

Through Her Lens: An Exploration of the Experiences of Women Mentor Teachers in Government Schools

Devanshi Negi* and Alka Bajpai**

Abstract

In an attempt to understand the experiences of mentorship from the perspective of women mentors working in the government schools in Delhi, the present study aimed at exploring the images that they have regarding their role and social realities of mentoring. Perceptions of effectiveness in their role and the challenges of mentoring were specifically explored. In order to understand this, a detailed qualitative exploration was conducted using photovoice method and in-depth interviews with women mentor teachers working in schools of Delhi government. Data was gathered from 12 participants between the age range of 34-53 years and whose experience of mentoring ranged from 8 months to 5 years. Thematic analysis by Clarke and Braun (2015) was employed in order to analyze the data and explore thematic areas. Among the salient images shared most commonly highlighted the mentor role functions as providing support, creating perfect alignment and twining, balancing the micro and the macro environments, and the creating of enabling environment through presence, mirroring and creation of a wholesome entity with diverse elements. Results also discuss the challenges with respect to effective enactment of their roles with specific reference to the mentor-mentee relationship and the challenges for the self of women mentors. Implications for the development of women mentors and the strengthening of mentoring process in schools are discussed.

Key Words: Women mentors, mentoring in schools, mentor-mentee relationship.

Mentoring primarily entails an interpersonal or one to one relationship between a lesser experienced mentee and an experienced mentor who facilitates the personal and professional growth of the former (Mullen, 1994). Mentors are accountable for two types of functions (Kram, 1985). First, is career related. In this case the protégés “learn the ropes” of functioning in the organization leading to further advancements in the organizational hierarchy. It involves coaching protégés, providing them positive exposure and visibility, offering them protection and challenging assignments. Second function is nurturing psychosocial support towards building trust, intimacy, and interpersonal bonds in the relationship. This includes behaviors such as offering acceptance, validation, friendship, and role-modeling. Contemporary understanding of this relationship, construes the mentor-mentee relationship as reciprocal and dynamic (Healy and Welchert, 1990) involving social interaction and co-construction of knowledge between both individuals (Palincsar, 1998).

Group mentorship is another alternative to the traditional dyadic mentoring idea. According to Kroll (2016), it involves “three or more individuals connected by their social relationship, distinctly gathered for the specific and shared purpose of intentionally challenging, and supporting the others to enhance personal growth and professional skill development of others” (p.55). In group mentoring the interactions are simultaneous and collaborative (Huizing, 2012) wherein mentoring occurs in the same time and space for all participants. This type of mentoring assumes the shared responsibility for each member to be mentored and also be a mentor for others, thereby enable professional development of each other (Goodyear, 2006).

The constructivist approach to mentorship (McGowan, Stone, & Kegan, 2007; Millwater & Yarrow, 1997), is also known as co-mentoring, mentoring communities, collaborative mentoring, and mentoring circles. It centers around on (a) justice (focusing on historically marginalized and excluded groups), (b) the equal distribution of power and authority so that shared leadership is enabled. In other words, all the members (irrespective of their role or responsibilities within the organization or community) are equally valued in the mentoring context (Mullen, 2005).

Among the different types of groups mentoring i.e. one-to-many, many-to-one, many-to-many, peer group mentoring, the last two are found to be most effective (Huizing, 2012). One-to-many and many-to-one mentoring relationships are considered ‘facilitated group mentoring’ wherein a selected mentor (or mentors) with greater experience or knowledge facilitates the learning experience (Zachary, 2014). Many-to-many is a team mentoring approach wherein there are two or more people who serve the role of the mentor throughout the life of the group (Nisbet and McAllister, 2015). Peer group mentoring, on the other hand is designed as a group-directed and group-managed mentoring experience. In this case the mentor role shifts between group members regardless of age, professional title or life experiences. Each individual serves as mentor as well as a mentee to their mentoring group collaborators and there is development of the co-mentoring skills (p.63). According to Heikkinen, Jokinen, & Tynjala (2012) in contrast to the classic approach to knowledge transfer, such type of mentoring involves learning through dialogue and social interactions. The ‘peer feeling’ drives group mentoring processes (SunWolf, 2008).

*Former Student, M.A. Psychology, Department of Psychology, Delhi University (email: negidevanshi@gmail.com)

**Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Delhi University (email: alkabajpaidu@gmail.com)

Since group mentoring builds on collaborative work, the members come to perceive themselves as well as others as valued participants. It subsequently facilitates an understanding of the self, the other, and the environment (Driscoll et al., 2009). There is greater access to each other's networks, greater sense of connectivity and lower isolation experienced, enhanced confidence, commitment, career progression, and knowledge acquisition (Darwin & Palmer, 2009). Members feel supported, are able to effectively generate new ideas, and there is enhanced problem solving (Mitchell, 1999).

Mentoring in the School Context

The idea and practice of both individual and group mentoring is increasingly being recognized for its positive outcomes for teacher education and professional development of schools (Sundli, 2006). Mentoring helps attract, motivate, and develop new leaders in educational systems. It plays an important role in educational reform for both newly recruited teachers who are in their early careers as well as the veteran teachers (Ganser, 1996). This facilitates retention of new teachers in the school system and also formalizes the mentor role of the veteran teachers. Both these aspects contribute to the professionalism of education (Koki, 1997). Mentoring in schools is associated with many positive personal and organizational outcomes. In educational contexts like K-12 schools and in higher education, mentoring can develop effective educators and facilitate the best classroom practices (Lucey and White, 2017). The peer group mentoring model has been widely applauded as a successful case in Finnish education (Geeraerts, Tynjala, Heikkinen, Markkanen, Pennanen, Gijbels, 2015).

Mentoring is an important component of professional development for teachers in the context of schools. Effective mentoring can help to improve teacher job satisfaction, retention, and classroom practice, as well as to build a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement within the school. According to Head, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1992), several factors contribute to the complexity of mentoring in schools. The needs, developmental issues, proficiency in teaching skills and the school culture, all play an important role in the mentoring process.

In the Indian context, one such initiative was the Mentor Teacher programme initiated in the year 2016 by the State Government of the time. The objective was to facilitate training of the teaching fraternity working in Delhi government schools. In 2016, the Directorate of Education constituted a Teachers' Mentor Group (TMG) to capitalize on the existing expertise of approximately 200 teachers for strengthening the academic and pedagogy related aspects of teaching up to class tenth. The role of Teacher Development Coordinator (TDC) shaped up from two pilot programmes: the first one initiated by the Delhi government and second one from STiR Education, an NGO whose work centers around

improving the intrinsic motivation of education officials, teachers, and students. The current version of the TDC programme launched in 2017 is a government programme that builds on the practice of learning managers and mentor teachers and aims to improve the academic environment, the intrinsic motivation and peer collaboration in government schools. Each government school in Delhi selects one teacher in the role of TDC, who are the mentors, role models, and collaborative leaders. Likewise, the Mentor Teachers are typically assigned between four and six schools, who are responsible for guidance and feedback to both the TDCs and teachers.

Rationale of the Study

Most researchers have focused to understand the dynamics of mentoring from the perspective of the mentee and it therefore becomes imperative to understand the experiences of mentors as well in order to get a more holistic and balanced understanding of the challenges of mentoring. The Mentor Teacher Program of the Delhi government, facilitates females to take up mentorship positions. Studying the experiences of women mentor teachers will help provide insights into the unique challenges, opportunities, and strategies that female mentors employ in mentoring relationships. Further, by focusing on the narratives of female mentors, light can be shed on their perspectives, experiences, and contributions. The current study was thus designed to understand the mentoring experiences of female mentors, specifically:

How do women Mentor Teachers in the government schools of Delhi perceive their role, the perceptions of effectiveness in their roles?

Method

The aim of the current study was to understand the experiences of women mentors in the context of the Mentor Teacher Program initiated in the schools of Delhi government. To understand the perceptions that the female mentors have regarding their role and challenges, a qualitative in-depth interview was conducted. To understand the images for their role as female mentors, 'photovoice' was chosen. Photovoice is a participatory group analysis methodology that has its theoretical underpinnings in participatory action research (PAR), developed by Wang and Burris (1994). 2009). The present study adopted the Online Photovoice (OPV) method developed by Tanhan and Strack (2020) which follows similar steps as proposed by Wang and Burris (1994) in their traditional photovoice approach but takes an online approach.

Participants and Procedure

The current study involved the participation of 12 female Mentor Teachers who were active participants of both the photovoice study as well as the semi-structured interviews. All the participants were residing in Delhi and worked in the government affiliated schools of the Delhi government. They all started their careers as teachers and volunteered for

being a part of this program as Mentors. Their range of experience as a mentor varied from 8 months to 5 years. Except one, all the participants were married. Their age ranged between 34 years to 53 years.

The following table represents the details of the 12 female Mentor teachers who participated in the study. Pseudonyms are used in the table to represent the Mentor Teachers and are used throughout the remainder of the study when referring to their experiences. For the sampling of the study, purposive and snowball sampling was employed to select the participants for the study. A formal letter was sought from the university and participants were approached through Instagram, WhatsApp and the Directorate of Education. They were briefed about the research aim and process and interested candidates were added to a common group. Post this, informed consent was taken from the participants and their confidentiality and anonymity was maintained.

The photovoice part of the study went on for 5 days. Participants were sent a cue for each day and were requested to share a photograph along with a caption

respond to the various research questions were identified and for the interviews, similar and idiosyncratic themes were identified. Clark and Braun (2015) framework was used for analysis that included familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, generating themes.

Results

An understanding of the perceptions of the mentors regarding their role was sought as one of the primary aims. Participants made use of various metaphors to share images and representations of the role of mentor. For example, Rakhi, a 36-year-old young mentor with an experience of 8 months in the role referred to mentoring as a **'ladder'** as she helps in 'connecting the schools at the ground level with system at the top and vice versa'. The participant mentioned how she considered herself to be like a bridge and connecting link between the mentees and the higher authorities. She also considered herself to be someone who provides support to her mentees when they are not able to navigate through their role just like a 'ladder works as a support tool for various

Table 1 Demographic details of Participants

S.No.	Pseudonym	Experience as a Mentor Teacher	Age in years	Marital Status
1	Komal	2 years	37	Married
2	Rakhi	8 months	34	Married
3	Sujata	2 years	43	Married
4	Prerna	2 years	53	Married
5	Shagun	5 years	40	Married
6	Neha	4 years	49	Married
7	Mehak	4 years	53	Married
8	Shivangi	8 months	36	Married
9	Kusum	2 years	53	Married
10	Suman	8 months	37	Married
11	Mamta	2 years	35	Unmarried
12	Vineeta	4 years	47	Married

that would best describe the photograph and answer the cue. Whenever required, clarifications were sought from the participants on their photographs and descriptions. Three of the interviews were conducted online due to lack of physical availability of the participants. The interviews were recorded through audio recorders of a smartphone as well as the laptop.

The interview domains spanned across various areas such as, motivators to join this program, challenges faced by them during their mentorship, the dynamics of their mentor-mentee relationship, their perceptions regarding their role and the strategies used by them in their role. The interviews ranged from 30-80 minutes.

Method of Analysis

The data obtained from the descriptions of the photographs and interviews was analyzed using the method of thematic analysis. For the photographs, the metaphors used by the participants in order to

tasks'. In her words, I associated my role with the ladder. I feel, the most important task that I as a mentor perform is connecting the schools at the ground level with system at the top and vice versa. As a mentor I am expecting to ensure the proper execution of the various programs and curriculums developed by the top most hierarchy and at the same time I am expected to convey the challenges faced by the schools to the concerned authorities so that same can be combatted. A ladder works as a support tool for various tasks. People look for it when they are not able to reach a point on their own. As a mentor I find myself in the same position. Teachers and principal approach me whenever they need support and assistance for any task to be done in school.

She further compared her role to that of a **'small balancing wheel'** of a bicycle. She mentioned how the role of a mentor is not only limited to providing

support to their mentees but also to the larger education system as they help in the implementation of the policies at the ground level as well as represent the teaching community, communicating their concerns, thereby ensuring smooth functioning of the system and ‘bridging the gap between policy making and execution’. This photograph depicts a larger wheel supported by the smaller one. Many new

support that mentors are going to provide is by representing the teacher community at all levels. Shivangi, a young mentor with an experience of 8 months compared mentors to be like **‘tape and wooden support’**. According to her, ‘due to burden the branch had broken but that wood and tape became support for this plant's life system’. Similarly, mentors become the support system of their mentees and help

Table 2 Codes, themes and verbatims of mentor teachers

Themes	Codes	Verbatims
Role inadequacies characterized by Self- doubt and not being “goodenough”	Inadequacy due to difficulty using social media Feeling of not being goodenough	<i>Well, I keep feeling.... No, I'm not good enough. I keep feeling that I should do this. I should be like.... I'm not very. I don't show that this is the work I've done. So I do the work whatever. But I am not very good with social media. I don't click pics sometimes. So I rather find that I'm just on the 50/50...notvery good.</i> <i>(Kusum, a senior mentor aged 53 years when asked if she considered herself to be a successful mentor)</i>
Successful mentorship anchored in “good relationships”	Self layman versus others as effective communicators.	<i>Kahin aur baat karne mein main comfortable rahti hun per yahan (when among mentors) mujhe aisalagta hai ki sab master hain main as a layman hun.... To yahan mujhe lagta hai ki mujhe apne communication skill per kam karneki jarurat hai</i>
	Perceives herself to be at the backfoot vis a vis younger mentors	<i>Main Yahan apne aap ko thoda backfoot per bhi Manati hun.... jo aapke generation ke bacche Hain jinhen 5-7 saal teaching Mein hue hain aur vah bhi yahan Aaye Hain.... although Mera experience jyada hai vah Kahin na kahin session ko overtake kar lete hain...jaise Hamari wali generation kobologe vah tab tak Nahin bolate jab tak unhen bola Nahin Jata... to ya to vah at the back of the mind Kahin na kahin vah culture hai ki Hamen ekadam Se Kisi Ke Samne Se bolane Ki Aadat Nahin Hai vah</i>
	Senior mentors Lagging behind in technology use.	<i>Thoda Sa difference hai isliye is mentorship Mein I keep myself calm.... Agar Yahan 20 25 log Baithe Hain aur aap Kuchh padhaRahe Ho To I am in a listening mode.....Question Hote Hain pervah main sochati hun ki koi aur poochh le per Agar Nahin hota haitoh i raise my question or i raise itafter the session....To yah Ek hesitation samajh lo Main isko overcome nahin kar pa rahi hun yah abhi mujhe lag raha hai.... thoda Technology mein bhi Ham Thode Piche Hain.... yah Kuchhchijen Hain Jo Hamen thoda sastay back Karke Rakhi Hui Hai</i>
	Mentee Reluctance and offensive behaviour perceived as a marker of unsuccessful mentorship	<i>(Prerna, a senior mentor aged 53 years when asked about the barriers she has experienced in thisrole)</i> <i>If I have good relationships with allthe HOSs with all the teachers and with my students toh vahi meri success hai ki if they're listening to me haina they are discussing their problems with me to get solutions toh yahi meri success hai and agar merko bohot reluctant behavior mile bohot hi offensive mile ya ignorant Mile toh main kahungi yaar i am not a successful mentor.... (Sujata, a 43 year old mentor with an experience of 2 years when asked about her measure of success in this role)</i>
	Getting alongwith mentees	<i>Maybe if I'm able to connect well with people, especially with my mentee schools and TDCs and get along with them.... If I'm able to solve their problems and build my approachability towards them...then I think I'm a good mentor.</i> <i>(Rahki, a young mentor with an experience of 8 months when asked about her views on being a successful mentor).</i>

initiatives are being taken in education department and the schools need support in their proper execution. Just like the small balancing wheel, mentors will be supporting the entire education system in the revolution that is happening in government education sector. This support will also evolve in nature with time. I feel the biggest kind of

them navigate difficulties. Another participant, Mamta who was 35-year-old and had the experience of being a mentor for the past 2 years compared herself to **‘water supporting the growth of nearby bushes’** and captioned her picture as – ‘The water shows hope that there is always room for positivity that you can bring in everyone's life. As Mentor Teacher I still feel

the same that in this role I have to support many schools, principals, teachers and finally connecting to students with every bit of positivity and knowledge that I have. The water symbolizes positive vibes and knowledge that touches every bush to support in its growth.'

Perna spoke of '**joining of hearts**' which helps in ensuring fruition Perna, a 53-year-old senior teacher with an experience of 2 years being a mentor: In my role as a mentor the most important task that I consider is that of connect.... Kyunki mujhe aisa lagta hai ki agar aapka connect Nahin Banega Kisi Se to Aapka Jo kam jo hai vah possible Nahin hoga.... Meri picture mein jo drawn hai vah hai two hearts...these are hearts of different stakeholders or mentor... Ismein jo maine depict Kiya Hai vah trees with flowers depict Kiya Hai Kyunki Kahin na kahin main yah Manati Hun Ki flowers aur yah tree always in every season grow Karte rahte hain... Kuchh Na Kuchh useful usse we gain.... So in thisway different stakeholders jo bhi is mentor program mein Aaye Hain they will connect by their heart or kuch na kuch usme fruitful nazar aega.

Similarly, Suman, a youngmentor with an experience of 8 months compared the relationship of mentor-mentee to that of a '**plug and socket**' mentioning – 'I feel connect is very important in building relationshipbetween mentor and mentee'.

When mentioning about how to establish a successful bond with their mentees, Rakhi compared her being available for mentees like being present around "**milk when it is boiling**" as a prerequisite to establishing a bond. She emphasized Sahi Waqt per maujud Nahin Ho to aap Kuchh Bhi Nahin kar sakte... connection building is important in this program per agar aap available hi nahin Ho to aap kya hi connection build Karog.... Even if aap Kisi Aur engagement mein ho To at least of call pay ya message per usko bata sakte ho ki yes you are available agar vo aapko contact Karta Hai Kisi bhi problem ke liye toh aap Usko Jarur call back ya message karo...aur uski Problem ka jo solution hai jo vah chah raha hai...Genuinely use per kam karo efforts dalo Kya Uski help kar pao to presence aur available is the most important in a mentor mentee relationship

Shagun, a 40-year-old mentor for the past 5 years showcased this by comparing herself and her mentee to the process of '**twinning**'. I think twinning. They can empathise with each other. See each other in same role. Can understand their thoughts. Connect is most important thing.

Sujata with an experience of 2 years in mentoring compared the mentor-mentee relationship to '**seeing a As evident in the photovoice data the teacher mentors' criteria of success in roles depended on the acknowledgement they were getting for their capabilities and the opportunities that they were given. Effective performance anchored in acknowledgement and nurturing relationships For instance, Komal mentioned- 'My capabilities were**

reflection in the mirror'. In her words, Empathy with teachers and positive attitude.....Seeing myself in mirror relates to seeing myself at teacher's place and solving problems and searching solutions.....If I keep in mindhow would I feel if I was at teachers/HOS/students place. I will able to give practical solutions to the problems ...If I am having empathy with my mentees then I will be a good listener, act as a problem solver, support system rather than being authoritative.

Regarding the emotions that the mentors have experienced in this role, two participants compared it to being a '**mixed bag of emotions**. Rakhi showcased this with a picture of multicoloured bangles with each colour representing an emotion. I have mixed feelings like the colours of these bangles. At times I feel bright and happy likeyellow, pink and orange. It gives you a feel of pride and contentment when you are able tolive up to the expectations and trust they put in you and provide the required support. Also you feel like a celebrity and star when they treat you with exceptional respect and love. Being mentor is not always about making people learn new things. It's a two way process. You also get to learn new skills while performing your role as a mentor. Also your job become much more interesting with new sets of task in front of you each day. On the other hand there are days when you feel low and like black colour in the bangles. Being a mentor of so many mentees demand a lot of your time and energy than the job of usual teachers. At times your family, your personal and social life suffers as you are always on duty. Also, you are not only responsible but accountable for so many things. You start doubting your decision and feel like going..... Back to your usuals job. All together it's a mixed set of emotions that you go through. For example, she mentioned- 'At times I feel bright and happy like yellow, pink and orange. It gives you a feel of pride and contentment when you are able to live up to the expectations and trust they put in you and provide the required support.' Another participant, Neha who had an experience of being a mentor for the past 4 years showcased these mixed emotions through a picture of a salt-pepperbox where she considered 'all ingredients play an important role to make that one best dish'. It's mixed bag of emotions much like the salt pepper box.... Whole I'm happy and contended.

II. Interview data was coded and analyzed for themes related to the 'Evaluations regarding their perceived effectiveness as mentors.

acknowledged. They were identified. And I was given chanceSo I would say I have been really successful.' **Successful mentorship anchored in "good relationships"** emerged as another theme. For example, Sujata, a 43-year-old mentor with an experience of 2 years mentioned how she would consider herself to be successful if her mentees

cooperate with her by listening to her and discussing their problems with her in order to get solutions highlighting how good relationships are a marker of success. However, 'ignorant or offensive behaviour' from mentees would be perceived as being unsuccessful. Establishing connection for mentoring emerged as one of the challenges faced and being able to bring about some degree of change in the mentee.

Other challenges highlighted were the demands for multi-tasking. In terms of the barriers experienced in this role, one of the participants mentioned how handling '**multiple tasks**' creates a barrier in the effectiveness of the mentors. Shivangi, also mentioned how being in the role of a mentor requires one to interact with many people but when these people create feelings of distrust it creates a '**breakage**' which not only creates a setback for them but also the entire system. She mentioned- 'Mentorship Ek Aisa program hai jismein aap bahut Sare Logon ke sath involved rahte ho aur Jaise aap is picture Mein dekh rahe ho ek breakage sa aa gaya hai..... aur is breakage ki wajahse Jo Ek structure Hai vah dagmaga Sa Gaya Hai.... To Jab Jaise koi Hamara trust break karta hai..... is mentorship ke program Mein Ham Sab ke sath bahut hi collaboration aur support ke sath kam Karte Hain.... lekin Kai bar Hamare hi Sathi Thodi Si prashansa pane ke liye.... thoda sa fame lene ke liye..... to usmein kya hota hai ki jo aapka collaborative work Hota Hai usmein vah Kabhi kbar aapko Bhul Jaate Hain.... vah Jab aapko Bhul Jaate Hain Is Tarah Setoh vo ek breakage Ka kam karta hai aur vah aapke liye ek set back Hota Hai.... aur aapke liye barrier hota hai aapke mind set ke liye barrier Hota Hai.... Aap usse recover kar Jaate hain lekin Thode time ke liye aapke mind set ke liye bahut bada ye barrier Hota Hai'.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was an attempt to understand the perceptions of their roles and markers of their effectiveness as mentors. Among the salient images shared most commonly highlighted the mentor role functions as providing support, nurturing connections, creating perfect alignment and twining, representation of teacher community, serving as the connecting link between the institutional reality and larger educational context, balancing the micro and the macro environments through policy execution and implementation. Lastly and the creating enabling environments through their subtle presence, mirroring and positivity, knowledge transfer a holistic approach. Almost all of these image's spring from an underlying notion of the nurturant leader (Sinha, 1980) who balances task with relational fulfillment. Relationship building is an important component of learning environments has been highlighted the data. female mentors mentioned how their success is anchored in the relationships they establish and interpersonal connect is a strategy that they use to facilitate bonds. A study by Ragins and Verbos (2007) found that women mentors were more likely

to engage in activities aimed at building personal connections with their mentees, such as sharing personal experiences and providing emotional support as was also seen in the current study through the use of informal conversations and showcasing vulnerabilities to establish connection with mentees. Although specific strategies of mentoring were beyond the purview of this study, building connectedness distinctly appeared to be a key theme in their images of important functions of mentoring.

A key finding was how the women mentors despite being chosen after a rigorous selection process, not only reported a sense of self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy but also sought for validations to believe in their potential. Such findings highlight the vulnerability and confidence issues of older women who are struggling to adapt to technology. This seems similar to 'imposter syndrome' phenomena by Pauline Clauance and Suzanne Imes in the year 1978, which highlights how in many field there are chronic feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy among women. This phenomenon is seen as existing even in some recent studies. Paulise (2023) reported the findings of a KPMG study, in 2022, wherein 75% of female executives have experienced imposter syndrome in their careers. The same phenomena were seen to be existing in surgical fields (Narayanmoorthy et.al.,2024). Albeit there the data of women mentors does not correspond exactly to imposter phenomena; however, the take home message seems to be related to issues of confidence and competence building in this group of older women teachers. This mentorship program being a fairly new program (launched in 2016) and most of the participants being a mentor from the start could perhaps have resulted in these findings as they lacked role models. Interestingly, the narratives of self-doubt were mostly highlighted by senior teachers who had been a mentor for the past few years. On the other hand, junior teachers reported more self- efficacy and feelings of success. Despite feelings of self-doubt, senior mentors were able to navigate the social dynamics of gender and easily establish connections with their male mentees. However, young mentors reported difficulties and resistance from male mentees. These findings showcase how age and gender can create doubled vulnerabilities for female employees.

The study also shares light on the dynamics of group mentoring. Research has shown that group mentoring programs can be effective in enhancing mentee learning and development, improving interpersonal skills, and promoting social connections (Allen, 2007). However, the success of group mentoring programs also depends on various factors, including the program's design, the quality of mentor-mentee relationships, and the organizational culture that supports the program. In the current study, multitasking and concerns of politics as breakage in the system was perceived as a barrier in the performance of the role which led to dissatisfaction

with the system, suggesting the need for the development of a healthy culture. Hence a supportive organizational culture can help to promote group mentoring by providing resources, recognition, and incentives for both mentors and mentees, and by creating a culture that values and promotes mentoring as a means of learning and development (Hezlett et al, 2016).

The study thus highlights various facets that drive a mentoring program in the context of schools including the role of the organization's culture, its members, the dynamics of various social realities like gender and power and the interpersonal dynamics of the mentor and the mentee. These findings can be useful to train and develop mentor teachers and strengthen the mentoring process in schools.

Implications and Future Directions

One potential future direction is to conduct a comparative study that compares the experiences of female mentors to male mentors. This could help to identify any gender differences in mentoring styles, experiences, and challenges in this context. Further, an attempt could be made to explore the impact of the mentoring relationship on the mentees.

Limitations

The present study had certain limitations. First, due to time constraints participants were given lesser time for clicking pictures in the photovoice part of the study i.e. five days, which could have been increased to get a deeper perspective with more photos and descriptions. Small sample size of only 12 female mentors, may not have captured the full range of mentor experiences. The study focused solely on the experiences of female mentors, which limits the generalizability of the findings to male mentors or mentors of other genders.

Conclusion

The current study was thus designed in order to understand the mentoring experiences of female mentors in an attempt to amplify their voices and gain insights. The findings can inform the development of evidence-based mentoring programs and policies that are more inclusive, effective, and responsive to the needs of female mentors. Mentoring programs are successful only if they are designed keeping in background the context. It therefore becomes imperative to understand the social and cultural realities that the mentors in the program have to navigate in order to better address the challenges.

References

Allen, T. D. (2007). Mentoring relationships from the perspective of the mentor. In B. R. Ragins & K. E. Kram (Eds.), *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research, and Practice* (pp. 123-152). Sage Publications.

Clark, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.

Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter

phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 15(3), 241-247. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006>

Darwin, A., & Palmer, E. (2009). Peer mentoring: Untapped potential. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 46(2), 145-152.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290902765415>

Directorate of Education. (2016). Constitution of teachers' mentor group for the academic session 2016-17. Government of NCT of Delhi.

https://www.edudel.nic.in/upload_2015_16/9109_13_dt_050416.pdf

Driscoll, M., Russell, M., & Hamilton, D. (2009). *Being your own mentor: A guide for students and researchers*. Routledge.

Goodyear, M. (2006) 'Mentoring: A learning collaboration'. *Educause Quarterly*, 29 (4), 52. available at

<http://er.educause.edu/articles/2006/1/mentoring-a-learning-collaboration>

Government of NCT of Delhi. (2016). *Mentor teacher program (MTP)*. Directorate of Education, Delhi.

https://www.edudel.nic.in/welcome_folder/MTP/MT_P.htm

Healy, C.C. and Welchert, A.J. (1990) Mentoring relations: A definition to advance research and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 19 (9), 17-21.

Hezlett, S. A., Gibson, S. K., & Riggio, R. E. (2016). Leadership and mentoring: Fostering an ethical environment. In R. A. Giacalone & M. Promislo (Eds.), *Handbook of Unethical Work Behavior: Implications for Individual Well-Being* (pp. 319-330). Routledge.

Heikkinen, H. L. T., Jokinen, E., & Tynjala, P. (2012). Mentoring dialogue as a tool for developing pedagogical expertise in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(6), 657-669. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.656742>

Koki, S. (1997). Role of teacher mentoring in educational reform. *Pacific Resources for Education and Learning*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED420647.pdf>

Kram, K. E. (1985). *Mentoring at work: Developmental relationships in organizational life*. University Press of America.

Kroll, K. (2016). Group mentoring: Is there power in numbers? *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 27(1), 1-15.

Lucey, T.A. and White, E.S. (2017). *Mentorship in Higher Education: Compassionate approaches supporting culturally responsive pedagogy*. *Multicultural Education*, Winter, 11-17.

McGowan, R., Stone, D. L., & Kegan, R. (2007). Creating constructivist environments: Aligning instructional and mentoring practices. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 55(6), 671-691. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-007-9065-y>

- Mullen, E. J. (1994). Mentorship in academe: Revisiting the apprenticeship model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(3), 304-323. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1046>.
- Narayanamoorthy, S., McLaren, R., Pendam, R., & Minkoff, H. (2024). Are women residents of surgical specialties at a higher risk of developing imposter syndrome? *The American Journal of Surgery*, Volume 227, Pages 48-51, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjsurg.2023.09.025>.
- Nisbet, G. & McAllister, L. (2015). A critical review of outcomes of peer group mentoring and elements influencing its success and application to student placement supervisors. *International Journal of Practice-based Learning in Health and Social Care*, 3(2), 61-76.
- Palinscar, A. S. (1998). Social constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 345-375.
- Sinha, J. B. P. (1980). Nurturant-task leadership in India: A third dimension in leadership behavior. *Organizational Dynamics*, 8(1), 48-62.
- STiR Education. (2019). System Scaling in Delhi. <https://stireducation.org/about/our-approach/>