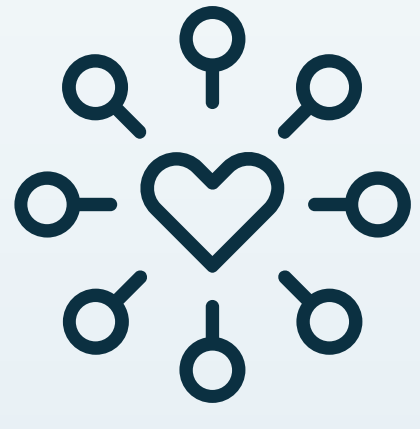


Positive coping strategies & resilience to undocumented status: Evaluating the mental health effects of a peer mentoring program on undocumented young adults in the San Francisco Bay Area, California

Frida Calvo Huerta¹, Andrew Wooyoung Kim, PhD²

Near-peer mentoring in UndocuScholars enhances resilience and mental well-being for undocumented youth. Through essential emotional and tangible support, the program cultivates safety, belonging and diminishes stigma associated with undocumented status.



Community Support and Belonging

Participants find understanding and value in shared undocumented status and marginalized identities, transforming personal narratives into sources of empowerment, belonging and community.



Aspirational Role Models

Mentees draw hope, strength and motivation from witnessing their mentors' success, nurturing the belief that they can also overcome challenges and achieve success.



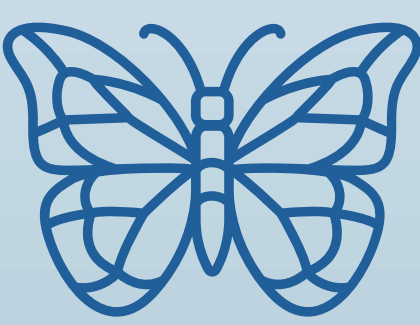
Confidence Building and Overcoming Self-Doubt

Participants cultivate belief in their own abilities, overcoming self-doubt and pursuing their college and career aspirations.



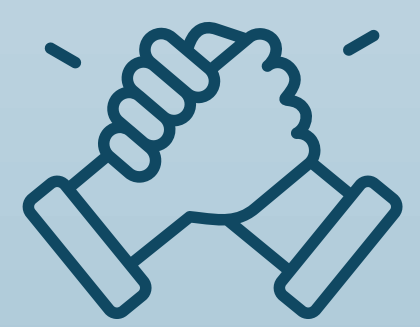
Cultural, Linguistic and Identity Affirmation

Through sharing narratives amid similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, participants forge deep connections, fostering profound understanding and trust. This transformative process affirms their identities and empowers both mentors and mentees in navigating the complexities of having an undocumented status.



Transformative Impact on Concrete Plans

Receiving instrumental support in addition to emotional support assists mentees with the college application process and achieving aspirations through actionable steps.



Professional and Personal Empowerment

Mentors gain valuable, paid professional opportunities to advance their careers while finding affirmation through mentoring, countering feelings of being unheard or undervalued.



Validation of Lived Experiences

Through sharing personal stories of adversities, mentors reframe their past experiences with newfound meaning and appreciation, validating their life journeys.

“As a mentor, I am really close to my mentee. My mentee values my words, experiences, advice, tips as worth listening to. She takes them to heart and tries her best. I spent a big part of my life, growing up, always being told to shut up. It’s a 180 moment for me. It feels really rewarding. I’ve never had this experience before.” – Elena

(Mentor, Mexican, non-DACA, 4th year UC Berkeley student, 21 years old)

Purpose

We investigate:

- 1) Stress and coping related to undocumented status among young adults applying to 4-year colleges;
- 2) Mental health effects of participation in a peer mentorship program among undocumented college and high school students (n=11).

Hypotheses

- We expected elevated levels of stress due to intersectional marginalized identities (racial minority, undocumented, working-class) during a major life transition into early adulthood.
- We expected peer mentoring to have a beneficial impact on their mental health through social support, belonging, and specific knowledge through an undocumented, first-generation perspective to navigate college applications.

Methodology

1) Study Sample

- **Sample:** Undocumented students in high school (mentees), community college students (mentees) and 4-year university students (mentors) over 16 years of age living in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- **Program description:** UndocuScholars is a free, virtual, 10-month peer mentorship program led by undocumented UC Berkeley students, guiding undocumented high school seniors and transfer students through the UC college applications, financial aid and scholarship application process, and transition to college.

2) Qualitative data collection

- Employ ethnographic approach with semi-structured interviews lasting 1.5-2.5 hours each; accompanied by detailed field notes (n=11).
- **Interview Focus:**
 - **Demographics:** Explore household context and socioeconomic status.
 - **Stress:** Identify stressors and investigate navigation of stressful experiences, immigration challenges, barriers to higher education, undocumented status and anxieties about the future.
 - **Coping Strategies:** Explore perspectives, behaviors and resources such as UndocuScholars, community and social support.
 - **Mental Health:** Investigate mood, emotions, and experiences related to anxiety, loneliness, uncertainty, mental health stigma, self-esteem, fear and hope.

3) Thematic analysis

Conclusions

- Combining emotional support with instrumental support to undocumented youth during the transition to adulthood has a significant positive effect on their mental health.
- For undocumented mentors, providing advice and emotional support to mentees with similar experiences facilitates bringing meaning to challenging past experiences.
- **Limitations:** Potential bias exists as mentors and mentees have self-selected for participation in UndocuScholars affecting the study's representativeness.

¹ fridacalvo@berkeley.edu; Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of California, Berkeley; Marco Antonio Firebaugh Scholars Program; Haas Scholars Program

² awkim@berkeley.edu; Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley

