
About The ENCOUNTER Project

Experiences of Youth in Natural Mentoring Relationship

Natural mentoring relationships (NMRs) can positively impact a child's cognitive and socio-emotional development. NMRs contribute to intergenerational dialogue and social cohesion in EU societies, a current Council of Europe's Youth policy priority. However, knowledge of NMRs' dynamics and benefits experienced by young adolescents (ages 12-15) in the EU is limited. In addition, there are no mentoring programmes available for the general population of youths (12-15 years) in the EU, targeting e.g. training in mentoring skills for all young people. The EU-funded ENCOUNTER project will examine young adolescents' experiences in the EU. The research team will specifically compare the dynamics and features of NMRs, including a comparison between genders, in the Czech Republic. ENCOUNTER project will also review and conceptualise a theoretical framework on natural mentoring phenomena in a child-centred perspective as articulated by the UN CRC.

The ENCOUNTER project is designed as a ground-breaking innovative project on natural mentoring with its child-centred approach and research design addressing the gaps in current literature and discussion in the field, in line with the current EU's policies on youths and UN SDG 2030. It develops partnerships with the Department of Children's Studies, School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway and Mentoring Europe, two distinguished partners of the project, to support its aims, objectives, and social impact. The partnership with Children's studies includes co-supervision of Prof. Michal Molcho in the project and conceptualisation and integration of the rights-based approach of children's studies in natural mentoring research. The partnership with Mentoring Europe includes communication and dissemination of the ENCOUNTER results among youth mentoring practitioners and academics across EU countries.

Three main objectives:

- RO1: To examine the characteristics, dynamics, and perceived benefits of the natural mentoring relationships experienced by young adolescents in an EU context.
- RO2: To conceptualise the theoretical, interdisciplinary youth-centred framework on natural mentoring phenomena by reviewing the relevant youth development theories across disciplines and research literature on NMRs.
- RO3: To contrast the functions, characteristics, and dynamics of NMRs among gender; and the features of NMRs experienced by young adolescents in the CZ and an international context.

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