



Initial motives and organizational context enabling female mentors' engagement in formal mentoring – A qualitative study from the mentors' perspective

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring aimed at supporting young people and their development shows promising results, but its delivery is threatened by the difficulty of recruiting sufficient numbers of mentors and keeping them engaged over time. The aim of this study was to help overcome this problem by examining female mentors' motives for engaging in formal voluntary mentoring of young women, and exploring how organizations can facilitate these mentors' satisfaction in staying engaged over time. Based on qualitative interviews with 12 mentors in a Swedish non-governmental organization, the Girls Zone, we show six categories of mentor motives related to initial motivation for engagement: self-interested reasons, empowering women, being a responsible citizen, sense of compassion, self-awareness, and longing for meaningfulness. In addition, we show five categories related to the organizational work of satisfying mentors: a win-win relationship, a feeling of ambivalence despite clear responsibilities and contributions, customized support and guidance, a caring organizational identity, and a commitment to pursue with feelings of duty and emotional connection. Using self-determination theory as the framework to guide our understanding of the findings, we conclude that mentors' motivations for engaging as mentors are linked to the fulfillment of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Practical recommendations are offered in light of the findings.

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1. Introduction

In order to experience healthy development, people have a need for belonging, relatedness, and social interaction with family, friends, and the community (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Young people have a particular need for adults in their growth process to establish a healthy development (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Formal mentoring programs constitute a public health intervention aimed at establishing relatedness and involving adults in young people's development, and promising results have been reported (Larsson, Pettersson, Skoog, & Eriksson, 2016). Mentoring organizations often have difficulties recruiting and retaining mentors (Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 2013), resulting in the number of young people requesting mentors exceeding the supply (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). Waiting times as long as two years can occur (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, 2009). Strategies are clearly needed to develop adults' involvement in young people's healthy development, to close the mentoring gap. In this process, a deeper understanding of

motivational factors for engagement from the mentor's perspective is of central importance (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). This information can be used to facilitate mentor recruitment, mentor satisfaction, and commitment to mentoring in the future (Stukas & Tanti, 2005). Motivations can be suitably examined with qualitative techniques in a context where adults choose to become involved and to continue engaging over time. Although mentors play unique roles in the mentor-protégé relationship and are necessary for mentoring to take place, remarkably few studies have focused on the mentor perspective. The current study was developed against this backdrop. We examined motivations among female mentors aged 24–40 years in a community-based mentoring (CBM) program organized by the Girls Zone, a Swedish non-governmental organization. The Girls Zone arranges one-year relationships between protégés (young women aged 12–25) and female mentors. The mentor and protégé are matched only with regard to age, with a ten-year difference within each dyad. The stated goals of the program are to prevent mental health problems, promote equality, and prevent drug abuse by strengthening young women's self-esteem, self-confidence, and trust (The Girls Zone, 2013). Mentors engage in mentorship as volunteers, without rewards, and are welcome regardless of their formal educational level.

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The organization recommends that the dyads meet for about one and a half hours every two weeks for one year.

The Girls Zone is of particular interest, because in sharp contrast to many other mentoring organizations (Stukas et al., 2013) it has a surplus of potential mentors — a line of female mentors waiting to be trained and matched with a female protégé. Moreover, the female mentors stay in the organization for at least a year, which is the recommended minimal duration of mentor relationships (Rhodes, Lowe, Litchfield, & Walsh-Samp, 2008). The apparent high intrinsic motivation behind being a mentor and remaining in the Girls Zone suggests that the mentors experience benefits, likely including satisfaction in the mentoring role. We aimed to provide deeper understanding of young adult women's motives to begin mentoring for young women in a formal mentoring program and to continue their engagement over time. We used self-determination theory (SDT) as a theoretical framework to guide our understanding of underlying motivations among mentors. In a SDT perspective, it is these motivations which bring about the high level of engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

1.1. Self-determination theory as a theoretical framework

SDT is a meta theory of human motivation which states that people have three basic psychological needs, varying in degree of self-determination: autonomy (experiencing choice and volition of one's own actions), competence (experiencing success in challenging tasks and influencing one's desired outcomes), and relatedness (experiencing connection, mutual respect, caring, and reliance in relationships with others) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These three psychological needs promote a willingness among people to explore and engage in contexts that are assumed to nurture their psychological needs. This facilitates people's self-motivation and effective functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Hence, one of the key questions for scholars in the field of SDT is to examine how social contexts facilitate or undermine people's experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which in turn is linked to their motivation and engagement.

SDT distinguishes between two different kinds of human motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic motivation emerges spontaneously from the fulfillment of basic psychological needs within people themselves, and exists in the relations between individuals and activities. High intrinsic motivation to perform a behavior increases the likelihood that the target behavior will be repeated. Extrinsic motivation, conversely, refers to doing something because it leads to a preferable outcome, or an external reward such as money. SDT has previously been used to examine motivational factors among volunteers and has received empirical support as a model of volunteer satisfaction (e.g., Bidee et al., 2013; Oostlander, Güntert, & Wehner, 2014). However, to our knowledge, it has never been used to study motivation among mentors engaged in mentoring young people.

1.2. Motives to engage as a mentor

Although far from exhaustive, previous studies have revealed important insights into mentors' motivations, including reasons for becoming and enjoying being a mentor. First, most mentors mention more than one motivation to engage as a mentor (Stukas, Daly, & Clary, 2006), and they choose to become mentors for a variety of reasons (Gehrke, Jenkins, Miskovetz, & Wray, 2006). Mentors who perceive their mentoring relationships as motivated by internal motivations are more positive than those who perceive external motivations, and their engagement is more likely to be long-term (Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005).

In a study by Strapp et al. (2014), mentors in junior- or senior-age school-based mentoring (SBM) reported motives including *gaining hands-on experience and experiencing the gratification that comes from watching a mentee grow and develop*. According to SDT, these motives can be related to the need for autonomy. A quantitative study conducted

by Caldarella, Gomm, Shatzer, and Wall (2010) examined motives among school-based mentors (aged 21 years and over). The need for autonomy was present in motives such as *career enhancement*, the need for competence in motives such as *seeking learning experiences to better understand themselves and others*, and the need for relatedness in *humanitarian concerns*.

Previous research has examined motives among volunteer mentors in school-based settings (e.g., Caldarella et al., 2010; Strapp et al., 2014). However, CBM programs face challenges different from SBM programs in terms of factors including activities, outcomes, and mentor characteristics. Mentors in CBM are involved for longer periods of time and experience more pressure to determine activities, making recruitment of mentors more difficult (Herrera & Karcher, 2013). In addition, SBM more often attracts older or youth mentors whereas CBM more often attracts those aged 22–49 (Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000). Motives among CBM mentors are less well-known. Thus, there is a need for research into both initial motives and factors that influence mentors to uphold their commitment (Stukas et al., 2013). Volunteering research has shown that motives differ between individuals depending on gender, mission, target group, and context (Wilson, 2012). Based on these facts, there is a clear need to identify motives for mentoring specifically among CBM female mentors engaging in positive development among young women, but there is little current evidence to answer this question.

A study of community-based mentors working with disadvantaged young people mentioned reasons for being a mentor such as *giving back to the community* and *strengthening social relations* (Evans, 2005). According to SDT, these motives can be understood as a need for relatedness among mentors. Moreover, the need for competence may be seen in the same study in the reported motive *gaining career experience*. A survey of 2000 mentors conducted in 2005 by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership reported five motives in the following order from most frequent to least frequent: 1) to help young people succeed, 2) to make a difference in someone's life, 3) to give back to the community, 4) religious and spiritual reasons, and 5) having been helped by someone else when young (O'Connor, 2006).

Gender differences in mentor engagement are noteworthy. Women have been found to be motivated by opportunities for self-esteem enhancement, value expression (Stukas et al., 2013), and personal gratification (Gehrke et al., 2006). Young female mentors (aged 18–25) volunteer as mentors for reasons including wanting to be a positive influence for adolescent girls (Dowd, Harden, & Beauchamp, 2015), which can be interpreted both as a need for relatedness and a need for competence, based on their expertise as women who had previously experienced being teenagers.

Although initial motives are important in the recruitment process of engaging mentors, they differ from those which influence retention (Stukas & Tanti, 2005). Once mentors have been recruited, they are affected by contextual effects such as the organizational structure. Thus, it is crucial to get a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual motivations and organizational characteristics in order to determine how these promote mentor satisfaction and hence consolidate mentors' intentions to continue their engagement. This information can be used to understand motivation at both the individual and the organizational level.

1.3. Organizational context influencing motivation among mentors

Experience and level of satisfaction among mentors differ depending on the mission and the organization's context, including program infrastructure, design, practices, and ways of managing the mentors (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Stukas & Tanti, 2005). Thus, there is a need for research into the relationship between the organizational context and satisfaction in mentoring programs (Kulik & Megidna, 2011; Stukas et al., 2013). What kind of approach in the

organization's work is most likely to lead to mentors being satisfied and thus continuing their engagement?

The MENTOR publication *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (Garringer, Kupersmidt, Rhodes, Stelter, & Tai, 2015) covers six areas for mentoring organizations to consider in creating and sustaining a setting which promotes mentors' satisfaction and motivation: (a) recruitment, (b) screening, (c) training, (d) matching, (e) monitoring and support, and (f) closure. First, in the recruitment process, communication strategies are central. To recruit appropriate mentors, the degree of identification with the target group and the mission seems to be of importance (Stukas & Tanti, 2005). To satisfy mentors in their mentoring experience, their perceived benefits need to match their initial motivations (Caldarella et al., 2010). The pre-match period, involving preparation for the relationship, is a time when it is important to address mentor motivation and when motivations among mentors are most influential (Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2013).

Scholars agree that initial training and ongoing support are important to mentors; these are sometimes mentioned as key strategies for increasing retention (Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2013), as shown among young female mentors (Dowd et al., 2015). Such strategies can create satisfied and motivated mentors who receive guidance in establishing and building close, caring, longer-term relationships and better outcomes for protégés (DuBois et al., 2011; Martin & Sifers, 2012; Spencer, 2007).

During initial training, which should preferably last at least 6 h (Herrera et al., 2000), mentors can learn and build skills related to developing, maintaining, and managing relationships, and receive clear information on what is expected of mentors in terms of the time and emotional commitment. This may help mentors personally to clarify their roles and responsibilities and to understand the expectations of all parties (Evans, 2005) as well as the level of support that can be expected and ways to access that support (Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Spencer, 2007). Taken together, this may provide autonomous motivation (Stone, Deci, & Ryan, 2009) and diminish the occurrence of prematurely terminated relationships caused by unclear expectations among mentors and inadequate agency support (Karcher et al., 2005; Spencer, 2007). Further, the quality of interaction with the mentor activity coordinator has been shown to be correlated with psychological empowerment (sense of accomplishment, social mission, and personal growth) among women mentors, which will increase their motivation to continue (Kulik & Megidna, 2011).

To summarize, mentoring organizations must be aware of the challenges that mentors face during the mentoring relationship. To facilitate the situation of a mentor, the organization has a responsibility to prepare and support the mentor during their ongoing engagement.

According to our review of the literature, SDT has not previously been used to understand and gain more knowledge about the motivation of mentors, but we consider that its use can bring us deeper knowledge. A gender perspective can also affect our understanding of mentors' motivation.

1.4. The importance of acknowledging gender in mentoring relationships

Mentoring practices are most effective when they are sensitive to individual differences and contextual factors, such as gender (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sánchez, 2006). Thus, gender-specific studies in mentoring are needed, as mentoring may work differently for boys and girls (Rhodes et al., 2008). There is some indication that boys like activity-based mentoring more than girls (Liang, Bogat, & Duffy, 2013) and that the amount of time needed for satisfactory mentoring is not as important among boys as it is among girls (Rhodes et al., 2008). There is evidence that the nature and quality of the mentoring relationship are significant for girls (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). Girls prefer relationships more characterized by intimate connections (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Deutsch, Wiggins, Henneberger, & Lawrence, 2013; Liang et al., 2002, 2013; Spencer & Liang, 2009), in

order to contribute to their psychological empowerment (Kulik & Megidna, 2011). This requires regular meetings over time, continuing for at least one year (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2008). Moreover, mentoring programs specifically for young women have been designed in response to theories on gender and young women's psychological health and development, indicating women's particular psychosocial needs and ways of relating (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Jordan, 2001). As girls and boys seem to have different preferences for their mentoring relationships, it is reasonable to assume that female mentors also have particular needs in the mentoring program.

1.5. The current study

As recruiting mentors is becoming increasingly challenging in CBM programs, there is a need for deeper knowledge of initial motives to engage as a mentor in formal mentoring and the creation of optimally stimulating climates which result in positive outcomes such as mentor retention. The number of mentoring programs are growing around the world (DuBois & Karcher, 2013), with young people requesting mentors exceeding the supply (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). At the same time, there is an indication that people in advanced industrial societies increasingly prefer more episodic forms of volunteering, short in duration and shorn of commitment (Wilson, 2012). This can be seen as negative and contradict the development of long-lasting mentoring relationships.

Qualitative methods can produce detailed insight and understanding of mentors' motives towards engagement with young women to establish healthy development. There is little knowledge of why female young adults engage, especially in mentoring other young women and girls, and hence a lack of information and deeper understanding about the nature of specific female motives and differences between the motives. Moreover, the best practice of *what to do* may be clear (Garringer et al., 2015), but the question of *how to do it* is less known. Accordingly, the question is how we can facilitate female formal mentoring relationships and create conditions for these relationships to evolve and become successful, as seen from the female mentor's perspective.

In this study, we define a formal mentoring relationship as a one-year relationship between two people aged ten years apart, relying on use of community volunteers as mentors in an organization. A previous study (Larsson et al., 2016) explored young female protégés' own experiences of the formal mentoring relationship process. As the current study includes experience from the mentor perspective, these two studies together generate an overall understanding of how mentoring programs can be designed and developed to be especially adapted to the needs of women. We base the current study on a successful case, the Girls Zone. This organization involves self-initiated female mentors, with a majority staying in the organization for at least one year. We use this organization as a learning case, and make a purposive sampling of mentors in order to understand initial motives and what is extraordinary and successful in this organization.

The aim of this study was to examine young women's motives to engage as mentors in a CBM, in order to reach a deeper understanding of their motives and what makes them satisfied in their mentoring relationships. The specific research questions were: (1) What are the female volunteers' motives to become engaged as mentors? and (2) What makes the female volunteers stay in the organization and continue their engagement? We used SDT as a guide to understanding the motivation expressed by the mentors and the factors that made them remain engaged with the organization and the mentoring process over time.

2. Method

This study had an explorative design, and used qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The interviews with female mentors were part of a larger study of the Girls Zone mentoring

program; one other study in this project has already been published (Larsson et al., 2016). That study explored the characteristics of the female protégés attracted to the mentoring program in terms of demographic and psychological characteristics, and how the relationship develops between the protégés and the mentors.

2.1. Participants and procedure

A purposive criterion sampling was chosen (Patton, 2015). All mentors within the Girls Zone organization who were engaged as mentors during 2011 were asked to participate in an individual interview during autumn 2011. The program manager sent e-mails to the mentors, including information written by the research group. Of the 46 mentors invited to participate, 12 agreed and were interviewed (26% of the target sample). The participants varied in terms of the number of mentoring relationships they had engaged in (1–3), the duration of their mentoring experiences (3–30 months), and their age (24–40 years). Most of the participants (58%) were engaged in or had completed studies at the high school or university level; the remaining participants' level of education was not reported. All study participants had ongoing mentoring relationships at the time of the interview.

Two of the authors conducted six individual semi-structured interviews each. The interviews focused on the mentors themselves, their motives for volunteering as mentors (Why did you begin your engagement as a mentor?), and the specific mentoring program (What kind of support do you receive as a mentor?). All interviews were tape recorded after approval from the mentors. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 min, and were conducted at a time and place suitable for the mentors. The participants were assigned fictitious names by which they are referred to in this article. All mentors who participated in the study received a movie ticket as an incentive. Verbal informed consent was obtained from the mentors before the interviews and after they had received information both in verbal and in written form. The study was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board at (removed for masked review).

2.2. Qualitative analysis

Our analysis of the interview data was inspired by the technique of inductive qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), with the difference that we did not create themes in the analysis. The two authors who performed the interviews transcribed the interviews verbatim. Before applying the content analysis, we read through the transcribed interviews. Next, we used triangulating analysis, meaning that initially two persons analyzed the same interview (Patton, 2015). We identified meaning units in accordance with the study aim, each consisting of a constellation of words relating to the same central

meaning (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). These were condensed with descriptions close to the text, and each condensed meaning unit was labeled with a code. Differences and similarities of the codes were compared, and all codes were sorted into subcategories and categories with the same content (Table 1). Following this, the rest of the interviews were analyzed by one of the authors. New codes that emerged were discussed within the research team until consensus was reached. In this article, the categories are sorted according to the three basic needs identified in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000): autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Several steps were included in the analysis to ensure trustworthiness (Patton, 2015), including triangulating analysis and peer-examination (i.e. a discussion of the process and findings with impartial colleagues).

3. Results

The results are described on the basis of two questions: (1) What are the female volunteers' motives for becoming engaged as mentors? and (2) What makes the female volunteers stay in the organization and continue their engagement? The results are presented on the basis of a time perspective, and are summarized in Fig. 1. The first question relates to the time before the female mentors were engaged in the organization, and the second question to the time period when they were acting as mentors in the organization. The interviewees' motives fell into six categories regarding the first question, and five regarding the second. Since SDT was used to interpret the results, the categories were sorted based on the three psychological needs identified by this theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It should be noted that some of the categories may be considered to relate to more than one of these three needs, but the way we present the results is based on our interpretation and analysis of the interviews.

3.1. What are the female volunteers' motives for becoming engaged as mentors?

Results from the interviews are presented below to address the first question. In line with SDT, the results are understood and presented in terms of the three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Motives related to all three needs were mentioned by the mentors.

3.1.1. Autonomy

Three categories related to autonomy included motives such as the desire to change and improve for their own benefit, for the benefit of other people, and particularly for the benefit of their protégés.

Table 1
Example of the process of the inductive content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004); moving from the text (condensed meaning units) to the codes, sub-categories, and categories.

Condensed meaning units	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories
I would have liked to have had this chance when I was younger. (Rachel)	Previous experience of lack of support	Own experiences of difficulties while growing up	Sense of compassion
Vulnerability and loneliness that I have experienced. (Jules)	Previous experience of loneliness		
I was a little lost when I was a teenager, and even when I was a little older, in my twenties. (Leila)	Previous experience of confusion		
My mom has always been such a good role model for me, and it was such a great privilege for me when I was younger. (Celine)	Mom as a role model	Own positive experiences of support	
I know myself how nice it was at that age when someone just listened to me. (Anna)	Previous experience of support	A positive belief in mentoring as a method	Self-awareness
I've always thought it was important to meet older people who inspire me. (Anna)	A good thing for younger people to meet older people		
When I read the description of the job on the internet I really felt like this was exactly what I wanted to do. It was written for me. (Rachel)	An attractive mission		
I would like to share experiences. (Anna)	Conveying one's own experience	Self-confidence in being a woman	
Based on evidence, I can say that it will get better; actually, you can manage to get through quite a lot. (Celine)	Life gets better		
Setbacks make you stronger. (Danela)	Being strengthened by adversity		

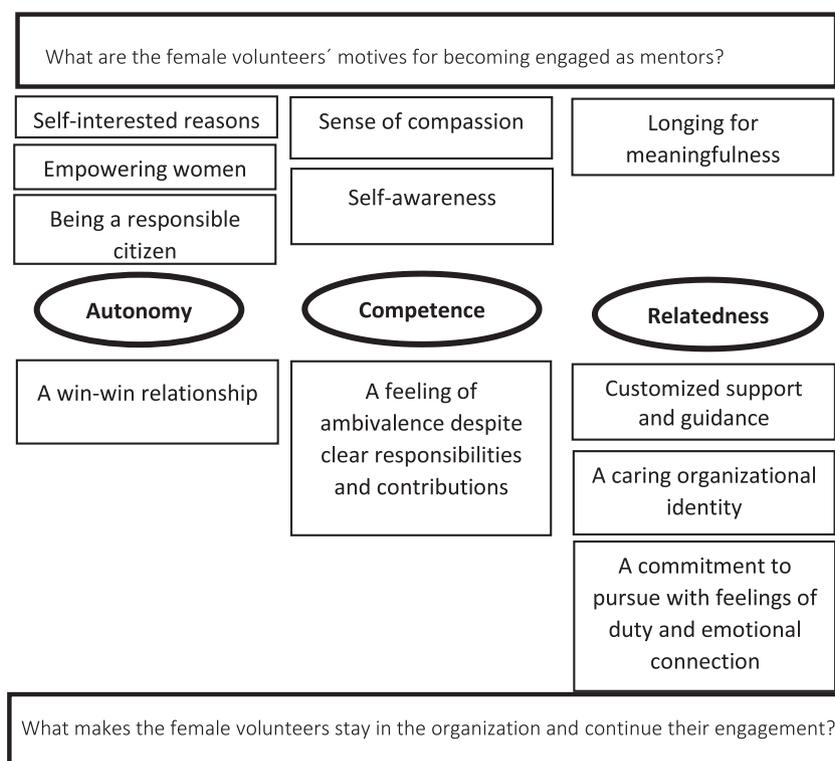


Fig. 1. Findings from the analyses, according to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

3.1.1.1. Self-interested reasons. The engagement was seen as benefiting the mentors themselves, as it could provide significant experience relevant to professional life and improve their opportunities to pursue careers such as becoming a psychologist. The mentors also described the engagement as an alternative way to achieve their dreams of working with social issues.

I want to work with young people within schools to inform, educate, and talk about what this is, actually the things going on here in the Girls Zone. So that's a big part of why I do this; it's certainly a dream that I've had. But I haven't yet been able to work in this field as a professional. (Sophie)

3.1.1.2. Empowering women. The mentoring target of supporting and helping young girls was an attractive one. The mentors expressed their knowledge of the vulnerability of young girls in society in terms of ideals, pressure, exposure, and huge demands. They felt strong empathy and solidarity with young girls, and wanted to change and improve life among this group.

There seem to be so many young girls who don't have a female role model at all, so I was trying to do this in combination with a wish to give someone a female role model and do something good, and then I contacted the Girls Zone. I wanted to do something for my sisters in society. (Celine)

The mentors also mentioned their interest in gender issues. They expressed a hope that their engagement as mentors would lead to an improvement in the situation of women in society and to increased equality between women and men.

3.1.1.3. Being a responsible citizen. Interest in social issues was well-represented among the mentors, with some having been previously engaged as volunteers and some showing an increased community involvement in recent years, sometimes because of friends with voluntary engagement. Working as a mentor was attractive in itself, because

it could improve the situation for others and help alleviate the lack of non-judgmental relationships in society. They felt a responsibility as human beings to influence and improve society.

3.1.2. Competence

The mentors considered their life experiences to have given them skills that would be valuable in a relationship with a protégé. This was partly because they were women with life experience, whether positive or negative, but also because they were fellow human beings able to share their experiences with another person.

3.1.2.1. A sense of compassion. The mentors' own experiences of the teenage years made it an attractive idea to become a mentor for young women, focusing on the young girls' mental health. They felt it was important that they had gone through their own teens, because they were able to relate to and recognize themselves in situations described by the protégés. Some mentors had experienced problems themselves, and could relate to vulnerability and loneliness while growing up.

I can't relate to the young people living in Africa, starving, and feel like I want to go there and do something, because I've never experienced starvation, but I have experienced vulnerability and loneliness, and that's probably why. (Jules)

Having experienced their own problems was however not a prerequisite for the engagement. Just being there for another human being, to hear about their life, was also significant.

One thing I thought about before I began the engagement as a mentor was, well, God, I didn't have a very difficult childhood or anything like that. But I don't think that's the only way you can be able to relate to someone else's feelings. (Danela)

The mentors had their own positive experiences of support from adults during their teenage years, and being a mentor was a chance to give something back to another young woman. At the same time, lack of support during the teenage years was mentioned as another reason

to become a mentor. These participants had felt the need for a mentor themselves, but that opportunity was not offered when they were young.

When I was younger I would have liked to have had a mentor or someone who could [...] who wouldn't have needed to give advice or be a psychologist or anything like that, but a friend as well. (Rachel)

3.1.2.2. Self-awareness. The mentors' distance from their teenage years meant that they now felt self-confidence in being a woman. They wanted to share the knowledge that many problems that occur during growing up disappear when you get older. The mentors had faith in the method of helping young girls by giving them someone older to talk to who understood adolescence, and felt that they would therefore play an important role in the young girls' lives.

I have no illusions that I can enter someone's life and control and solve everything, but I think sometimes it might help a bit if you have someone to talk to who's been a teenager and knows that it wasn't always much fun. (Celine)

3.1.3. Relatedness

The mentors mentioned two motives relevant to the need to feel related. There was an absence of meaningfulness in their time prior to engagement, and mentoring therefore met their needs. They could also receive direct feedback on their engagement.

3.1.3.1. Longing for meaningfulness. There was a feeling of dissatisfaction and unused time in the mentors' lives prior to becoming engaged in mentoring. Among other things, the mentors mentioned a heavy focus on performance, money, and material things, both in society and in their professional lives. As a result, they lacked emotional relationships and felt out of touch with reality.

I appreciate relationships very much, people, and I felt that I was missing that a little bit in my daily work. (Tiffany)

The organization's method of creating interpersonal relationships meant that the mentors had direct responses to their engagement, face-to-face, whether positive or negative. Compared to other charitable actions, such as giving money, engagement as a mentor was of more significance.

I think it's great to go out and raise money for *Save the Children* or whatever, but I felt this engagement was more about being able to work directly one to one. [...]. This lets you relate directly to those you help. It's not someone in another country or in another city. And for me it was important to have this individual relationship. (Leila)

3.2. What makes the female volunteers stay in the organization and continue their engagement?

Results from the interviews are presented below to address the second question. The mentors' narratives included several different aspects of organizational context which were important for them to feel satisfied in the role of a mentor. Categories related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness are presented.

3.2.1. Autonomy

The mentors felt that they were able to influence the engagement based on their own preferences, and that they could be themselves, resulting in personal development.

3.2.1.1. A win-win relationship. The mentors guided the protégés, and developed and formed their relationships on the basis of the needs and desires of both women. This created unique relationships, and they experienced a feeling of having choice despite the restrictions and rules established by the organization.

Here you are supposed to work in a particular way, but you can still be in charge; you can do it on your own, at your own pace, and you don't feel pressured or forced to do anything. (Sophie)

The mentoring role gave them opportunities to reflect on their own situation, leading to personal development. The conversations meant reciprocal exchange. The mentors gained perspective on their lives, learned things about themselves, and experienced a boost to their confidence.

Actually, I learn a lot from her in a way. We're both humans and have both experienced the same things, or I've experienced situations that she's in now. So there will be many worthwhile meetings, I think. (Anna)

3.2.2. Competence

The organization's way of working led to the mentors feeling they had the skills to cope with the mentoring task, but at the same time, their empathy made them question their own skills and competence.

3.2.2.1. A feeling of ambivalence despite clear responsibilities and contributions. From the beginning, the mentors felt competent to manage the engagement. The form of the engagement — just being there, listening, with no demands or pressure to perform — made them feel competent, and they described the engagement as simple. They did not have to perform a role, but could just be themselves. The mentors highlighted that the organization was clear about what was expected and how to act in the role, and expectations were discussed and clarified during initial training. The practical rules in the relationship between mentor and protégé were also clarified by a manager when the mentor and protégé met for the first time, meaning that both parts of the dyad had the same knowledge. In all, this helped the mentors to feel self-confident, mentally prepared, and able to manage the role. Moreover, they could determine the degree of responsibility.

We aren't dealing with therapist work. She doesn't come to me and ask how I'm going to solve her problems, but she comes to me and asks things and I'll listen. Actually, that's enough, and that's what we were told, it was emphasized in the initial training, we know that now as well, otherwise I think we'd probably have had some unachievable demands, but as it is, we don't. (Annie)

The mentors' narratives underlined the importance of having rules for the relationship. Initially, the mentors were really excited, and wanted to help and save these young girls; they wanted to do more than meet their protégé for an hour and a half every other week. However the organization was aware of the importance of limiting the engagement in order to diminish the risk of the mentors' becoming overwhelmed.

Especially in the beginning, you have a tendency to think you can do more. You might want to begin a mentoring relationship with another protégé via online chat as well [...] But it's very strict. It's a task you have to do, but you also have the right to be free. We give something of ourselves for no charge, actually I wouldn't accept money. That's not the point, but I'm still happy because there are rules. (Tiffany)

Despite this clarification of responsibilities, including the fact that the protégés were the responsibility of the organization rather than the mentors, the mentors found it difficult to disregard their own

feelings of responsibility for the protégés. They asked themselves whether they were doing enough as mentors. They had strong emotional and empathetic relationships with their protégés, and the feeling of being able to save these young women from their situation was still present.

Actually, I have overly-high expectations, because sometimes I still believe that I want to be able to save her as well, which is exactly what we were told not to do [...] (Annie)

A feeling of responsibility for the protégé could lead to ambivalence when the year of mentoring was over and it was time to end the relationship. The mentors were reluctant to “betray” their protégés by saying that they did not want to meet up any more. For some protégés, this might not have been their first betrayal by someone they trusted, and so the mentors felt a strong obligation to avoid their protégés’ feeling betrayed again.

3.2.3. Relatedness

Three categories could be associated with relatedness, all including the positive experience of mentors’ affinity to the organization. There was a thoughtfulness and a commitment from the organization’s side in terms of both the mentors and protégés. This created the possibility of an emotional connection between mentor and protégé that in turn led to a sense of duty among the mentors to fulfill their mission.

3.2.3.1. A caring organizational identity. The narratives highlighted the organization’s overall caring for women. Women cared for women, and the feeling of relatedness was present. The mentors described an organization which cared strongly for its mentors. There was a culture within the organization where mentors were seen and confirmed as fellow women, and they were aware of the importance of their work in the organization. The organization cared for the mentors and the mentors cared for the protégés, which was highlighted as a successful concept. The mentors felt that they were appreciated and seen as an asset for the organization.

They appreciate you anyway, and you do need that, you must feel appreciated if you’re going to be able to do this. Even if you’re not doing it for appreciation, that’s what you need in order to carry on. (Sophie)

Feelings of belonging were highlighted; the mentors never felt alone, but on the contrary felt included and a part of the organization. This created feelings of safety in cases where the mentor experienced a challenging mentoring relationship. The organization clearly demonstrated the seriousness of its efforts to support and care for young girls. There was a great enthusiasm for working with female mentoring among the program managers, which was transmitted to the mentors. Over the years, the organization had found a well-functioning professional concept, and they believed in what they did.

I didn’t know it before I became engaged, but at once I noticed that there was a warmth and a real commitment. (Annie)

3.2.3.2. Customized support and guidance. The organization was available and present both emotionally and physically, by email or phone. No matter what, mentors knew that a contact with the organization would never be responded to in a judgmental manner, but always with a positive approach. The program managers guided the mentors during their relationships. After each meeting between mentor and protégé, the organization provided tutoring individually adapted to each unique relationship. The purpose of this was partly to inform the program manager about the development of the mentoring relationship, but mainly to guide and encourage mentors who encountered challenges. It also gave the mentors an opportunity to reflect on the development of the relationship and their own experience of the engagement.

Every time I meet my protégé, I send an email describing what has happened, because that’s the only way for the organization to keep track of what we are dealing with, which isn’t so strange. Then I always get very positive feedback, and no matter what I’ve written, I get feedback on what I should do, how I should take this on, and if I have questions ... So it works extremely well. (Annie)

The regular tutoring and contact with the program manager were also individually adapted. If the mentor did not experience any complicated situations and the protégé’s health was sound, the tutorial was adapted to the mentor’s needs, and the program manager asked for contact only if the mentor experienced any problems in the relationship.

3.2.3.3. A commitment to pursue with feelings of duty and emotional connection. The mentors spoke in many ways about the satisfaction of a relationship with a protégé. They enjoyed each other’s company, and found the meetings pleasurable and fun. The direct confirmation from the protégés of the importance of their presence strengthened them; they saw that they were doing something of great significance for another human being, and a strong emotional connection arose, almost like a sibling relationship.

It’s a joy, it’s a nice feeling to see my protégé’s face when I meet her. It’s not like having children, but it’s almost like having a little sister, and it’s just a nice feeling to see her and hear how her life’s going. It’s a sort of life force. I’m proud, I feel pride. So that’s probably that, joy and pride. (Jules)

However, the engagement did not always feel positive and stimulating. Sometimes the relationships were experienced as challenging and mentally arduous, but even so, the mentors did not want to give up. On the one hand, they felt a duty to fulfill the engagement for the organization, and on the other, they felt responsible for their protégés, resulting in a feeling of duty to fulfill the one-year engagement.

You have to be there, you have to be present at least, and show that you’re out there and you’ll be happy, so you’ll be positive and happy, at the same time as you do it because you like to help and so on. It’s a kind of game. I don’t always find the meetings fun, unfortunately, I think probably not, but I feel that now I’m here, now I’m going to do this, and I want to do it because it means a lot to her ... be present, listen, and carry on. (Sophie)

4. Discussion

In this qualitative study, we attempted to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of women’s motives and the organizational context influencing women’s engagement as formal mentors, from a mentor perspective. To guide our understanding of underlying motivations among mentors, we organized the findings on the basis of the three psychological needs identified by SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Our results can contribute to understanding of the what (i.e., content) and why (i.e., process) of female mentor engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

We posed two specific questions in the study. The first was: What motivates the female volunteers to get involved as mentors? Our inductive content analyses revealed six categories of motives giving insight into why female mentors aged 24–40 chose to engage as mentors for girls ten years younger. The mentors were attracted to the engagement both because of personal interest, including career enhancement, and because of public good, especially working for benefits to young girls. They also found mentoring to be an intervention well-suited for young women, based on their own life experience during adolescence.

We chose to study the Swedish mentoring organization the Girls Zone, which provides a successful and educational case because most female mentors in this organization initiate their own engagement.

This is in contrast to the results of the MENTOR 2005 survey, which showed that half of the mentors began their engagement via a personal invitation (O'Connor, 2006). As mentoring programs continue to expand, it is important to conduct studies such as the present one; if we want more evidence-based practice, we need more practice-based evidence (Green, 2006). As there are few evidence-based training programs for volunteer mentors (Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2013), this study adds significant knowledge useful in developing mentor training programs.

What can this study tell us about how to recruit female mentors? In accordance with previous research, the findings show that these mentors engaged because they knew the importance of the intervention, they could identify with the young girls (Stukas & Tanti, 2005), and they had feelings of care towards young girls (Dowd et al., 2015). Our findings of initial motives are in accordance with previous research into motives among mentors (Evans, 2005; O'Connor, 2006). However, several of the initial motives mentioned were related to the mentors' own life experiences as women. Their own experiences during the teenage years, whether positive or negative, generated feelings of compassion for these young girls, who were relatively close to their current age. They could imagine the situation and life of a girl ten years younger. The form of the intervention, a meeting between a younger and an older woman, was expressed as something they required, both out of their previous life experiences and in their current state of life. This indicates women's special psychosocial needs and ways of relating (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Jordan, 2001), regardless of age, and may indicate that a mentoring relationship is an attractive intervention among young women as it offers the possibility to relate and share experiences. The mentors also expressed a desire to change and improve the lives of young girls and women, and considered that their life experience had given them the competence to convey strength to these young girls.

In *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (Garringer et al., 2015), the recruitment process is highlighted as one of six important aspects to consider in a mentoring relationship. In order to recruit appropriate mentors, identification with the target group and the mission seems to be of importance (Stukas & Tanti, 2005). In the recruitment process, the Girls Zone organization describes the mentoring relationship as a "sisterhood", with the mentor designated a "Big Sister" and the protégé a "Little Sister". This may generate a sense of relatedness as well as a strengthening sense of competence; that is, confidence in the ability to be a good, positive role model. The term "Big Sister" may sound more friendly, more gender-specific, and less professional than the term "Mentor". Our findings regarding the motive of empowering women suggest that the term "Big Sister" attracts women to engage as mentors. Although, the organizational context in this study is different compared to most other CBM programs, it offers a gender-specific mentoring program targeting women only aged 12–25 years and ten year older female mentors. This fact needs to be considered in relation to the transferability of the findings.

One well-used theory to examine motives among volunteers and even among mentors (e.g., Strapp et al., 2014) is the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1998). This theory argues that programs should take a functional approach to volunteer recruitment. Based on this theory and previous studies, recruitment messages may include motives such as gaining career experience and strengthening social relationships. Our results make the important addition of highlighting the prosocial and civic motivation in the recruitment process, including women's desire to relate and to increase the welfare of other women.

The second question posed in this study was: What makes the female volunteers stay in the organization and continue their engagement? The inductive content analysis revealed five categories in relation to the organizational context. Based on our results, organizations working with female mentoring can succeed in making the mentor feel autonomous, competent, and related. To achieve this and to satisfy mentors in the organization, several significant strategies

emerged in the analysis, including support, social integration, and limitations.

Previous studies have discussed the importance of initial mentor training and support (Dowd et al., 2015; Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2013). The current study adds understanding about how to act from the organizational perspective and the kind of satisfaction that mentors achieve.

First, mentors must know how to access the support that is available, and this support must include guidance. Regular contact with the program manager seems to be important, as it generates a feeling of safety among mentors. Mentors need to be supported individually, on the basis of their needs, with a positive, guiding, and non-blaming approach. Mentors need to know how to contact the program managers, preferably the same person each time. If challenges arise with the protégé, the mentor needs to feel safe in handing over the situation to the organization. This feeling was obvious among our interviewees. The organization included in this study is small-scale – purposefully so, in order to achieve high quality – which makes it easier to establish close connections between mentor and program manager. From the perspective of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this approach makes the mentor feel competent.

Second, mentors need to feel included in the organization. The organization must communicate with the mentors and make it clear that they are not alone, but rather part of an organization in which everyone is enthusiastically working towards the same goal. Moreover, all the work that mentors do must be acknowledged. Mentors must be seen and confirmed. They engage without external rewards, and so confirmation that they are doing a significant job for the protégé is especially appreciated. From the perspective of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), relatedness refers to the desire to feel connected to others; to love and care, and to be loved and cared for. A sense of belonging, both to the protégés and to the organization, was clear in our results. The engagement involved relatedness both to the organization (they are cared for) and to the protégés (they care).

Third, the mission needs to be limited in terms of time and responsibility. The organization should be particularly aware of the mentors' initial enthusiasm and willingness to do good for their protégés. Clarification of rules and expectations is important at the beginning of the engagement, as highlighted in previous research (e.g., Spencer, 2007). To reduce the mentors' risk of becoming burned out and emotionally drained, the organization can limit the mission. From the beginning, the organization needs to communicate the expected length of commitment in a mentoring relationship. The engagement needs to be limited to one relationship at a time, and limits can also be placed on contact between mentor and protégé outside the regular meetings. Lack of time is one common barrier to having a good relationship with one's protégé (Martin & Sifers, 2012). In the organization studied here, mentors are aware of the one-year commitment and no contact is allowed in the dyad outside the meetings which take place every second week. In total, each mentor engages for around 4 h a month, which is a manageable commitment. It is also important to communicate that the mentors are not professionals, but simply fellow human beings volunteering to do this for no compensation; and they need to be respected just the way they are. Furthermore, related to the voluntary engagement, organizations need to communicate that the mentors do not have sole personal responsibility for the protégés, but rather that this is the organization's responsibility. Taken together, these strategies allow the mentor to feel that engagement in a mentoring relationship is usually a simple task. In terms of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), they feel competent to continue the engagement.

A major finding related to support and ongoing training of mentors is the importance of repeated clarification of the organization's rules and expectations during the mentor's engagement. This will help avoid the possibility of mentors experiencing the sense of responsibility, inner feeling of duty, and irrelevant expectations displayed by the mentors in this study.

Rules, limitations, and regular reporting to a program manager could result in feelings among mentors of being controlled and having no possibility to influence the engagement. However, our results show that the mentors experienced freedom of choice; that is, autonomy. The way in which the meetings and the relationship were formed was determined within each dyad, meaning that each relationship was unique. Although mentors and protégés were encouraged to meet every two weeks, each dyad maintained different schedules and modes of contact based on the needs and time constraints of the two individuals. Structures and rules create the prerequisites allowing mentors and protégés to focus on the relational process and establish the trustful relationships which women desire (Liang et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2008). Taken together, this shows the importance of the organization's approach to mentoring relationships. It seems to be successful in delivering the concept to a mentor with a job description, similar to employment. Further, to ensure long-term commitment, the job description can be signed by the mentor. It is important to be clear about what is the responsibility of the organization and what is the responsibility of the mentor.

To summarize, our findings indicate that motivation to engage as a female mentor can be understood in terms of an SDT approach. The results suggest that female mentors engage because of pleasure, not pressure. According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this indicates that the mentors are intrinsically motivated; that is, they find the activity inherently interesting and rewarding. The mentors engaged because the activity was in itself a source of satisfaction and enjoyment; as stated by one mentor, "I really enjoy just seeing her."

Mentoring programs can promote mentor recruitment and retention efforts by understanding what motivates their volunteer pool and then tailoring their recruitment messages and experiences accordingly (Rhodes, 2006). A gender-specific mentoring program, such as the one investigated in this study, provides a possibility to target recruitment messages specifically to women. Based on our finding that women engage because of compassion for other women, it seems worthwhile to include this in the recruitment message. This must be considered for CBM programs in general, such as the Big Brothers and Big Sisters organizations (Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013), because they include both boys and girls in the same program.

5. Conclusion

To recruit and satisfy mentors in female mentoring programs, organizations can facilitate the mentors' experience of the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As a result, mentors will self-initiate their engagement and achieve positive psychological well-being during the engagement, because of the pleasure of being a mentor.

5.1. Limitations and strengths

This study has some limitations. First, mentors were asked about their initial motives for engagement despite the fact that they had already been mentoring for periods ranging from 3 to 30 months. As mentoring motives may change across time (Stukas & Tanti, 2005), their answers may have been different if the same question had been asked before their engagement began. Second, the motivations were gathered only from mentors engaged in mentoring relationships, with no comparison group. Thus we cannot be sure that the initial motives mentioned actually made any difference at all. Non-volunteer female mentors might have the same needs, and be similarly motivated (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Third, the number of interviews was fairly small, and therefore we cannot be sure to have covered all the perspectives of motives among female mentors. It is possible that those who agreed to participate in the study (26% of the target sample) were predominantly those with positive experience of and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. However, there were a few mentors who had started a relationship but did not follow the plan for the one year

stipulated. These limitations should be addressed in future research. Finally, this study is based on a sample study group of participants involved in a small-scale organization and it includes volunteer mentors who seek out the organization themselves and who stay in the organization for at least a year. This must be considered concerning the issue of to what extent the findings are transferable to other CBM programs.

Despite these limitations, the findings from the current study have several important strengths. First, the voices of women mentors have been heard, and they have had the possibility to express their experiences of this engagement. Second, this study used a well-established organization as an educational example from which much can be learned. Third, this is the second study using this organization as an evidence-based practice example, which generates an overall understanding of how mentoring programs can be designed and developed to be especially adopted to the needs of women (for the first, see Larsson et al. (2016)).

5.2. Issues for further study

While the findings of this study identify the female mentoring program as an intervention worth exploring and continuing, from the perspectives of mentors, many questions remain unanswered. Seen from a voluntary perspective, it would be of interest to conduct longitudinal studies of mentors to see how their voluntary engagement develops over time. Future studies should examine the quality of the mentoring relationship, and follow both mentor and protégé over time to identify the relational factors producing a successful relationship. Additionally, the question of the organization's focus remains unanswered. What roles do the aim, focus, and type of the organization play in recruiting and retaining mentors? Are gender-specific mentoring organizations needed to recruit and retain mentors successfully?

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the conception and design of the study. ML, CP, and CE prepared and processed the ethics applications. ML and CP collected the data, prepared the data, and were mainly responsible for the initial interpretation of qualitative data. All authors contributed to the interpretation of the data. CP, TS, and CE provided scientific oversight and feedback throughout the development of the study and the manuscript. ML drafted the manuscript. All authors critically revised, read, and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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