



State of Mentoring Youth Survey Report

Canadian Mentoring Partnership

December 2020

Submitted by SRDC

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Since its establishment in December 1991, SRDC has conducted over 350 projects and studies for various federal and provincial departments, municipalities, as well as other public and non-profit organizations. SRDC has offices located in Ottawa and Vancouver, and satellite offices in Calgary and Montreal.

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BACKGROUND

In its role as a leader and advocate for youth mentoring in Canada, the newly-created MENTOR Canada is undertaking exploratory research to better understand Canada's current state of youth mentoring. Exploring both young people's mentoring experiences as well as the mentoring program landscape in Canada, this study is a critical piece of foundational work to inform quality improvement and decision-making around future directions for the field and ultimately to improve the practice and delivery of youth mentoring programs and services across communities in Canada.

MENTOR Canada was launched in 2019 with funding from the Government of Canada¹ and BMO Financial Group. MENTOR Canada is a coalition between the Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP), the Ontario Mentoring Coalition (OMC), and Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada (BBBSC) and is affiliated with a network of academic experts in the field of positive youth development and mentoring in Canada and the United States. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is the research partner contracted to carry out the research project.

This research project – *Understanding the State of Mentoring in Canada* – represents a collective effort across key mentoring organizations and stakeholders to replicate similar survey studies from the US through an exploratory study comprised of three main streams: **Mapping the Gap; Capturing the Landscape; and Raising the Profile of Mentoring** in Canada.

Mapping the Gap – Building on a similar study in the US from MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, this stream aims to understand access to and experiences of mentoring from the perspectives of youth 18-30 in Canada. With the goal of reflecting the diversity of perspectives and youth in Canada, this stream includes a nationally representative survey panel and extensive survey outreach within the mentoring network to reach underrepresented youth, as well as in-depth qualitative interviews with youth.

Capturing the Landscape – Through a national survey of mentoring service providers, this stream explores the mentoring program landscape in Canada. Building on similar work undertaken in the US, this stream aims to explore the prevalence, scope, structure, services, strengths and challenges of mentoring programs and services across Canada. This stream also serves as a key mechanism for MENTOR Canada to grow the mentoring movement in Canada and build the national network by identifying and engaging with many organizations delivering mentoring or near-mentoring programs and/or services.

¹ Employment and Social Development Canada

Raising the Profile of Mentoring – To better understand adults' attitudes towards mentoring and youth needs in Canada, SRDC is supporting a nationally representative survey of adults living in Canada, as well as qualitative interviews with current mentors. The objectives of the survey are to explore the interest and capacity of adults in Canada to become mentors, and barriers and facilitators to mentoring from the perspectives of current and former mentors, and those who have never been a mentor. The ultimate aim is to use this information to help grow the number of mentors across Canada.

Findings from these streams will provide critical information for MENTOR Canada related to quality improvement of mentoring programs and decision-making, whether for the assessment of existing mentoring practices and alignment with standards of practice already shown effective in the US research and practitioner-informed literature, or supporting improvement and innovation of youth mentoring service delivery in communities across Canada. This study will guide the efforts of MENTOR Canada as it sets out to attract new partners, advocate for increased investment, support existing programs and services, and develop a long-term strategy to enhance youth mentoring in Canada.

We report here on research activities related to **Mapping the Gap**. Details about methods and findings from **Capturing the Landscape** and **Raising the Profile** will be released in subsequent reports.

PROJECT GOALS AND RATIONALE

There is a need to capture in-depth information about the scope and quality of mentoring programs/services and gaps that the MENTOR Canada initiative may be able to address, as well as the level of access to mentoring and the mentoring experiences among young people in Canada. The lack of data and research in the Canadian context on mentorship of young people is an important barrier to generating evidence-based policies and practices to improve mentoring uptake and effectiveness in Canada.

The following research activities support **Mapping the Gap**:

- A nationally representative survey of young people aged 18-30;
- A non-representative survey of young people aged 18-30 (targeting harder-to-reach/underrepresented populations); and
- Qualitative data collection with young people aged 18-30.

Objectives

MENTOR Canada's overarching objectives across all three research initiatives are to improve access to and quality of mentoring programs/services across Canada, and to build a network of youth serving organizations offering mentoring and youth development programs.

Mapping the Gap will explore how youth who may face barriers to accessing mentoring programs/services define and experience mentoring across cultures and contexts. From prior work conducted in the field of access to and quality of mentoring and youth development programs in Canada, we found that groups of youth who may face barriers to accessing responsive, high quality mentoring programs and services include:

- racialized youth,
- Indigenous youth,
- youth with disabilities,
- youth who identify as a part of sexual or gender minority communities,
- youth who have been in government care,
- youth living in rural/remote communities,
- newcomer youth, and
- official language minority (Francophone) youth.

Research Questions

Mapping the Gap

1. *The meaning of mentoring:* How is mentorship defined across cultures and contexts, and ages and stages of life?
2. *Access and unmet need:* What proportion of young people in Canada recall having access to mentors? What types of mentoring did they have access to? What proportion wanted mentoring but did not have access? Did this vary by youth subgroup?
3. *Barriers:* What are the barriers and facilitators of having access to a mentor? What factors influence Canada's young people when it comes to accessing, or developing, mentoring

relationships during childhood and adolescence? Do subgroups of youth report different barriers?

4. *Dynamics of relationship initiation, development, maintenance, and closure:* How do young people experience mentors and mentoring relationships in childhood and adolescence? For youth reporting at least one mentoring relationship, when, how, and in what contexts were these relationships first established, who were the mentors (relationship to youth), how and where did most of the mentoring happen, what was the focus of the relationship(s), how did youth rate the quality of these relationships, and how long did each last?
5. *Outcomes:* What are young people's perceptions of the ways in which mentoring has influenced their lives? Did mentoring influence youths' educational aspirations and attainment, self-perceived resilience and coping, pathways to training and employment, relationships and social networks, volunteering and willingness to mentor others, or internal mechanisms such as self-efficacy and self-esteem? Did this vary by subgroup, or by type or quantity of mentoring received? Do young people who report having a mentor when they were younger report different determinants of wellbeing at present?

METHODS

We use a mixed methods approach to address these research questions, specifically a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Quantitative and qualitative research questions, data collection and analysis occurred in parallel between January and August 2020. Although the youth survey was fielded ahead of qualitative data collection, both survey and interview sampling and data collection were planned in parallel, at the outset. As noted above, data collection included a survey of young people aged 18-30; an asynchronous online data collection tool; and qualitative semi-structured interviews with young people.

YOUTH SURVEY

Sampling Strategy

Young people between the ages of 18 to 30 were recruited by Maru Matchbox, a market research firm with a panel of individuals across Canada. Eligible participants were asked to complete an online survey between January and March 2020. The overall sample of respondents was compared to characteristics of the national population of young people (ages 18 to 30) published by Statistics Canada. These key characteristics were age, province of residence, and gender

identity². It is important to note that there were few respondents in the sample from the Territories (n=10). Results showed that the overall respondents were shown to be similar to national estimates. Therefore, in preliminary analyses, survey results were not weighted, as it would have reduced the power of statistical tests. While some inferences may be made to the national population of youth and their mentoring experiences, generalizing overarching findings related to mentoring access and experiences of mentoring should be cautioned against. A total of 3,100 respondents completed the survey. Of these, 262 individuals were excluded from analysis as they had immigrated to Canada after the age of 18 and hence their mentoring experiences were deemed to be less reflective of the Canadian mentoring landscape. In total, survey results from 2,838 respondents were used to proceed for further analysis.

Non-representative youth survey

In order to engage with young people living in the Territories, as well as individuals from under-represented groups, an open link of the youth survey was generated. SRDC and MENTOR Canada sent this link to its respective networks of youth serving organizations, with a focus on reaching and including young people aged 18-30 living in the Territories. A total of n=668 youth responded to the open link. A small number (n=25) reported living in the Territories or Inuit Nunangat. We present results related to barriers to accessing mentoring reported by Northern youth. The remaining data from youth respondents across Canadian provinces did not differ significantly (data not shown) from the nationally representative survey sample and was not included in the analyses presented below.

Analysis

Recoding and categorization of variables

Descriptive statistics were used to show the full spread of responses to survey questions. Due to sample sizes across categories, it was not feasible to keep all sub-categories when conducting and reporting on various statistical tests and analyses. Characteristics were re-coded into binary responses to ensure there were enough cases when conducting multivariate analyses. While all questions were mandatory, “Prefer not to say” or “Don’t know” responses were treated as missing values and were not included when conducting statistical tests.

Experiences of mentoring were assessed for two distinct age periods in the survey, between ages 6 to 11 and between ages 12 to 18. For our preliminary analyses, outcomes related to ‘mentoring access’ and ‘unmet needs’ were recoded into single variables that depicted the full age range between 6 to 18. That is, if conditions were fulfilled for either of the age periods, respondents were coded as ‘Yes’ and all others who responded to those questions were coded as ‘No’. This approach was taken to simplify the analysis and interpretation for the preliminary results. ‘Access to any mentor’ and ‘access to any formal mentor’ variables were generated from a

² We are able to compare/match according to other characteristics, pending further discussion with the RAC and MENTOR Canada.

combination of questions about experiences during ages 6 to 11 (Q18 and Q18A) and ages 12 to 18 (Q19 and Q20C). Similarly, having any ‘unmet needs with access to mentoring’ was generated from a combination of questions (Q18D and Q19C).

The full recoding guide of demographic characteristics, outcomes, and mentoring variables used in the analysis is shown in **Table 1**.

Statistical analysis

Access to Mentoring

To assess which factors are associated with access to mentorship, all (recoded) demographic factors were first tabulated with the two composite measures for mentoring between ages 6 to 18 inclusively. Chi-squared tests were used to determine whether there was varied distribution of access to mentoring among different demographic factors. In addition, odds ratios were calculated to show the direction of association, with both ‘access’ measures, ‘access to any mentor’ and ‘access to any formal mentor’. Since it is possible any observed associations could in fact be due to confounding effects of a limited set of variables, we also performed multivariate analyses. Multivariate analyses can assist in identifying the key characteristics in this sample which are associated with significant differences in access to mentoring.

First, univariate logistic regression models were used to assess the independent association of each demographic factor on both ‘access’ variables. Second, the factors that resulted in a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) at a univariate level were entered into an adjusted multivariate model. Some demographic factors were statistically significantly associated with ‘access to any mentor’ but not with ‘access to a formal mentor’, and vice versa. For developing the fully adjusted multivariate logistic regression model, we considered any demographic factor that showed some statistical significance for either of the two outcomes. This ensured models for both ‘access’ measures remained similar. In these two multivariate models, odds ratios show the effect of the specific demographic factors, adjusted by all other factors, on access to mentoring.

Unmet Needs

A composite measure was generated to describe having any unmet needs for accessing a mentor across ages 6 to 18 inclusively. Univariate analysis was used to determine which demographic factors may be associated with higher or lower likelihood of unmet needs. Multivariate regression was also conducted controlling for demographic factors with a statistically significant association with access to mentoring. Additionally, for ages 12 to 18, question 19C1 asked respondents to list specific barriers they had faced in accessing a mentor. The overall frequency of these barriers was tabulated for all respondents and also by demographic groups.

Dynamics of Mentoring Relationships

For ages 12 to 18, respondents described characteristics of up to 3 of their most meaningful mentors. For the preliminary analysis, descriptive statistics of the most meaningful mentor were tabulated.

Outcomes

Respondents reported on several outcomes related to their lives during childhood and adolescence and since turning 18. Most of these outcomes were recoded into binary outcomes, but three outcomes were based on a series of questions. For these outcomes, three composite scores were generated by summing the totals. In the univariate analysis, ‘access to any mentor’ and ‘access to a formal mentor’ were treated as the exposures (explanatory variables). For binary outcomes, logistic regression was used, and for the three composite outcomes linear regression was used. These univariate models assessed the crude (unadjusted by other factors) effect of ‘access to any mentor’ or ‘access to any formal mentor’ on the various outcomes.

Thereafter, multivariate models were tested to assess the effect of mentoring on the various outcomes, after controlling for different demographic factors. In these models, we adjusted for the same set of demographic factors that were shown to be significantly associated with access to mentoring in earlier tests and could be confounding the effect of mentoring on outcomes of interest. For the binary outcomes, odds ratios were calculated to indicate the likelihood of the outcome among those with and without access to mentoring. For the composite measures, only direction of association and significance has been reported. Due to complexity in interpretation, significantly higher or lower scores for the composite outcomes among respondents with and without a mentor may not suggest a meaningful difference. Caution should be used when making inferences related to these results.

Stata Version 14 was used to conduct all statistical tests.

Table 1 Recoding guide used to create binary or other limited categories for conducting analyses

Question on Survey	Variable Name	Response options and coding used
Demographics		
Q2b. Since turning 18 years of age, where have you lived for the longest period of time? In what type of community?	Community Type	<p>Rural/ Remote (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rural ▪ Remote <p>Urban/ Suburban (1)</p>

Question on Survey	Variable Name	Response options and coding used
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urban ▪ Suburban
Q3. Are you First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)?	Indigenous Identity	<p>No (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I don't identify as a member of these communities <p>Yes (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First Nations (North American Indian) ▪ Métis ▪ Inuk (Inuit)
Q4. You may belong to one or more racial or cultural groups on the following list. Check all that apply.	Ethnocultural identity	<p>Only white (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ White (exclusively) <p>Diverse ethnocultural identity (1)</p> <p>One or more of any of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ South Asian ▪ Chinese ▪ Black ▪ Filipino ▪ Latin American ▪ Arab ▪ Southeast Asian ▪ West Asian ▪ Korean ▪ Japanese ▪ Other
Q5. Were you born in Canada?	Newcomer	<p>No – immigrant born (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No <p>Yes – Canadian born (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q6. Which best describes your current gender identity? Select all that apply.	Gender Identity	<p>Woman (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Woman (exclusively) <p>Man (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Man (exclusively) <p>Non-binary (2)</p>

Question on Survey	Variable Name	Response options and coding used
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-binary ▪ Indigenous or other cultural gender minority (i.e. Two-Spirit) ▪ Prefer to self-describe ▪ Or a combination of more than 1 option
Q7. Do you identify as transgender, trans, or within the trans umbrella?	Transgender Identity	No (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Yes (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q8. Which of the following best describes you?	Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heterosexual ▪ Prefer to self-describe: (if response was 'straight') LGBTQ2S+ (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lesbian ▪ Gay ▪ Bisexual, pansexual, or queer ▪ Asexual ▪ Two-Spirit ▪ Questioning or unsure ▪ Prefer to self-describe: (Open)
Q9. At any point in your life, have you had a physical or mental condition or health problem that reduced the amount or kind of activity you could perform at home, school, or in any other pursuit such as transportation or leisure?	Disability (functional)	No (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Yes (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q9a. Did you ever receive a professional diagnosis of a disability or disorder?	Disability (diagnosis)	No (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Yes (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q10a. At any point in your life up to the age of 18, were you ever in the care of	Youth in Care	No (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No

Question on Survey	Variable Name	Response options and coding used
government services, either permanently or temporarily (i.e. child protection services)?		Yes (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q38. Here is a list of things that some people might do or experience growing up. Please select all the ones that applied to you when you were 12-18 years old.	Risk factors (during youth)	No risk factors (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 risk factors 1 or more risk (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 or more risk factors
Mentoring		
Q18. & Q19. Thinking back to when you were 6 to 11 years old, did you have anyone in your life who you would consider a mentor, not including your parent(s) or guardian(s)?	Access to ANY Mentor	No (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Yes (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Now think back to when you were 12 to 18 years old. Did you have anyone in your life who you would consider a mentor, not including your parent(s) or guardian(s)?		
Q18A. (6 to 11) Did this mentoring happen as part of a formal mentoring?	Access to ANY FORMAL Mentor	No (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Yes (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q20C. (12 to 18) Part of a formal mentoring program?		
Q18D. (6 to 11) Were there times you would have wanted a mentor or more mentors but did not have access to one?	Unmet Needs	No (0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Yes (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q19C. Were there times you would have wanted a mentor or more mentors		

Question on Survey	Variable Name	Response options and coding used
when you were 12-18 years old but did not have access to one?		
Q23. Thinking of how your mentoring relationship with the MOST MEANINGFUL ID started, who would you say initiated it?	Youth Initiate	<p>Not Youth Initiated (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The mentor did ▪ My parent(s) or guardian(s) did ▪ Someone else put us in touch <p>Youth Initiated (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I did
Outcomes		
Q12. Have you completed the requirements for a high school diploma or its equivalent?	High School (Completion)	<p>No (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No <p>Yes (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q13. Have you taken any education or training above the high school level?	Further Education	<p>No (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No <p>Yes (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes
Q13A. What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Highest Education (Completed)	<p>Less than university (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Certificate of Apprenticeship or Certificate of Qualification ▪ Other trades certificate or diploma ▪ College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma <p>Some university or more (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University diploma or certificate BELOW Bachelor's Degree ▪ Bachelor's degree ▪ University diploma or certificate ABOVE Bachelor's Degree ▪ First professional degree ▪ Master's degree ▪ Doctorate degree or post-doctoral program

Question on Survey	Variable Name	Response options and coding used
Q42A. What is the minimum level of education with which you would be satisfied?	Highest Education (Aspiration/Satisfaction)	<p>Less than university (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Certificate of Apprenticeship or Certificate of Qualification ▪ Other trades certificate or diploma ▪ College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma <p>Some university or more (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University diploma or certificate BELOW Bachelor's Degree ▪ Bachelor's degree ▪ University diploma or certificate ABOVE Bachelor's Degree ▪ First professional degree ▪ Master's degree ▪ Doctorate degree or post-doctoral program
Q14. Currently, what is your main day-to-day activity?	NEET Status	<p>NEET (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neither (studying or working) <p>Studying or Working (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Studying or in education/training ▪ Working (paid work for at least 1 hr/week) ▪ Both
Q45. In general, would you say your mental health is...	Mental Health	<p>Negative (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor ▪ Fair <p>Positive (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good ▪ Very Good ▪ Excellent
Q47. How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community now? Is it...?	Belonging	<p>Negative (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very weak ▪ Somewhat weak <p>Positive (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very strong ▪ Somewhat strong

Question on Survey	Variable Name	Response options and coding used
Q49. Here is a list of things that some people might have done or experienced <u>since turning 18</u> . Please select all the ones that apply to you <u>since turning 18</u> .	Risk Factors (after 18)	<p>No risk factors (0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 risk factors <p>1 or more risk (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 or more risk factors
Q41. 8 questions about career-planning (now)	Career-Planning	<p>Total score Min = 8; Max = 56</p>
Q43. 4 Questions about social capital (now)	Social Capital	<p>Total score Min = 4; Max = 20</p>
Q46. 7 questions about mental well-being (now)	Mental Well-Being	<p>Total score Min = 7; Max = 35</p>

YOUTH QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Sampling Strategy

For qualitative interviews, we sought to recruit a diverse sample of young people aged 18-30, currently living in Canada, including young people from priority populations such as Indigenous youth; visible minority youth; newcomer youth; youth identifying as LGBTQ2S+; youth with lived experience in out-of-home care; youth living with a disability; and youth reporting risk factors during adolescence. MENTOR Canada assisted with recruitment by connecting with specific contacts in its existing network – including Research Advisory Committee members and youth-serving organizations – to request their assistance in identifying young people interested in participating in a research interview. Contacts were specifically asked to distribute a recruitment poster through email. Young people who received the poster were invited to contact an SRDC researcher directly for further information. In addition to conducting recruitment through its existing network of contacts, MENTOR Canada also distributed the poster through paid ad space on Instagram.

Procedure

When contacted by interested participants, SRDC researchers distributed an information letter and coordinated through email to schedule an interview. Interviews were conducted using Zoom videoconferencing software. Sharing video was optional. A small number of participants chose not to share their video either due to bandwidth issues or due to discomfort with having video recorded. Interviews were roughly 45 minutes in length and were recorded and later transcribed using NVivo software. Researchers followed a semi-structured interview guide, which was continually refined based on insights gathered during the initial interviews. A total of 17 interviews were conducted in English and 2 in French. Participants received a \$25 gift card from a retailer of choice (either online or sent through mail) as an honorarium.

Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data was aligned with a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) based in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory allows themes to emerge inductively, grounded in data that is systematically collected and analyzed. An SRDC researcher began by reviewing and quality-checking transcripts by cross-referencing audio files. She then created a summary table to condense raw data according to a series of overarching themes, which were focused according to the pre-established research objectives. The table included themes and subthemes, descriptions, and illustrative quotes from participants. The researcher then used this summary table as the basis for creating a written narrative account of the qualitative findings, presented here in this report. A modified summary table, which presents a high-level overview of the results from the youth interviews, is included in Appendix A.

RESULTS

Results from the representative youth survey and the youth interviews are presented below in an integrated fashion. Results are organized according to the relevant research questions and objectives set out in ***Mapping the Gap***.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVES

Youth Survey Overall Sample

Overall, 2,838 respondents were included in this sample of analysis. The age of the respondents was broadly similar to the national population estimates of 18 to 30 year olds, although there were some slight differences.³ There was a slightly higher proportion of 29 to 30 year olds in the sample. Statistical differences were not assessed. The average age of respondents was 24.5 years (SD 3.8).

There was a similar distribution of respondents' gender identity compared to the national population.⁴ In addition, there was less than 1.0 per cent difference in the distribution of the respondents' province of residence (longest period of residence since turning 18) compared to

³ Statistics Canada. Population estimates 2019, by age and sex. Available from:
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000501>

⁴ Ibid.
National estimates of non-binary gender identities were not available, but are expected for future iterations of the census. See more information from Statistics Canada: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/road2021-chemin2021/fs-fi/sex-and-gender.cfm>

the national population, except for Ontario, which represented 38.7 per cent of respondents compared to the national estimate of 40.8 per cent for 18 to 30 year olds.⁵ 1.3 per cent of respondents listed ‘Outside of Canada’ as their longest period of residence since turning 18. Additional demographic details of respondents are shown in **Table 2**. Risk factors respondents may have experienced during childhood and adolescence are shown in **Figure 2**.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

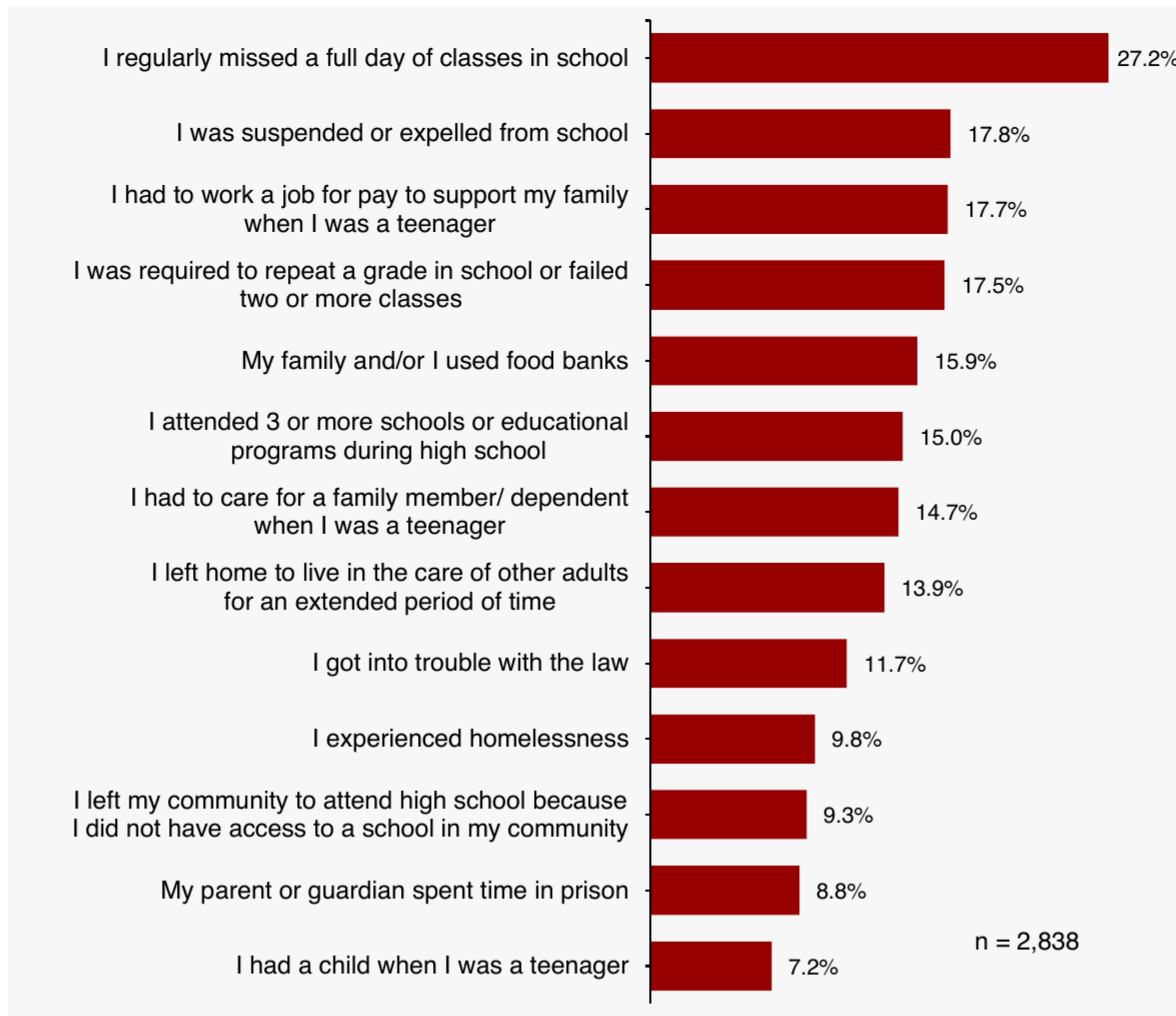
Note not all respondents answered each question, hence, the total may not be 2,838 for each characteristic

Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
Age					
18 to 20	598	21.1%	Urban	1,380	49.8%
21 to 22	352	12.4%	Suburban	931	33.6%
23 to 24	377	13.3%	Rural	408	14.7%
25 to 26	473	16.7%	Remote	54	2.0%
27 to 28	469	16.5%	Total	2,773	100.0%
29 to 30	569	20.1%	Indigenous Identity		
Total	2,838	100.0%	I don't identify as Indigenous	2,313	81.5%
Province of residence					
Alberta	353	12.4%	First Nations	185	6.0%
British Columbia	347	12.2%	Métis	106	3.7%
Saskatchewan	87	3.1%	Inuk (Inuit)	13	0.5%
Manitoba	95	3.4%	Unsure	120	4.2%
Ontario	1,097	38.7%	Prefer not to say	111	3.9%
Quebec	610	21.5%	Total	2,838	100.0%
Born in Canada					
Nova Scotia	60	2.1%	Yes	2,378	83.8%
New Brunswick	67	2.4%	No	417	14.7%
Newfoundland and Labrador	33	1.2%	Prefer not to answer	43	1.5%
Prince Edward Island	14	0.5%	Total	2,838	100.0%
Northwest Territories	3	0.1%	Gender Identity		
Yukon	6	0.2%	Woman	1,434	50.5%
Nunavut	1	0.0%	Man	1,341	47.3%
Outside of Canada	37	1.3%	Non-binary	48	1.7%

⁵ Statistics Canada. Population estimates 2019, by age and sex. Available from:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000501>

Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
Unsure	7	0.3%	Indigenous or other cultural minority	21	0.7%
Prefer not to say	21	0.7%	Prefer to self-describe	11	0.4%
Total	2,838	100.0%	Prefer not to say	21	0.7%
Ethnocultural Identity			Total	2,838	100.0%
South Asian	182	6.4%	Identify as transgender/ trans/ trans-umbrella		
Chinese	193	6.8%	Yes	126	4.4%
Black	177	6.2%	No	2,650	93.4%
Filipino	82	2.9%	Prefer not to answer	62	2.2%
Latin American	110	3.9%	Total	2,838	100.0%
Arab	79	2.8%	Sexual orientation		
Southeast Asian	82	2.9%	Heterosexual	2,121	74.7%
West Asian	34	1.2%	Lesbian	43	1.5%
Korean	37	1.3%	Gay	72	2.5%
Japanese	37	1.3%	Bisexual, pansexual, or queer	291	10.3%
White	1,833	64.6%	Asexual	42	1.5%
Other	106	3.7%	Two-Spirit	17	0.6%
Unsure	50	1.8%	Questioning or unsure	59	2.1%
Prefer not to say	93	3.3%	Prefer to self-describe:	46	1.6%
Total	2,838	100.0%	Prefer not to say	147	5.2%
Disability (reduced functional activity)			Total	2,838	100.0%
Yes	1,193	42.0%	Youth in Care		
No	1,395	49.2%	Yes	34	39.5%
Unsure	177	6.2%	No	36	41.9%
Prefer not to say	73	2.6%	Unsure	7	8.1%
Total	2,838	100.0%	Prefer not to say	9	10.5%
Disability (professional diagnosis)			Total	86	100.0%
Yes	727	60.9%	Having risk factors during youth		
No	403	33.8%	None	1,209	42.6%
Unsure	52	4.4%	1 or more	1,629	57.4%
Prefer not to say	11	0.9%	2 or more	1,106	39.0%
Total	1,193	100.0%	Total	2,838	100.0%

Figure 1 Prevalence of risk factors during youth (Q38).

Youth Interview Sample

In total, 19 young people participated in interviews, including 12 women, 6 men, and 1 participant who identified as Two Spirit. Two participants lived in a rural/remote area, including one participant in a northern community. Three participants identified as Francophone. Most participants were BIPOC, including 2 participants who identified as Indigenous, 2 participants who identified as Asian, 1 participant who identified as Korean, 1 participant who identified as Indian and South Asian, and 1 participant who identified as Black Canadian with Somali Canadian background. Two participants identified as part of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Seven participants identified as newcomers/immigrants to Canada, including two participants who identified as having English as a second language.

Participants discussed a range of different lived experiences, including experience of risk factors in their childhood and adolescence. One participant had lived experience of homelessness, one participant had lived experience of domestic violence, one participant had lived experience of severe mental illness and suicidality, and one participant had lived experience in out-of-home care. Two participants identified as differently abled, including one participant who identified as being neuro-divergent, on the autism spectrum, with ADHD and one participant who identified as having an acquired brain injury.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: DEFINING MENTORSHIP

Young Peoples' Understanding of The Meaning of Mentoring

Who a mentor is

According to young people, a mentor is someone who takes a mentee under their wing; shows a mentee the ropes; acts as a sounding board for a mentee; joins a mentee on the mentee's personal journey; serves as a role model or a reference figure for a mentee; and connects and networks on a mentee's behalf.

When you have a mentor, you take a piece of them and their habits and you want to put it in to your own life. Because that's how you're building your life. Your mentor helps you build your life and your experiences and habits that you want to bring with you.

A mentor might be a person who just acts in a certain way and like you really want to reflect the positive attributes that you might see in that person.

Young people consider a mentor to be someone who is accessible and available, who they can reach out to when needed. Interview participants emphasized the importance of having a mentor who is genuinely willing to help, outside of any job-related obligation. It is a sign that someone is indeed a mentor if, when a young person is faced with a challenge or a success, their thoughts turn toward that individual.

What a mentor does

In a mentoring relationship, a mentor listens, pays attention, and spends time together with a young person. Interview participants said that a mentor is someone who truly gets to know them, understanding their personality, mindset, ideas, thoughts, hopes, and dreams. The mentor guides, helps, supports, encourages, and motivates their mentee, leading by example along the way. The mentor shares and transmits knowledge and answers their mentee's questions. A mentor may be someone who holds a mentee accountable. A mentor may advocate for their mentee, using their own voice to elevate and lend credibility to a young person's voice.

I can ask as many questions as I need and I don't have to be afraid. Because a lot of kids are repressed because over the years they learn that if you ask a question, if it's stupid, you are wrong. And that's what I've learned as a kid. Ask a question, it's stupid, completely wrong. I just want kids to be comfortable.

I think the mentors were like advocates. It was like an extension of an arm and they were able to speak on my behalf. So oftentimes and when I spoke it would seem like people would kind of come into thought with all these biases - the general assumption is like, this kid doesn't know shit. But, when adults spoke on my behalf, it kind of got rid of that, and allowed an opportunity for my thoughts to be considered without all these external factors.

Defining features of a mentoring relationship

Some of the features that set mentoring apart from other relationships in a young person's life are the fact that a mentor and mentee develop an intentional, meaningful personal connection, with a relationship that lasts long-term. Instead of focusing on one single area of a young person's life, a mentor guides a mentee in all aspects of life, including religion, education, career, and social relationships.

Teaching occurs in a mentoring relationship, but in a hands-on, experience-based way. The relationship is reciprocal and bi-directional, with both the mentor and mentee learning from and teaching one other. A mentor allows the mentee to lead and avoids telling the mentee what way to go in life. When a mentor shares advice, a mentee is free to take what they want and leave what they do not. A mentoring relationship is non-judgemental and unconditional. There is an aspect of fun to the relationship. A mentor focuses on a mentee's journey, not their destination.

I think a mentor is someone who isn't there to necessarily coach you on your journey, but to kind of be on that journey with you. And I think there's a pretty big difference. A coach, they're focusing on the end result and they tell you what to do to get there. Now, a mentor is different because I think a mentor is someone who's part of that journey. They don't care as much about what your destination is, but more so how you get there.

Using different terms to refer to mentorship

Some young people may find the term ‘mentor’ intimidating. A better name for a mentor might be a touchpoint, a connection, a friend. Young people can be directly involved in coming up with a new, welcoming term to encompass the essence of mentoring.

I remember thinking, you know, I'm an adult, I don't need a babysitter to go to. And I just didn't take advantage of it. And I didn't really want anything to do with it, I think, because of the label that was given to it...If we change the titles of the role people have, to kind of, it's a touchpoint, it's a connection, it's a friend, it might make it less intimidating.

The concept of mentorship is really intimidating. I would think that especially being so young. So, you probably want to do a bit of rebranding, you need a different term for it. Something that's a little bit more high school friendly. Hopefully, it's something kids who come together and figure redefine mentorship or come up with the Internet slang for mentorship. You know, that's a natural process. You could facilitate that.

Cultural and Contextual Considerations when Defining Mentoring

Mentoring looks different dependent on culture

According to young people, in some cultures, mentoring from an adult outside the family is not common. Parents are the people who take on the primary mentorship role in a young person’s life.

Everything was handled within the family. So it was an aspect that I didn't need anybody extended to help me apart from my teachers....We have families, relatives, within our own community someone will guide us if we have any doubts, we don't need someone external.

Culture shapes the way adults and young people relate to one another. In some cultural communities, adults give firm direction to young people and conversations between adults and young people are highly task-oriented. In these instances, mentoring may be less about exploration and letting the mentee lead, and more about a mentor telling a young person what to do and insisting on a particular path. Some cultures view youth independence in narrow terms, with young people encouraged to live at home until marriage.

I think just like for me, there's definitely a culture aspect of it. I'm Korean, so Korean church is a little bit more, definitely, definitely a different community. The Korean background or the Korean relationship between an adult and

like someone who is a youth is a bit like ‘do this, do that’, ‘oh, why don’t you try this, why don’t you try that.’ So it’s like a different way of framing things. And I think that’s just how we are naturally... I think you had to take consideration of that because like when I think of mentorship, that’s so different, depending on who I get it from as well, in terms of their background and their ethnicity... Mentorship in the Korean community, there’s a level of respect that’s expected, which I’m not a huge fan of. It’s a little less nurturing, more of a right answer mindset, like telling you what to do. At times when you’re lost, it’s great. But at times when you are making a decision, you miss some of the aspects, you forget how to make decisions for yourself. Which I didn’t like about it, because I like to make my own decisions, I never really liked someone else choosing things for me.

Growing up in an Asian family, like you really have adults that would be like checking up on the other person. I remember like most times, like when my dad talked to me it was like, have you done your homework? Have you figured out what you want to do? Not a conversation.

The concept of mentoring is consistent with Indigenous approaches to learning, rather than a colonial way of learning. There is a long history of mentoring, including inter-generational knowledge transmission, in Indigenous communities.

It’s about teaching them like by hand instead of from the books, like from pure experience versus just reading it off a piece of paper. It’s more of a hands-on or the nitty gritty experience... I don’t know how to do it, I can ask them to show me how... Kids need to learn different ways to grasp the knowledge, not just reading a book.

I really started learning about the native way of knowing and doing as well, which in some contexts they call it, they’ll talk about getting a degree on the land, like it’s a different way of learning. And mentorship is huge. Like, that’s such an important way to knowledge transmission, and inter-generational transmission as well.

How culture influences mentoring

Identity is complex, especially at a young age. Young people want space to explore and determine their own identities on their own terms. Some young people are keen to learn culture and language from their mentors, whether the same or different from their own. Some young people may actively hide their identity or resist having another person or program project or impose a given identity onto them. For example, one Indigenous participant explained that she would not have wanted to be grouped with other Indigenous youth in a program.

I hide my identity a lot. I don’t even identify myself as, I guess, what my own race feels like right now since the pandemic has happened. My race is now being stigmatized now. So, yeah, that’s why when people ask me what race I am, I say I’m Canadian because I was born raised in Canada and part of LGBT. I just don’t say it because people just think that you can’t be gay, you can’t do this. So, I keep it quite hidden from a lot of people unless I trust and know that they would not like defame my name because I’m one way and because I’m one race.

For me personally, I had a really complicated identity issue growing up. And. Yeah, so it was it was a little more complicated. Like the sixties scoop, the goal of that was to like make native kids grow up not identifying as native. I had public racial features that people couldn’t quite place because I am mixed and my whole life growing up, people

thought I was of Asian descent or like mixed Asian people always ask me to pick. [I would look at other cultures] I'd be like, Oh, I'm super interested in hearing about their culture, their perspective, their experiences, like everything. And I think if I'd had that identity as a native person, which I do now. Right. And now when I speak to people like, hey, you know, I would have said, sure. Yeah. And I see my native students doing that. Yeah. But at that age, it was complicated. And like the extent to which you, I guess, valued or related or whatever were drawn in that direction was different. I read that people were kind of projecting an (Asian) identity onto me. And so, I identified with people of that race.

Mentors must be culturally aware of norms and acceptable behaviour in different cultures. For example, one participant shared that as a woman, it would not be appropriate to meet with a male mentor in the evening or on weekends. Another participant shared that it would not be appropriate to discuss personal matters with a mentor. Instead, her perspective was that mentors should provide guidance on education and career-related matters only, keeping professional and personal issues separate. Stigma, particularly around mental health issues, is strong in some cultural communities. Some young people may avoid help-seeking due to cultural pressures.

Young people have lived experiences of racism and discrimination. They are acutely aware of how factors like race and immigration experiences have affected their lives, such as by limiting professional or job opportunities available to them. Young people want mentors who acknowledge these realities.

Cultural competence is important. It's really important that a mentor not invalidate their mentee's experience just because they don't understand them... I think people come from such different backgrounds, and sometimes when you talk to people who come from a different background, it can feel like they're invalidating your experience. So, I like having people who are aware of that diversity and embrace that diversity is really important.

I prefer a mentor who is not Caucasian, maybe. Because that plays an important role for when you want to look for a job, I believe. Racism is not that much in Canada compared to Europe. But, still like, you need someone who understands the situation, because a lot of people don't understand it. So, [I prefer a mentor] who understands that. Then we have something to talk about.

The effects of intergenerational trauma are felt by young people. Flexibility, understanding, and spiritual integration are important in mentoring programs.

Indigenous people have inherited an intergenerational trauma. If you're a native person in Canada today, you did on some level. They're struggling to get through everyday and they don't have the time to take on these mentorship roles in a formal context. Now with those commitments, they talk about 'Indian time' a lot... Well, it's usually a joke about things being like not organized well and they're always really late or unpredictable, like a sign for a shop that says we're open from these random days or sometimes these random days and nights. And I've come to understand what we call 'Indian time' isn't just about being unplanned, but it's about, things happen when they're supposed to. We lose a little bit of spiritual integration in there. So, it comes back to hunting, right. They believe that if you shoot an animal, it is because that animal came to you, gave itself to you because it knew you needed it... Flexibility or understanding, I guess, would be really important in mentorship, in areas that are really the most important areas that I think where we need mentors are the areas where it's hard for those people who have that experience that we want to meet those kind

of time constraints and commitments in a structured way that they have to be able to respond when you try and impose this structure on it. Like recognizing that people still have something to offer.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: ACCESS AND UNMET NEEDS

Access to Mentoring

Between the ages of 6 to 11, 1,496 (52.7 per cent) of survey respondents said they had a meaningful person in their life and 951 (38.9 per cent) said they had a mentor. 270 said they had a formal mentor (~9.5 per cent)

Between the ages of 12 to 18, 1,674 (59.0 per cent) of respondents said they had a meaningful person and 1,148 (40.5 per cent) said they had a mentor. 330 (~11.6 per cent⁶) said they had a formal mentor.

Across both age groups collectively, 1,490 (55.8 per cent) said they had a mentor and 1,182 (44.2 per cent) said they did not have a mentor. For this overall measure, respondents who selected Unsure/ Prefer not to say were excluded. Of those who had a mentor, 455 (31.5 per cent) had a formal mentor, and 989 (68.5 per cent) said they did not have a formal mentor. The percentage who had a formal mentor is based on 1,444 respondents who provided a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ response to the questions about having a formal mentor. **Of the total number of respondents to the survey (n=2,838), approximately 16.0 per cent had a formal mentor.**

In our analyses we used these two variables, ‘access to any mentor’ and ‘access to any formal mentor’, as key measures.

At a univariate level, access to any mentor was significantly higher among respondents who identified has Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous (OR = 1.59, p=0.001), those who identify as transgender (OR = 1.68, p=0.009), those who had a disability reducing their functional ability (OR = 1.54, p<0.001), and among those who had at least one risk factor during youth (OR = 1.36, p<0.001). Access to a formal mentor was higher among respondents who identify as Indigenous (OR = 2.60, p<0.001), had a diverse ethnocultural identity (OR = 1.81, p<0.001), identify as trans, transgender, or under the trans umbrella (OR = 4.59, p<0.001), and those who had at least one risk factor during youth (OR = 2.18, p<0.001). **See Table 3 for full univariate results.**

⁶ Based on the total number of respondents (n = 2,838). This total number of respondents who were specifically asked this question was less. Other who responded as Unsure/ Prefer not to say were not considered.

From the univariate analysis, six demographic characteristics showed statistically significant associations with access to mentoring. These six characteristics and age (treated as a continuous variable) were added to multivariate models (one for access to any mentor and one for access to a formal mentor). Based on these fully adjusted models, access to a mentor was significantly associated among individuals identifying as Indigenous ($OR = 1.39$, $p=0.026$), having a functional disability ($OR = 1.44$, $p<0.001$), non-binary gender identity ($OR = 0.50$, $p=0.025$), and having or more risk factors during youth ($OR = 1.31$, $p<0.002$).

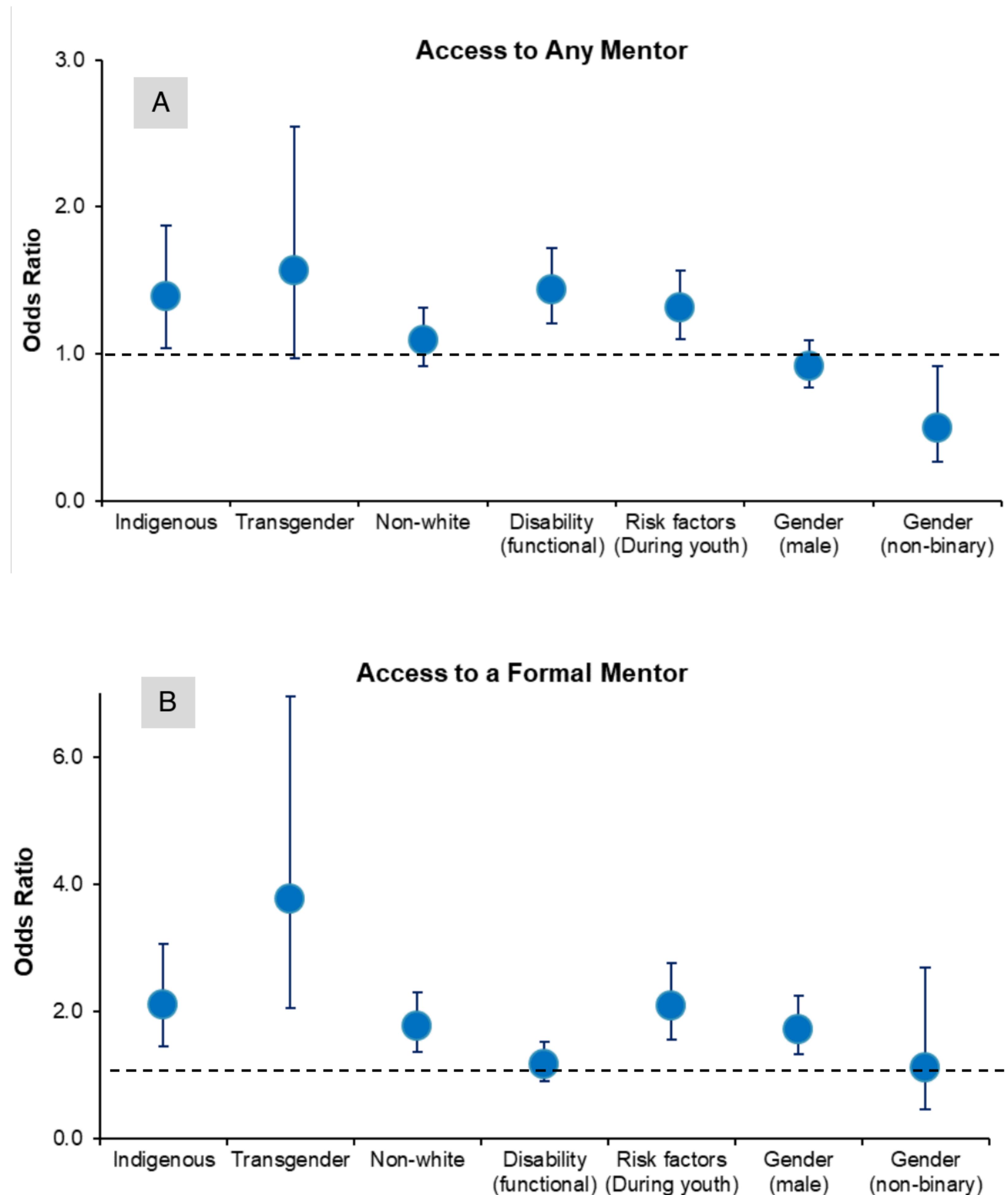
Having access to a formal mentor was significantly associated with Indigenous identity ($OR = 2.10$, $p<0.001$), transgender identity ($OR = 3.77$, $p<0.001$), having a diverse ethnocultural identity ($OR = 1.76$, $p<0.001$), men (compared to women, $OR = 1.72$, $p<0.001$), and having risk factors during youth ($OR = 2.08$, $p<0.001$) in the multivariate model. Results of this multivariate analysis are shown in **Figure 3**. Odds ratios above 1 indicate higher access to mentoring, and odds ratios below 1 indicate lower access to mentoring.

We additionally examined whether youth among these key demographic groups who showed higher access to mentoring were more or less likely to initiate mentoring (Q23). Chi-squared tests were used to compare the distribution of respondents who stated that their mentoring relationship was initiated by themselves (youth initiated) or by others (non-youth initiated). Results showed that youth who had one or more risk factors who had access to a mentor were more likely to initiate mentoring themselves rather than through someone else (Chi-squared test, $OR = 1.53$, $p=0.01$). Other demographic such as Indigenous identity ($p=0.469$), ethnocultural identity ($p=0.485$), transgender identity ($p=0.059$), having a disability ($p=0.111$), and being in care (not applicable due to limited cases) showed little evidence of being associated with youth-initiation of mentoring.

Table 3 **Univariate logistic regression analysis showing the association of demographic factors with access to mentoring.** Factors that show evidence of statistical significance at p<0.05 are highlighted.

Demographic Characteristic	Access to any Mentor		Access to a Formal Mentor	
	OR (95% CI)	p-value	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Urban Community Type (compared to rural/ remote)	1.11 (0.90 - 1.37)	0.311	1.26 (0.91 - 1.73)	0.163
Indigenous Identity (compared to non-Indigenous)	1.59 (1.22 - 2.06)	0.001	2.60 (1.88 - 3.59)	<0.001
Diverse Ethnocultural identity (compared to White only)	1.08 (0.92 - 1.27)	0.362	1.81 (1.43 - 2.28)	<0.001
Being born in Canada (compared to being immigrant born)	1.06 (0.86 - 1.31)	0.576	0.96 (0.71 - 1.32)	0.821
Gender Identity (man compared to woman)	0.98 (0.84 - 1.15)	0.823	1.98 (1.58 - 2.49)	<0.001
Gender Identity (non-binary compared to woman)	0.94 (0.59 - 1.49)	0.792	1.87 (0.96 - 3.62)	0.064
Transgender Identity (compared to non-trans identifying)	1.68 (1.14 - 2.48)	0.009	4.59 (2.82 - 7.48)	<0.001
Sexual Orientation – LGBTQ2S+ (compared to heterosexual)	0.97 (0.79 - 1.17)	0.724	1.04 (0.78 - 1.38)	0.790
Disability – reduced activity (compared to no disability)	1.54 (1.32 - 1.81)	<0.001	1.35 (1.07 - 1.70)	0.011
Disability – professional diagnosis (compared to no diagnosis)	0.83 (0.65 - 1.08)	0.169	0.98 (0.70 - 1.36)	0.889
Youth in Care (compared to 'No' respondents, Q10A)	1.39 (0.68 - 2.84)	0.365	2.20 (0.87 - 5.59)	0.096
Having 1 or More Risk Factors during Youth (compared to no risk factors, Q38)	1.36 (1.16 - 1.59)	<0.001	2.18 (1.71 - 2.77)	<0.001

Figure 2 Multivariate analysis to assess the differences in access to any mentor (A) or access to a formal mentor (B). Figures show odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals.



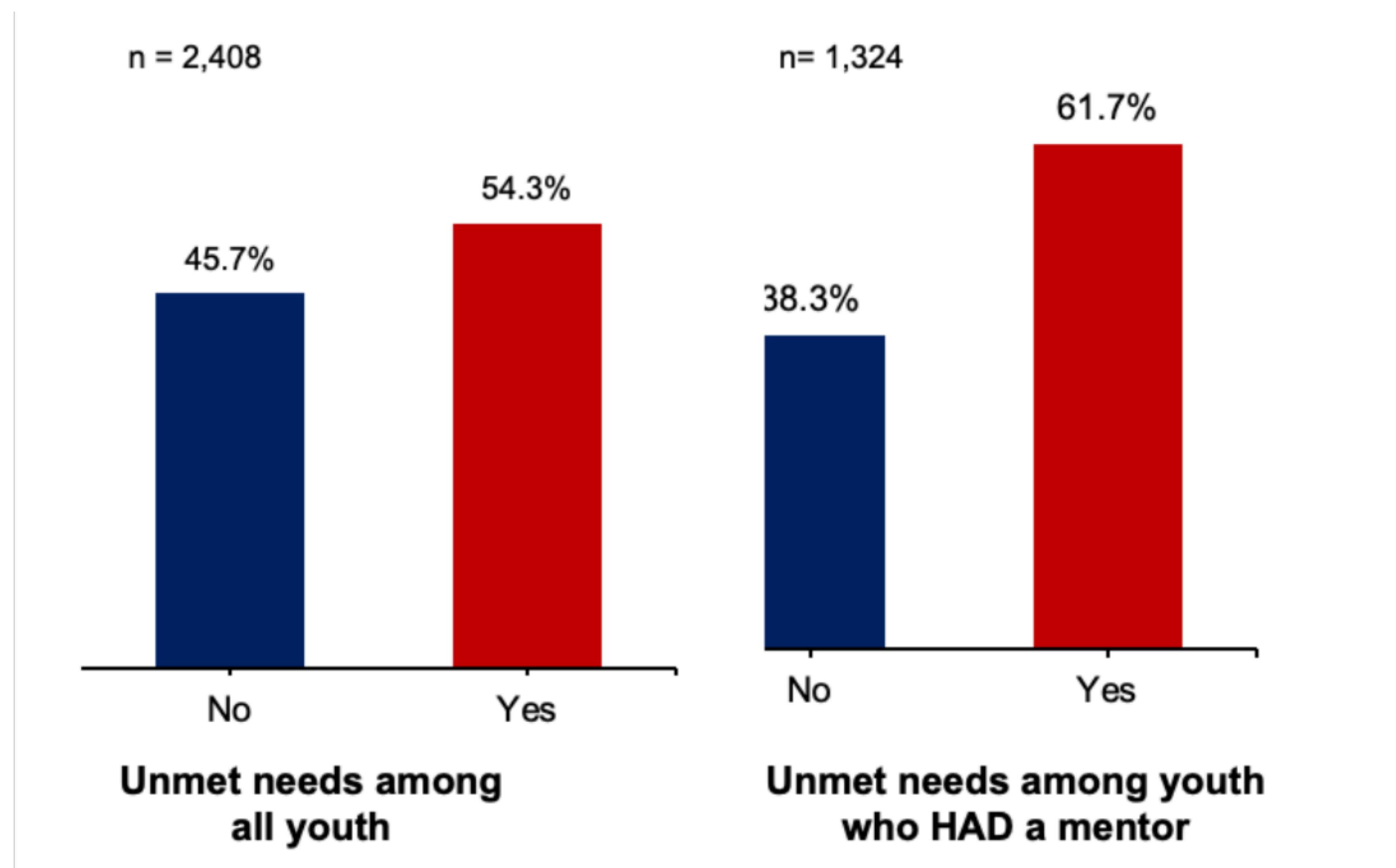
Unmet Needs: Access to Mentors

Unmet needs to accessing a mentor were assessed by two questions in the survey (Q18D and Q19C) to reflect the two age periods of interest. Both questions asked ‘Were there times you would have wanted a mentor or more mentors but did not have access to one’, with questions 18D and 19C asking about ages 6-11; and 12-18 respectively.

A composite measure was generated to indicate unmet needs at either of the two age periods and was then used as the primary outcome for further analysis.

Of the 2,408 respondents who answered at least one question related to unmet needs, 1,101 (45.7 per cent) indicated they had no unmet needs and 1,307 (54.3 per cent) stated they had some kind of unmet need or faced a barrier to accessing a mentor. Even among youth who had access to a mentor, 61.7 per cent indicated they still had an unmet need (**See Figure 4**).

Figure 3 Unmet needs to accessing a mentoring at any age during ages 6 to 18.



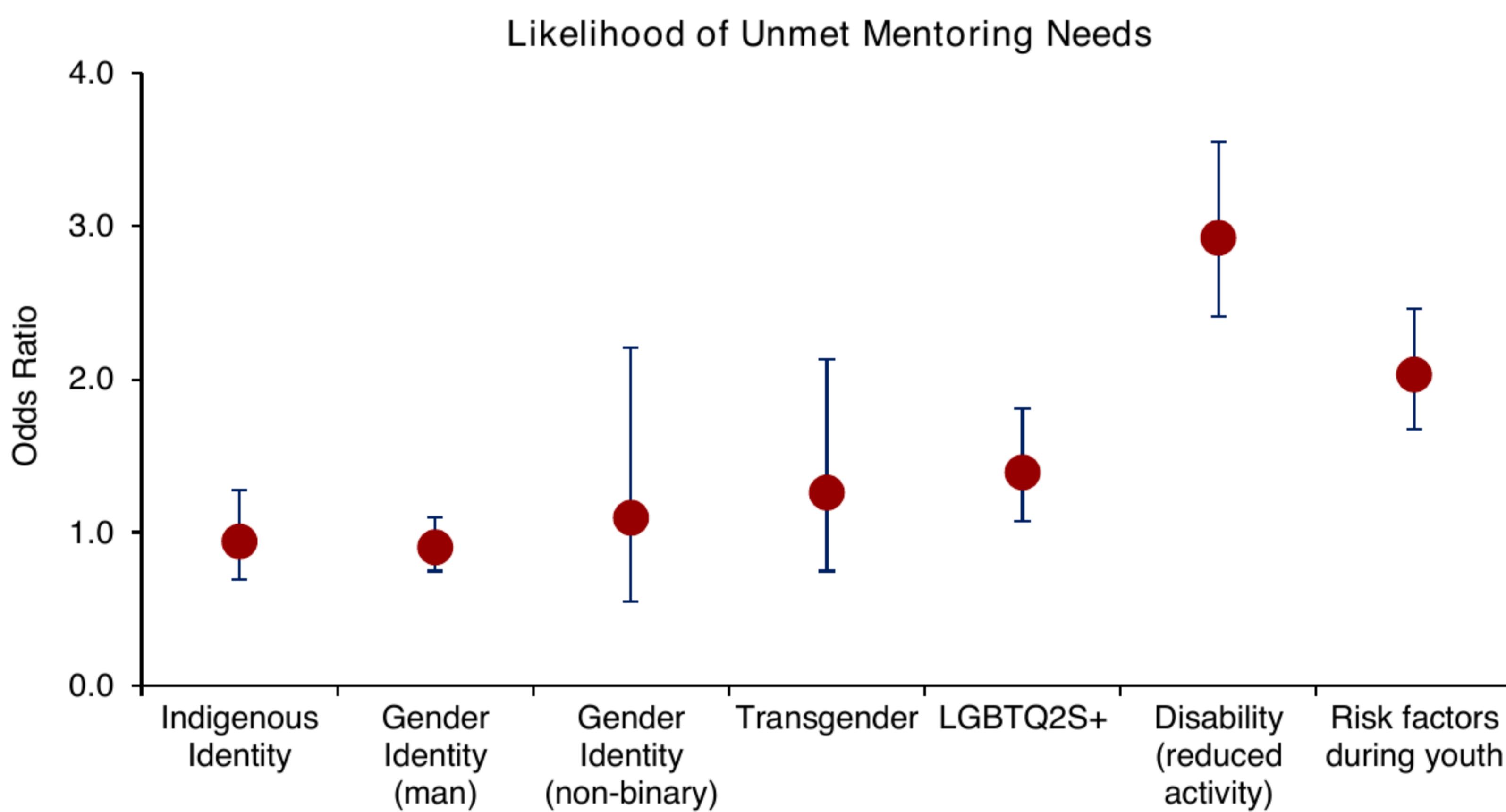
Univariate regression analysis was used to identify sub-groups of respondents who may be more or less likely to report having any unmet needs to accessing mentoring. Respondents who identified as Indigenous, men, transgender, LGBTQ2S+, had a disability affecting functional ability, and had one or more risk factors during youth showed evidence of statistical association with unmet needs (**See Table 4**). These variables were added into a multivariate logistic regression model. After adjusting for other demographic factors, respondents who identified has LGBTQ2S+ (OR = 1.39, p=0.013), had a disability affecting functional ability (OR = 2.93, p<0.001), and had risk factors during youth (OR = 2.03, p<0.001) showed statistical evidence of having a higher likelihood of unmet needs (**See Figure 5**)

Table 4 **Univariate analysis (crude odds ratios) showing the association of demographic sub-groups with unmet needs to access a mentoring.**
Significant factors (p<0.05) are highlighted.

Demographic Characteristic	Unmet Mentoring Needs	
	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Urban community type (compared to rural/ remote)	1.07 (0.86 - 1.34)	0.531
Indigenous Identity (compared to non-Indigenous)	1.38 (1.06 - 1.79)	0.018
Non-White Ethnocultural identity (compared to White)	1.11 (0.94 - 1.31)	0.233
Being born in Canada (compared to being immigrant born)	1.15 (0.92 - 1.43)	0.232
Gender Identity (man compared to woman)	0.81 (0.69 - 0.95)	0.010
Gender Identity (non-binary compared to woman)	1.33 (0.81 - 2.18)	0.265
Transgender Identity (compared to non-trans identifying)	2.52 (1.64 - 3.88)	<0.001
Sexual Orientation – LGBTQ2S+ (compared to heterosexual)	2.06 (1.66 - 2.56)	<0.001
Disability – reduced activity (compared to no disability)	3.30 (2.77 - 3.93)	<0.001
Disability – professional diagnosis (compared to no diagnosis)	1.32 (1.00 - 1.74)	0.051

Youth in Care (compared to 'No' respondents, Q10A)	1.98 (0.90 - 4.34)	0.088
Having 1 or more risk factors during youth (compared to no risk factors, Q38)	2.19 (1.86 - 2.59)	<0.001

Figure 4 Multivariate analysis to assess sub-groups which may show significant associations with likelihood of unmet needs at any age during ages 6 to 18. Figure shows adjusted odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals.



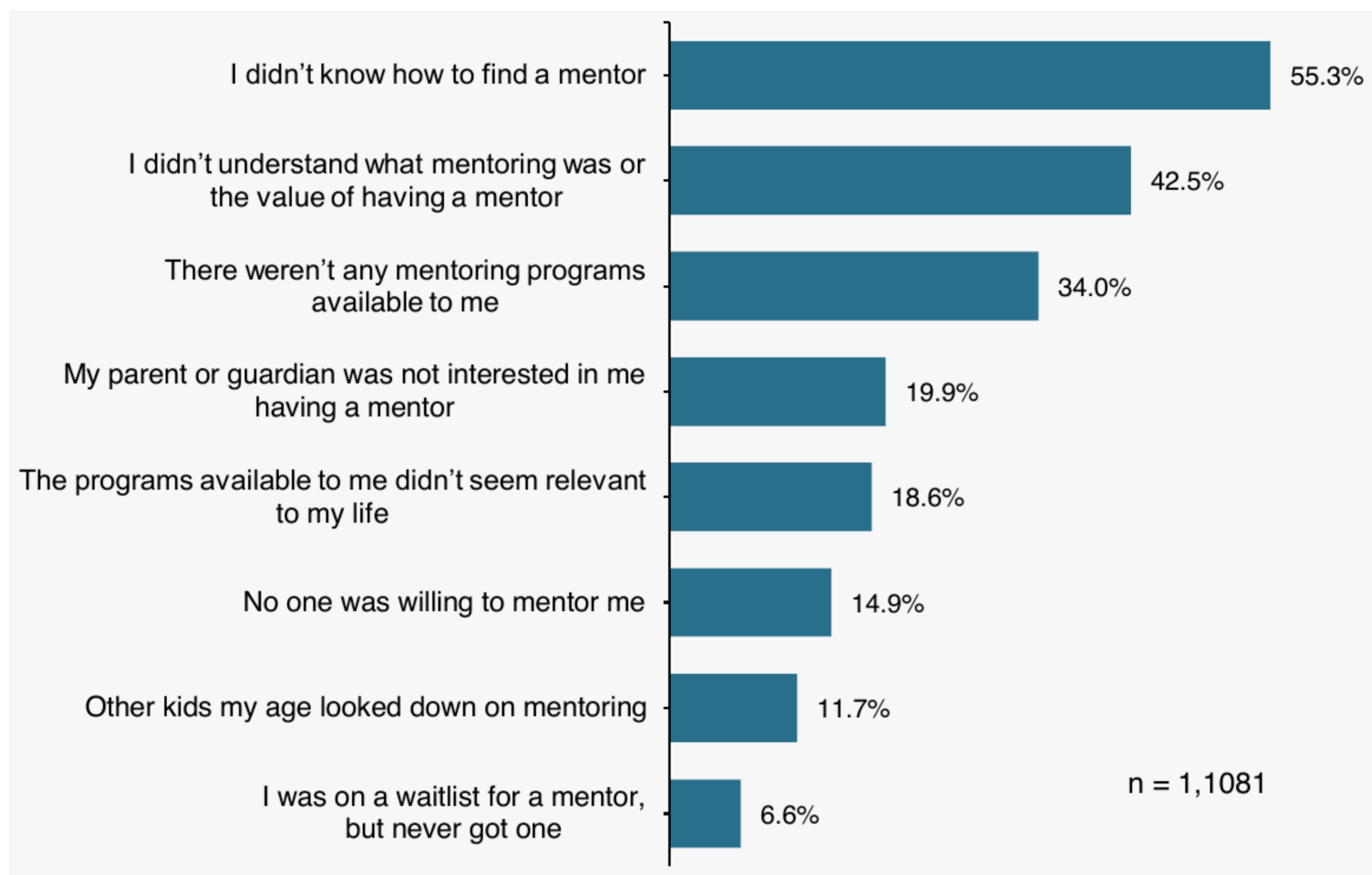
Barriers to Accessing Mentoring

Survey respondents had an option to list specific barriers they may have faced to accessing a mentor, specifically during ages 12 to 18 (Q19C1). Results showed that the top barriers among all respondents were related to not knowing how to find a mentor, not understanding the value of a mentor, and not having mentoring programs available (See Figure 6). Among respondents who identified as Indigenous, transgender, LGBTQ2S+, or had experience of a risk factor during

youth, these three barriers remained the top three most commonly-reported, with similar proportions observed.

34 open responses were also provided, detailing the barriers youth faced to accessing a mentor. Several youth reported it was difficult to ask for help or open up to people, they lived in distant places where they could not seek help, or were not able to get mentoring services that were specific to their needs. These same barriers were also identified by youth participating in qualitative interviews, as described below.

Figure 5 Barriers to accessing mentors as reported by youth who had unmet needs.
Note: respondents could select multiple items.



Barriers to access reported by Northern youth

Youth living in the Territories and Inuit Nunangat (Nunavik and Nunatsiavut) reported the following barriers to accessing mentoring services and programs during childhood and adolescence:

- I didn't know how to find a mentor
- I didn't understand what mentoring was or the value of having a mentor
- There weren't any mentoring programs available to me

The programs available to me didn't seem relevant to my life
My parent or guardian was not interested in me having a mentor

Young Peoples' Experiences of Barriers and Facilitators to Accessing a Mentor

Awareness of Mentoring

Qualitative interviews confirmed that awareness of mentoring varies among young people. Most interview participants reported that they first became aware of mentoring in their teenage years. Only two participants recalled awareness of mentoring as a child. One participant considered her grandpa her mentor from an early age. Another participant considered her school-based “*reading buddy*” to be a mentor. Even young people who receive mentoring might not be explicitly aware of it.

At the age of ten, twelve years old, I would not have known that external organizations can help me and like what they could have done. So, I don't think I would have known where to go.

In elementary school, I literally didn't know what mentorship was like. I never had someone who was older me that I could ask for advice, even choosing which high school to go to. That was like a discussion I had only with my parents. I didn't know who else to ask. Like I didn't know you could ask someone else who was in high school to ask what their experience like...I just didn't hear about it... Like I didn't know it existed... I guess I was never really actively searching for a mentor and I think a lot of students who are younger, they don't realize that there's these services out there... I don't think I would have been someone to search up mentorship programs in Canada and then apply to have a mentor. It would just never have crossed my mind to do that.

When you're living it, you don't really recognize that it's a mentor. You take the support and guidance when it comes, and it's helpful in the moment, but it's only with time that you can see how much it influenced your path.

Young people may have misplaced impressions of what mentoring is or who it is available to. Interview participants explained that they had confounded mentoring with other activities like daycare/babysitting, tutoring, guidance counselling, or therapy. Other participants noted that they did not think mentoring applied to them. Instead, they thought mentoring was specifically for young people who were either excelling (e.g., students with high marks, athletes who are the best on the team) or struggling (e.g., students who are getting poor marks, young people who are getting into trouble, young people who do not have their needs met within their family unit).

Young people who are new to Canada, or whose parents are new to Canada, may be less likely to be aware of mentoring programs because their parents are not aware of them and may be facing language barriers.

So I think a big challenge is definitely being aware, especially if your parent, you know, don't necessarily speak English or they're not like from Canada. There's no way for them to even know certain things exist on what someone else tells them. And like, they're not proficient in English. They can't just Google it. They can't, you know, search it up or, you know, call the community centre and ask about some thing like that. So, definitely like figuring out ways to get messages across to first generation immigrants. It's like a big way to help solve things.

Being able to get to the parents is like, I don't know through whether it's like through religious organizations that they would be part of or cultural organizations that they make part of, for example church, right, especially if it's like an Asian background church or a Chinese church, something like that. They're all gonna be people who speak Chinese, who are immigrants, because Chinese is their first language. And like reaching out to their means, they'll be able to reach a lot of people who have kids usually who might be going through something similar.

To increase awareness of mentoring among young people, participants suggested that mentoring be advertised at religious or cultural centres; settlement offices; libraries; YMCAs; community centres; government websites; buses and subways; and assemblies at school. A central hub of information about available mentoring programs would be helpful. One participant noted that an introductory video could be created to show young people what a mentor is, similar to the “Kids Meet” series on YouTube.

I think there is a big need for a portal that people can access to find a mentor, because I feel it's very hard to find a mentor nowadays. So, I think it's important to have a system or like a central hub where like people can go to so that they can find their needs and stuff.

One big problem for programs is a lack of visibility. It took me days to find this program and it was almost hidden on some website.

Interest in Having a Mentor

Young people are often interested and open to having a mentor during their childhood and teenage years, particularly during times of transition in their life. One participant recalled that she would have liked a mentor to reach out to her when she had just moved to a new city and started at a new school. Another participant stated that she would have been receptive to a mentoring program when she was placed in out-of-home care, especially if the program included former youth-in-care as mentors. Several participants recalled a desire for mentoring when they were transitioning from high school to post-secondary education. Academic institutions were described as large and “impersonal”, making it hard to form human connections with potential mentors at this time.

Some young people may be hesitant to have a mentor. Young people may be suspicious of a potential mentor’s motives, especially if the mentor is in a paid or “official” volunteer role.

Mentoring may be seen as transactional, or for the mentor's own personal gain. Some young people may be averse to adults or authority figures during their youth.

I'm just making them feel good and they'll just do anything and they'll do a shitty job at it. But at the end of the day, they'll say, 'Oh yeah, I volunteer, I feel good about it'. Other people do it to build resumes, which, you know, you find that a lot throughout high school, in university. And most of the time. Yeah. Everything ends up being transactional, right?

It wasn't up until that point where that 'official' relationship ended that I seemed to personally care for it. So, at that point, he kept reaching out more as a friend rather than a mentor. And at that point, I was like, OK, well, if he's not doing it because he has to. And at that point, it's kind of like getting the opportunity to get to know him and become friends. And that's really when the relationship formed itself. So up until that point, when that title was taken away, I honestly was kind of against it.

I don't talk to adults or people in general. As a loner kid, I don't spend a lot of time with adults. I think it's mostly I felt uncomfortable or alone because I always felt that they wanted things from me that I couldn't necessarily provide. So. I was like I was academically smart but not socially smart. I think it's the best way to put it. Adults were more of the enemy and I needed to just like work around them as constraints in my life rather than someone who can support.

The idea of a teacher becoming a mentor may be particularly polarizing. Some young people may not consider teachers to be genuine mentors. A young person may doubt that a teacher can offer individualized support because getting to know a student personally is seen as inappropriate. One interview participant mentioned an abusive history with teachers and the education system as a whole. Another participant noted the colonial nature of the education system.

Stigma, fear of judgment, feelings of shame, shyness, and “awkwardness” may leave some young people uninterested in mentorship. Sometimes young people do not realize or do not want to admit that they need help. Some young people may have been conditioned to believe asking for help meant they were stupid or broken. Mentoring was described as “intimidating” or “daunting” by some interview participants.

You know, growing up in those ages, it's an awkward time, so I don't think I would have reached out to anybody. So, we're talking about young teens like 14, 15. Those ages were tough because people are trying to discover themselves. They're shy. They don't want to admit that, you know, if anything is wrong with them and often-times they don't know where to go as well.

I probably would have never reached out because I still thought it was taboo. Kind of like if you're reaching out to that kind of stuff, it's because you need it in the sense that there's something wrong... instead of being, you know, I'm working through issues which everybody's got something they can work through. It was more like you're broken and you need extra help... back then I thought like, oh, I don't need this, I'm not broken, I'm not behind.

A lot of kids are repressed because over the years they learn that if you ask a question, if it's stupid, you are wrong. And that's what I've learned as a kid. Ask a question if it's stupid, completely wrong.

I just didn't feel safe, like opening up to really anybody because it's all part of shame.

Young people are heavily influenced by their parents' perceptions of mentoring. Sometimes parents may not be willing to allow their child to be mentored by others. This may be because they do not want their own influence as parents to be diminished in any way, or because they value independence and self-reliance. In some cases, cultural influences may be at play.

My dad is very independent on self-made very, you know, kind of gritty business man who has the pride to say, like, nobody got me here. Like I did this on my own. I don't need anyone. Like you don't need to rely on others, which in one way is a good value to have to be self starting, but it's not good to the extent that you'll lock yourself in when you need help.

I think my mom tried to have the role of supporting us, which is just purely out of caring. But I think in a sense, without her realizing, that made it seem like you don't need external support. You've got me... If we had to seek external support, she would have seen it as, "I'm not good enough for them," or something as a mother...I think it was a motherly thing that like, "I'm good enough for my children."

I don't think my parents would take me to a mentor organization and say, okay you need a mentor. I say this because of my culture. For us it is mostly like the parents. They know what is right and what is wrong for you. They are the ones who are looking upon you and looking out for you. So for them going to a mentor, it would be something which will go up against the dad. Right. We are South Asians and Indians will say it is always that parents look out for their children, not even the closest of other family members, but solely parents.... And parents would also feel insecure because there would come the clashes of the values and it would think that, okay, this would lead my child and do some wrong. But maybe it will like the forefront of values and would make them feel less connected to their own child. They would feel they would give the importance and the respect that we should have for our parents would go to the mentors. So parents will become a little less prioritized.

In a sense, my family was very closed off from community things because they thought getting help from community was shameful. There's a lot of pride for the Asian family... So, it's just kind of hard to get help from a lot of people because they're too prideful to ask for help or go out, see the community because we're very, I guess, quiet people. We don't want to let anybody else know. So, we just kind of keep it down. So, I really never got to see any of those things.

I was a very independent child and I didn't like asking for help. I wasn't really open to that...Mostly I was raised, I think, like my parents are not big on helping us and giving us answers. It was more so we let you suffer for several hours and then when you can figure out, we'll help you. So I. It is to just try and figure things out on my own.

Facilitators to Accessing Mentoring

At the initiation stage of a mentoring relationship, young people may appreciate a light touch. They may request help “*opening the door*” to mentoring, but then prefer to “*take it from there*” with choosing a mentor and forming a relationship, rather than having it externally “*mandated*.” Initial meetings should be “*low-key*” or just “*hanging out*.” One participant suggested that mentoring could be initiated by bringing young people and prospective mentors together around a simple activity like making cookies or going through a corn maze, because “*people don’t want to just sit in a room and talk*.”

Like if you have something to do, like you're in like a corn maze. It doesn't have to be like a big thing. But I feel like if you're just stuck together and told to talk, I think it's just nice to have something. So even if it does get awkward or like it doesn't deter people away from it because you still have something tangible that you're doing like a game. I feel like it just is less pressure on both of the sides, really.

The fact that it wasn't mandatory, the fact that it evolved naturally, really helped. If it had been mandated as part of a course, for example, maybe it wouldn't have worked.

To feel like you're having to find some older as a mentor like that might be really super positive thing. But in the moment, it's kind of a daunting thing as well. I think just having there by the school can open the door. And then once the door's open, then it's not so hard. Then it's like, OK, you really already know each other. We already kind of have this common ground for like talking to each other and knowing each other.

Young people may prefer universal mentoring that is offered equally to everyone. Compared to targeted approaches, which may aim to recruit youth who are either excelling or struggling, young people see a universal mentoring as a way to reduce stigma and encourage normalization of mentoring. Universal programs are also helpful because they do not require young people to self-identify (e.g., in terms of culture or sexual orientation) in any particular way.

I think if let's just say coming into high school, every student is sat down with a guidance counselor, even if for a 15 minute intro meeting or given a mentor off the bat like everybody has one, if you normalize it and give every child an opportunity to just have access to it, like for a couple of minutes to see what it is. I think that would have definitely changed my view because if I had a say, a guidance counselor and every student got to see one for the first 15 minutes of the first week of grade seven, like this is normal. This is someone that's part of my educational journey, like everybody else got it.

Personalized outreach is important. Young people appreciate it when a prospective mentor learns something about them and their interests and then uses that as the basis for reaching out to them in a personalized way. Mentors can look for opportunities to make small gestures, like giving a young person a card to celebrate pride month. Activities and shared interests may be the “*spark*” or the “*foundation*” on which a mentoring relationship can be built. Young people might

want to meet mentors through a writing circle, an open mic poetry event, sports, music/band, art, cooking, or coding.

I think maybe finding something that I was specifically interested in, like writing might have been a good way. Like I read something that you wrote, I think that's really interesting. Can you tell me more like something that show that they actually thought about what to say? And so not just like a generic statement.

Mentoring that involves academic or professional components may appeal to young people. Academic or professional mentorship may be considered more neutral or less stigmatized. This type of mentoring could eventually grow into a more personal mentoring relationship.

I think you have to build a bond with someone before you can open up for more personal things, at least for me personally. So I think if I have clicked with someone who I felt I could trust and I respected in terms of academics, which is very neutral, then with time that relationship could have definitely grown into two more emotional and deeper connections.

Some participants emphasized the importance of first reaching out to parents to ask their permission before attempting to form a mentoring relationship with a young person directly. This first step fosters trust.

The thing it all just boils down to like trusting, like having your mom like having met the mentor, for example, might have felt some trust.

There are a wide range of places where a young person may connect to a mentor. Participants shared their experiences being introduced to a mentor through counselling, workplace settings, community centres, Katimavik, Girl Guides/Scouts, an immigration settlement office, and through friends and family (e.g., older sister's friend, friend's dad).

School was often emphasized as an ideal place for mentoring relationships to form, because young people already spend a lot of their time there. School was described as a credible, accessible location that did not require extra transportation. Young people do not need to rely on their parents/guardians to attend. One participant remarked that, “*school’s the only place to be free to actually do something for yourself.*” Mentoring relationships might start in a school setting, where mentors and mentees can get to know each other and build trust, and then progress to meeting in the community.

Maybe if it is a centre or some organization that would help me. But I think I would still give more priority to school because that what I know. Okay. This is authentic. If my school has it. Yeah, it's right. I'm not blaming you. I'm not being scammed. I'm safe. And if from there, though, we take it outside. From school, it goes to community or any other setting. Then I would be open to it because I have seen that person at my school. I know he's right and I know that I'm not like I'm not in the wrong position, you and I. I would consider taking it outside and meeting somewhere out. But for, say, if I just meet them at a coffee shop or something. I wouldn't be open to that.

Several young people recalled that they accessed mentoring through a **faith-based community**. For example, interview participants were mentored by church pastors, youth ministry program providers, church youth group leaders, and Sunday School teachers. One participant explained that his pastor initiated a mentoring relationship with him after noticing he was on a “*rocky*” path as a teenager. The pastor tried to connect with him and suggested that he get involved in different community volunteering projects.

Community volunteering initiatives may present an opportunity for mentoring. Several participants recalled receiving mentorship through youth councils, which involved young people working together with an adult on community-based volunteer and fundraising projects. One participant said youth council was an “*empowering*” environment and that she liked the opportunity to leave a “*legacy*” in the community.

Young people may have mixed views about meeting a mentor **online in a virtual environment**. Several interview participants stated that they would consider virtual mentoring but suggested that at least one face-to-face meeting is important. Virtual mentoring was considered accessible and familiar to young people because they are used to forming friendships in online contexts. One participant explained that she receives mentoring from a religious guru who broadcasts videos online. Young people like the idea of a mentor being available through text. Some participants noted that virtual mentoring might offer an opportunity to find a mentor outside of her small town.

Barriers to Accessing Mentoring

Young people may encounter barriers that make it harder for them to access mentoring. One issue is a shortage of mentors, leading to wait lists. Even if a young person gains access to a mentoring program, it is hard to switch mentors if a match is not working out. It may be especially difficult to access a mentor with particular qualifications or experiences – this is relevant for career/academic mentoring, as well as for mentees looking for a mentor with a specific lived experience, like a mentor from the LGBTQ2S+ community, or a mentor who speaks a shared language. One interview participant described challenges finding a male mentor, noting that most male mentors in his field were actually more like examples of what not to do and were prone to pushing him on a very specific path in business, despite his own personal interest in film-making.

After arriving in Canada I tried to seek out different career mentors. I looked online, I tried contacting people, I looked on government websites, and other organizations websites. Some programs offered career mentors, but they did not seem qualified to help me and my career. They were older but they did not have the experience that could help me.

Language is a very important thing. For people who have a first language that is different than English, they feel afraid to have someone to help them because of the language barrier. Having mentors who speak more than one language, and helping mentees to improve their own language skills, will help people.

Young people may not have the means to go where they want to – they have to rely on adults. Parents/guardians may be unavailable to supervise or take a child to extra-curricular activities where mentoring would take place. Costs for these activities may be another barrier. In a rural area, transportation is particularly important. Rural areas may also be isolated, with fewer youth-serving organizations available.

There were not many adults who could actually supervise me in extracurricular activities, so I wouldn't have been able to go anyways because there was nobody over the age of 18 to take me there and watch over. So that also stopped me from going to a lot of these things.

Getting closer to like 12 or 13 is when I started doing a little bit of the extra curriculars, but I never fully got into it because my parents realized it got more expensive and couldn't afford it.

A lack of time can be a barrier to mentoring. Both mentors and mentees have busy schedules. Young people who are focused on their studies may not want to be removed from class time or have their academic schedule interfered with in order to gain access to a mentor.

There was one person I was able to connect with, but since they were so busy they didn't have time to help me... The people you look up to or have the type of experiences you can learn from, often are too busy in their work to help. They have their own lives, so it can be hard.

Some young people may have concerns about appropriate boundaries or have a sense of “stranger danger” with adults. They may question whether it is okay for an adult to form a relationship with them as a younger person.

I guess they got to have a draw a certain line because you can't be hanging out with like someone 15 years younger than you, like every day or whatever.

When you're still in high school, it's a little bit strange. They are your teacher and I don't even know if I would be like allowed legally speaking.

Crises in a mentee’s personal life or mental health might mean that they are not able to seek out or attend a mentoring program. One interview participant with lived experience of homelessness and domestic violence shared that she had to step away from the mentoring program she was in during this period in her life. Another explained that she dealt with social anxiety that made it difficult for her to leave her house to participate in mentoring.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: DYNAMICS OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

1,148 (40.5 per cent) survey respondents reported that they had at least one mentor during ages 12 to 18. Each person who had a mentor said they had a mean 2.5 mentors (median 2 mentors). Respondents provided detailed information of up to 3 mentors they had during the ages of 12 to 18. All 1,148 individuals who reported having a mentor during ages 12 to 18, provided in-depth information about at least 1 mentor they had during this period. Of these, 796 (69.3 percent) individuals also provided information about two mentors, and 572 (49.8 per cent) provided information about three mentors. For this preliminary analysis, we report on the different aspects of the mentoring relationship that are specific for respondents' most meaningful mentor (Q21).

The majority of the respondents stated that their most meaningful mentor was not part of a formal mentoring program (80.4 per cent). This was further substantiated when youth described their relationship to their mentor, which was most frequently reported as being a teacher/ school staff or family friend (**See Figure 6**). The full details of other characteristics related to respondents' most meaningful mentors are shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5 Characteristics of the most meaningful mentor (ages 12 to 18).
[A] All mentors and [B] formal mentors only.

[A]

Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
Was this part of a formal mentoring program?			Type		
No	876	80.4%	One-on-one	637	55.5%
Yes	214	19.6%	With other youth	187	16.3%
Total	1,090	100.0%	A mix of both	313	27.3%
Location			Other	14	1.1%
At School	327	28.5%	Total	1,148	100.0%
In community	410	35.7%	Focus of relationship		
A mix of both	207	18.0%	School or education support	636	55.4%
Other (Home/ place of worship/ text or online)	204	17.8%	Spiritual, religious, or cultural support	308	26.8%
Total	1,148	100.0%	Emotional or social support	814	70.9%

Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
Length of relationship			Total	1,148	100.0%
<3 months	55	4.8%	Age Difference with Mentor		
3-6 months	99	8.6%	1-2 years older than me	132	11.5%
7-11 months	100	8.7%	3-5 years older than me	178	15.5%
12+ months	423	36.9%	> 6 years older than me	764	66.6%
It is still ongoing	471	41.0%	Unsure	57	5.0%
Total	1,148	100.0%	Prefer not to say	17	1.5%
Experiences with mentor			Total	1,148	100.0%
Negative or neutral	57	5.0%			
Positive experience	1,091	95.0%			
Total	1,148	100.0%			

[B] ‘Most meaningful’ mentors, indicated to be a part of a formal mentoring program.

Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
Location			Type		
At School	95	44.4%	One-on-one	117	54.7%
In community	64	29.9%	With other youth	54	25.2%
A mix of both	39	18.2%	A mix of both	43	20.1%
Other (Home/ place of worship/ text or online)	16	7.5%	Other	0	0.0%
Total	214	100.0%	Total	214	100.0%
Length of relationship			Focus of relationship		
<3 months	35	16.4%	School or education support	133	62.2%
3-6 months	35	16.4%	Spiritual, religious, or cultural support	63	29.4%
7-11 months	39	18.2%	Emotional or social support	121	56.5%
12+ months	57	26.6%	Total	214	100.0%
Its still ongoing	48	22.4%	Age Difference with Mentor		

Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
Total	214	100.0%	1-2 years older than me	44	20.6%
Experiences with mentor			3-5 years older than me	47	22.0%
Negative or neutral	9	4.2%	> 6 years older than me	110	51.4%
Positive experience	205	95.8%	Unsure	13	6.1%
Total	214	100.0%	Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
			Total	214	100.0%

Figure 6 Relation to the most meaningful mentor (ages 12 to 18)

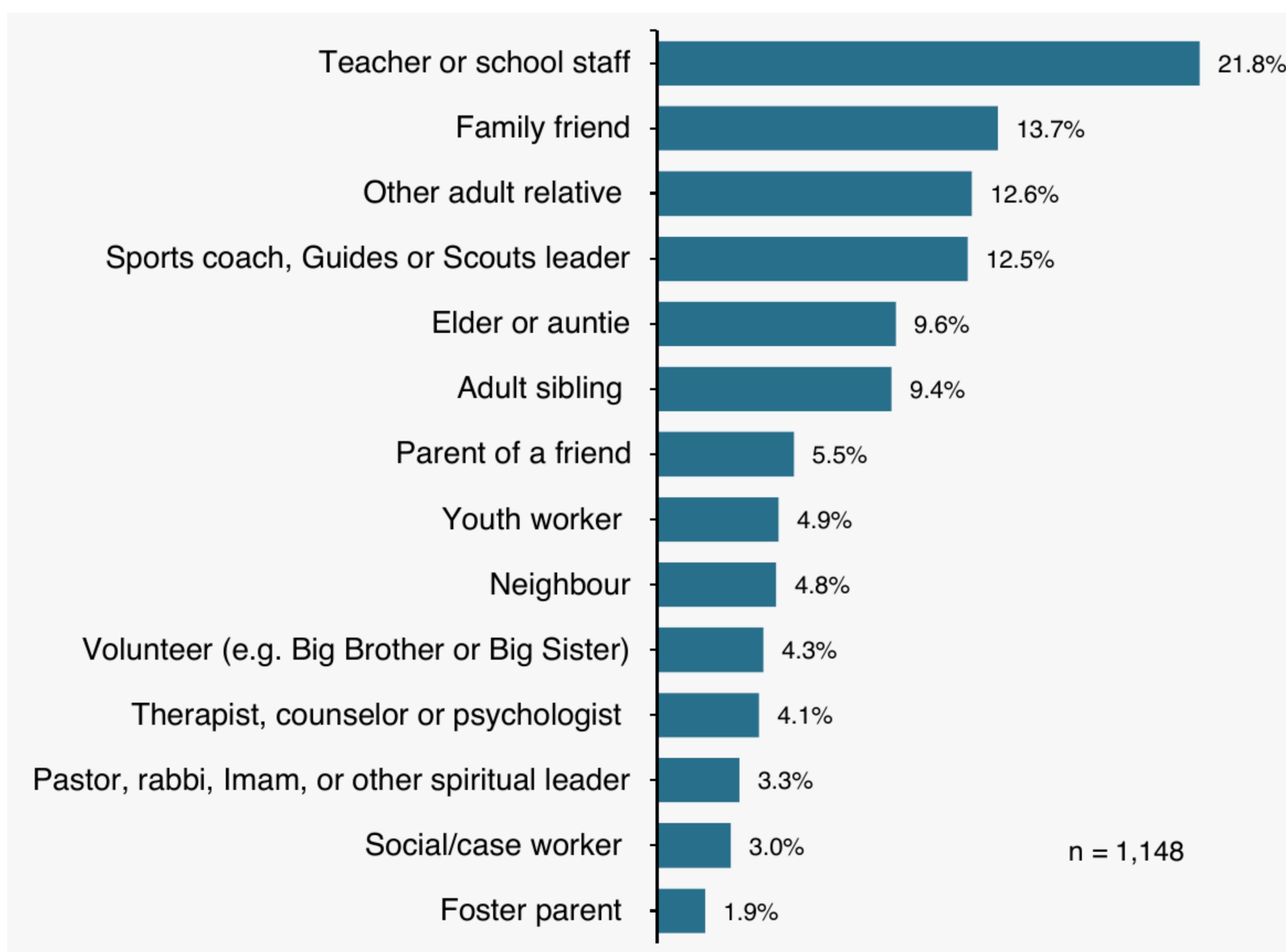
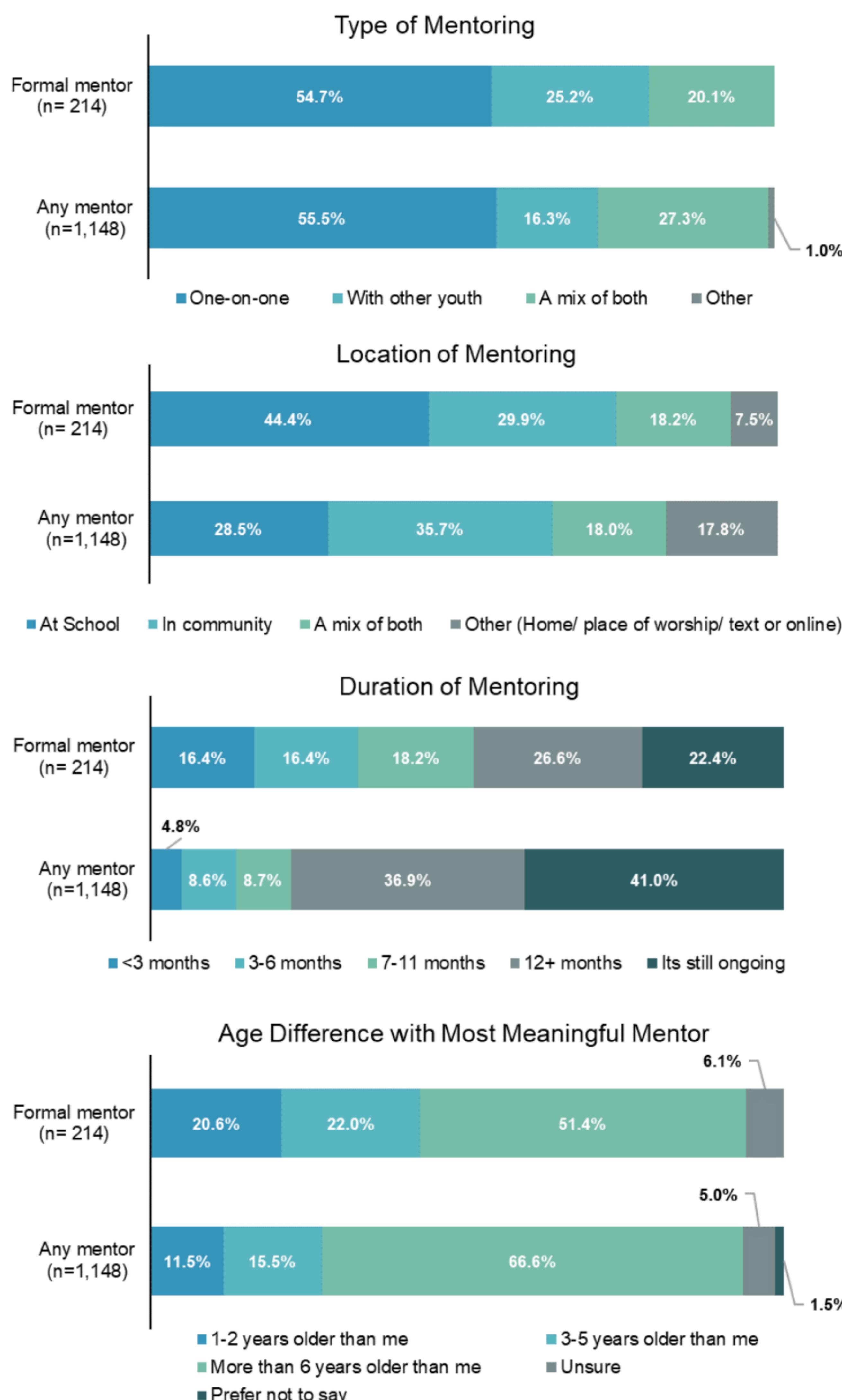


Figure 7**Mentoring dynamics of most meaningful mentors compared to most meaningful mentors who were part of a formal mentoring program.**

Most meaningful mentors largely spoke the same language (84.9 per cent) and shared similar ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds (70.4 per cent) as youth (**See Figure 8**). Results also showed most meaningful mentors provided a range of transition and other supports to mentees (**See Figure 9**). Notably, formal most meaningful mentors were more likely to provide supports for young people to learn career related skills, connect to their culture, and attend community events together (**See Figure 10**).

Figure 8 Similarity in matched characteristics of most meaningful mentors. Figure shows the proportion of respondents answering “Agree” to questions about, “My most meaningful mentor matched...”

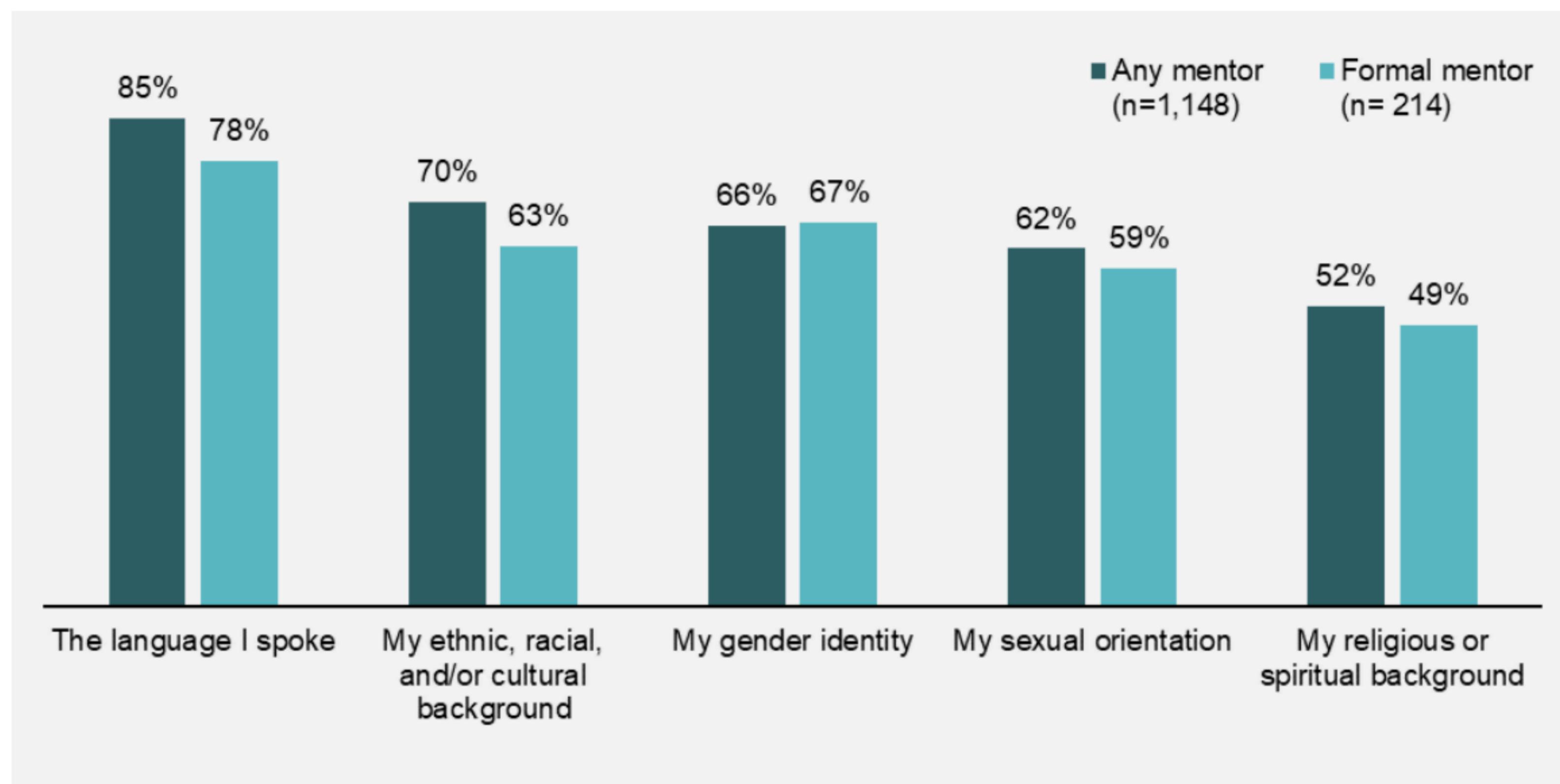


Figure 9 **Transition supports provided by most meaningful mentors.** Respondents could select all responses that apply.

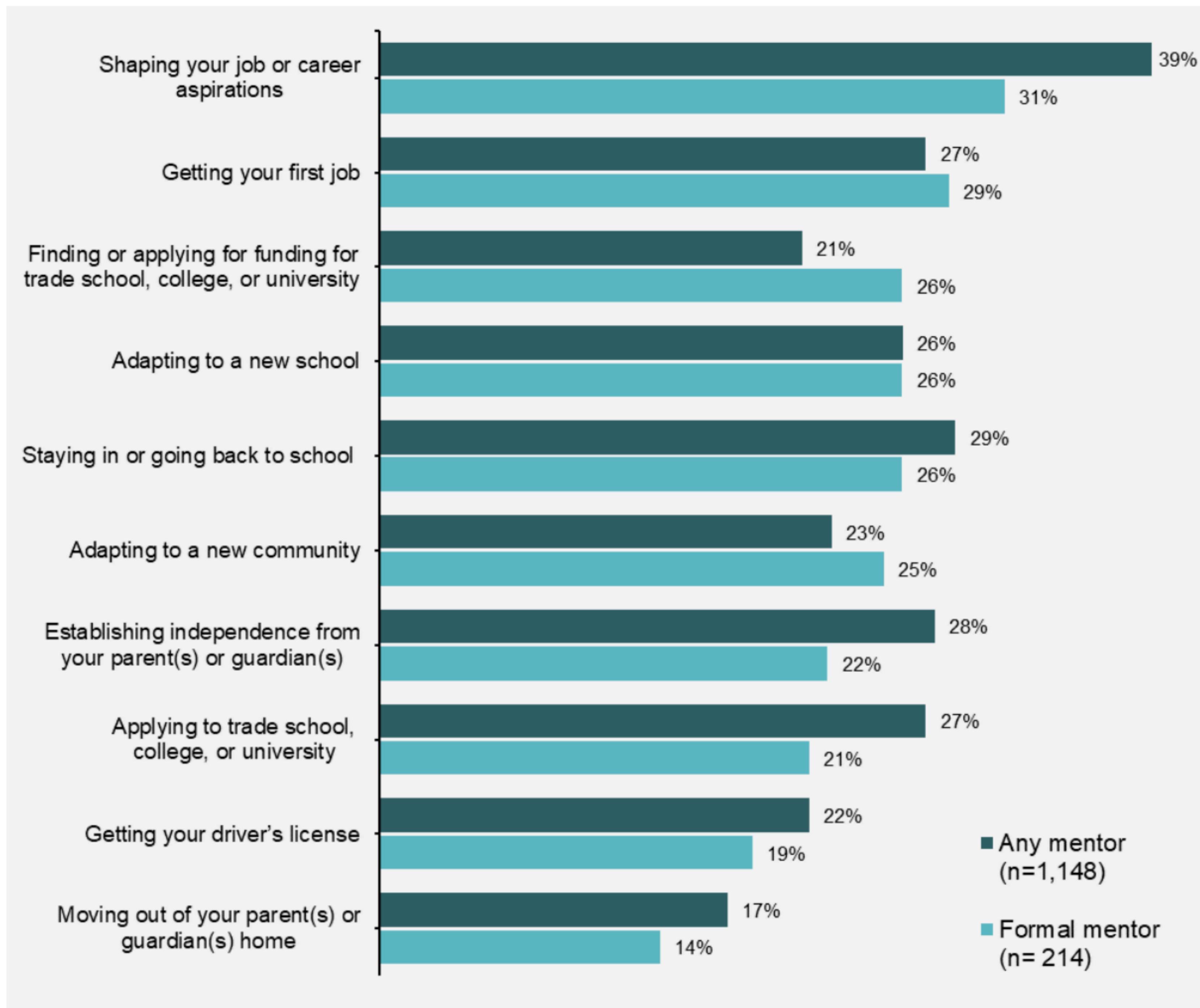
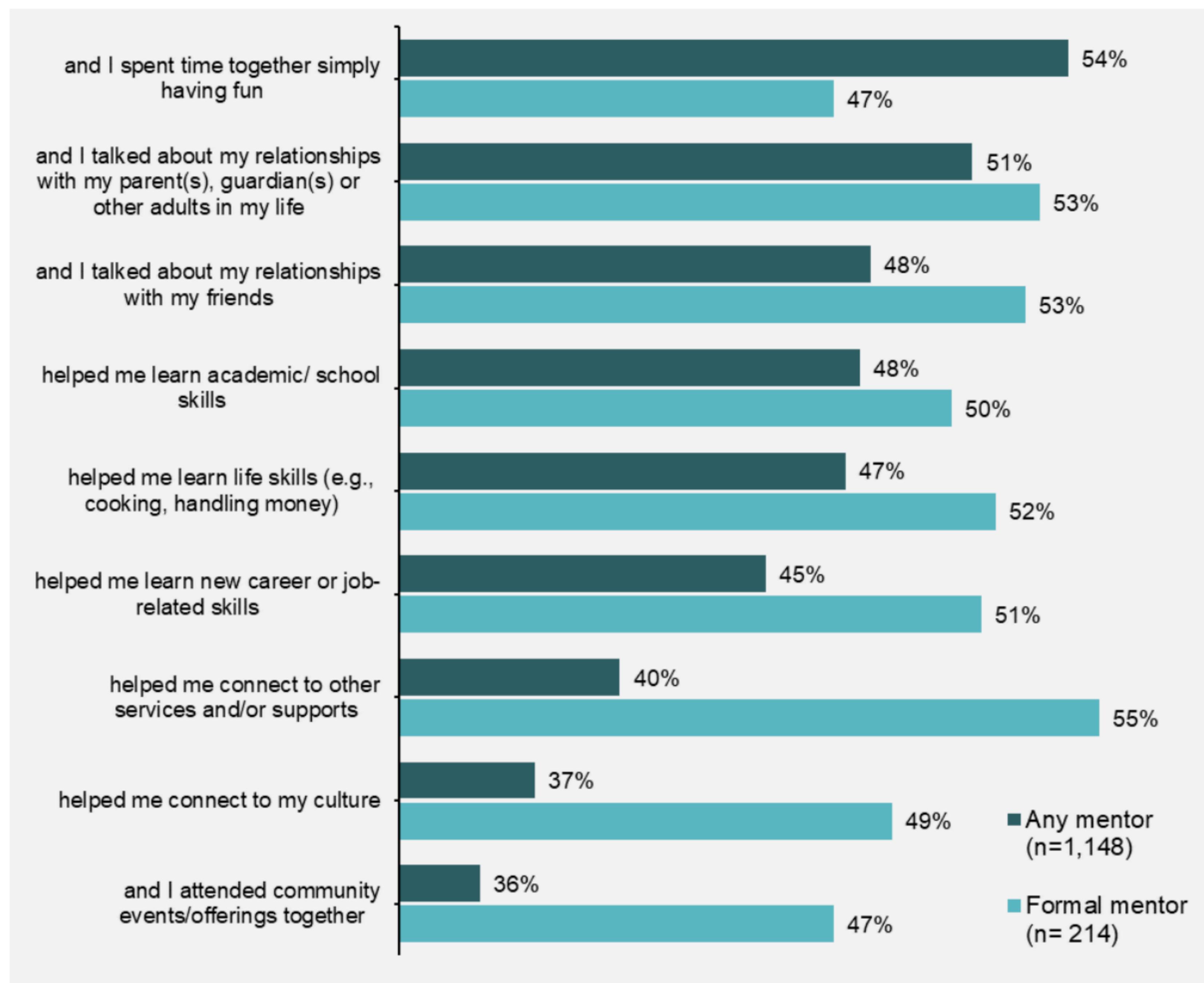


Figure 10 Other life supports provided by most meaningful mentors. Figure shows the proportion of respondents answering “Very true” to questions about, “My most meaningful mentor...”



Young People's Experiences of Mentoring Relationships

The Focus of Mentoring Relationships

Young people say that when it comes to mentoring, they just want someone to talk to. Young people are interested in mentoring relationships that focus on many different areas of their lives. Interview participants explained that as a young person, they would have wanted a mentor who could offer them:

- Professional development, such as how to behave professionally in work contexts, interview skills, and resume writing
- Career guidance, such as help selecting educational and career pathways, especially niche pathways that are not well-known
- Connections to jobs, networking in a chosen field of study or work
- Financial guidance
- Academic help, such as help with schoolwork or strategies for learning at school
- Social skill development, such as how to talk to people, how to overcome shyness
- Support around relationships with family and friends, including dating relationships and break-ups, being bullied, and dealing with divorce
- Emotional support around a range of issues, including mental health, grief, trauma and histories of abuse, loneliness, comparing self to others
- Tangible tools and support around adapting to a disability or condition
- A reminder that other people go through the same things, normalizing problems, “*Someone who will tell you that everything is going to be alright.*”
- A break or distraction from stressful situations (e.g., a sick parent or sibling)
- Support navigating times of transition (e.g., from elementary to high school, from high school to post-secondary, moving to a new city and starting a new school)
- Help staying out of trouble, building healthy habits
- Help finding the right path, feeling lost, “*no direction*”, “*floundering*”

- A chance to explore and discover, understand identity
- Language and cultural (Indigenous) teachings, cultural identity development
- Settlement support, help adjusting to life in Canada as a newcomer, gaining qualifications, following a career path, especially first-generation immigrants whose parents are not familiar with Canadian education systems
- A chance to be the teacher sometimes, through two-directional exchanges, where the mentee can teach the mentor a few things

Simply spending time together with a mentor was considered valuable by participants. One participant said all she wanted was a mentor to go to the park with, “*Just a conversation. Walk and talk.*” Another participant said that she just wanted a chance to get out of the house and do something. One participant shared how meaningful it was to her to be invited to join her mentor on errands.

Just inviting me to do things like go to the hardware store, which was, you know, most of the time super uninteresting to a 16 year old girl. But the idea of spending time with him. Yeah. The fact that he wanted me to invite me to his daily things was, you know, super kind of heartwarming. It seemed like cool. Yeah. You know, I'd love to.

Young people appreciate food! Participants explained that there is something special about eating food together and having the experience of a shared meal. Mentors could eat lunch together as a group with mentees. When a mentoring relationship is formed, a mentor could treat a mentee to lunch.

I think food definitely is such a huge component. If I look back like I have all sat down with them, you've had a coffee, lunch or dinner, and there's a repetition of that. Every time, call, go grab a coffee. Let's go. Let's go eat... And all my mentors like paid for my food too. I think that component of it was you know, as a student, what kind of money do you have? Well, how many chances do you get to really go out there and eat out, somewhere, you know, nice. Like I was like, I know if I see my mentor today, I'm gonna eat some good food!

Young people may also be interested in exploring cultural activities with a mentor. Indigenous participants noted that all programs – not just Indigenous-specific ones – could benefit from Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning, like on-the-land programming and opportunities to learn from and listen to Elders. Participants shared examples of cultural activities to do with a mentee, including maintaining a dog team, cutting wood, harvesting berries, and learning which plants are edible.

It doesn't have to be for kids who like identify a certain way or like it doesn't impose that on them. It's just this is like a good way for everyone. It's a good way of being a period. And then that creates a space that, come what may. Like, you know, for certain people that will go in a certain direction. But for everyone, it's the right way of starting.

I would say on the land programming, I would say like I really advocate right now. I've gotten this shift in my understanding. I think there's a serious lacking or just limiting things in a way. It's not just in education, it's in a lot of our public systems where society runs it. It's like kind of tired to just call it colonial, right, but that's what it is. And I think that if we integrated indigenous ways of teaching and learning and understanding, it would fill a lot of those gaps. It would overcome a lot of those limits. I was talking about how indigenous and informed understanding at the planning level, any programming would benefit every single program.

Matching Mentors and Mentees

Young people may prefer to have characteristics and life experiences in common with their mentor. Participants cited a range of factors that could be relevant to a mentor-mentee match, including language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, career/field/program of study, disability, newcomer status, and more generally, “background”. Shared passions and interests were also described as important. One participant emphasized his preference for a mentor who *felt* the same way about a topic of interest.

Age is a relevant factor for many young people when considering a mentor-mentee match. Some young people may prefer older mentors, while others may prefer peer-aged mentors. Some participants described older mentors as being out of touch or naïve about the realities faced by young people today. Younger mentors were considered “cool” and “relatable”, with more current experiences to share with their mentee. At the same time, some participants expressed a preference for older mentors. Younger mentors were described as being intimidating or as being unlikely to have helpful life experience to draw from.

I mean, it depends on the age difference, because if I had gone to school with the person mentoring me, personally, I wouldn't take it seriously. What are you going to tell me about life that I don't already know? Whereas maybe if someone let's say you're 15, maybe some of that 25, 30, you to them more and you know, they could at least have some personal experience to kind of mentor you with.

I think I would have preferred to have someone like closer to my age because. Yeah, age is also a key factor, I think. I mean, a young person could have a much older adult as their mentor. I think for me personally, I like because a mentor, like someone who's not your parents. Right. And for me, it takes a little more time to trust adults more than people my age, because I feel like people close to my age can understand certain like my experience is better than an adult that I haven't met before, what I think. So, yeah, I think I would have preferred someone much closer.

Maybe if the mentor was maybe “cool”, not just an older citizen, right. Like an older person. But maybe if the mentor related to me, you know, and had the same upbringing...Someone who represented the, I guess, popular things of that time. So, we're talking early 2000s. It would be fast cars, rap and hip hop. For example, a friend of mine who live on the same street. His father was young when he had him. So we all looked up to the father because, you know, he was he had a fast car and he was cool. We want to be around him.

In some communities, having a local mentor is important. One participant explained that in a small-town context, an outside mentor would not have been taken seriously. A mentor would need to be someone who grew up in the community, with insider knowledge of cliques and social groups and possession of social capital at a local level.

Young people may prefer mentors who share characteristics and life experiences in common with them because they represent a success story – someone who faced the same struggles and had to overcome the same obstacles, and can now relate to and share back with a mentee. A mentor who is similar to their mentee will have common values and a similar “*mentality*.”

When a person has a shared life experience, you are able to learn from how they overcame the same struggles you face, and you can see how they succeeded. You can see that you'll be OK, too.

When a mentor has gone through the same things as you, it's easier to explain what you are going through or what you are thinking, they know what you are feeling and they know what you are talking about. On the other hand, it doesn't matter sometimes, they still understand you.

I do think that I guess similar I guess background and sexual orientation would be preferable because they can relate their experience to them and like they can compare saying that I did this and you don't have to worry if something happens here. We're in the same place together. If you need help, I'll be here to guide you along, which would make sense because you would relate somebody who's similar to you, including race, even if they're not. It's still really good to have somebody there who knows that they went through a similar experience that everyone else has or they just have. Right. And it makes it comfortable more easy going because they have somebody to rely on in the end.

In some cases, a young person may prefer a mentor of a specific gender due to a history of trauma, or may prefer a mentor of a specific gender, race, or cultural background due to experiences of bias, discrimination, and racism. For young people who are Indigenous, a chance to share culture between a mentor and mentee is important and relevant to reconciliation.

If she were looking for assistance with mathematics, for example, she would want to find a female tutor because there is a stereotype that women are not good at math. A male tutor might share those biases, whereas a female tutor might be able to see her potential.

It boils down to like my comfortability and the whole like being mistrusting a woman and not feeling safe enough in safety with women. But that stemmed from my childhood.

It's really important that we share our culture with ourselves, right? Like, there's a lot of stuff that we have to be cautious of, like indigenous stuff, right. We don't all want us to be like making dream catchers, but there's still aspects of the whole overall world view that we can get from it. So even if it's not like if I don't get somebody who's my nation or

my ancestors locality, I can still make stuff out of it. Right. And we'll be sharing our culture with ourselves in a good way, which is important, especially in like the era of reconciliation and such.

Although similarities are appreciated, differences between a mentor and mentee are also considered valuable. Young people may seek out opportunities to learn from someone different from themselves as a growth experience. One participant explained that a mentor from the same culture might be familiar and comfortable, but at the same time, limiting.

It's really , really nice to have a mentor who comes from a different background because you are able to learn more about other fields that you might not have considered before... a lot of people . Don't realize the value of having someone come from a diverse background than who you are , and a lot of times , like the lessons you learned from mentors are universal . Like you don't need to have a mentor in your program to teach you or like to give you tips about how to study well or even like how to approach cold e-mailing or contacting people you're interested in , like networking with stuff like that . So like something that's are universal . It is , I guess , helpful to have a match with a mentor who you kind of want at the same time . I think it's good for the mentee to be open minded in terms of who or what type of mentor that they're looking for.

A lot of my mentors now are generally like white, Caucasians. I think background helps in making mentees more comfortable because everyone is a little bit more comfortable with someone they are familiar with. I think that's one of the main reasons people don't change, because they like to stay comfortable with the things they have been in touch with. But for me, I don't like it, you miss out on growth opportunities. For me, I like to learn how people do things differently, different cultures, how they behave differently, what they eat differently as well.

Youth want to be involved and engaged in the process of being matched with a mentor. Almost all participants acknowledged that the choice of a mentor was a personal one and had to be made on a case-by-case basis according to the preferences of each mentee. A poor mentor-mentee match can lead to negative experiences in the mentoring relationship. It is important to young people to have an opportunity to switch to a different mentor if the fit is not right. One participant noted that needs change over time and that a mentee may outgrow a match.

I didn't really want to be matched to a person by someone else. I wanted to have that organic connection with that person and get to kind of choose and have your own say in matching with someone.

The mentees should be given the liberty to choose who they want to be mentored from. Because their life is the one was will be which will be being affected. So that is where this part is very important that the mentee should have this liberty.

If an adult or someone with what I recognized as authority at the time, had sort of put us together and told us okay guys, you can talk, I don't know why but it would feel forced and I'd be very shy, even if I had like those feelings toward her like oh you're so amazing and skilled, it would have been hard to find my voice.

To get a mentor is usually to have an interview with the person in question. Because you have to get to know them a little bit. Even though they don't really want to say much. It's best to get that small bit of information from them and then maybe put them with someone similar, I guess in a race, maybe sexuality, maybe gender depending. And then slowly, if they don't like them, we can just keep moving them on with somebody. Also, because that's how it should be. It should be tailored to them, not like some standard that somebody decided to put out because it becomes really difficult to connect to someone saying, okay, you're partnered with this mentor and you can't change it. Yeah, because every person is fluid. They don't stay the same. So it's best to like I'm not one that clicks with you. That's easy to talk to. Able to know what you're going through. Makes it easier for somebody like a kid to just open up instead of. Being shut down all the time and just being ignored from their mentor.

I was paired with a basketball player that was almost 7 feet high and a nice guy, but very I couldn't relate to him and it was intimidating. And I just I remember looking up to him and be like, this is high school, you know, like, I want to talk to this guy. He's scary. You know, he doesn't want to help me. He doesn't care. So I think that pairing was not well done and more intimidating than anything else. So definitely never helped me in any way. It actually made high school scarier.

Mentoring programs that endeavour to match a mentor and mentee should prioritize confidentiality. Young people want a safe space so that they truly share what they are looking for in a mentor, which may involve revealing important aspects of their own personal identity, such as their sexual orientation. One participant pointed out that to be inclusive to differently-abled young people, mentees should be offered a choice between an interview format or a survey in order to express their needs or interests in a mentor-mentee match.

Ask questions and have it like in a place where they know it's guaranteed to be like Confidential so that they can cause fear, fearing one of the program or your like. Still, like under your parents control, right? Like habit. So, like, those parents can't have any access to it at all if they need feel like if they're going to court against a different parent than like they have to subpoena it like anybody else. Kind of stuff, right. Well, I have it so that it's completely confidential. Let them just like their hearts. What kind of stuff they're looking for and what kind. Kind of things they're struggling with in general, right? It would be more than just like a multiple choice kinda answer, right

I know like forms can be really overwhelming for neurodivergent folks. Definitely. Because we're worried that we're not getting the point across quite clearly, but then also if you're a dyslexic, divergent type, then like forms themselves can be actually really hard to fill out. So, if they have that option to do like an interview intake process, in place of their survey.

Qualities of an Ideal Mentor

Young people value a range of different qualities in a mentor, relating to a mentor's personal attributes, what a mentor knows, how a mentor acts, and how a mentor makes a mentee feel. An ideal mentor is one who is:

- Knowledgeable, experienced, skilled, qualified, professional
- Approachable, friendly, able to build rapport
- Natural, real, genuine
- Trustworthy, accountable
- Casual, not intimidating
- Determined, patient
- Non-judgemental
- Compassionate, understanding, caring
- Confident
- Attentive, a good listener with strong communication skills
- Culturally competent
- Has Canadian experience and know-how to share with a newcomer

In practice, an ideal mentor:

- Maintains boundaries, keeps a respectful distance
- Validates – and does not deny – a mentee's feelings

Considering their feelings is the most important thing. Respect their feelings, don't tell them, "Oh, don't be sad", consider and respect what they are feeling first. Then, later on, try to understand the problem or what's going on, what they are struggling with and worried about. Then try to give some solutions and suggestions that work with their personality. You have to know that person so that you know what to give them or tell them.

You have to like, feel safe, heard and seen and validated... That someone noticed you as a person.

- Creates a safe, calming atmosphere for a mentee, so that the mentee “just wants to be around them”
- Shows the mentee that they are important and valued, shows the mentee that they enjoy their company, having fun and laughing with the mentee

She kind of fostered those relationships. So, having that kind of feeling that you were kind of approached like that you weren't just a younger person that she like had to hang out with once a week. So, she kind of took those extra steps to kind of make us all feel like we're valued and that we could go to her for things like that.

So I think it was almost as much of a learning opportunity for me as it was a guidance opportunity and it kind of became a two way street. And for me, the idea of being able to be an active part of his life and something useful for him. So not just I'm not just a task or somebody speaks to kids. He feels like he's helping. Like the fact that he can benefit from it definitely interests me more in having that relationship... after that title was taken away with that feeling of being able to give some benefit to him, too. And even as a child, if I'd had that relationship with someone older would have been the feeling of I'm bringing something good to their life... It's there's something real there and there's a back and forth, back and forth I think with be the biggest part of it. And just the feeling of you're here because you want to be not because you're told.

- Speaks to the mentee as an equal

Like sometimes he'd have conversations with me that you wouldn't have with the kid because they just wouldn't understand. Nothing inappropriate. But, you know, talk about things way more in-depth than the child would technically be able to pick up on. And I remember being so fascinated and being almost on it, thinking like, oh, he doesn't talk to me like I'm stupid. You know, he talks to me like adults and I was like a big girl. And that was always very satisfying to say, they don't speak to me like a baby, you know, like I was treated as an equal.

- Reaches out to the mentee, fostering two-sided interactions, rather than relying on the mentee to initiate or come to them with questions

I guess it's like a small thing, but a lot of times I'm scared of my bothering them. Because, you know, they don't they're not obligated to answer my questions or like help me with anything. So sometimes it's nice when they reach out to me first and ask, hey, how are you doing? Questions or how special you've been? Or, you know, how good we can be in something like this, like small things like that. Help me, like feel better about bothering them. Whenever I do have questions.

Like , if they ever see any , like , interesting articles or maybe an interesting opportunity , they could send it over, so you've got a two way conversation rather than just constantly one question and then an answer... know , if someone is just going to be robotically answering the four questions , you ask like . Yes , no . Yes . Maybe , you know , that it's hard to build a relationship that way . So having a dynamic conversation , you know , some people might not might not like unsolicited advice , but I don't know . I'm a big fan of it . I think it shows that you care above and beyond The kids at those ages won't really approach you. You have to make an effort, right? And ask them what's going on because people bottle things up at that age. So, I guess someone just who's determined in helping someone out even though their walls are up.

- Never tries to contradict or “*turn away*” mentor from their closest friends, family, or cultural values
- Never judges, tries to control a mentee’s behaviour, or tells them not to do something they want to do

There's no judgment. And I think that's what most people want, is a no judgment meant that even if they feel like they can't be themselves, they can in front of them, because even if they are one way, it's just comfortable. It's just easy to talk to. That's what I feel like. Mentorship to me should be open. It should be kind and I guess patient with people trying to learn.

Features of an Ideal Mentoring Relationship

Young people express preferences for “*softer*”, “*lighter*”, “*easy going*” mentoring approaches that are not rushed, allowing the mentee to take it slow. These types of mentoring programs contrast with other environments that youth commonly spend time in, like schools. Some participants specified that they would prefer “*dynamic*” and “*fluid*” mentoring experiences. They were less open to structured programs that involved “*someone just setting me up with an old person*”. Mentoring programs should not be “*boring*”, “*prescriptive*”, or “*forced*.”

Just getting together, just having that time together. It's just a break from like everything else. You get to learn something. You learn something new and then just take it with you. And it's just a restful time.

It's softer to me. I don't have to rush through everything. They take it slow. They let me digest the information. They're teaching me things and skills I wouldn't have remembered before. It's just there. They lay it out. They give you every information you need if you need help. They're very open and they're just like, send me a message. If you need help, I'll be here to check on anything you need. If you need any financial help, just let us know and we'll get back to you on that.

Some young people may prefer more frequent mentoring. For example, while some participants expressed that every other week was sufficient, other participants expressed a desire to meet with a mentor twice per week, daily, or even to have a mentor with 24/7 availability.

Giving young people a say in where they meet with their mentor can be helpful. One participant recalled that she always met her mentor at Starbucks, but she acknowledged that she actually felt unsafe discussing personal things in that public environment.

Mentors themselves should be well-supported and should ensure that their mental health is well-cared for. One participant noted that a mentor should have a mentor of their own.

The organizers have to be, in way, like the organizers are mentoring the mentors. They have to be the ones who are kind of telling the mentors what their role is , how to act upon those roles and definitely provide mentors with

resources... Like having even some things like OK , how to get your mentor relationship back on track when it feels like you haven't connected in a while.

Mentors. Right. You have some way for them to, like, deal and cope with what they're doing, right? Because like, it's not all fun and games. Even if it's just like they get to see social work for free. Right. Like they get free therapy sessions, stuff like that. Like just to make sure that they're taking care of themselves, too.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH MENTORING

The Effect of Mentoring on Youth Outcomes

The survey assessed a wide range of outcomes related to young people's lives. For each of these outcomes we assessed the effect of having access to mentoring (both 'access to any mentor' and 'access to a formal mentor'). First a crude association of access to mentoring as the exposure with different outcomes was made with univariate logistic regression (for binary outcomes). Thereafter, multivariate analyses were conducted, controlling for the demographic factors shown to be significantly associated with access to mentoring. That is, these models adjusted for age (treated as a continuous variable), gender identity, Indigenous identity, transgender identity, ethnocultural group, having a disability, and having exposure to risk factors. The results of the multivariate analyses are shown in **Table 7**. Univariate analysis showed similar levels of association for most outcomes (**Table 6**).

Results show that having access to mentoring (both any mentor and a formal mentor) is significantly associated with better mental health, a stronger sense of belonging, likeliness to serve as a mentor, and interest in serving as a mentor in the future (all odd ratios above 1). Results also indicate that young people who had access to a mentor were significantly more likely to have completed high school ($OR = 2.34$, $p < 0.001$), pursued further education after high school ($OR = 1.95$, $p < 0.001$), and were more likely to be currently studying and/or working (i.e. being non-NEET), than youth who did not have access to any mentor ($OR = 1.59$, $p = 0.01$). Having access to a formal mentor, but not any mentor, was significantly associated with a greater likelihood of having experienced at least one risky life event since age 18 ($OR = 1.97$, $p < 0.001$). See Tables 6 and 7 for results of all categorical outcomes.

Additionally, three composite outcome measures – namely, career planning (Q41), social capital (Q43), and mental well-being (Q47) – were generated by totalling the score of their sub-questions. Multivariate linear regression was used to assess the effect of mentoring on these outcomes. All three outcomes were shown to be positively correlated with access to any mentor ($p < 0.001$). Career planning ($p < 0.001$) and mental well-being ($p = 0.022$), but not social capital

($p=0.504$), were also shown to be positively correlated with access to a formal mentor. That is, having access to mentoring is significantly associated with higher scores for these outcome measures. However, it is not certain whether these statistical differences are meaningful. The interpretation of these tests requires further exploration and has not been reported here.

Table 6 Univariate analysis assessing the effect of mentoring on various outcomes.

Outcome being assessed	Effect of having access to any mentor		Effect of having access to a <u>formal</u> Mentor	
	OR (95% CI)	p-value	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Self-rated mental health Excellent/ good/ very good compared to fair/ poor	1.25 (1.07 - 1.47)	0.006	2.39 (1.84 - 3.10)	<0.001
Strong sense of Belonging Very/ somewhat strong compared to very/ somewhat weak	2.16 (1.83 - 2.55)	<0.001	2.08 (1.63 - 2.65)	<0.001
High School Completion Yes completed high school compared to No, did not complete	2.00 (1.47 - 2.73)	<0.001	1.09 (0.63 - 1.89)	0.747
Pursued further education after HS Yes pursued further education compared to No, did not pursue	1.66 (1.37 - 2.02)	<0.001	1.31 (0.95 - 1.81)	0.095
Higher education (completed) Completed some level of university or more compared to less than university completed	0.74 (0.61 - 0.89)	0.001	1.01 (0.78 - 1.30)	0.943
Higher education (aspirations) Aspire to complete some level of university or more compared to less than university	0.95 (0.80 - 1.12)	0.551	0.73 (0.58 - 0.93)	0.010
Current Working or Studying (non-NEET) Currently working and/or studying compared to doing neither (i.e. being NEET)	1.55 (1.24 - 1.93)	<0.001	1.67 (1.13 - 2.48)	0.010
Faced risky life event since turning 18 Experienced at least one or more risky life event compare to no risky life events (Q49)	1.13 (0.96 - 1.34)	0.144	2.27 (1.79 - 2.87)	<0.001
Served as a mentor since 18 Yes served as a mentor compared to No	2.75 (2.27 - 3.32)	<0.001	1.90 (1.50 - 2.41)	<0.001

Outcome being assessed	Effect of having access to any mentor		Effect of having access to a <u>formal</u> Mentor	
	OR (95% CI)	p-value	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Interested in mentoring in future Very/ fairly interested in mentoring others compared to not that/ not interested at all	2.12 (1.81 - 2.48)	<0.001	1.48 (1.15 - 1.89)	0.002

Table 7 Multivariate analysis (adjusted odds ratios) assessing the effect of mentoring on various outcomes.

Outcome being assessed	Effect of having access to any mentor		Effect of having access to a <u>formal</u> Mentor	
	OR (95% CI)	p-value	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Self-rated mental health Excellent/ good/ very good compared to fair/ poor	1.53 (1.26 - 1.85)	<0.001	2.90 (2.09 - 4.03)	<0.001
Strong sense of Belonging Very/ somewhat strong compared to very/ somewhat weak	2.27 (1.87 - 2.74)	<0.001	1.83 (1.38 - 2.43)	<0.001
High School Completion Yes completed high school compared to No, did not complete	2.34 (1.59 - 3.44)	<0.001	1.04 (0.52 - 2.06)	0.910
Pursued further education after HS Yes pursued further education compared to No, did not pursue	1.95 (1.55 - 2.47)	<0.001	1.40 (0.95 - 2.08)	0.090
Higher education (completed) Completed some level of university or more compared to less than university completed	0.84 (0.68 - 1.04)	0.113	1.11 (0.82 - 1.50)	0.513
Higher education (aspirations) Aspire to complete some level of university or more compared to less than university	1.04 (0.86 - 1.26)	0.700	0.82 (0.62 - 1.08)	0.153
Current Working or Studying (non-NEET) Currently working and/or studying compared to doing neither (i.e. being NEET)	1.59 (1.22 - 2.08)	0.001	1.78 (1.08 - 2.91)	0.023
Faced risky life event since turning 18 Experienced at least one or more risky life event compare to no risky life events (Q49)	0.93 (0.75 - 1.14)	0.470	1.97 (1.47 - 2.64)	<0.001

Outcome being assessed	Effect of having access to any mentor		Effect of having access to a <u>formal</u> Mentor	
	OR (95% CI)	p-value	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Served as a mentor since 18 Yes served as a mentor compared to No	2.63 (2.12 - 3.26)	<0.001	1.74 (1.32 - 2.30)	<0.001
Interested in mentoring in future Very/ fairly interested in mentoring others compared to not that/ not interested at all	2.07 (1.74 - 2.47)	<0.001	1.55 (1.15 - 2.08)	0.004

Young Peoples' Perceptions of How Mentoring Influenced Them

Young people who participated in interviews reflected on the ways in which their lives were influenced by the presence of a mentor. Mentorship can change young people's mindsets and foster personal growth. Young people who are mentored can gain hope and begin thinking more positively and being more open to other people. Mentoring can influence help-seeking behaviour. Through mentoring, young people can come to the realization that help is there if they need it.

Mentoring can make young people more confident and believe in themselves. They can feel encouraged and empowered to try new or hard things, “*go for it*”, be bold, not be afraid of failure, not miss out on things, and take risks. Mentoring can push young people to meet their full potential and develop their capabilities. A mentor can lead a young person to make good decisions, making their path through life easier, because they do not have to learn things the hard way. Mentoring can inspire and motivate young people.

As a newcomer, having someone to support you when you are new, there are a lot of things to face and struggles, someone who supports you and mentors you and makes your life easier. Your work, your studies, your life in general. Instead of doing everything yourself, you can take a risk and even if you fail sometimes, a mentor who knows how to help you will make you feel inside that you will be okay because there is someone who will help you and support you. Coming to a new country, when you're new, you're afraid to experience things because everything is new. Having someone around you who encourages you and motivates you really helps you to move forward and not be scared. This is your life, no one will come and do it for you, but when someone is mentoring you and helping you it will motivate you inside and push you and save you time instead of feeling afraid to go for it.

She's inspired me to try a whole bunch of new techniques with my writing because there are certain things like I was a bit scared to try, I was afraid it wouldn't turn out the way that it should. If that's a proper term and she's like introduced me to so many opportunities in terms of writing, like submitting to magazines and such. Yeah. So there's that for one and I know she just she inspires me in general.

Young people can improve their social and communication skills through mentoring. For example, mentoring can support young people to overcome shyness. Mental health can also be improved through mentoring. One interview participant explained that having a mentor makes a young person less anxious.

Mentees may remember lessons or tools from their mentor many years later. They can carry these with them throughout their lives.

I still play the songs she taught me on the piano, like when I'm sad, they cheer me up. And I was 12 then. So that has lasted 18 years.

She sat down beside me, and said, we've all struggled with our skills, you know. Learning is hard. And if it's really important to you, don't give up. And I remember she had a poster on her wall that she always pointed to all the time and students would be struggling with something and they'd say, I can't. But the poster was numbered and there was the worst one: I don't. And then it went up to like: I won't. And then there's: I can't. And then there's: I'll try. And then: I will, I can, and I do. And so she would stop someone when she heard one of those like red flag words and be like, where are you on the scale right now? Where do you want to be? I remember a lot of them and that helped me in an awful lot of contexts throughout my life, like at school.

PRELIMINARY INTEPRETATION OF FINDINGS TO DATE

SURVEY FINDINGS

Our work to date has performed several preliminary analyses aimed at understanding the prevalence of mentoring in Canada and identifying potential gaps for certain sub-groups. The sample of 2,838 young people ages 18 to 30 who responded to the survey broadly show similarity to the national population of young people across Canada in terms of age distribution, gender identity, and province of residence.

In total, 1,490 (55.8 per cent) respondents said they had access to any mentor (across ages 6 to 18). Of these who had a mentor, 455 said they had a formal mentor, which approximates to 16.0 per cent of the entire sample. Given the higher prevalence of mentoring overall, compared to formal mentoring specifically, it is likely that statistical tests relating to mentoring overall (any mentor) are more robust.

Access to Mentoring may be Higher Among Some Sub-groups

While access to mentoring was prevalent among more than half of survey respondents, evidence suggests that access varies significantly among different sub-groups.

- Individuals who identify as Indigenous, non-white ethnocultural identity, transgender, trans, or within the trans-umbrella, those who had a disability (in terms of function not professional diagnosis), and those who had faced one or more risk factors during youth may be more likely to have access to mentoring (**See Figure 4**).
- Additionally, results suggested that youth who had one or more risk factors may be more likely to initiate mentoring themselves ($OR = 1.53, p=0.01$). Other demographic groups with higher access to mentoring showed little evidence of being more or less likely to initiate mentoring.

Overall, while these results show an interesting pattern, it should be cautioned that this survey is cross-sectional. Indication of statistical associations only suggest correlation and not causation. For instance, it is possible that young people from different sub-groups may have a higher need for mentoring and thus may be more likely to seek or access mentoring – this point is expanded on below.

Unmet Needs of Mentoring are also Higher among Sub-groups

Results of our preliminary analysis suggest that many of the same groups which show higher access to mentoring may indeed be more likely to have unmet needs.

- In particular, young people who identify as LGBTQ2S+, had a disability, and had one or more risk factors during youth showed strong statistical evidence of being more likely to have unmet needs in fully adjusted multivariate models (**See Figure 4**).
- Other factors like Indigenous identity and gender identity (women compared to men) also showed statistical significance of having higher likelihood of unmet needs in univariate analyses (**Table 4**).

Furthermore, despite having access to mentoring, many young people reported having unmet needs and facing barriers to access. Among those who had a mentor, 62.0 per cent said they still had unmet needs. Specifically, the most common barriers to mentoring were related to not knowing how to find a mentor, not understanding the value of a mentor, and not having relevant programs available to youth (**See Figure 5**). These barriers were reported similarly across different sub-groups. Overall, these results suggest it is possible that while several sub-groups may have access to mentors, they face gaps in accessing *the right* mentor.

Mentoring is Associated with Many Positive Outcomes

Finally, preliminary analysis of the youth survey suggest access to mentoring is associated with several positive outcomes, some of which were also reiterated by youth participants in the qualitative interviews.

In the survey analysis, multivariate models – adjusted for key demographic characteristics which reduce the bias of confounding factors – were used to assess the effect of having access to mentoring. Results showed strong evidence of mentoring (access to any mentor and access to formal mentoring) being significantly associated with positive self-reported mental health and a stronger sense of belonging to one's local community (**See Table 6**). Other outcomes like completing high school, pursuing further education after high school, and currently being non-NEET (i.e. currently studying and/ or working) were also significantly more likely among those who had access to any mentor than those who did not (OR >1, p<0.05) in fully adjusted models.

Young people who had access to a mentor showed strong evidence of having served as mentors themselves and having an interest in mentoring in the future (**See Table 6**). Access to a formal mentor was also associated with a higher likelihood of having experienced one or more risky life events after age 18 (OR =1.97, p<0.001). It is possible young people who have access to formal mentoring programs were more likely to experience other vulnerabilities – thus, we should not

assume that this finding indicates that mentoring itself caused young people to experience risky life events.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Findings from the qualitative interviews suggest several actionable items that can be used to inform program providers as they strive to improve access to and quality of youth mentoring in Canada. Findings indicate that more work can be done to raise awareness of mentoring among young people, especially newcomers to Canada. Mentoring may be commonly misconstrued with other relationships and services like guidance counselling and therapy. There is an opportunity to engage young people in raising awareness of mentoring by inventing a new term or creating introductory videos.

Some parents may discourage their children from participating in mentoring opportunities. To reach these young people, it is necessary to overcome negative parental perceptions about help-seeking and extra-familial influences. Some of these views may be culturally-specific.

There is demand for mentoring programs that are universally available to all students. A universal approach makes mentoring more equitable and accessible while reducing stigma and normalizing mentoring relationships.

It is important to recognize that identity is complex and that some young people will be resistant to programs that target specific sub-groups of youth, which may feel like their identity is being exposed or imposed upon them. Indigenous ways of learning, including on-the-land programming, can benefit all young people, not just those who are Indigenous. Cultural competence is necessary among all mentors.

Young people want support in finding mentors and forming relationships, but they do not want to feel as though mentoring programs are overly structured, formal, or fake. They value flexibility and a “light touch” approach. Mentors must be genuine with their mentees. Young people may question mentors’ motives. Transactional, obligatory relationships are not welcomed. Young people do not want to feel like a burden. Mentees want the chance to lead and teach their mentors too sometimes and to know that they are having a positive influence on their mentor’s life.

Preferences for mentor-mentee matching are personal. Some youth prefer matches who are similar to them, while others appreciate mentors who are different. Youth are interested in actively participating in the process of choosing a mentor.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

To date, the analysis of survey results presented in this report remains preliminary. Many demographic variables were recoded into binary categories to help facilitate the development of statistical models. In many cases, these categorizes generalize the results for the whole group, whereas in reality, sub-groups within those categories may have very different experiences. After assessing the feasibility of cutting the data into small groups, further analysis may help to explore the experiences of various sub-groups. In addition, while key characteristic like age, gender, and province of residence are largely similar to the Canadian population, extrapolating the results to the entire youth population in Canada may not be suitable.

Importantly, the preliminary analyses presented in this report are based on a cross-sectional survey of young people at one time. Respondents are in many cases retrospectively describing their experiences during youth and adolescence (ages 6 to 18), which may be prone to recall bias. This is also true of participants in the qualitative interviews.

In addition, statistical associations made with having access to a mentor are only correlative associations. They do not assess whether mentoring *causes* or *leads* to young people having better outcomes. While we have tried our best to control for several demographic factors and used multivariate models in most places to help reduce the bias of confounding effects, it is possible that other life experiences and factors associated with access to mentoring may be influencing the results. Overall, caution should be used when interpreting the associations made with mentoring. However, it is encouraging to note that participants in the qualitative interviews shared positive perceptions about the influence of mentoring in their lives, which does serve to triangulate the positive survey findings in this area.

Finally, although the sample of respondents was nationally representative across provinces, it included a very small number of respondents from the Territories ($n=10$). This means our analyses do not adequately include experiences and input from people living in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. Several efforts were made to engage respondents from the Territories using an open link – these included media campaigns, intensive outreach to youth development programs, services, and government stakeholders at multiple levels, and respondent-driven approaches. Despite these efforts, our final sample of youth living in Territories and Inuit Nunangat was $n=25$. Including the voices of Northern young people, and their experiences is a priority for MENTOR Canada, and will be a focus of future research and engagement.

NEXT STEPS

Implications for research

SRDC will support MENTOR Canada and other project stakeholders to develop an understanding with respect to data sharing in the short and long-term. SRDC will hold any data related to the *State of Mentoring* research project until a data sharing arrangement is reached, up to five years from its collection. SRDC will transfer the survey dataset to the Canadian Centre for Mentoring Research for storage and management of access by academics and other qualified research, for future studies.

The data shared by people aged 18-30 in the survey and through qualitative interviews is rich and cannot be explored fully in this study. Survey data include in-depth demographic information as well as outcomes related to educational attainment, employment status, social capital, and mental wellbeing. For example, the dataset includes gender identity, trans identity, and sexual orientation: it is the only nationally representative sample for this age group that includes these identities alongside human capital and health-related outcomes simultaneously. Further analyses can and should be performed exploring relationships between identities, mentoring, and important outcomes for people in emerging adulthood.

Although the data are rich, further research is needed to **Map the Gap** in mentoring programs and services for youth living in the North. Capturing northern youth voices, experiences, and their perspectives in terms of dimensions of high quality mentoring relationships is a priority/focus area for future research by MENTOR Canada. MENTOR Canada is building networks with programs, organizations, and communities across the Territories and will work with Northern partners to co-design an approach to **Mapping the Gap and Capturing the Landscape** in these contexts.

Sharing results

Throughout this study, MENTOR Canada has hosted a series of webinars sharing preliminary findings across this and other streams of data collection. MENTOR Canada is working to build an open-source dashboard to share results from the youth survey with youth and other stakeholders. The youth Research Advisory Committee members have provided key input with respect to data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings – we will continue to work with youth, youth serving organizations, and youth-led networks to explore how the information and our findings are useful to improving access to mentoring for all youth in Canada.

Implications for policy and practice

We heard that youth have overwhelmingly positive experiences with mentoring when they have access to the right kind of mentors. Youth from groups facing structural inequities and discrimination may have access to mentoring programs and services, however the majority of young people report having unmet needs with respect to mentoring and the supports mentoring provides. Barriers to mentoring need further exploration – particularly for Indigenous and racialized youth, trans youth, LBGTQ2S+ youth, youth with disabilities, and youth reporting adverse early-life experiences. We will work with network members, youth representatives, and organizations working with youth from diverse backgrounds to build a relevant, responsive, and credible evidence base related to mentoring, and set of recommendations about how to address the gaps in programs/services identified.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE YOUTH INTERVIEWS

Defining mentorship across cultures and context, ages and stages of life

The meaning of mentoring

- A mentor takes a mentee under their wing; shows a mentee the ropes; is a sounding board; joins a mentee on the mentee's personal journey; is a role model; acts as a connector; a networker; is accessible and available; has a genuine willingness to help with no ulterior motive.
- A mentor truly gets to know their mentee; guides, helps, supports, encourages, motivates; shares knowledge; advocates; listens; leads by example.
- A mentoring relationship is personal; long-term; intentional; applies to all aspects of life; non-judgemental; hands-on; reciprocal and bi-directional; led by the mentee, not the mentor.
- Young people can help identify a new, more welcoming term for 'mentor' like touchpoint, connection, friend.

Cultural and contextual considerations

- Parents may be considered mentors; mentors external to the family may be discouraged; help-seeking may be stigmatized; culture shapes the ways adults and young people relate to one another.
- Young people do not want to be assigned an identity and put into a culturally-specific program; young people are keen to learn culture and language from their mentors, whether or not they share the same culture.
- Mentoring is consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing; mentors must be culturally competent; acknowledge lived experiences of racism, intergenerational trauma.

Barriers and facilitators of having access to a mentor

Awareness of mentoring

- Young people may not become aware of mentoring until their teens; may be mentored without realizing it.
- Young people may think mentoring is comparable to daycare/babysitting, tutoring, guidance counselling, or therapy; or that mentoring is only for certain types of people who are either excelling or struggling.
- Newcomers/their parents/guardians may not be aware or face language barriers.
- Young people suggest advertising mentoring through creation of a central information hub; religious or cultural centres, settlement offices; libraries, YMCAs, community centres, government websites, buses and subways, assemblies at school; and introductory YouTube videos.

Interest in having a mentor

- Many young people are interested in having a mentor, especially during times of transition.
- Some young people are hesitant to have a mentor because they are suspicious of motives; weary of transactional relationships; averse to authority figures; or experiencing stigma or shame around help-seeking.
- Young people may be particularly hesitant to accept mentoring from a teacher.
- Some parents may not consider mentoring for their child because they value self-reliance; prefer to be the only influence in their child's life; think external mentoring is a negative reflection on their own parenting.

Facilitators to accessing mentoring

- To meet a mentor, young people may prefer a ‘light touch’ introductory approach, based around a group activity; personalized outreach through small gestures is appreciated; academic-focused mentoring may eventually lead to a more holistic mentoring relationship; reaching out to parents/guardians first fosters trust; a universal approach may reduce stigma and normalize mentoring.
- School is emphasized as an ideal place for mentoring relationships to form because it is accessible; young people may meet mentors through faith-based communities and community volunteering initiatives; young people are open to the idea of virtual mentoring.

Barriers to accessing mentoring

- There is a shortage of mentors, including male mentors and mentors with specific qualifications or expertise; language barriers; cost; age-cut offs; transportation is an issue in small communities; time constraints are a reality for mentors and mentees; parents/guardians may not be available to supervise or bring a child to extra-curricular activities where mentoring takes place; concerns about appropriate boundaries and ‘stranger danger’ may be a deterrent; young people in crisis may not be able to participate in mentoring.

Dynamics of mentoring relationships

The focus of mentoring relationships

- Professional development; career guidance; networking; financial guidance; academic help; social skills; relationships; emotional support; adapting to a disability; a break; navigating times of transition; staying out of trouble; finding the right path; exploring identity; language and culture; settlement; teaching one another; just spending time together; sharing food; cultural activities.

Matching mentors and mentees

- Factors that could be relevant to a mentor-mentee match include language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, career/field/program of study, disability, newcomer status, passions and interests, coming from the same local community; and more generally, “*background*”.
- Some young people prefer older mentors with life experience, some prefer younger mentors who are more relatable. Histories of trauma, bias, discrimination and racism may influence preferences for a match.
- Mentors who are similar to mentees offer a success story and shared values. At the same time, mentors who are different are appreciated as learning and growth opportunities.
- Young people want to be engaged in the process of choosing a mentor; they want freedom to switch a mentor if needed; when discussing mentor preferences, confidentiality is important.

Qualities of an ideal mentor

- Young people value a range of qualities in a mentor, relating to a mentor’s personal attributes, what a mentor knows, how a mentor acts, and how a mentor makes a mentee feel. Young people want mentors to validate their feelings; maintain boundaries; create safe spaces; enjoy their mentee’s company, have fun; speak to their mentee as an equal; reach out to mentees and foster two-sided interactions; be non-judgemental.

Features of an ideal mentoring relationship

- Mentoring should be softer, lighter, easy going, dynamic, and fluid; young people have different ideas about how frequent mentors and mentees should meet and where; young people want mentors to be supported too.

Outcomes associated with mentoring

- Mentorship can change mindsets; foster personal growth; increase confidence; push young people to reach their potential; inspire, motivate; improve social skills; increase help-seeking; help newcomers settle; lead to better decisions; give young people lessons and tools to carry with them throughout their lives.
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APPENDIX B: REFERENCES

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