rehabilitation program. At that time, Daniel already had the insight he needed and wanted to stop using drugs, but it was hard for him to actually take action. Jord would then call him and ask if he already made ‘the’ phone call. According to Daniel, it is this regular activity with Jord, and slowly gaining insight in his own situation that made him decide to sign up for a rehabilitation program for his drug addiction, and he is applying for jobs now too.

Laura (Low closeness): “Just a text would do”: how the need for closeness is hard to express when experiencing rejection.

Laura is 19 years old, and as most of the mentees in the program, living in Rotterdam. Approximately one year ago she was permanently expelled from school. She then went to the municipal agency to ask for support and apply for social welfare, and at this site she was introduced to the mentoring program. At the time of the interview she met her mentor almost one year ago but it has been a long time since they last met. At the beginning of the interview, Laura needed to be reminded which mentor the interview was about, since she had multiple mentors and coaches.

Laura and her mentor met for the first time at the mentoring program’s office. Laura was struggling with the lack of daily activities and with financial problems. After their first meeting, Laura and her mentor

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started messaging each other and met multiple times. They then talked about what Laura needed since she was expelled from school. According to Laura, no concrete objectives were formulated, and her needs at the time remained vague; “I just needed help with my life situation” [...] [support] in a nice way. Support includes what I want to do in my life”. Laura feels the mentor could not really support her, neither emotional nor instrumental.

During the interview Laura indicates the need for some closeness, only if it is just a text saying “Hey, how are you?”. She would like to talk about issues and receive positive feedback from her mentor. At the same time Laura tells about the negative experiences she has with teachers and social workers, and how she feels that they are never really on her side. Laura thinks that this also led to the fact that she rather does things on her own. Even though she has the need for support, she does not think that her mentor can really support her. She rather handles private issues on her own, because she does not like to ask for help. She has experiences of rejection after asking for help, so she does not do that any longer. In her own words, she is used to doing things on her own now.

Discussion

The present study explored the role of closeness in instrumental mentoring for young adults. Young adults with practical needs in mentoring programs require guidance, support, and advocacy, which makes instrumental mentoring better suited for young adults than developmental mentoring (Bowers, 2019; Cavell & Elledge, 2014;

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Rhodes, 2019). Since research on the role of closeness in instrumental mentoring is limited (see McQuillin et al., 2019), and especially on how instrumental mentoring supports young adults, the present study set out to explore the role of closeness in instrumental mentoring for this specific group. A two cluster solution was validated based on the levels of closeness mentees indicated to experience with their mentor. The first group reflected mentees experiencing high levels of closeness from their mentor. The second group reflected mentees who experienced lower levels of closeness with their mentor. Compared to mentees with low levels of closeness, mentees with high levels of closeness perceived their mentor to be more compatible to their instrumental needs, were more satisfied with their mentor relation, and perceived more similarities in attitude between them and their mentor. Case studies illustrated the way closeness developed, mainly as a result from receiving instrumental support. In the group of low levels of closeness there was more variation in how mentees experience this lack of closeness. For some mentees this was problematic, for others this was their preference as the result of their experiences with social services.

Although mentees in the High closeness cluster were more satisfied with the relation and perceived their mentor as more compatible to their needs, the mentees in the Low closeness cluster were not unanimously dissatisfied with their mentoring relation. For some, the emotional distance between them and their mentor was how they liked their relation to be, and still led to the achievement of some very important goals. For others, the lack of emotional support seemed more problematic. Here, the lack of setting goals seemed to hinder the

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development of the relation. Previous research has indicated the importance of concrete goal setting in instrumental mentoring (Keller, 2005). With no close bond and no concrete goals to work on, the contact remained superficial and vague and may lead to early closure of the match. For young adults this experience on top of their previous experiences with social services is rather problematic (Spencer, 2007).

Mentees with higher levels of closeness were characterized by having more perceived similarities in attitude with their mentor, but not with more perceived similarities in background. Interviews with mentees showed that indeed, mentees did not see their mentors' background as dissimilar to theirs, but they focused on details that would underscore their similarity. For example, mentor and mentee that both spend their younger years in the same type of school, or sharing same interests in sports, or having the same mind set. Mentees would also seize these similarities as indicators of an instant connection with their mentor. They mentioned that because of this connection they had the idea this match was going to be a good one. Although the present study was not set up to identify the minimal basis of trust and empathy, our results suggest that that even for mentees where closeness developed as a result of instrumental support, some basic levels of trust between mentor and mentee is necessary. This trust is most likely related to levels of similarities. The types of similarities mentioned as important for a connection varied broadly but were not focused on background similarities such as social class or ethnicity. This finding complies with previous mentoring research that finds surface similarities (gender and ethnicity) are inconsistently linked to perceptions of mentoring, and that

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deep level similarities (attitudes and beliefs) are related to more support (Eby et al., 2013). Similarities on the experiential level (educational background or job tenure), however, are believed to be associated with more instrumental support (Eby et al., 2013). In our study, mentors and mentees were often dissimilar in their educational background and jobs, but this did not seem to hinder the mentors' effectiveness in providing instrumental support. Mentors' ability to connect and navigate through networks seemed sufficient in the development of mentees' social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

As Hamilton and Hamilton (2005) suggested, our interviewees indicated a close bond to arise from the mentor's supporting behavior. In our study, closeness seemed to be the result of the instrumental support of the mentor, instead of a precondition of working on set goals. Research suggests that behavior that is perceived to be performed voluntarily, rather than formally required, is an indicator of someone's trustworthiness (De Jong, Van der Vegt, & Molleman, 2007). Mentees in our study often talked about everything their mentors did for them with amazement. A mentor supporting a mentee without immediate self-interest is signaling a positive orientation toward the relationship, and repeated support over time, can lead to the formation of a close bond between mentor and mentee (McAllister, 1995).

Something many mentees in our study struggled with, was the prescriptive attitude they were used to from previous encounters with social care providers. Several mentees indicated the need to make their own decisions, and to see where things were going without an explicit focus on goals during the mentoring relation. This was in accordance

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with previous research on at-risk young adults' needs to do things on their own (Lenkens et al., 2019). Although a close bond in our study did not appear to be a precondition of effective instrumental mentoring, it could be the case that the presence of an emotional bond makes it easier to work towards goals. According to Karcher and Nakkula (2010), sharing thoughts and emotions with a mentor may prevent instrumentally focused interactions from feeling prescriptive. An emotional bond thus, does not seem to be a precondition in instrumental mentoring, but it may make it easier to set and attain goals, and, in turn, to keep the relation going. At the beginning of the relationship, goals should, therefore, be primarily based on the mentees' needs. Optionally, new goals could be introduced later in the relation when some level of closeness has been established.

Satisfaction and mentors' compatibility were both associated with mentees experiencing more closeness (High closeness cluster). Satisfaction in the quantitative measure concerned a broad sense of being satisfied with having a mentor, both instrumental and relational. Mentors' compatibility regarded their skills and background with respect to supporting the mentee. From the interviews these two constructs were hard to separate. Mentees' satisfaction with the relation was often related to how they saw their mentor contribute to their goals. Indeed, mentees' dissatisfaction with the relationship was previously found to be associated with insufficient instrumental support (Nakkula & Harris, 2010). Most importantly, there were cases of mentees in our study, indicating to have low levels of closeness, but still were satisfied with having a mentor, and their mentors' effectiveness in supporting them.

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This finding might be specific for the age and needs of our sample and suggests that the sweet-spot of combining goal-directed and relational activities may differ per match (Lyons et al., 2019).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The present study explored relationship quality in instrumental mentoring among young adults, a so far understudied sample and program type. Findings are based on a small sample and the use of case studies can only be seen as indicators of relevant issues in instrumental mentoring for this group. Although we were aware of mentees' possible restraint to talk about negative elements in their relation, it could be the case that they did not want to open up about this element in their relation, that they did not want to talk about differences between them and their mentor. Additionally, mentees could voluntarily enter the study, and this might have resulted in a biased sample. It may be that mentees who had negative experiences were less motivated to enter the study, and most importantly, were reluctant to do an additional interview after completing the survey. We showed the variety in the Low closeness cluster by presenting two cases of mentees both experiencing lower levels of closeness but with various levels of satisfaction and instrumental compatibility. Daniel's scores on the correlates of closeness (satisfaction, instrumental compatibility, and similarities) were indeed higher than Laura's and this difference was reflected in their interviews. However, the satisfaction and instrumental compatibility scales were of low reliability. Future research, therefore, should be conducted with validated instruments that are able to differentiate between instrumental and

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relational elements in mentoring. We also suggest future research to take gender into account when studying the development of relational closeness in instrumental mentoring. Closeness in our study was largely constructed of items that considered talking about personal things and problems (see Appendix A). For women, self-disclosure is considered a sign of closeness, whereas for men, engaging in activities is generally more important (Liang, Bogat, & Duffy, 2014). In our sample there were more men than women, and this may explain our finding that mentees (64 % men) preferred instrumental support over experiencing closeness. In addition, in order to examine the sequential order of the development of closeness and instrumental support, future research should use longitudinal data of mentoring relationships. Also, it is important to identify the minimal conditions that mentees need in instrumental mentoring, such as mentors' empathy and levels of trust. Finally, the present study only used mentees as informants, but mentors' perceptions should be taken into account as well. This could provide more insight in the dynamics between mentor and mentee. For example, if mentors perceive their mentees to avoid closeness, the question is whether they see this as a hurdle to provide instrumental support.

Practical Implications

Our study indicated the importance of providing youth with support that meets their instrumental needs. To formulate and monitor the progression of this need fulfillment, goal setting seems useful. Setting goals to work on may give youths a sense of control with regards to the problems they are dealing with in their life stage, but also seems necessary

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to start the mentoring relation without just spending time together to get to know each other. However, setting goals should also be handled with caution. As previous experiences with support influence how young adults perceive support and goalsetting, mentees' preference in setting goals should be leading instead of prescriptive goal setting by the mentor or the program. For some mentees, the presence of clear goals seems to provide concrete agreements on how and when mentor and mentee will meet. To set appropriate expectations and effective communication, mentors need skills to do this (Nakkula & Harris, 2014).

Based on our findings that mentors' contribution to the relation is not only providing emotional support, but also advising, networking, and advocating, we would suggest matching mentors and mentees based on the mentor's compatibility to the mentee's (instrumental) needs. Mentees frequently indicated that their mentors had many useful connections and knew how to navigate the bureaucratic structure in order to support mentees in their obstacles. Additionally, although future research is needed, matching based on shared interests seemed more important for experiencing closeness than shared backgrounds. Even one similarity could provide a mentee with the confidence that the match is going to be successful. Mentors can also be trained in self-disclosure, which is thought of as a stimulator to identify similarities enhancing the relationship (Dutton, Bullen, & Deane, 2019).

Conclusion

Questions have been raised about the role of closeness in instrumental mentoring of young adults. The findings of the present

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study suggest that it is worthwhile to further explore the role of closeness in instrumental mentoring, since cluster analyses and case studies showed variation in how mentees perceived closeness. For some young adults, closeness was a result of perceiving instrumental support, whereas for other young adults the lack of closeness was problematic. The findings of our study suggest that for young adults in instrumental mentoring, findings on relationship quality in developmental mentoring (c.q. closeness) cannot be translated one on one to instrumental mentoring. The developmental stage of the mentees, and their history of social care, seemed to relate to their perceptions and preferences in mentor relations. For mentoring to serve as an intervention strategy for young adults, improvement in both research and practice is required.

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Appendix A. Mentor Characteristics Quality Scales

Items below were rated using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “I totally disagree” to “I totally agree”.

Closeness

My mentor and I have a close relationship.

My mentor knows what is going on in my life.

We talk about problems I have or things that worry me.

We talk about personal things I wouldn't discuss with just anyone.

We talk about negative or stressful things that were happening in my life.

Instrumental Compatibility

My mentor is a good match for someone with my academic focus.

My mentor is a good fit for someone with my career goals.

My mentor is well-suited to help me with the most important challenges in my life.

Satisfaction

My mentor makes me happy.

I'm not sure I'm getting enough out of this match.

Having a mentor has made a real difference in my college and work experience.

This year would have been much harder for me if I had not had my mentor.

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CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

With the transition to adulthood comes a higher chance of mismatch between intra-individual needs and environmental factors. Successful shifts in roles (e.g., increasing independence) and settings (e.g., out of home and school settings), are dependent on the existence and nature of social connections in and between the different ecological levels of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The transition to adulthood is dependent on the structural opportunities and obstacles, as well as resources and individual characteristics. Youths who experience multiple problems in various life domains (multi-problem youths) and who have less sources to compensate existing risk factors (at-risk youths) can often take less advantage of opportunities available (Schoon & Schulenberg, 2013). Transitions may not only be harder for these youths to go through, but the encountered obstacles may even be self-enforcing (Schuyt, 1995) and deviation amplifying (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). In these transitional periods of adolescence and young adulthood, social support is known to protect youths from risks, provide them with opportunities, and ultimately, increase youths' wellbeing (Dodge, et al., 2012; Gallupe

et al., 2019; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Sijtsema & Lindenberg, 2018; Spendelow et al., 2017; Taylor, 2011; Vaux et al., 1986). As such, social support may play a vital role in protecting youths from not being able to successfully participate in society or reach their full potential. The overall aim of the current dissertation was to explore the role of the social network in supporting urban at-risk youths, adding to the literature on how processes of self-enforcement occur and are perceived by youths themselves. Two research questions were formulated to address this aim for which, situated in Rotterdam, the Netherlands' second largest city and known for its social and cultural dynamic context, four studies were conducted. First, I studied how social network characteristics of at-risk youths are related to their wellbeing (chapter 2 and 3). Second, I studied how non-parental adults can provide social support to youths in formal mentoring programs (chapter 4 and 5). In this final chapter I summarize the main findings, answer the two research questions, and imbed the findings in a broader societal and theoretical frame.

Summary

In chapter 2 I studied the association between young adult men's social networks and their wellbeing. I tested whether young adults' problematic social networks were related to declines in their wellbeing over time. Vice versa, I tested if a decline in wellbeing was related to more problematic social networks over time. I approached youths' wellbeing in this study in terms of levels of psychopathology, distinguishing internalizing and externalizing problem behavior. Youths' levels of internalizing and externalizing problems appeared relatively

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high, which was in line with what is known about this specific population from previous research (e.g., van Duin et al., 2019). Youths often described unhealthy social networks, characterized by lack of family contact, living in isolation, and having hindering contacts. To study the associations between social networks and wellbeing, I argued that two types of analyses would fit two types of questions. First, I applied traditional cross-lagged panel models to study the associations on a group level. Results indicated that young adults with problematic social networks experience lower levels of wellbeing (higher levels of psychopathology) compared to young adults with more healthy social networks (i.e., between-level). Over time, more internalizing problems were related to more problematic social networks and vice versa. More externalizing problems, however, were only predictive of problematic social networks and not vice versa. These results confirm the assumption that youths with problems in one domain (i.e., wellbeing), are at risk for problems in other domains (i.e., social network). However, based on the second analysis, the random intercept-cross lagged panel model (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015), these associations could not be explained on the individual level (i.e., within-level). In other words, while this study showed that problematic social networks and lower levels of wellbeing in multi-problem young adult men often co-occur, I did not find evidence for the reciprocal relation between the two over time within individuals. This suggests that the social networks of youths do not have a direct effect on their wellbeing, nor does youths' wellbeing have a direct effect on their social networks.

Summary and General Discussion

In chapter 3 I studied youths' perceptions of their social networks and their needs and preferences related to their wellbeing. For wellbeing to increase, youths need to be able to identify supportive contacts and have positive attitudes towards asking for help. Youths' perceptions of help are shaped by their belief of influence, needs and expectations of the usefulness of their network (i.e., help-seeking orientation) (Gulliver et al., 2010; Rickwood et al., 2005). The perceived availability of resources in youths' networks was qualitatively studied using the bonding and bridging social capital framework. In accordance to my expectations, youths indicated that their bonding social capital mainly consisted of emotional support. However, youths felt they did not want to burden their bonding social network too much, since this network often consisted of people who are in vulnerable positions too. This led to youths not liking to ask for support, and rather be self-reliant instead. Youths cited external factors that influence their situation (i.e., external locus of control), such as hindering peers, unsupportive parents, and negative life-events. Although youths indicated the need for instrumental and informational support, their bridging social capital was present in a limited way. Bridging contacts providing these types of support were nearly always affiliated with formal institutions, such as youth coaches and social workers. Overall, the perceptions of their social network, and negative experiences with past help-seeking, led youths to have negative attitudes towards help-seeking. This negative help-seeking behavior hinders resources to counterbalance the challenges youths faced, which is likely to result in lower levels of wellbeing.

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In chapter 4 I studied how intra-individual characteristics of at-risk youths were related to relationship quality with mentors in a school-based mentoring program. Youths who are able to interact with their mentor in an effective and appropriate way, attract more social attention, provoke more positive responses, resulting in better established and maintained relations (Segrin & Taylor, 2007). These social skills are primarily thought of as possible outcomes of mentoring. I expected social skills to also be of influence in establishing a high-quality relation with a mentor. Results showed that only for young youths this assumption seemed true; youths between 11 and 13 years old with lower social skills than other youths, reported lower levels of perceived relationship quality with their mentor. Lower relationship quality in turn, predicted lower outcomes of social skills, compared to youths with higher relationship quality. The latter appeared to be true for all youths, regardless of age, but this association was stronger for the youngest youths in the sample. The outcome that relationship quality is important to profit from mentoring, and in this case, to increase one's social skills, underlines the importance of relationship quality in mentoring. The finding that social skills of young youths are positively associated with relation quality with a mentor may be explained by these youths having less experiences with non-parental adults compared to older youths. These results indicate the importance of taking youths' characteristics, such as age and skills, into account in mentoring.

The study in chapter 5 focused on relationship quality in mentoring for at-risk young adults specifically. In this study I examined how instrumental mentoring serves at-risk young adults (age 18-28) in

their instrumental needs and what relationship quality entails for this target group. Relationship quality is often defined as a close relation in the mentoring literature, but I argued that for young adults with specific needs regarding self-sufficiency, instrumental support can play an important role as well. The presence of relational closeness next to instrumental need fulfilment, therefore, was central in studying relationship quality in this study. Cluster analyses revealed that two groups of relationships were present: one group with youths experiencing closeness in their relation, and a group indicating to experience less closeness in their relation. Qualitative data analyses, subsequently, revealed that the lack of relational closeness is not necessarily preventing youths to profit from mentoring. Goal-oriented activities with an instrumental compatible mentor, could for some youths be effective without relational closeness. This finding suggests that the sweet-spot of combining goal-directed and relational activities in instrumental mentoring may differ per match.

What is the Association between Social Network Characteristics of At-Risk Youths and their Wellbeing?

To answer the first research question, two studies were conducted. First, I studied the relation between wellbeing and social networks over time, taking into account the transactional processes of individual and environmental factors (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). Second, I studied youths' perceptions of their networks in the bonding and bridging social networks framework (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam,

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2000), and how these characteristics were related to youths' help-seeking orientation. Together, these two studies shed light on the question what these network characteristics are and how they are related to wellbeing. The findings imply that characteristics of youths' social networks are related to their wellbeing in terms of psychopathology and help-seeking orientation. Youths' bonding social networks are characterized by levels of isolation, lack of family contact, and hindering contacts and this was associated with having lower levels of wellbeing in terms of psychopathology (chapter 2). Additionally, youths perceived their own bonding social networks as sufficient for emotional support on the one hand, but also indicated that they are hesitant to burden this network and expressed the need for more bridging social capital. This, together with negative experiences of support in the past and an external locus of control, negatively shaped their help-seeking orientation (chapter 3), which in turn is related to lower sense of well-being (Hom, de Terte, Bennett, & Joiner, 2020). These findings together imply that youths who are experiencing multiple problems and risk factors, are less likely to have a healthy bonding social network. These studies additionally showed that, also during young adulthood, the bonding social network of at-risk youth is not able to provide all support that youths indicate to need.

Models that explain the relation between social support and wellbeing state that more social support is directly related to better wellbeing (main-effects model; Campos & Kim, 2017; Rook, 1990; Rook et al., 2011) and that social support buffers the negative effects of stress on wellbeing (stress-buffering model; Cohen & Wills, 1988; Raffaelli et al., 2013; Santini et al., 2015). These two models consider social support

and stress as non-interpersonal even though it is likely that someone's life-stress is interacting with the social support one is given. The studies presented in this dissertation point out that at-risk youths' characteristics are partly overlapping with those of their social networks. Especially when the support provider is under the same stressors as the support receiver (e.g., poverty) this is likely to be reflected in the social support. The *reverse stress-buffering* model accordingly, states that the benefits of social support for wellbeing (cf. main-effect model) are dampened in stressful contexts. In other words, this model suggests that social support is less of a protective factor for youths in risky environments. Evidence for this model is found in multiple studies among adolescents where the presence of social support in combination with high stress was associated with poorer wellbeing (for meta-analysis see Rueger, Malecki, Pyun, Aycock, & Coyle, 2016). Findings from chapter 2 and 3 seem to confirm this latter model. At-risk youths' amount and quality of emotional support is primarily derived from their bonding social network. These support providers are, by definition, characterized by a shared social identity and other similarities (Granovetter, 1973). Therefore, these support providers are most likely to be under the same (structural) stressors as youth themselves. The first two studies in this dissertation offer several leads of how youth's social support and its relation with wellbeing is influenced by characteristics of their social network. The first lead may be that due to shared stressors, parents and close family are not able to provide youths with all social support they need. This is reflected in the finding that youths were oftentimes lacking family contact and had hindering contacts (chapter 2 and 3). Hindering contacts may imply that

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social support from peers and family under the same stressors leads to negative interactions, instead of support (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Second, youths expressed the fact that their family was struggling with their own affairs as a reason to not want to burden them (chapter 3). When the bonding social network has the same stressors, thus, youths may experience less social support, but also be less reliant on the network because they do not want to burden it and/or do not believe that this support will fulfill their needs. Together, these findings correspond with the reverse stress-buffering model and adds meaning to the functioning of this model in at-risk urban youths.

Although these findings indicated that there is a relation between youths' social networks and wellbeing, none of these studies provided insights in the direction or directness of these effects. In the first study (chapter 2) I did not find evidence for the longitudinal relation between the two constructs over time within individuals. In the qualitative study (chapter 3) I did not take the element of time into account while interviewing youths on their perceptions of their social networks and consequent help-seeking orientation. For both studies, thus, it may well be that there are also elements of youths' social networks that influenced youths' wellbeing in a direct way, next to through social support. For example, parents' own psychopathology may influence youths' psychopathology (e.g., Faro et al., 2019; Gregory & Eley, 2007) and family coping practices are linked to the help-seeking orientations of children (e.g., Cometto, 2014; Jorm & Wright, 2007). Bonding social networks can transfer wellbeing in terms of biological and genetical influences, but also by modeling. Individuals in youths' bonding social

networks may provide their children with behavioral models to deal with problems (Bandura, 1977). Children observe and imitate their parents and internalize these thoughts and behaviors, shaping youths' response to stressful events and their wellbeing.

In general, support from parents is believed to become less important with increasing emphasis on the support of friends and peers (and romantic partners). However, results from the present studies indicate that the bonding social network remains of influence in youths' wellbeing, also during young adulthood. A growing body of literature underlines this (e.g., Colarossi & Eccles, 2003; Rueger, Malecki, & Demaray, 2010). Young adulthood on the one hand is a transitional period offering many ways of more freedom and abundance of choices, but on the other hand may be an especially vulnerable time for youths with multiple problems and risk factors. To be able to deal with expected adult roles and its accompanying disappointments, youths may longer rely on their parents than other (non at-risk) young adults. This would indicate that for these youths, parents remain an important factor in shaping young adults' wellbeing. Also, many youths in our sample had a non-Western migration background that is associated with more emphasis on family closeness than autonomy. This way, these youths may decide to stay in the parental home for a longer period, but also when they do move out, may stay more connected to their parents and family compared to youths with no migration background (Arnett, 2004). Since I found bonding social networks to be related to the wellbeing of young adults in both chapter 2 and 3 in complex ways, these studies offer

reason to keep taking parental support into account while studying at-risk young adults' wellbeing.

Which Intra-individual Factors are associated with Relationship Quality between Mentors and At-Risk Youths?

The findings that youths' bonding social networks consist of relatively low levels of supportive contacts, youths expressing the need for more instrumental and informational support, and the association with wellbeing, stressed the importance of studying additional sources of support. Support from the larger social context is especially important for youth whose bonding social networks are affected by the same stressors (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Mentors in formal youth mentoring programs can function as supportive non-parental adults and provide youths with additional support. To gain insight in how at-risk youths are able to profit from a mentoring relation, I studied the quality of the relationship in two mentoring programs. Consistent with existing literature, I found that higher relationship quality in school-based mentoring was associated with better mentoring outcomes in terms of youths' social skills (Dubois et al., 2011; Eby et al., 2013), but also that youths' initial social skills can affect the relationship quality. Looking at young adults in a community-based program, results indicated that previous experiences in support receiving, and clear goals around self-sufficiency, made some youths more open for instrumental support provided by their mentor, with or without experiencing relational closeness. Taken together, findings from the last two studies in this

dissertation showed that various intra-individual characteristics are related to relationship quality in mentoring at-risk youths.

These findings can be integrated in the emerging insights of hybrid mentoring programs where relational and instrumental activities alternate. The recent debate on how to incorporate insights from the *friendship-model* and instrumental mentoring has resulted in the suggestion of a sweet-spot (Bowers, 2019; Lyons et al2019; Rhodes, 2019). This sweet-spot entails the presence of both activities that increase relational closeness, *and* activities that increase skills and competence. The outcomes of my research suggested to put youths' age, skills and needs central to define what relationship quality entails in instrumental mentoring. First, increasing relational closeness is depending on the social skills that youths have. For younger youths with lower social skills than older youths, it is harder to experience closeness. Second, for some youths, experiencing their mentor to be compatible to support them in their set goals, seems sufficient to profit from mentoring, also without closeness. In other cases, the closeness developed as a result of experiencing the dedication of a mentor to reach the set goals. Others again, seemed to long for relational closeness but were not able to establish this. Third, for both aspects of the hybrid model, age should be taken into account since younger aged youths' social skills are related to relationship quality, and young adults' needs may be more instrumental than younger youths. Taken together, my research implies that the sweet-spot of combining goal-directed and relational activities is dependent on youths' age, social skills, and instrumental needs. Ultimately, when this is aligned to youths' needs, relationship quality is likely to increase.

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In both studies, relationship quality was defined as the development of a close bond and being able to share thoughts and feelings with the mentor. The findings from my study indicate that relationship quality is not only based on these indicators, but also on how youths perceive the compatibility of their mentor regarding their instrumental needs. There is only little research on the combination of instrumental and relational activities in mentoring, and how this affects relationship quality. Research on relationship quality in a school-based mentoring program indeed showed that the development of relationship quality was very heterogeneous among mentor-mentee matches, and that mentors and mentees had different perceptions of relationship quality (Spiekerman, Lyons, & Lawrence, 2020). This implies that what is understood as relationship quality by youth may vary across the relationship, may differ per match, and may differ from what is generally believed to be relationship quality (by mentors and mentor researchers).

Strengths and Limitations

This dissertation was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development. Acknowledging the interrelatedness of problems in multiple domains led me to study youths' intra-individual characteristics in their social context. I referred to youth who experience multiple obstacles in multiple domains as 'at-risk youths' to emphasize the interactional character and possible (long term) consequences of experiencing multiple problems. These approaches led to several strengths and limitations.

Summary and General Discussion

A first aspect that is both a strength and limitation of my study is the way I conceptualized the target group. In the introduction of this dissertation I elaborated on which youths are considered at-risk and why. I use the term ‘at-risk’ as a fairly broad indicator of the target group. This conceptualization meets the assumption that the need for social support depends on individual characteristics and preferences and is not primarily shaped by specific (combinations) of problems and risks. The qualitative approach in two of my studies allowed for taking these individual preferences into account. On the other hand, the term ‘at-risk’ has in its way a unidimensional character, because it focusses on the risks only, instead of the broad spectrum that defines youths and their needs. Rather, an intersectional approach in which multiple categories that define youths are seen as interrelated, and mutually shaping each other, would do more justice to youths’ experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Additionally, being at risk is relative and contextual, and I do not use this term assuming that these factors and related outcomes are immutable. On the contrary, it is under the present circumstances in our society, and its structural and individual beliefs, that these youths are referred to as at-risk. Using this term, however, may lead to stigmatization. By only focusing on risk factors and less on other (compensating) factors that construe their wellbeing, these youths are defined and seen only from this perspective. With an intersectional approach future research could take more indicators of youths’ experiences into account.

This broad conceptualization of the target group, and the varying indicators of risk, may also lead to fragmented knowledge. Although I assume social support to be of importance for all youths,

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there may be reason to differentiate in types of risks. The influence and quality of social support from the bonding social network may be associated with specific risk factors (that are possibly shared with the support provider). For example, the results from the first study (chapter 2) indicated that social support is differently associated with externalizing problems than with internalizing problems. Similarly, the samples throughout this dissertation consisted of varying and sometimes broad age ranges. Different ages are linked to different developmental stages and accompanying developmental tasks and obstacles. Even though age is a relevant factor, my aim was to focus on structural characteristics of at-risk youth, such as their networks and self-enforcing processes of deprivation during social change. This aim fits the need for more universal preventive interventions that can and should be adapted to individual needs and preferences, for example according to developmental stage.

I not only aimed to study youth in their social context, but also intended to bridge the gap between science and practice, meaning that I focused on questions that would contribute to supporting at-risk youths in Rotterdam. I used research strategies that matched this intention. First, in chapter 3 and 5 I conducted qualitative research in which I was led by youth's perspectives of their situation. This allowed to gain insight in youths perceptions and preferences, in their own vocabulary, making it easier to bridge the gap between youths' perceptions and scientific or professional inferences. Implications that originate from these studies are more likely to be in line with youths' experience of their situation, and therefore, easier to implement. Second, in chapter 2 I argued that to draw

conclusions on an individual, intervention level (where developmental processes take place) advanced analytic strategies are necessary. The use of traditional models provided insight in the characteristics of at-risk youths on a group-level and showed the co-occurrence of individual problems with problematic social networks. But to see how these two concepts are related at an individual level (i.e., how change in one construct is related to change in the other construct within-persons) I used RI-CLPM to assess the relation between social networks and psychopathology (i.e., random-intercept cross-lagged panel model, Hamaker et al., 2015). This gave insight in intervention level implications.

Another way a close connection to the reality of at-risk youths in Rotterdam and bridging the gap between science and practice was pursued, was to collaborate with local parties and the municipality of Rotterdam. This resulted in multiple strengths, but also limitations of the studies conducted. To start with, it was hard to align the interests of policymakers, practitioners, and researchers regarding the design and execution of research. At the municipal level, the importance and priority of scientific research was depending on political programs and interests. At program level, there was dependence of practitioners to comply with the need for scientific research. Regular measurements and sound instruments are necessary to monitor interventions. Validated measures did not always do justice to every specific mentoring program and it was therefore hard to convince program staff to use these measures. The regular measurements would increase the staff's workload and also burden participants. Conducting research on existing local interventions also resulted in relatively small sample sizes in some of the studies.

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Especially the findings in chapter 3 and 5 should be validated in bigger samples. Finally, not all mentoring interventions under study had a clear vision of what was or should be going on in the relationships they facilitated, leaving the relationship as a ‘black box’ where various processes are at play. As McQuillin, Lyons, Clayton, & Anderson (2020) described, the power of mentoring is that it can provide customized support to youths in the program, but a downside is that this results in a broad range of activities. For the study at Rotterdamse Douwers (chapter 5) therefore, I spent reasonable amount of time at the program’s office. Being present, talking to program staff, and youth was necessary to understand the course of affairs and formulate the objective and ways of supporting youths that were implicitly present. The major advantage of working together with practice, on the other hand, is the knowledge exchange. Being able to be present at the intervention site allowed me to better understand what was going on. I was able to share my hypothesis with practitioners, and this way sharpen my view and align the research questions and hypothesis with practice. Vice versa, I was able to share scientific insight with the program staff both directly and indirectly. Presenting findings would allow practice to incorporate findings into practice, but also setting up and explaining my research might have sharpen program staff’s ideas on effective (mentoring) practices.

Scientific Implications

The findings and limitations of this dissertation allow for multiple recommendations for future research. First of all, the definition of wellbeing and at-risk youth merits attention in future research. There

are instruments that address youths' wellbeing specifically, and they are very similar to the self-sufficiency matrix (see chapter 2 and 5) in that they distinguish various life domains (e.g., relationships, mental health, physical health). The Wellbeing Tool for Youth (WIT-Y) for example, adds to this more abstract and positive domains such as purpose (being hopeful about one's future), hobbies, and feelings of connection. However, these tools also tend to be normative in what wellbeing should look like (e.g., environmental wellbeing: 'engaging daily or regularly in efforts to improve physical environment, such as recycling, gardening, picking up trash'). Qualitative research could make an inventory of how (what I refer to as) at-risk youths define their own wellbeing and which aspects of their identity, social contexts, events and activities are part of this. This approach would also provide youths with the opportunity to focus on positive aspects of their contexts and identity.

Regarding the relation between social support and wellbeing, future studies could integrate the use of advanced models and insights from the reverse stress-buffering model in various ways. I made a case to use advanced models to determine the reciprocal relations between youths' social networks and wellbeing on an individual level (i.e., RI-CLPM). Future studies could apply this model to longitudinal data with a wider time span (longer than one year) to examine the processes at hand during transitional periods. These models could also be extended with insights from the reverse stress-buffering model that the benefits of social support for wellbeing are reduced by stress (Rueger et al., 2016). For example, by including stress in the RI-CLPMs as moderator and distinguishing types of stress in stressors that youth share with their

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support providers from their bonding social network, and stressors that are individual. This model should also allow for including protective indicators of wellbeing (identified by youth) because positive aspects (such as leisure activities and meaning) are likely to shape wellbeing too (Seligman, 2012). Additionally, I referred to adolescence and young adulthood as general transitional periods, but taking specific life-events into account in these models would contribute to knowledge on the process of chronic stress (or cumulative stress; Monroe, 2008) dampening the benefits of social support, specific stressful life-events dampening these benefits, or the reciprocity of these associations.

The present study on relationship quality in mentoring also yields multiple suggestions for future research. However, conducting research on existing mentoring programs in the Netherlands is not easily done. Many mentoring programs have relatively small numbers of participants to serve as a sample for scientific data analysis, resulting in low statistical power. Taking together multiple mentoring programs is also hard, since most mentoring programs do not have the same mentoring approach (instrumental or developmental) or do not formulate clear mentoring models that allow for comparing and combining multiple mentoring programs for research (I refer to this as a 'black box' under Strengths and Limitations). Also, the insights that more specific and goal-directed mentoring are more effective than programs who do not formulate and monitor clear goals (Christensen et al., 2020; McQuillin et al., 2020) are not yet completely translated into practice (in the Netherlands). These facts argue for setting up new, or altering existing mentoring programs. In these programs, that ideally combine

Summary and General Discussion

relational activities and skills and competence related goals, multiple aspects can be studied. First, longitudinal data would facilitate a better understanding of the development of relationship quality in mentor relations. This could provide insight in until what point in the relation youths' social skills affect the relationship quality, and how and when the sweet-spot of instrumental support and relational closeness is reached. Second, these analyses should be done with the use of valid instruments, that take both relational closeness and instrumental compatibility into account as indicators of relationship quality. Third, future research should also take youths' characteristics (such as age, gender, and risk factors) into account, but more importantly, should focus on the alignment of youths' needs on the one hand, and the activities and compatibility of the mentor on the other hand. Finally, goalsetting in youth mentoring is relatively understudied, but from psychological treatment interventions we know that goals that are explicitly established together with the therapist, and regularly discussed, leads to higher goal clarity. Patients with goal clarity subsequently, report higher quality of the therapeutic alliance (Geurtzen, Keijsers, Karremans, Tiemens, & Hutschemaekers, 2020). Mentoring research, thus, can focus on how goal setting (types of goals, way of setting goals, monitoring goals) are related to relationship quality with the mentor.

Lastly, I would recommend future studies to enter collaboration with practice in an early stage of the development of an intervention program. For optimal knowledge utilization, research and practice should work together in all stages to be able to identify the instrumental or conceptual needs, to use validated instruments for monitoring, and to

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align the needs and possibilities of practitioners and researchers (Clarke, 1999). Both should be aware of the consequences, workload, but also of the benefits of working together and these elements should be made explicit at the start. If science wants to improve practice, not only a close cooperation between the two is needed, but also the way science is perceived. Although a shift is taking place, social science still mainly evolves around making novel theoretical contributions, instead of around practical utility and its solution design (Holmström, Ketokivi, & Hameri, 2009). This underlines the importance of conducting research that aims to create theoretical insights *and* leads to implications that are immediately relevant to practice (Marsh & Reed, 2015).

Practical Implications

The findings on at-risk youths' social networks presented in this dissertation yields suggestions for practical implications. First, I showed that youths with multiple problems are at risk of having less supportive social networks. I was not able to draw conclusions on the direction of the effects, but the presence of less supportive networks and youths' need for more support was clearly shown. The strong focus on self-sufficiency in the Netherlands may thus be less achievable and even unrealistic for at-risk youths. However, for institutions to keep addressing the responsibility of at-risk youths' social networks, may stimulate the self-enforcing process of deprivation. The findings imply that, also during young adulthood, social networks remain important in supporting youths' wellbeing. Therefore, involving social networks during the treatment of psychopathology or other needs of young adults,

requires greater attention. Interventions that included the social relations in multiple systems, such as Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and multidimensional family therapy (MDFI) have been found effective during adolescence (Alexander et al., 2013; Van der Pol et al., 2017) and may be effective in young adulthood as well.

The majority of youths in my qualitative study (chapter 3) had an external locus of control, meaning that they cite external factors as reasons for their problems. This external locus of control is related to negative help-seeking behaviour. Additionally, from the study on mentoring young adults (chapter 5), the need for informational and instrumental support was indicated. These types of support are believed to enhance perceptions of control (Hogan, Linden, & Najarian, 2002). Providing youth with informational and instrumental support, thus, would not only benefit their knowledge and opportunities in a direct way, but also could lead to increased perceptions of control. Having the perception of being in control of outcomes is related to more positive help-seeking behavior, less depression and effective stress management (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004). Equipping urban at-risk youths with the right resources to feel that they have access to information on education, finance, work, and housing seems critical for youths' wellbeing. In Rotterdam, the municipal agency for young adults (In Dutch: Jongerenloket) plays a central role in this support and provision of information. However, not many youths are familiar with this service, the agency has a negative image, and youths do not return after unpleasant treatment or being confronted with complex procedures (Inspectie SZW, 2015; Rekenkamer Rotterdam, 2019). For youths to

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profit from this service, next to communication about the service, it seems important to create opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making, and service providers to connect with youth. This is known to make youth feel less powerless and give them the feeling they are doing something for themselves, instead of for the service provider, and stay engaged with services in turn (Meltzer, Muir, & Craig, 2016; Mumford & Sanders, 2015). Ways service providers can do this is, is by taking time to understand youth's experiences, by trying to help youth understand why something needs to be done, and by responding directly to youths' needs and circumstances (de Wit, de Jong, & Mulder, 2019; Mumford & Sanders, 2015). In such a way, offering support that meets youths' needs may not only have direct consequences, but also indirect consequences for youths' wellbeing. Giving youths the experience of successful help seeking by giving them access to the right information and control in decision-making can make youths capable and willing to seek for additional sources of support.

Implications for Mentoring

I pointed out multiple ways in which self-enforcing processes of deprivation are taking place in social support and mentoring. At-risk youths are less likely to have a diverse network, therefore are less likely to have a supportive non-parental adult. When in a mentoring program, it is often more difficult for these youths to establish a high-quality relation with their mentor. Those who could profit the most from mentoring, are less likely to be in a mentoring program in the first place (Erickson et al., 2009), but also experience more obstacles in establishing

a relationship with their mentor. To let at-risk youths be able to profit from mentoring, three implications are formulated. First, reaching youths who are most likely to profit most from mentoring should be considered. School-based mentoring in that sense, is a universal intervention that not only reaches youths who ('s parents) sign up for the program, but reaches youths who otherwise would not know about mentoring, or experience a threshold for signing up. Introducing the concept of mentoring to complete schools or classrooms with large portions of at-risk populations, may normalize having and relying on a mentor. School-based mentoring has been found to be equally effective as community-based mentoring (Raposa et al., 2019). This way mentoring reaches the ones who need mentoring the most, possibly breaking the self-enforcing process of deprivation of at-risk youths.

Second, mentoring programs should keep developing strategies to establish relationship quality in mentoring. As at-risk youths' (intra-individual) characteristics shape their needs in mentoring, mentors are challenged to attune their support to the characteristics of the youth. However, mentors, who are working in a voluntary capacity, may not always completely be able to do so. Research found that mentoring program characteristics were associated with relationship quality (Weiler et al., 2019). This means that mentoring programs that have a clear program structure, provide sufficient support to the mentor, opportunities for skill building, and opportunities for the mentor to belong, are factors of effective programs. This in turn, becomes visible in the relationship quality between mentor and youths. Mentoring programs are more modifiable than inherent youth characteristics, and

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therefore should take responsibility in offering mentors and youths the best contexts for establishing relationship quality. For example, setting and tracking goals in mentoring has appeared to be an important factor of relational success. In the fourth study (chapter 5) I illustrated this by showing how young adults had fairly clear formulated needs. To translate these needs into goals, and track the progress towards these tangible goals, may ensure that youth's needs are central and the right support is being provided. However, mentors may find it hard to set and assess progress towards these goals in a systematic way. Programs accordingly, could offer mentors and mentees tools to formulate goals and track their progress, for example the Goal-Based Outcomes tool (Law & Jacob, 2015).

A third implication for mentoring resulting from this dissertation concerns the social capital of at-risk youths. Findings from my studies suggested the often problematic social networks of at-risk youths, and youths themselves indicated the need for more (and more varying) support as well. Social capital is not only the access to a variety of connections and support types, but also being able to mobilize these connections. This ability presupposes mindset (e.g., help-seeking orientation) and skills (e.g., social skills). The aim of mentoring programs should be to provide youths with skills that outlasts the mentoring intervention. To increase the lasting value of a mentor relationship, thus, mentoring should provide youths with a context to learn about their social network, to learn about the profits of asking for support (mindset), and practice (social) skills to do so. Primarily in school contexts, various examples of a focus on youths' social capital exist. For instance, Charania

and Fisher Freeland (2020) developed a framework to map students' social capital, based on four dimensions (quantity, quality, structure, mobilization), as a starting point for teachers and professionals to guide youths in activating their social capital. The Connected Scholars Program (<http://connectedscholarsprogram.com/>), additionally, is a social capital intervention teaching youths to network, to identify and recruit mentors, and to develop and maintain a relationship. Research showed that students who took part in the intervention program had improved attitudes and behaviors regarding support seeking (Schwartz et al., 2018). Concluding, the first tools to equip youths with more skills and positive mindsets about their social capital already exist and mentoring offers a great opportunity for youths to use and practice these tools.

Final Remarks

Although I make a case in this dissertation to continue research and improve practices in supporting at-risk youths in general, and mentoring in particular, some final comments on this are to be made. Despite the fact that supportive non-parental adults are partly able to support youths in navigating obstacles, a substantial portion of these obstacles are based at the macro and mesolevel of young people's development. By definition, at-risk youths are subject to structural societal obstacles, such as educational inequality, discrimination, societal polarization, and dominant beliefs about self-sufficiency. Nonetheless, the intentions of mentor researchers, mentor programs, and mentors have a downside. First, mentoring may imply that the problem, and thus solution, lies at the individual level and take away governmental

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responsibility to act upon structural change (Giridharadas, 2020). Providing individual support may divert the attention to take action for structural change. Uncovering social injustice should be at the core of research, policy and practice, instead of supporting or equipping youths with skills to navigate through these injustices. Second, mentoring may maintain the existing power structures. At the individual level, mentoring is based on the assumption that exposure to successful, higher-class adults, will increase youths' social capital (Deutsch, Lawrence, & Henneberger, 2014) and in practice too, mentors from a higher-class position are frequently linked to low-income youth from minority backgrounds (Tierney & Grossman, 1995). The message that mentoring may spread then may be that 'only people other than me are capable of being successful' and 'I need to escape my community to be successful' (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017). This deficit-based view of at-risk youths and potential white saviour complex is more likely to increase social inequality, than decrease. This (too) stresses the need for relationship quality in mentoring (in terms of e.g. mutually and shared decision making) and investing in skills that make youth capable of recruiting their own sources of support. These sources may as well lay in existing social networks, and mentors could make youth aware of the potential in their own network. In sum, youth mentoring cannot and should not be the solution to social inequality, but mentors can strengthen the current generation with information, advise, and skills in order for youths to be able to realize broader social change.

Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to shed light on the role of the social network in supporting urban at-risk youths. The findings presented highlight the importance of recognizing that at-risk youths' social sources may not always adequately meet their needs, possibly because the bonding social networks are under some of the same stressors as youth themselves. Findings suggested that this lower social support is often associated, or has consequences for, youths' wellbeing. The studies also demonstrated the importance of adjusting support to the needs of these youths' and to provide them with additional instrumental and informational support from bridging social networks. This additional support may come from supportive non-parental adults in mentoring programs. The findings in this dissertation provide empirical evidence for the fundamental role of relationship quality in order to profit from mentoring. Results also indicated that mentoring is not a one-size fits all approach. Moreover, youths' needs in mentoring may vary along their life stage and intra-individual needs. To conclude, this dissertation illustrates how youths' social networks and their well-being can benefit from a formal mentor, and offers suggestions of how mentoring can equip youth with skills and competences that outlast the mentoring relation.



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SAMENVATTING
SUMMARY IN DUTCH

Jongeren die meerdere problemen ervaren in verschillende leefdoeinen (multi-probleemjongeren) en die minder sociale steun krijgen om aanwezige risicofactoren te compenseren (risicjongeren), kunnen vaak minder profiteren van beschikbare mogelijkheden (Schoon & Schulenberg, 2013). Sociale veranderingen die gepaard gaan met hun ontwikkeling zijn niet alleen moeilijker voor deze jongeren, maar de obstakels die ze tegenkomen kunnen ook tot een grotere achterstelling leiden (Schuyt, 1995) en cognitieve en sociaal-emotionele problemen versterken (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). Problemen worden in een zichzelf versterkend proces dan steeds groter. Sociale steun beschermt jongeren tegen risico's, biedt hen kansen en verhoogt uiteindelijk hun welbevinden (Dodge, et al., 2012; Gallupe et al., 2019; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Sijtsema & Lindenberg, 2018; Spindelw et al., 2017; Taylor, 2011; Vaux et al., 1986). Sociale steun uit de sociale netwerken van risicjongeren kan daarom een cruciale rol spelen in een succesvolle deelname aan de maatschappij en kan jongeren stimuleren gebruik te maken van hun capaciteiten. Het doel van het huidige proefschrift was daarom het onderzoeken van de rol van het sociale netwerk bij het ondersteunen van grootstedelijke risicjongeren, door inzicht te geven in

hoe zichzelf versterkende processen plaatsvinden en hoe jongeren dit zelf ervaren. Om dit doel te bereiken stonden twee onderzoeksvragen centraal, waarvoor vier onderzoeken in Rotterdam zijn uitgevoerd. Ten eerste heb ik onderzocht hoe sociale netwerken van risicojongeren verband houden met hun welbevinden (hoofdstuk 2 en 3). Ten tweede heb ik onderzocht hoe de netwerken van risicojongeren versterkt kunnen worden door mentoren in formele mentorprogramma's (hoofdstuk 4 en 5).

Wat is het verband tussen de kenmerken van sociale netwerken van risicojongeren en hun welbevinden?

In **hoofdstuk 2** bestudeerde ik het verband tussen de sociale netwerken van jongvolwassen mannen en hun welbevinden. Ik heb onderzocht of problematische sociale netwerken van jongvolwassenen verband hielden met een afname van hun welbevinden over tijd. Omgekeerd heb ik bekeken of een afname van het welbevinden over tijd verband hield met meer problematische sociale netwerken. Ik benaderde het welbevinden van jongeren in deze studie in termen van psychopathologie, waarbij ik onderscheid maakte tussen internaliserende en externaliserende problemen. Het niveau van internaliserende en externaliserende problemen bij jongeren bleek relatief hoog, wat in overeenstemming is met eerder onderzoek bij deze specifieke populatie (bijv. Van Duin et al., 2019). Jongeren beschreven vaak problematische sociale netwerken, gekenmerkt door gebrek aan familiecontact, sociale isolatie en het hebben van belemmerende contacten. Om de samenhang tussen sociale netwerken en welbevinden te bestuderen, heb ik twee

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soorten analyses verricht. Ten eerste heb ik traditionele *cross-lagged panel*-modellen toegepast om de samenhang op groepsniveau te bestuderen. De resultaten lieten zien dat jongvolwassenen met problematische sociale netwerken een lager welbevinden hebben (hogere niveaus van psychopathologie) in vergelijking met jongvolwassenen met niet-problematische sociale netwerken (d.w.z. *tussen* individuen). Over tijd waren meer internaliserende problemen gerelateerd aan meer problematische sociale netwerken en vice versa. Meer externaliserende problemen waren echter alleen voorspellend voor problematische sociale netwerken en niet omgekeerd. Deze resultaten bevestigen de aanname dat jongeren met problemen in één domein (bijvoorbeeld depressie) ook vaker problemen hebben in andere domeinen (bijvoorbeeld negatieve interacties met familie en leeftijdsgenoten). Op basis van de tweede analyse, het *random intercept-cross lagged panel*-model (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015), kon deze samenhang echter niet op individueel niveau (d.w.z. *binnen* individuen) worden verklaard. Met andere woorden, hoewel deze studie aantoonde dat problematische sociale netwerken en een lager welbevinden bij multi-probleem jongvolwassen mannen vaak samen voorkomen, vond ik geen bewijs voor de wederzijdse relatie tussen de twee constructen over tijd binnen individuen. Dit suggereert dat ondanks de samenhang, kenmerken van de sociale netwerken van individuele jongeren geen direct effect hebben op hun welbevinden, en evenmin heeft het welbevinden van individuele jongeren een direct effect op hun sociale netwerken.

In **hoofdstuk 3** heb ik mij gericht op hoe jongeren zelf hun sociale netwerken beschouwen. Ik heb daarbij de behoeften en

voorkeuren in relatie tot hun welbevinden bestudeerd. Om hun welbevinden te vergroten, moeten jongeren in staat zijn om ondersteunende contacten te identificeren en een positieve houding aan te nemen ten opzichte van het vragen om hulp. Voor jongeren wordt de perceptie van hulp gevormd door hun overtuiging van invloed, behoeften en verwachtingen van het nut van hun netwerk (oriëntatie op het zoeken naar hulp) (Gulliver et al., 2010; Rickwood et al., 2005). De ervaringen van jongeren werden kwalitatief bestudeerd binnen het theoretisch kader van bindend (sterke banden in het eigen sociale netwerk) en overbruggend sociaal kapitaal (zwakke, maar meer diverse banden buiten iemands directe sociale netwerk). In overeenstemming met de verwachtingen, gaven jongeren aan dat hun bindend sociaal kapitaal vooral bestond uit emotionele steun uit hun directe sociale netwerk. Jongeren vonden echter dat ze hun bindend sociale netwerk niet te veel wilden belasten, aangezien dit netwerk vaak bestond uit mensen die zich (ook) in kwetsbare posities bevinden. Dit leidde ertoe dat jongeren niet graag om steun vroegen en in plaats daarvan liever zelfredzaam waren. Jongeren noemden externe factoren die van invloed zijn op hun situatie (zgn. externe *locus of control*), zoals leeftijdsgenoten die hun keuzes en motivatie belemmerden, niet-ondersteunende ouders en negatieve levensgebeurtenissen. Hoewel jongeren aangaven behoefte te hebben aan instrumentele en informatieve ondersteuning, was overbruggend sociaal kapitaal in beperkte mate aanwezig in hun netwerk. Overbruggende contacten die dit soort ondersteuning bieden waren vrijwel altijd aangesloten bij formele instellingen, zoals jeugdcoaches en maatschappelijk werkers. Over het algemeen hebben de percepties van

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hun sociale netwerk en de negatieve ervaringen in het verleden ertoe geleid dat jongeren een negatieve houding hebben ten opzichte van het zoeken naar hulp. Deze negatieve houding ten opzichte van hulp zoeken en gebrek aan overbruggend sociaal kapitaal, belemmeren jongeren in het zoeken van steun, wat kan resulteren in minder welbevinden.

De bevindingen uit hoofdstuk 2 en 3 impliceren dat kenmerken van de sociale netwerken van jongeren verband houden met hun welbevinden in termen van psychopathologie en hun houding ten opzichte van hulp zoeken. De bindende sociale netwerken van jongeren worden gekenmerkt door sociale isolatie, gebrek aan familiecontact en belemmerende contacten, en dit was geassocieerd met een lager welbevinden in termen van psychopathologie (hoofdstuk 2). Daarnaast zagen jongeren enerzijds hun eigen bindende sociale netwerken als voldoende om emotionele steun van te ontvangen, maar gaven ze ook aan terughoudend te zijn om dit netwerk te belasten en meer behoefte te hebben aan overbruggend sociaal kapitaal. Dit, samen met negatieve ervaringen met steun in het verleden en een externe *locus of control*, hangt negatief samen met hun oriëntatie op hulp zoeken (hoofdstuk 3), wat weer verband houdt met een lager welbevinden (Hom, de Terte, Bennett, & Joiner, 2020). Deze bevindingen samen impliceren dat jongeren die meerdere problemen en risicofactoren ervaren, minder vaak een steunend sociaal netwerk hebben. Deze onderzoeken lieten bovendien zien dat, ook tijdens de jongvolwassenheid, het directe sociale netwerk van risicojongeren niet alle ondersteuning kan bieden die jongeren aangeven nodig te hebben en dat dit samen kan hangen met een verhoogde mate van psychopathologie.

Hoewel deze studies aantonen dat problematische sociale netwerken vaak samen voorkomen met verminderd welbevinden bij risicojongeren, kan ik op basis van deze studies geen harde uitspraken doen over de richting van dit verband. Wel sluiten deze bevindingen aan op het *reverse stress buffering* model. Kort gezegd laat dit model zien dat, hoewel sociale steun over het algemeen een protectieve factor is in tijden van stress, dit voor risicojongeren anders kan zijn. Voor risicojongeren die veel sociale steun van hun eigen netwerk ontvangen kan het juist een negatief effect hebben op hun welbevinden. Mensen uit het eigen netwerk van jongeren leven over het algemeen onder dezelfde structurele stressoren. Sociale steun van deze mensen kan dan juist leiden tot negatieve interacties (Rodriguez et al., 2019) of jongeren zijn terughoudend in het vragen om steun, omdat ze deze mensen niet te veel willen belasten.

Welke intra-individuele factoren zijn gerelateerd aan relatiekwaliteit tussen mentoren en risicojongeren?

De laatste twee studies in dit proefschrift richtten zich op hoe formele mentoring programma's het sociale netwerk van risicojongeren kunnen versterken. Om te kunnen profiteren van een mentor is er een bepaalde mate van relatiekwaliteit nodig, en daarom onderzocht ik wat bijdroeg aan relatiekwaliteit tussen mentoren en mentees. In **hoofdstuk 4** heb ik onderzocht hoe intra-individuele kenmerken van risicojongeren verband hielden met de relatiekwaliteit met hun mentor in een mentorprogramma op school. Sociale vaardigheden worden voornamelijk gezien als mogelijke uitkomsten van mentoring, omdat de

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mentor een rolmodel kan zijn in het aangaan van relaties voor de mentee. De mentee leert zo door mentoring betere sociale vaardigheden. Ik verwachtte echter dat sociale vaardigheden ook van invloed zijn bij het opbouwen van een hoogwaardige relatie met een mentor, dus voorafgaand aan de relatie. Het is namelijk bekend dat jongeren die in staat zijn om op een effectieve en passende manier met een ander om te gaan, meer sociale aandacht trekken en meer positieve reacties uitlokken, resulterend in betere relaties (Segrin & Taylor, 2007). De resultaten lieten zien dat deze veronderstelling voor jonge jongeren klopte; jongeren tussen de 11 en 13 jaar met lagere sociale vaardigheden dan andere jongeren, rapporteerden een lagere relatiekwaliteit met hun mentor. Lagere relatiekwaliteit voorspelde vervolgens lagere uitkomsten van sociale vaardigheden, vergeleken met jongeren met een hogere relatiekwaliteit. Dit laatste bleek voor alle jongeren te gelden, ongeacht de leeftijd, maar deze associatie was wederom sterker voor de jongste jongeren in de steekproef. De uitkomst dat relatiekwaliteit belangrijk is om te profiteren van mentoring, en in dit geval om iemands sociale vaardigheden te vergroten, onderstreept het belang van relatiekwaliteit bij mentoring. De bevinding dat sociale vaardigheden van jonge jongeren positief samenhangen met de kwaliteit van de relatie met een mentor, kan worden verklaard doordat deze jongeren minder ervaringen hebben met niet-ouderlijke volwassenen in vergelijking met oudere jongeren. Voor hen is het ontwikkelen van een relatie met een mentor dus mogelijk moeilijker dan voor oudere jongeren.

De studie in **hoofdstuk 5** richtte zich op de kwaliteit van relaties bij mentoring voor jongvolwassenen. In deze studie heb ik onderzocht

hoe mentoring jongvolwassenen (leeftijd 18-28 jaar) ondersteunt in hun instrumentele behoeften en wat relatiekwaliteit inhoudt voor deze doelgroep. Relatiekwaliteit wordt in de literatuur vaak gedefinieerd als een hechte relatie, maar ik stelde dat voor jongvolwassenen met specifieke behoeften op het gebied van zelfredzaamheid, instrumentele ondersteuning ook een belangrijke rol kan spelen. Het kan voor deze jongeren door eerdere ervaringen moeilijker zijn om een hechte relatie op te bouwen met iemand en de voornaamste behoeften van deze jongeren kunnen meer praktisch van aard zijn dan emotioneel. Relationele nabijheid *en* instrumentele behoeftevervulling stonden daarom centraal in deze studie bij het bestuderen van relatiekwaliteit. Clusteranalyses lieten zien dat er twee groepen te onderscheiden waren: een groep met jongeren die relationele nabijheid van hun mentor in hun relatie ervoeren, en een groep die aangaf minder relationele nabijheid in hun relatie te ervaren. Kwalitatieve data-analyses toonden vervolgens aan dat het gebrek aan relationele nabijheid niet per se belet dat jongeren profiteren van mentoring. Doelgerichte activiteiten met een mentor die past bij de instrumentele behoeften van de jongere, kunnen voor sommige jongeren effectief zijn zonder relationele nabijheid te ervaren. Deze bevinding suggereert dat de ideale combinatie van doelgerichte en relationele activiteiten bij instrumentele mentoring per jongere kan verschillen.

De bevindingen dat de sociale netwerken van risicjongeren vaak bestaan uit minder ondersteunende contacten, terwijl jongeren wel aangeven behoefte te hebben aan meer instrumentele en informationele steun, benadrukt het belang van (preventieve) interventies voor deze

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doelgroep. Mentoren die regelmatig met jongeren af willen spreken en hen ondersteunen, kunnen daarom van belang zijn in de ontwikkeling van jongeren. Echter, om van mentoring te kunnen profiteren is het belangrijk dat er een bepaalde mate van relatiekwaliteit aanwezig is. Wat relatiekwaliteit in mentoring inhoudt en hoe dit verschilt voor verschillende doelgroepen bleef tot nu toe onduidelijk. Het tweede deel van dit proefschrift richtte zich daarom op de vraag welke intra-individuele factoren gerelateerd zijn aan relatiekwaliteit tussen mentoren en risicjongeren. Uit mijn derde studie (hoofdstuk 4) bleek dat de sociale vaardigheden van jongeren de kwaliteit van de mentorrelatie kunnen beïnvloeden. De vaardigheden om een mentorrelatie te starten en onderhouden zijn dus van invloed op hoe sterk jongeren kunnen profiteren van mentoring. De studie onder jongvolwassenen in hoofdstuk 5 liet zien dat het krijgen van ondersteuning van hun mentor, en het opstellen van duidelijke doelen rond zelfredzaamheid, jongeren meer open deed staan voor instrumentele ondersteuning. Ook als er geen of nauwelijks relationele nabijheid was, konden jongeren dus toch profiteren van praktische ondersteuning van hun mentor. De bevindingen van deze twee onderzoeken tonen aan dat verschillende intra-individuele kenmerken, zoals sociale vaardigheden en ontwikkelingsfase, verband houden met de kwaliteit van de relatie bij het ondersteunen van risicjongeren.

Deze bevindingen kunnen worden geïntegreerd in de laatste inzichten over hybride mentorprogramma's waar zowel relationele als instrumentele activiteiten elkaar afwisselen. Het recente debat over hoe inzichten uit het vriendschapsmodel (nadruk op elkaar leren kennen) en

instrumentele mentoring (nadruk op praktische ondersteuning) kunnen worden geïntegreerd, heeft geleid tot de suggestie van een *sweet spot* (Bowers, 2019; Lyons et al., 2019; Rhodes, 2019). Deze *sweet spot* houdt de aanwezigheid in van zowel activiteiten die de relationele verbondenheid vergroten als activiteiten die vaardigheden en competentie vergroten. De resultaten van mijn onderzoek suggereren om de leeftijd, vaardigheden en behoeften van jongeren centraal te stellen om te bepalen wat de kwaliteit van relaties inhoudt bij instrumentele mentoring. In beide onderzoeken werd relatiekwaliteit gedefinieerd als het ontwikkelen van een hechte band en het kunnen delen van gedachten en gevoelens met de mentor. De bevindingen van mijn onderzoek geven aan dat de kwaliteit van relaties echter niet alleen gebaseerd is op deze indicatoren, maar ook op hoe jongeren de compatibiliteit van hun mentor ervaren met betrekking tot hun instrumentele behoeften. Er is maar weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de combinatie van instrumentele en relationele activiteiten bij mentoring en hoe dit de kwaliteit van relaties beïnvloedt. Recent onderzoek naar relatiekwaliteit in een mentorprogramma op school toonde inderdaad aan dat de ontwikkeling van relatiekwaliteit zeer heterogeen was tussen mentor-mentee-matches, en dat mentoren en mentees verschillende percepties hadden van relatiekwaliteit (Spiekerman, Lyons, & Lawrence, 2020). Dit impliceert dat wat door jongeren als relatiekwaliteit wordt opgevat, gedurende de relatie kan variëren, en per match kan verschillen.

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Praktische Implicaties

De bevindingen uit dit proefschrift maken duidelijk dat er in de praktijk meer rekening gehouden moet worden met de zichzelf versterkende processen die een negatief effect hebben op risicojongeren. Er kan niet vanuit worden gegaan dat risicojongeren een beroep kunnen doen op hun bestaande sociale netwerk, en dat risicojongeren evenveel kunnen profiteren van mentorinterventies als andere jongeren. Ik doe verschillende suggesties met betrekking tot sociale netwerken van risicojongeren om deze zichzelf versterkende processen te doorbreken. In de eerste plaats blijft het sociale netwerk van veel jongvolwassenen een rol spelen in hun welbevinden, en daarom zou deze ook geïntegreerd moeten worden bij de behandeling van psychosociale problematiek (zoals voor kinderen en adolescenten dit al wel breed ingezet wordt, bijvoorbeeld in Functional Family Therapy). In de tweede plaats moeten jongeren positieve ervaringen krijgen met het vragen van hulp, doordat ze toegang hebben tot de juiste informatie en betrokken worden bij het maken van beslissingen. Hierin ligt een grote verantwoordelijkheid bij lokale informatievoorzieningen zoals het Jongerenloket in Rotterdam. Wat betreft mentoring suggereer ik dat in grote steden als Rotterdam, de meeste risicojongeren bereikt worden door *school-based* mentoring. Als scholen hun leerlingen op school een vrijwillige mentor aan kunnen bieden (zoals bij Mentoren op Zuid), bereikt mentoring ook de jongeren die doorgaans minder snel aangemeld worden voor preventieve interventies, maar wel het meest gebaat zijn bij extra ondersteuning. Een bijkomend voordeel van mentoring op school met een volledige klas is dat daardoor het hebben van een mentor normaliseert, in plaats van dat

er een stigma komt te liggen op het hebben van extra ondersteuning. Omdat jongeren met verschillende vaardigheden en leeftijden verschillende behoeften kunnen hebben, moet mentoring afgestemd zijn op de behoeften van jongeren zelf. Samen kunnen er doelen opgesteld worden waaraan gewerkt kan worden en waarvan ook de voortgang bijgehouden moet worden. Jongeren hebben minder baat bij alleen maar tijd samen doorbrengen om elkaar te leren kennen, maar profiteren veelal van een mentor die hen praktisch kan ondersteunen. Voor oudere jongeren (jongvolwassenen) is een praktische hulpvraag daarom ook een voldoende uitgangspunt om mentoring te starten. Het bieden van instrumentele en informationele steun door een mentor kan jongeren het gevoel geven *in control* te zijn en minder afhankelijk van institutionele bemoeienis te zijn. Als laatste beveel ik mentorprogramma's aan om jongeren ook toe te rusten met vaardigheden waarbij ze hun eigen sociaal kapitaal kunnen inzetten en vergroten. Vaardigheden als kapitaal herkennen en een positieve houding ten opzichte van hulp vragen kan door een mentor onder de aandacht gebracht worden en samen geoefend worden.

Conclusie

Dit proefschrift had tot doel licht te werpen op de rol van het sociale netwerk bij het ondersteunen van risicjongeren in Rotterdam. De in dit proefschrift gepresenteerde bevindingen onderstrepen het belang van het erkennen dat de sociale hulpbronnen van risicjongeren niet altijd voldoende tegemoet kunnen komen aan hun behoeften. Mogelijk is dit zo omdat mensen uit hun sociale netwerken onder dezelfde

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stressfactoren staan als de jongeren zelf. Mijn bevindingen suggereren dat sociale steun vaak verband houdt met, of gevolgen heeft voor, het welbevinden van jongeren. De onderzoeken toonden ook het belang aan van het aanpassen van de ondersteuning aan de behoeften van deze jongeren. Aanvullende instrumentele en informatieve ondersteuning kan geboden worden door het vergroten van overbruggende sociale netwerken, en mentoring is hier een manier voor. De resultaten gaven echter ook aan dat mentoring geen standaardbenadering is; de behoeften van jongeren op het gebied van mentoring kunnen variëren naargelang hun levensfase en intra-individuele behoeften. Het is van belang om in toekomstig onderzoek aandacht te besteden aan hoe de *sweet spot* van relationele verbondenheid en instrumentele steun in mentoring tot de best passende ondersteuning van risicojongeren leidt.



Curriculum Vitae

After completing her secondary education at Lambert Franckens College in Elburg in 2006, Loïs started studying Communication and Information Sciences at Utrecht University. Two years later she started studying Interdisciplinary Social Sciences (ISS). After completing both bachelor programs, she enrolled in the ISS master specialization Youth Studies. As part of this master's program she did an internship at the Netherlands Youth Institute and graduated with honors in 2012. After graduating, she worked at Erasmus University as an academic teacher/trainer at the Department of Psychology, Education and Child Studies (DPECS) and was a research interviewer at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR). Teaching academic skills, reading scientific literature, and doing research under hard-to-reach populations, made her eager and motivated to devote to scientific research. In 2015, Loïs became a PhD candidate at DPECS in a position that allowed for working interdisciplinary, multi-method, and under her main group of interest. Her PhD project (Vulnerable Youth in Major Cities) was imbedded in the Erasmus Urban Youth Lab (EUYL): Together with Erasmus University, Erasmus

Medical Centre and IVO research institute, this lab was constituted to bring research on young people in the city together and join forces. During her PhD trajectory, Loïs taught and coordinated courses, supervised (under)graduate students and interns, and trained tutors in problem-based learning. At the start of 2020 she initiated and started a collaboration with prof. Renee Spencer from Boston University on the development of trust in mentoring relations. Next to her research and educational activities, she is involved in multiple additional activities. She organises research meetings at the department, she is a member of the Campus Committee and of advisory boards of local and national mentoring programs. In 2019, she organized a symposium on research on social inequality. She received a SRA travel award and was shortlisted for 'Best article' by the Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities. Loïs is currently working as a post-doctoral researcher on the Mentoring Urban Talent project at Erasmus University, focusing on the effects of school-based mentoring.

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Presentations

Schenk, L., Sentse, M., Marhe, R., van Duin, L., Engbersen, G., Popma, A., & Severiens, S. (2019, November 22) *The Longitudinal interplay between social network characteristics and psychopathology in multi-problem young adult men; seperating within- and between-person differences*. Utrecht, The Netherlands, VNOP-CAS Research days.

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Courses

EGSH Multilevel Modelling 2: Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling

EGSH Great Thinkers of the 20th Century

EGSH Professionalism and Integrity in Research

EGSH Qualitative Data Analysis

EGSH Brushing up your Research Design

EGSH Qualitative Research Analysis

EGSH Academic Writing in English

EARA-SRA International Summer School (2019)

Radboud Summer School Relations and Interactions in Childhood and Adolescence (2019)

RuG Winterschool Youth, Policy and Society (2016)



DANKWOORD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements

Het zal de meeste lezers die mij kennen niet verbazen dat dit proefschrift met plezier tot stand is gekomen. Ik heb voornamelijk genoten van de uitdagingen en mogelijkheden die promoveren met zich meebracht. Dit proefschrift zie ik dan ook als een afspiegeling van mijn leerproces afgelopen jaren. Processen van niet begrijpen, niet kunnen, niet genoeg, niet significant, maar ook van langzaam toch begrijpen, toch iets op papier krijgen, toch een patroon ontdekken of een eigen mening ergens over vormen. Ik wil iedereen die daaraan bijgedragen heeft enorm bedanken!

Miranda, Sabine en Godfried, jullie hebben mij de vrijheid toevertrouwd om te doen wat ik interessant vond en ook op een manier die het best bij mij paste. Deze vrijheid maakte dat ik nieuwe dingen durfde te proberen en enorm veel heb kunnen leren. Jullie verschillende expertises, maar gemeenschappelijke doelgerichtheid maakten jullie tot een heel mooi promoteteam waar ik erg blij mee ben geweest!

Sabine, bedankt voor wie jij bent als promotor en leidinggevende. Er is niets fijner dan iemand die ziet wat ik nodig heb, kansen ziet en vertrouwen in mij heeft.

Miranda, ik ben blij jou als begeleider te hebben gehad. Je bent zo daadkrachtig, snel en doelgericht in je begeleiding en ik was vaak onder de indruk van wat je allemaal weet en kan. Je kon

me regelmatig geruststellen waardoor ik weer wat lichter uit onze afspraken kwam.

Godfried, ik heb altijd uitgezien naar jouw feedback waarin je met weinig woorden zoveel inzicht gaf in mijn werk.

Margriet, na onze tweede ontmoeting (“baadt het niet dan schaadt het wel”) wist ik dat wij het goed zouden hebben samen bij EUYL. Alsnog moesten we een beetje aan elkaars werkwijze wennen. Ik werd bijvoorbeeld best bang van al jouw e-mails en Excel sheets, en jij kon af en toe denk ik niet geloven dat ik iets niet had onthouden of genoteerd. Maar al snel werd duidelijk dat we elkaar echt versterkten in het project. Wat baalden we in het begin af en toe flink van hoe langzaam alles ging en onzeker alles was! Gelukkig wisselden onze onzekerheden en baalmomenten elkaar een beetje af en konden we elkaar omstebeurt geruststellen. Ik vind het leuk om te zien hoe we elk onze eigen weg zijn gegaan binnen het project. Ook privé hadden en hebben we zoveel om over te praten en daarom genoot ik van samen naar congressen (o.a. Leeuwarden, Berlijn) en onze schrijfweken (Malaga, Groningen) waar we werk konden afwisselen met strand, lekker eten, cafés en samen op de bank hangen. Bedankt voor je behulpzaamheid, betrokkenheid en gezelligheid afgelopen jaren!

Acknowledgements

Rob, Işıl, Ildeniz, ik ben echt een geluksvogel dat ik zulke leuke en behulpzame collega's en kamergenoten heb gehad. Jullie maakten mijn problemen en vragen tot jullie eigen problemen en vragen. Ook tijdens de lockdown zijn jullie een blijvende bron van steun voor mij geweest. Jullie belletjes, berichten, afspraakjes, en cadeautjes hebben me gesteund tijdens de laatste loodjes van mijn promotie. Ildeniz, jij stopte vaak niet met een antwoord zoeken op mijn vragen totdat je een boek, een syntax of iets anders had gevonden waar ik mee verder kon. Ik ben blij dat we elkaar op de hoogte blijven houden! Rob en Işıl, broers, ik weet dat ik hier zou moet pieken met mijn dankbaarheid voor jullie uit te spreken, maar dat is onmogelijk. Ik ben blij dat jullie aan mijn zijde staan tijdens de verdediging, zoals jullie naast mij hebben gestaan tijdens mijn hele promotie. Ik heb zo veel geleerd van hoe jullie in het leven staan, jullie inhoudelijke expertise, hoe jullie mij soms even goed uit- of toelachten, maar ook echt vertrouwen in mijn eigen kunnen gaven. Bedankt voor jullie vriendschap!

Ook alle andere (aio-) collega's wil ik bedanken voor de gezelligheid, pingpong, pizza-avonden, het organiseren van meetings, en inhoudelijke slimheid. In het bijzonder **Willemijn, Sabrina, Eke, Robert, Tessa, Julia, Iris, Lara, Donna, Miranda, Marcelo, Milou, Aike en Joran**.

Gera, Dike, Gerda en Frank, in verschillende stadia zijn jullie betrokken geweest bij het Erasmus Urban Youth Lab. Bedankt voor al jullie initiatieven, ideeën en feedback. Ook dank aan alle overige mensen die mij op verschillende manieren bij mijn onderzoek geholpen hebben door dataverzameling (Merel) en de samenwerkingen met Rotterdamse Douwers, Stichting de Verre Bergen, De Nieuwe Kans en Schoolscool.

Als laatste mijn lieve **vrienden en familie**. Ik ben zo mega blij met jullie! Ik heb niet het idee dat mijn promotieonderzoek een al te grote plek heeft ingenomen in onze vriendschappen en familiebanden afgelopen jaren, want helaas en gelukkig waren er zoveel andere dingen waarvoor we bij elkaar terecht konden. Ik wil jullie allemaal bedanken voor jullie lieve betrokkenheid. Pap, voor jou in het bijzonder toch een extra woordje. Opgroeien met een wandelende encyclopedie naast me was een groot geluk, je nieuwsgierigheid naar kennis en andere leefwerelden een voorbeeld, en “gewoon lekker proberen” altijd een fijn duwtje in de rug.

