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Experiences of Girls and Mentors With an Urban Kenyan Afterschool Support Program

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This article explores the experiences of female mentees and their mentors in an afterschool support program in two informal urban settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. We sought the perspectives of mentees and mentors to identify what has changed concerning the education and social lives of the girls because of this education intervention. Data come from a qualitative component of the midterm survey collected in May 2014 using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The results show improvements in the English and math courses in which support with homework was given; girls were motivated to stay in school and had a higher aspiration for school. However, challenges remained, as some parents did not provide adequate support to their daughters. Overall, the program highlights the role of other significant players and reinforces the out-of-school mentor support for girls' success in school.

Keywords: *afterschool program, mentoring, mentor, urban informal, Nairobi, Kenya*

Introduction

Research evidence on the efficacy of mentoring programs shows positive yet modest effects on the young people engaged in these programs, and particularly, the most deprived or at-risk youth (Raposa, Ben-Eliyahu, Olsho, & Rhodes, 2019; Raposa, Rhodes, et al., 2019; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Moreover, research shows that young people need caring and dependable relationships with adults to effectively go through the period of adolescence and beyond (Garringer, 2007). For many youth who live in the urban informal settlements where few adults are available to provide this kind of support, mentoring programs have provided the alternative. These community-based programs have been found to have the ability to improve youth behaviors and attitudes (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Moreover, evaluation results provide evidence that involvement in consistent, well supervised, and long-term relationships with adults can yield a wide range of benefits for youth, which includes improvement in grades and their family relationships, decreased drug and alcohol (De Wit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, & Lipman, 2019; Raposa, Ben-Eliyahu, et al., 2019; Weiler, Boat, & Haddock, 2019). In the context of India, engaging young women from an urban community to directly provide afterschool support to low performing students improved learning

(Banerjee, Cole, Duflo, & Linden, 2005), and the test scores of children whose schools were part of the program improved by 0.14 standard deviations in year one, and 0.28 in year two. In Ethiopia, a project targeting both unmarried and married adolescents aged 10-19 years in which girls were mentored by community mentors, and provided with economic incentives to remain in school, and information on reproductive health, reduced the ever married by 8%. (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009). In the context of Kenya, (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2011) evaluated an 'extra teacher' program, where extra teachers are hired locally with the same qualifications but with one-year contract and earning only a quarter of the regular teacher salary. Findings showed that contract teachers were more likely to be teaching than the regular teachers. In Bangladesh, a female secondary school stipend program increased girls' enrolment at the secondary level by between 43% to fivefold and thereby reducing the gender gap in access; and in some areas girls' outnumbered boys in secondary school (Mahmud, 2003).

These interventions across the developing world only tell us a part of a story—the quantitative effect that an intervention can have on the beneficiaries. However, we may never tell the experiences that mentors, otherwise referred to "extra teachers" that are engaged in some of these programs across the developing world. These studies often miss the experiences that mentors have with the individual mentees, and what this process means for both the mentor and the mentees. Research shows that mentorship creates the opportunity for the mentees to harness the services of these "extra teachers" to enhance the quality of education service that the mentees get in their quest for quality primary education. However, researchers have not developed a consensus on the definition of mentorship (Gagliardi et al., 2009), posit that mentoring is a process that involves interaction and facilitation of the mentees to promote learning and development (Gagliardi et al., 2009; Karcher, 2008). Mentoring can be formal (usually designed to last for a specific period of time) or informal (based on the rapport between participants) (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder Jr, 2009; Ndwiga et al., 2014). It occurs when a more experienced and skilled individual is matched up with a relatively less experienced person—with set goals that the less experienced person is to acquire to reach specific long-term goals (Gagliardi et al., 2009). Mentorship has been associated with a variety of constructive outcomes (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008), particularly, and increase in self-esteem and confidence among those individuals who have undergone mentorship compared to those individuals who have not undergone any mentorship training (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). Moreover, mentees become more experienced and knowledgeable and experience less conflict and stress (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997). In coaching, children—in this case, girls—practiced and mastered new techniques that they learned from the mentors, used identified and shared problem-solving skills, and received vital feedback from the mentors. Therefore, coaching has reciprocal in that participants assume the dual role of the observer and the observed (Berinšterová, 2019; Trautwein & Ammerman, 2010). This article explores the experiences of mentees and mentors in an afterschool support program in two urban informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya. Specifically, we sought to identify from the perspective of mentees and mentors what has changed concerning the education and social lives of the girls because of this education intervention.

The Intervention

Implementers 1 and 2 in Sites 1 and 2, respectively, implemented the Improving Learning Outcomes and Transition to Secondary School program in the urban informal settlements of Nairobi. The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) evaluated the impact. The aim of this intervention study was to increase access and transition to quality secondary education among girls who live in informal urban settlements and to demonstrate how an intervention with parental and community support can address unequal access in education. The intervention had four components: an afterschool support with homework in numeracy and literacy, mentoring in life skills, parental counseling, and transition subsidy. In the next section, we describe the components of the intervention.

Afterschool Support With Homework and Mentoring

The aim of this component of the intervention was to create opportunities to learn for girls by supporting them with homework in numeracy and literacy to enhance their academic performance. We hypothesized that enhanced academic performance would lead to increased transition to secondary school. This was done by supporting girls with homework using community role models. In addition, the community role models conducted mentoring sessions in life skills on specific topics related to puberty, reproductive health, and social behavior among adolescent girls. The mentorship was provided by volunteers from within the community who had completed secondary education and scored a mean grade of a C+ or better in their secondary Grade 4 examinations.

Primary to Secondary Transition Subsidy

This component of the intervention provided conditional financial support to girls from poor households with a mean score of 250 in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education at the end of primary school. The financial support subsidizes the cost of joining secondary Grade 1 for the first time by an equivalent of US$113 and therefore enables the beneficiaries to transit to secondary school.

Guidance and Counselling of Parents

This component of the intervention targeted parents of at-risk girls aged 12–19 years in the two informal urban slums to provide support for education and schooling of girls who are at risk of not completing primary school because of indulgence in risky behavior. The intervention focused on sensitizing parents on the kind of social, schooling, and educational support they can provide to girls. This included but was not limited to providing and obtaining information on minimizing the amount of time that girls are involved in household chores and ensuring that parents support girls with homework, release girls to attend the afterschool homework sessions, and cooperate with the volunteer mentors to help the girls. The mentors also sensitized parents on how to cooperate with teachers to track the girls' performance in school and attend sensitization sessions with their daughters.

The Process of Mentoring

Preparation Before Onset of Mentoring

The mentoring process was implemented by APHRC in partnership with Implementers 1 and 2 at Sites 1 and 2, respectively. APHRC was the lead partner with a core mandate to provide project leadership, monitoring, evaluation, and research and policy engagements. Implementers 1 and 2 provided the afterschool support and mentorship in life skills, counseled parents, and administered the subsidy at their respective sites. In all the implementation activities, we got support from the Department of Education at the Nairobi City County who were our collaborators—and were instrumental in the launch of the project in January 2013. APHRC led the development of the afterschool support and mentorship curriculum and manuals in liaison with consultant experts in English, math, life skills, and guidance and counseling. The curriculum and the manuals were validated to verify the content in several workshops that were held in April 2013 by consultant experts, practicing teachers, and practicing counselors.

Implementation

Mentorship activities were implemented between July 20, 2013, and November 30, 2015. Prior to the onset of the mentoring process, mentoring positions were advertised through posters and social media. Those who had a mean grade of C+ and above and were the residents of the targeted settlements were shortlisted and invited for interviews. The mentorship positions attracted university students, while counseling attracted professional counselors with extensive counseling and community engagement experience in the informal settlements. Those who were successful at the interview stage were invited for a 5-day mentorship training and induction on life skills, literacy,

and numeracy, counseling manuals, and guides. Expert trainers who had been part of the development of the curriculum and training manuals conducted the training. Mentors and counselors, who successfully completed the training, commenced mentoring girls as from July 2013.

Every year, the mentors and counselors underwent refresher training sessions before the onset of the intervention in January of 2014 and 2015. The main goal of the initial training and the refresher training was to equip mentors and counselors with necessary knowledge and skills to convey quality afterschool support, mentorship in life skills, and counseling to the girls and their parents respectively. The project manuals and guides were also revised in the second and third years, with the aim of incorporating the lessons learned in year 2013 and 2014. In the years 2013 and 2014, 628 contact hours were made between the mentors and the mentees in afterschool support and life skills sessions.

Supervision

The two community-based organizations—Implementer 1 and Implementer 2—recruited and trained monitoring personnel in collaboration with APHRC. Consequently, the monitoring process was carried out on a weekly basis in the treatment zones and on monthly basis in the control zones. In the control zone, the monitoring process focused on absenteeism among girls in the previous school week. In the treatment zone, monitoring focused on mentors' attendance and quality of sessions, number of sessions carried out, frequency of girls' attendance of mentorship sessions. Monthly meetings brought the three partners together in a forum where partners shared successes, challenges and way forward for continuous project implementation, quality assurance, and improvement. Moreover, the process of project implementation was strengthened through a review by the learning partners, the Results for Development and Center for Social Sector Education and Policy Analysis, who paid visits to project sites for face-to-face meetings and project learning in 2013 and 2014.This article explores the experiences of mentees and mentors who were involved in the study in the two sites in the urban informal settlements of Nairobi. The article addresses the question of what experiences the girls and mentors with the afterschool support with homework and mentoring sessions have had. We also describe the process, benefits, and challenges of the mentoring in resource-poor settings.

Method

Overview of the Design of the Study

The study was nested in APHRC's Nairobi Urban Health Demographic System (NUHDSS), which has been operating since 2002. The NUHDSS tracks data of households and individuals within the two urban study sites. Moreover, the NUHDSS provides framework for studying individuals and household's longitudinally. Data are collected and updated every 4 months. Data for this article comes from a midterm evaluation study of a 3-year education intervention nested on NUHDSS and aimed at improving learning outcomes of girls' ages between 12 and 19 years and in Grades 7 to 8. The evaluation study collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The intervention was initiated in 2013, tracking a total number of about 1,270. Using the geographical location of the households, each study site was demarcated into three zones that were assigned either to a treatment arm of the intervention or to a control. The results reported are from the qualitative component of the study and sheds light on the experiences of the girls and mentors within the treatment sites.

Data Collection

This article uses qualitative data derived from focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs), collected from the qualitative component of the midterm evaluation from the two study sites. Five qualitative tools (see Table 1) were used to collect this information. All the tools

that were developed and used in this study were piloted and validated to ensure that they had the requisite content to answer the research questions. The data presented in this article focuses on interview with girls and mentors. The girls' interview guide investigated girls' understanding of their role, and that of the community, toward their education and how they have benefited from the project. Moreover, the tool also captured challenges that girls encountered in the project and sought their opinion on how to mitigate these challenges. The mentors' protocol of questions investigated mentors' understanding of their role and that of the community toward the education of girls and to identify the challenges that they face as mentors and ways of mitigation to enhance their work. For more information on the presentation of data from parents, counselors, and community leaders, please refer to Abuya et al. (2014).

Table 1. *Five Qualitative Tools and the Content They Captured*

Participants	Description of Protocol of Questions
Parents' focus group discussion	Investigates parental understanding of their roles and that of the community related to girl education, to understand the challenges that impede access to education for girls, and to determine parental opinions about the impact of the intervention for girls in the community
Girls	Explores the girls' understanding of their role and that of the community in supporting their education, as well as what benefits were incurred from the project; pinpoints challenges encountered by project participants and gathers from their perspectives whether the project was beneficial to them
Community leaders	Investigates community leaders' understanding of their roles and the role the community should play in supporting girls' education and investigates community leaders' opinions on the impact of the intervention among girls in the community
Counselors	Explores the degree of understanding among counselors about their responsibilities in supporting the girls and the role the community should play in encouraging girls' education, their understanding of the challenges affecting their work as counselors, and what can be done to mitigate or resolve these challenges to improve their work
Mentors	Infers the degree of understanding among the mentors of their roles and responsibilities and the role the community should play in encouraging girls' education, their understanding of the challenges affecting their work as counselors, and what can be done to mitigate or resolve these challenges to improve their work
Implementers	Focuses on the management of the project by the two implementers; specifically seeks to understand their experiences in running the project

One FGD was conducted in Site 1 and Site 2 with all the mentors. In Site 1, the FGD had 16 participants and Site 2 had 10 FGD participants. All the mentors were female and between ages of 20 and 35 years. Both FGDs lasted between 45 and 90 min. Three girls were identified in each arm of the intervention and the control—making nine girls per site. Therefore, we interviewed 18 girls. We conducted IDIs with girls within their schools after seeking the consent from the head teachers and parental assent to interview the girls who were below 18 years. We also obtained consented of girls older than 18 years before the onset of the interviews. The IDIs lasted between 30 and 60 min. To document the process of mentoring, we reviewed the Improving Learning Outcomes and Transition to Secondary School program documents since the onset of the program in 2013. These included monthly reports from the implementers, APHRC-generated quarterly reports, tracking tools submitted by the implementers, and the baseline report, midterm report, and discussion notes documented every month during the meeting between the implementers and the evaluator.

Ethical Considerations

The study involved human subjects, but there was no anticipation of major harm by virtue of participating in the intervention. A consent-seeking information sheet and informed consent form described the possible benefits, risks, and inconveniences. Individual names did not appear on notes or reports, and pseudonyms have been used for informants in the FGDs. Information given by the mentors was not disclosed to the implementing community-based organizations under whom they work or outside of the research team. The research team asked the participants in the FGDs to respect the privacy of others by not disclosing to nonparticipants what the group discussed. Access to data was strictly limited to the project team. The transcribed qualitative data were password protected, and the audio recording was erased after transcription. We trained data collectors who assisted the researchers. This was to ensure that they clearly understood the ethical conduct of research. Training included focused sessions and exercises on the meaning and process of informed consent, the importance of protecting the privacy of subjects, and maintaining the confidentiality of the information obtained from them. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Kenya Medical Research Institute and the National Council for Science and Technology. All interviews were tape recorded for later transcription and analysis. The discussions began with a short conversation to establish rapport and to have a formal introduction by all the participants as well as the moderator and assistant moderator. Two moderators, one in each site, led the discussions based on a series of questions in the mentors' protocol FGD (see Appendix A), and the IDI guide for the girls (see Appendix B) was designed to investigate mentors and beneficiaries' experiences with the intervention. The moderators received similar training simultaneously, by the same facilitators, and used similar FGD guides. They also shared the experiences after each of the FGDs during debriefs. We administered consent forms to the mentors and girls. For the girls who were younger than 18 years, we first sought parental consent for girls to participate in the study before administering the consent forms to the girls.

Analytical Strategy

We used NVivo Version 10 software to facilitate storage and manipulation of the data. We generated codes for analysis both inductively and deductively. The deductive coding were guided by the research question of the study; the experiences of girls and mentors with the afterschool support with homework and mentoring sessions. We also described the process of mentoring, and challenges of the mentoring in resource poor settings. The inductive coding unearthed relevant concepts that were embedded in the data. These codes were generated after listening to voice records and reading the first set of transcripts. A review of the transcripts enabled us to identify the relevant codes that would emerge from the chunks of data, looking for either phrases that occurred frequently as the outcomes of mentoring and the challenges that affect mentoring, while at the same time having an eye for unique occurrences within the data (Miles & Herberman, 1994). The first reading of transcripts was to familiarize with the responses and to gain insights and clues as to what was contained in the data and thereby enrich the inductive codes. In reading the transcripts, we were looking out for the issues and concepts that characterized the mentorship, which highlights the mentors' and mentees' experience with the mentorship program. In the subsequent readings of the transcripts, we were looking for the ideas, phrases, concepts, and words that were most pronounced in the data; for example, aspirations for school, mentors as enablers, closeness with girls, and development of self-esteem. To get us to the process of mentoring, we undertook a desk review of the program documents that had existed since the onset of the improving learning outcomes project in 2013. We documented the process of mentoring in three main thematic categories: preparation before the onset of mentoring; the eligibility, training, and sessions covered; and supervision of mentors.

Results

The Narratives of Mentors and Girls

From the narratives of girls and their mentors, mentoring had several benefits and challenges. Among the key benefits that girls highlighted from their perspective as beneficiaries of the intervention were improvements in the subjects that they were learning in school (math and English), motivation to stay in school, higher aspirations for school, and reduced impact of peer pressure. Mentors identified four benefits of mentoring for the girls: (a) positive self-esteem; (b) mentors have been able to break the barriers with girls that teachers are not able to break, thereby ensuring closeness with mentees; (c) girls have internalized what they were taught in life skills, which is helping them navigate their challenges at the onset of puberty; and (d) mentors identified that they have complemented parents, and girls are exhibiting good performance despite the environment that they find themselves living.

Despite the benefits of mentoring that both girls and mentors have identified, there are numerous challenges that impair the ability of these mentors to be able to impart the knowledge to girls and girls' ability to attend the sessions to learn. From the mentors' perspective, one of the main challenges that affected mentoring was low attendance and absenteeism of the sessions. Some of the reasons given for low attendance included some parents did not allow girls to attend due to the religious activities that take place over the weekend. Other challenges from the mentors' perspective included lack of incentives like food, competing programs in the respective schools that they do attend, security issues, uncooperative girls, and neglect by parents. On their part, girls highlighted key challenges that have affected their attendance of mentoring sessions. These included uncooperative girls and parents who are not supportive of their daughters' attendance of the sessions.

Benefits of Mentoring

Improvements in English and Math

Girls in the program explained that through the program they have been able to improve their scores in math and English, subjects that they were not performing well in. Through the support that they received with homework, the difficulties, particularly with math, were in the process of being resolved. A girl in Site 1 explained the benefits of the program in enhancing her performance in math and English:

> … I have started attending those lessons, I have improved, as I was used to getting below forty percent (40%) but now am getting forty and above. And, English was a little bit harder but right now …my marks have improved…

To reinforce the importance of the program's effectiveness in enhancing the performance of girls in numeracy and literacy, Riki a girl in Site 2, who also became the face of the program, explained,

> The benefits that I have been able to see is in mathematics. I used to have challenges in mathematics, but nowadays, I can sit down and calculate five, six and more sums. In mathematics, I would get fifty as the highest marks but now I get more than fifty…Besides mathematics, Even life skills, and also grammar; in grammar the teacher teaches well…

Girls Are Motivated to Stay in School

Mentoring enabled girls to be motivated to stay in school. Those girls who did not like to attend school before began to attend, and they appreciated the value of school. Moreover, girls learned to desist from negative peer influence in order for them to be able to concentrate in school. A girl who is

a beneficiary from Site 1 said, "they encourage us to know what has taken us to school…and they can do anything so that we improve our studies…" Not only did the mentorship programs motivate them to stay in school, but those girls who attended the programs regularly were encouraged to attend school. A mentor who was part of the FGD in Site 2 extrapolated in this way:

> Most of the pupils attend sessions and for those who attend the sessions attend school regularly. Nevertheless, those who do not attend the sessions also do not attend school regularly. They go to school about twice or thrice in a week that is what I have come to find out.

In addition, the volunteer mentors in the project who had succeeded in the community motivated the girls to emulate the success that had been demonstrated by these mentors, and in the process, girls were more motivated to succeed in school. Girls were eager to follow the examples of their mentors, whom they saw as their role models, having been brought up in the same communities, and succeeded despite the difficult circumstances. A mentor from Site 2 said,

> …Yes I think that I agree with her, you know a mentor is like a role model, a mentor is somebody you would like to talk to, like when you want to do something, you look up to her and you see that she has achieved something…then the kids who are growing up see others from the slums working and earning, so they look up to them so that when they grow up they would like to be like them or in that career…

This symbiotic relationship between the mentors and the girls allowed for improved closeness between the girls and the mentors, which led to better interaction, hence improved mentoring experience for both girls and mentors. This not only improved the motivation of girls but also encouraged a positive mentoring experience for the mentors. A mentor from Site 2 intimated,

> …we may not be able to know unless that friendship and closeness is natured. So, since we started for the better part of this year, despite all the challenges that we are going through, I think the merits are more than the demerits.

Moreover, this closeness with mentors has enabled girls to be specific about the challenges that they face in an attempt to complete primary school. Therefore, the mentors have been able to nurture the girls' dreams, as they also help them to sidestep their challenges. A Site 1 mentor explained it like this:

> …I also realized that maybe some of them, they pass through a lot as far as their background is concerned and in one way or another, we may not be able to know unless that friendship and closeness is nurtured…

Higher Aspirations for School

Girls in the program also explained that because of the intervention, they now aspire to attain higher education levels. Before the onset of the intervention, many of them feared that they would not be able to make a transition to secondary school because of fees and other secondary school related costs. The subsidy component of the intervention has enabled parents to be able to provide basic items that girls needed to access secondary school. A girl from Site 1 explained the benefit in this way:

> …Another benefit is that many girls now in Site 1 have the hope for a bright future they know that they are now going to complete secondary…Many people (referring to girls) complete primary but they do not go to secondary. They just roam in the community. So, when we heard that…We were like finally there is light at the end of the tunnel. You find

that even some bright children had lost hope because they would say, I will pass my [Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exam] but who will pay for my secondary school?

For girls to aspire for higher education, mentors felt that they needed motivational speeches to keep themselves motivated about the benefits of upward mobility. A mentor in Site 2 explained, "…so some inspirational talks would just make them know there is something better from education and thus concentrate in the primary education so as to reach secondary level …then they will be better in life…"

Mentors as Enablers

The intervention enabled a close working relationship between the mentors and the girls. In so doing, mentors have been able to be at the forefront of helping girls with homework as was stipulated in the intervention design. Moreover, mentors explained that for some girls, they have had to do more for them, as their parents are not available at home to help with homework, as well as follow-up on school activities. A mentor in an FGD in Site 1 explained,

> …I realized that…parents do not follow up on the academic progress. It is likely they just see them in class six, class seven and onwards. They do not follow up in terms of checking their homework, being a mentor, doing the follow ups…now there is somebody who cares about their education unlike before where they had no one doing the follow-up…I can say they are now seeing us as somebody who cares about their education…

According to the mentors in Site 2, their role was key in ensuring that girls have role models to look up to as they navigate through their primary schooling. Therefore, in addition to mentors being able to step in and oversee their schooling, they have provided girls with people to look up to give them assurance them that they too can succeed. A mentor from Site 2 explained the role modeling as a benefit to the girls:

> Yes, I think that I agree with her…You know a mentor is like a role model, a mentor is somebody you would like to talk to. Like when you want to do something, you look up to her and you see that she has achieved something…they are motivated to work towards that course.

In addition, mentors became enablers; this they did through establishing good communication between themselves and girls in the program. Mentors have established a working relationship with the girls and in so doing, girls have been able to open up and discuss the issues that are affecting their education. For instance, they would be open with the mentors about any negative events that happened in the household or the school. In the short run, the open communication has trickled to the schools and the households. A mentor attending a FGD from Site 1 explained, "…I can say we are good friends. At least, girls can be very open to you unlike the way they are at home. We learn from each other as they have said. Yeah that's good..."

Consequently, girls have been able to open up to mentors on some of the issues that they have found hard to open up when interacting with their teachers in the respective schools. For instance, girls could be able to talk about issues related to menstruation, which they could not be able to talk to their teachers about. The mentors attribute this to the confidentiality that they have nurtured between them and the girls. In so doing, mentors have been able to break the barriers that hinder the communication among girls in schools. A mentor attending an FGD in Site 1 said,

> …So, it is easy for them to cope with you as a mentor as opposed to how she can cope with a teacher in school…and the mode of confidentiality. They will be more open to you if you are open with them and you will get to learn more from them…

Because of the mentors being enablers and girls developing the confidence to open up to the mentors, girls' self-esteem was enhanced. They are more confident now than ever before. This has manifested in the way girls have been able to open up and speak out about any negative experiences both at home and at school. According to the mentors, girls have been able to pay attention to what is been taught in the program and in so doing improved in their approach to life situations both in their homes and in school. A mentor in an FGD in Site 1 said this:

> …I have come to understand them taking into account their background, and where they come from…through the life skill, I can say that today if you look at the girls…from when the program begun and compare with today, I think the girls have got some level of positive self-esteem. So that has given them chance to open up to some things in life and through that we have come to share a lot and I think they have gained some knowledge…

Challenges Experienced During Mentoring

One of the greatest challenges that plagued the mentoring sessions was attendance of the sessions by girls. It was noted that girls' attendance of mentoring sessions was inconsistent. Inconsistency in attendance was an issue raised both by the girls and by the mentors in the course of the program. Some of the reasons that were raised for the inconsistent attendance of sessions included being within the urban informal settlements, the community having myriad activities going on at the same time (this makes girls not focus on attending sessions as their parents require them to be engaged in other activities), girls becoming uncooperative (especially after being overburdened by domestic chores), parents not supporting girls to attend the mentoring sessions because they require their help at home or elsewhere, and lacking incentives to attend the sessions.

Too Many Activities Happening in the Community
In Site 1 and Site 2, like many informal settlements, there are many development-related activities that take place, organized by different organizations including nongovernmental organizations. These include but are not limited to projects that target youth for income-generating activities. These activities at times distract children from going to school, or attending other activities that are useful to their education, like attending the sessions in the A LOT Change program. The multiple activities disrupted the attendance of mentoring sessions in Site 1 and Site 2. A mentor from Site 1 attending an FGD said,

> …Girls have been coming for the sessions but in our community, there are many things happening around. Therefore, whenever there is an activity happening in the community…organized by a certain [nongovernmental organization], they do not come on that day, therefore (noise) on such days the attendance will be very low...

Uncooperative Girls
One of the greatest challenges was that girls were not willing at times to come to the mentoring centers. These girls would leave home and would not end up at the sessions. Sometimes girls explained this that after engaging in work at home, they feel tired to come to the mentoring centers. It was the consultations between mentors and parents that revealed that girls are not attending the sessions, even when they leave home to go to these sessions. A mentor from Site 2 explained,

> …the sessions are good and the girls like it. However, some girls are adamant; some girls are not coming for the sessions and when you call the parents, they tell you that they have sent them for the sessions. That they must be on their way, and yet you have not seen the girl for two weeks.

Parents Are Not Supportive of Girls

One of the challenges that persisted in the context of the slum where the intervention was being implemented is that parents were not supportive of the girls attending sessions. This is because parents still required that girls undertake domestic chores in the households before they can attend the sessions within the centers in the community. Mentors attending FGD in both Site 1 and Site 2 were in consensus that domestic chores was still a hindrance to girls attending the afterschool and mentoring sessions in both sites. A mentor affiliated to Site 2 expressed the ills of domestic work in interfering with mentoring sessions in this way:

> Like she has said, it seems that some parents are not serious. They know that it is time for the sessions and then they are giving the girls household chores and when they are called they give excuses for not letting the girls attend the sessions. Because when you ask them the reasons for not attending, they tell you that they were, either washing or they were left with their siblings. Therefore, I think that the problem is with the parents....

Lack of Incentives

The attendance to the mentoring sessions was low because of the program offered no incentives in form of snacks or refreshments given to the girls to attend these sessions. Most of the girls did not attend sessions when there were no snacks. However, it was not the presence of the incentives per se, but the fact that some of these girls may not have had any food to eat in the course of the day, thereby hindering them from attending sessions. A mentor from Site 1 intimated,

> …The attendance has fluctuated. Today they can come, a good number can show up, another day the number again goes down, and then it rises. However, in most cases, I think when we always have a good number, it is because maybe today we promised them incentives or some snacks…

One of the challenges that persisted during the mentoring sessions was how to bring out the best among the outgoing girls and bring out the issues among the quiet and reserved girls in the same mentoring sessions. Mentors faced a challenge on how to bridge the gap between girls who are willing to talk and those that were very reserved, and not willing to talk, let alone participate during sessions. From the mentors' perspective, it took quite an effort to be able to get reserved girls to be able to speak out. A mentor attending FGDs in Site 2 had this to say:

> …And we have been able to live with them with their different personalities, there is a challenge in blending the hyper girls and those who are reserved, you know these hyper girls you have to bring them down and then these other shy girls you have to up their spirit so that they can be at the same level. You see like there are girls who do not talk to you, you ask them questions they are just quiet; those are the challenges that we are facing…

Discussion

The article addresses the question of the experiences of girls and mentors with the afterschool support and mentoring program. We also described the process of mentoring, benefits, and challenges of the mentoring in the urban informal settlements of Nairobi. The study found that among the perceived key benefits of the afterschool and mentoring programs in the urban informal settlements were improvements in literacy and numeracy, girls were motivated to attend and stay in school, and girls developed higher aspirations for postprimary education. In terms of experience of mentors with the afterschool support program, these mentors became enablers and they developed closeness with girls, which led to enhanced self-esteem of girls.

In terms of the improvements in the subjects, the narratives of girls reiterate that they have improved in literacy and in numeracy since they joined the program. This supports the quantitative data from the quantitative component of the project that showed a 20-percentage-point improvement in numeracy scores among the girls (see Abuya et al., 2015), 1.5 years after the onset of the program. This finding supports the evidence on the efficacy of mentoring programs and the positive, yet modest effects on a number of the young people engaged in them, and that most deprived or at risk of risky behavior and peer influence do benefit from these interventions (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Closely connected to the improvements in learning achievement, there was enhanced motivation and aspiration for school among girls, with the narratives showing that they were motivated to attend school. This finding is supported by the improvement that was witnessed in the quantitative data that showed a 10% improvement in aspiration for girls. This clearly shows that some of those girls who wanted to reach secondary school education now aspire to acquire postsecondary education (Abuya et al., 2014). This finding is consistent with that from other evaluation studies that provide clear evidence that involvement in consistent, well-supervised, and long-term relationships with adults can yield a wide range of benefits for youth, which includes improvement in grades and their family relationships and decreased drug and alcohol use (Durlak et al., 2010; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005). In this case, there is aspiration for higher education beyond just attaining good grades.

The study also found that mentors were enablers to girls in the process of mentoring. These mentors were able to step in and oversee the schooling of girls—thereby providing girls with people to look up to assure them that they too can succeed. Therefore, the mentorship program in effect solidified the relationship that results when a more experienced and skilled individual is matched up with a relatively less experienced person—with set goals that the less experienced person is to acquire to reach specific long-term goals (Gagliardi et al., 2009).

In developing the closeness with girls, mentors almost became mother figures for girls, and girls readily identified with them. This put parents on the spot, in the sense that their roles were being taken over by the mentors—a sign that parent need to do more for their children. This brings forward persisting challenges that the mentors face with the intervention, which is that some parents are not supportive of the girls attending sessions, and domestic chores continued to be on the priority list for parents. In essence, the dilemma that mentors found themselves in 1.5 years after the onset of the project proves that the parents in the program had not reached the threshold of becoming good and effective role models. Therefore, to improve the intervention going forward, more emphasis should be on the sensitization of parents so that they not only perform their roles as parents, but also realize the necessity to allow their daughters to go to the afterschool support centers.

This study was limited in the sense that the program only covered two urban informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. This study had one significant policy implication in relation to the education of girls in a poor urban context. The study found that girls still faced certain risks in an attempt to navigate through the primary school years. This study brings to the fore the role of the significant others in the lives of girls. In this mentoring program, the significant other was the mentor, whose responsibility was to carry out the mentorship. There is documented success right from when the process begins in terms of the performance in the classes in literacy and numeracy. More so, the results show that mentorship in life skills at the community level by the mentors benefited girls who have been exposed to the sessions. Therefore, the successes witnessed in this program can be replicated with other children in the urban informal settlements of Nairobi County. Together with Nairobi County education officers, we are still exploring ways of harnessing this success in an attempt to improve the teaching of life skills in schools. The program brings to the fore the role of other significant players in the education of girls and reinforces the out-of-school support—in this

case, mentors from the community—for the success of girls in school. It is only when girls are supported in schools that they can attain the quality education that they so deserve.

These results are also timely if we consider the process of the ongoing curriculum reform. One of the lessons that Kenya as a country should learn is to use such studies to inform the adoption of a more holistic and learner-centered approach to learning for learners to be able to get skills and internalize values for lifelong learning. Our study shows that despite the challenges girls experienced, mentorship in life skills proved to be very beneficial to those girls who undertook the mentorship. We propose that the Ministry of Education in Kenya should seriously consider mentorship in life skills and work to implement the same in collaboration with parents and the community to deliver the life skills within the households and community. In so doing, this would provide an avenue to safeguard the future of the children and, by extension, the community. It is important to note that since writing this article, the program has expanded and included mentorship of boys and a leadership component in the expanded phase (i.e., Phase II). Currently, we are also following the recipients of the intervention to determine the sustainability of the intervention among older adolescents in high school.

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[*Appendix follows*]

Appendix A

Focus Discussion Guide for Mentors

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="2">Focus Group Discussion Guide
(1) To investigate mentors' understanding of their role and that of the community toward the education of girls in the community
(2) To understand challenges affecting their work as mentors and what can be done to improve on their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Give an account of your mentees' [the girls under your care] school and
    (a) attendance session from the start of the program to date
    (b) attendance in school from the start of the program to date</td>
<td>(2) What has been your experience as a mentor in this program?
    (a) Please take me through your typical day when you are engaged in mentorship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) In your opinion, and from the sessions that you have covered so far, what is the role of this community in keeping the girls in school?
    (a) In your opinion, what do you expect the community to do differently to improve education for the girls in this community?</td>
<td>(4) What do you think has changed among the girls in your sessions as a result of the sessions that you have covered with them so far?
    (a) In what other ways do you think you can be of help to the girls' schooling in this community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) What is your expectation of your mentees being that they are involved in this program?</td>
<td>(6) What are some of the challenges that you encounter in your work as a mentor?
    (a) How have you solved them in the past and what suggestions do you have on improving on the challenges going forward?</td>
</tr>
</table>

Appendix B

The In-Depth Interview Guide Questions for Girls

In-Depth Interview Protocol
(1) To investigate the girls' understanding of their role and that of the community towards their education and how they have benefitted from the project so far (2) To understand the challenges that affect girls' education in the two urban informal settlements where an education intervention is being implemented (3) To find out challenges they are encountering in the project, e.g., on attendance (4) To get their views on the project and whether it's beneficial to them or not

(1) What is your role as a girl toward your own education in this community?	(2) In your opinion, what do you think is your role [as a girl] in ensuring you stay in school?
(3) In your opinion, what is the role of this community in keeping you and the other girls like you in school? (a) In your opinion, what do you expect the parents and community in general to do differently in order to improve education of girls like you in this community?	(4) What are some of the challenges that affect girls in this community from attending and completing school?
(5) In what ways have you and other girls in this community benefitted from this and other interventions, if any?	(6) What has been your experience so far as a participant in the project? (a) On challenges they have encountered in the project, ways they have resolved them, things that can be done differently, attendance, whether the project is helpful to them or not?