

Evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire

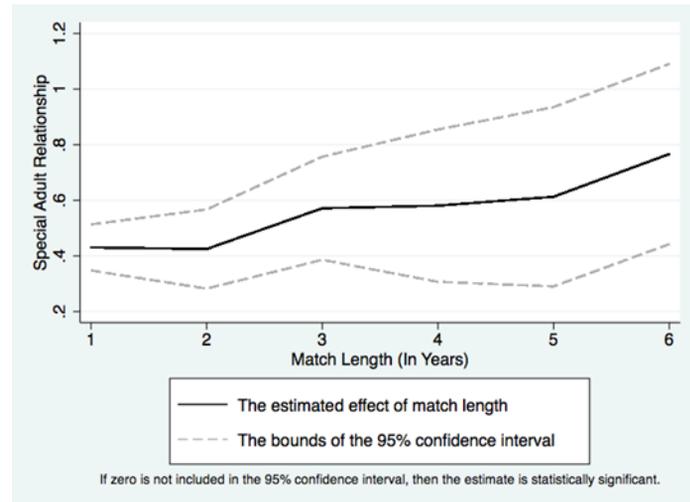
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Introduction

Big Brothers and Big Sisters (BBBS) of Orange County and the Inland Empire was founded with the goal of improving outcomes of children by providing professionally trained adult mentors. Such a program entails substantial costs, including identifying, training, and matching qualified mentors, the time of the mentors, and general operational costs. There is, at this point, limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of the BBBS program. It is of interest to practitioners and funders of the program, and others like it, to study the relationship between BBBS participation and measures of youth success in order to determine whether the program is achieving its goals.

Key findings

- Several significant associations are observed between measures of youth success and a child's assignment to a mentor that lasts an additional year. The largest associations are for social acceptance, scholastic competence, parental trust, having a special adult relationship (i.e., the child has a non-parental adult in their life who they look up to, and who cares about their wellbeing), and risk behavior.
- For example, a one-year increase in match length is associated with a 13 percent increase in special adult relationship. (See table.) Conversely, a one-year increase in match length is associated with a 6 percent increase in risk behavior (being late for school.)
- There isn't random assignment to either the program or to match length. For that reason, estimates could be biased and, therefore, may be more descriptive than causal. Random assignment could be used to provide more reliable estimates of the true effect (i.e., the causal effect).



Recommendations

- Conduct an experiment that randomly assigns new participants either to a waitlist (for a predetermined amount of time) or to a mentor. Random variation in treatment will allow BBBS to identify the causal relationship between match length and outcomes as measured by the Youth Outcome Survey.
- Collect high school graduation and college attendance information for individuals who have dropped out of BBBS. This data will allow BBBS to calculate the high school graduation and college attendance probabilities for BBBS participants as a whole and not just for the individuals who complete the program.
- Reach out to the representative school districts and request information for non-BBBS participants to create a control group against which to measure the effect of BBBS participation on high school graduation and college attendance.

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