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Author(s)	Mirkovi, Barbara; Brady, Bernadine; Silke, Charlotte
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Associations between non-parental adult support and youths' individual and contextual characteristics

Barbara Mirković, Bernadine Brady and Charlotte Silke

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, School of Sociology and Political Science, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

Email of the correspondent author: b.mirkovic1@nuigalway.ie

Associations between non-parental adult support and youths' individual and contextual characteristics

While the role parents play in supporting young people is well established, support from other caring adults also becomes important during adolescence, particularly when young people are facing problems in their lives. The goal of this paper is to reflect on youth support seeking when facing problems, exploring differences between youth who seek support from parents only and those who seek support from parents and other non-parental adults. This paper outlines the findings of a secondary analysis of data from the third wave of the Growing up in Ireland child cohort at 17/18 years, collected from primary caregivers and youth. From 6126 young people in the national sample, 91.3% answered the selective question about the type of adult support they seek. Of this cohort, 36% of young people seek support from a parent and 48% go to a parent and another adult. Comparing these groups, there are significant differences found in both their individual and contextual characteristics, with better outcomes for youth with additional non-parental adult support, including using active coping strategies, better self-esteem, and identity resolution. While the findings indicate that non-parental adults have a positive influence in different areas of youth well-being, further research is required to better understand the ways in which support from non-parental adults helps young people in their transition to adulthood.

Keywords: supportive adults; natural mentors; youth; transition to adulthood; parenting

Introduction

The period of late adolescence involves many transitions and changes in a young person's life, including those in their bodies, minds, emotions, relationships, and environments. With these changes happening, young people are also facing societal expectations to define themselves more clearly, especially in the areas of identity, education and vocation (Holland *et al.,* 2007). At 17 and 18 years, young people are facing decisions about their future pathways and experiencing new roles. Their social networks are expanding, and they are presented with different perspectives that can help them question previously learned attitudes and values and establish their own. As the demands of this period are intensive, young people often seek support from different sources in their social networks. Relationships with others can help young people to understand themselves better and enable them to face changes and transitions more effectively (Cotterell, 2007). While the opinions of friends and time spent with them become more important during this life phase, youth often engage in new roles such as romantic partners and workers, which can be demanding and emotionally intense. Facing these changes, young people need guidance, advice and support not only to be protected from risks and difficulties they might be facing but also to address the development of their capacities and thrive in their transition to adulthood (Chang *et al.,* 2010; Lerner *et al.,* 2006; Rhodes, 2002; Sulimani-Aidan, 2018).

Both adult and peer support are very important for different aspects of youths' well-being during these transitions. Relationships with parents can change while adolescents are negotiating their autonomy, but parents continue to be important sources of socialization, support, comfort, and influence (Giordano, 2003). Close relationships with parents relate to higher academic goal orientation and academic effort among youth (Wentzel, 1998) and are often a protective factor against depression and low self-esteem (Wentzel & McNamara, 1999) and in dealing with failure (Heaven, 1994). On the other

hand, relationships with close friends are a great source of information about dating, lifestyle, body image, and social relationships (Heaven, 1994) and have been associated with emotional well-being and lower emotional distress (Wentzel, *et al.,* 2004). But there are many questions friends can't answer because they lack the experience and skills, which young people may not want to discuss with their parents (Beam, *et al.,* 2002). At this stage, other important adults present in young people's lives, who young people feel connected to (DuBois *et al.,* 2002), can step in to share their experience, advise youth or show new perspectives in a meaningful way. They can potentially achieve a balance between parent-like adult characteristics and friend-like peer characteristics.

Support from other adults is often found through relationships with teachers, coaches, counsellors, family friends or relatives (Spencer, 2007; Zimmerman *et al.,* 2005). During adolescence, young people are more active in shaping their social environments and developing an awareness of their present and future selves (Darling *et al.,* 2003), while developing their self-concept and identity. The contact they have with non-parental adults is often important in shaping young people's opinions, values and world views by introducing them to adult perspectives, knowledge and skills, that may be different to those of their parents (Chang *et al.,* 2010, Yu & Deutsch, 2019). Cotterell (2007) argues that contact young people have with other adults gives them access to the resources of the adult world. He comments that social interactions with non-parental adults challenge young people to "stretch their social skills" from the usual demands of relationships with parents and peers.

Theoretical Perspectives

A range of theoretical perspectives help us to understand how young people who engage positively with other adults who are not their parents benefit from these relationships

(Zimmerman *et al.,* 2005). Resilience theory suggests that other adults could sometimes compensate for the lack of adult support a young person is receiving, for instance, in the case of parental illness, divorce, poverty or violence in the family (Spencer, 2007). As a part of that framework, research has focused on the significance of non-parental adult support for vulnerable groups of youth, often referring to them as "significant others". Caring and consistent adults can play a significant role for youth experiencing risk by providing them with social support, social capital and guidance, and by enhancing the effects of the protective factors youth already have (for example, further connecting them to their community). That said, close relationships with non-parental trusted adults are a normative experience in development (Beam *et al.,* 2002), and although they have been shown to be important for at-risk youth, their significance is valuable regardless of risk. The framework of social support underlines the importance of having different types of supporters in youth networks (Cutrona, 2000; Sterrett *et al.,* 2011), while social capital theory posits that other non-parental adults could provide specific support through connecting the young person to new networks and opportunities (Brady *et al.,* 2020). However, there is little evidence on what are the sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics of young people who do or do not have non-parental support and the degree to which young people in the broader population seek and use such non-parental support in their everyday lives.

Attachment theory explains that young people who have a secure base in relationships with their parents are better able to form relationships with other adults (Zimmerman *et al.,* 2005). But Rhodes (2005) also suggests that relationships with other adults could improve relationships with others (parents, peers, teachers etc.) which has been shown in some studies to date (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014; Langhout *et al.,* 2004). Caring adults can change youth's perceptions of other

interpersonal relationships and help by sharing their own life experience, showing young people which coping strategies "work and which don't". Based on this, we would expect youth with additional non-parental support to show better relationships with their parents.

Finally, the positive youth development framework views the relationships youth have with caring, supportive non-parental adults as a benefit not only to young people "at-risk" but all young people (Benson *et al.,* 2007; Lerner, 2005). These relationships can foster the development of positive outcomes but also prevent different negative outcomes. Caring adults often listen to young peoples' problems and show them respect, which can enhance well-being and increase self-esteem (Schwartz *et al.,* 2012, Yu & Deutsch, 2019). Although the relationships young people have with non-parental adults are shown to be both a protective and a promotive factor in the development of all youth (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012; Erickson *et al.,* 2009), they are an understudied area of research in the broader population (Beam et al., 2002; Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001), especially in the European context. In the Irish context, there is little understanding of socioeconomic, family or youths' characteristics that come into play in the context of relationships with caring non-parental adults.

In sum, several theories and developmental frameworks propose that relationships with caring and consistent adults are key for promoting positive youth outcomes. While some theorists suggest that relationships with non-parental adults may be helpful when tackling risk, others argue that support from non-parental adults may be beneficial for all young people, particularly when this support is provided in addition to parental support. However, in order to gain support for these theoretical propositions, further research is needed to provide greater insight into the value of non-parental relationships for different groups.

Rationale

The limited body of research on the relationships young people have with other adults shows that these relationships are connected to academic and vocational functioning, and psychological well-being, including higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, fewer depressive symptoms, and coping with emotional and behavioural problems (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Miranda-Chan *et al,* 2016; Sterrett *et al.,* 2011). The Irish national study "My world survey" highlighted the important role that support from "one good adult" can bring in terms of youth mental health. It found that a supportive relationship with a caring adult is associated with higher life satisfaction, self-esteem, more functional coping strategies, a greater sense of belonging, and less likelihood of self-harm (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). Although it's the first and only study of that size in Ireland that included caring adults and their importance for youths' mental health, it included both parents and other non-parental adult figures under the term "one good adult". We argue that there is a difference between these kinds of support. Based on the theory and previous research, we would expect youth with additional non-parental support to have better socio-emotional well-being, use more active coping strategies and show higher self-esteem and identity resolution development.

At this specific age when young people are becoming more connected to adults who are not their parents, there is a need to know more about the profiles of young people who do and don't have caring non-parental adults and the ways in which they benefit from these relationships. Equally, there is a need to know more about the youth who are not connected to non-parental adults and to explore ways in which relationships with adults who are not their parents would help them to thrive (Hagler *et al.,* 2017).

The aim of this paper is to better understand the profile of support seeking from adults among young people. Specifically, we quantify how many 17- and 18- year old young people in an Irish national sample receive adult support in the form of parental and

other non-parental adult support. The paper also assesses the differences in socioeconomic characteristics, relationship with parents, socio-emotional behaviours, coping strategies, self-esteem and identity between youth with diverse adult support profiles.

Method

This paper is based on a secondary analysis of Growing Up in Ireland data accessed from the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA) in December 2018. Growing Up in Ireland is an Irish longitudinal study funded by the Department of Children and Youth affairs. This project follows two cohorts of children providing observations from the children (when old enough), their caregivers, teachers and school principals. The Cohort '98, which is the focus of this study, was included in data collection when the children were 9, 13 and 17 years old.

This analysis is a quantitative cross-sectional study as it includes only the data from the third wave of the Child cohort study (17 years old). The measures included in the study to answer the research questions are descriptive and comparative. The study is based on the main questionnaires from the primary caregiver (usually mother or mother figure) and young-person self-completed questionnaires. To explore the sources of support sought by youth, profiles of youth's adult support answers were made by categorising youth's responses to the question into different groups: "parent only", "parent and another adult", "another adult only" and "no adults". The first two groups were included in the analyses of this paper. The "parent only" group is composed of youth who reported that they seek support from at least one parent, but do not go to another adult. Young people who have the support of their parents and another adult were given the profile "parent and another adult".

This dataset involved a Bioecological model of development, which shows an awareness of the importance of interconnections in the social context and brings possibilities for further research in this field, especially for the preparation of young people for transition to adulthood.

Participants

There were 6216 young people aged 17/18 in the third wave of the Growing Up in Ireland study, 51.2% of whom were girls. Most of the youth (96.3%) were at that time still at school/education, 2.1% were at work or in training, and 0.9% were unemployed. Data were also collected from their primary caregiver, with the primary caregiver usually being the mother of the young person (95.9%). Most of the primary caregivers were in the age range of 40-49 (48.8%) or 50-54 (32.9%) years, with 69.7% in work or education. The household type for most of the families included in the sample was "two-parent household" (85.1%). The social class of the family is in most cases "managerial and technical staff" (36.3%), followed by "non-manual" (19.2%) and "professional workers" (14.4%).

The sample was formed as a fixed sample design when the participants were 9 years old. The sampling of the participants was through a two-stage selection process. The first stage was a random selection of schools in Ireland and second of children in schools. Classification of school characteristics such as region, disadvantaged status, size, school type, denominational status, and gender mix was included (Murray *et al.,* 2011). If the children continued to live in Ireland when they were 17/18, they were contacted to be included in the sample at the third wave (Murphy *et al.,* 2018).

Materials & Measures

Adult support

To assess adult support in young people's lives two questions from the Young person supplementary questionnaire were used. Firstly, to assess a young person's perception of the general adult support available to them the question H9 was used "Is there an adult (or adults) in your life you can usually turn to for help and advice?". To specify parental

from other non-parental adult support the question L5 "When I have difficulties or problems I can usually talk about them to:" with multiple choices being: my mother, my father and another adult.

Sociodemographic data

Variables derived from the household grid were used for sociodemographic data and as indicators of the socioeconomic characteristics of the family. The indicators included are young people's gender, household type (single-parents or two-parent household), primary caregiver's level of education, employment status and equivalised household income.

Relationship with parents

Youths' relationships with parents were measured using subscales from The Parental Monitoring and Youth disclosure scale (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Subscales of monitoring and disclosure were reported by the primary caregiver ("Do you know what <young person> does with his/her free time?"), while young people reported on perceived control from parents (e.g. "Do you need your parents' permission before going out on week nights?"). Reports were derived into total score variables from caregiver's and youth's answers on five-point scales from 1-Almost never or never true to 5-Almost always or always true. Higher results on all subscales indicate higher results of monitoring, disclosure and control. The alpha values of the measurements were: Monitoring (α=.76), Youth disclosure (α= .72), Control (α= .83).

Socio-emotional behaviour

The young person's socio-emotional behaviour was measured using the 25 item Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) reported by the primary caregiver. This is a three-point scale where 0-Not true, 1–somewhat true, 2-certainly true. It included four negative subscales (emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer

relationship problems) that are summed to produce a total difficulties scores, while prosocial behaviour is assessed as a positive subscale representing strength. A higher score indicates a higher presence of difficulties or prosocial behaviour. Alpha scores for both Total difficulties and Prosocial Behaviour are α=.70.

Coping strategies

Assessment of three types of coping strategies young people can use when dealing with problems (problem solving, seeking social support, and avoidance coping) was made with the 15 questions Coping strategies indicator (Amirkhan, 1990). The responses were rated on a five-point scales from 1-Almost never or never true to 5-Almost always or always true A higher score on each of the subscales indicated higher use of that coping strategy and reliability scores showed good internal consistency (problem solving α=. 83, seeking social support α = .90, avoidance coping α = .83).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem was measured as a part of the young people's report with the 6-item short form of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) on a 4-point scale, which measured global self-esteem or the general value youth place on themselves. A higher score indicates higher self-esteem and the internal consistency of the measurement was α=.73.

Identity resolution

Identity resolution was measured with the Adult Identity Resolution Scale which measures the extent to which young people consider themselves to be adults. The scale is a subscale of the Identity Resolution Index (Côté, 1997). The scale consists of 3 items on a 5-point scale which are summed to give a total score. A higher result indicates greater adult identity resolution. The Cronbach alpha at age 17/18 years of the Growing Up in

Ireland was α=.72. This scale was a part of the young person's self-completed questionnaire.

Procedure and statistical analysis

Data were collected through interviews conducted between November 2015 and September 2016 by a trained national panel of interviewers and acquired by the Irish Social Science Data Archive in December 2018. The dataset was analysed using the statistical programme IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

As the sample size is very large, preliminary tests of normality indicated that the distributions are not normally distributed and variances are not homogenous, so the decision was made to use nonparametric tests, specifically the chi-square test and nonparametric t-test (Mann Whitney U test) (Field, 2013). The data collection of the quantitative phase of the child cohort was approved by the Research Ethical Committee of the Health Research Board and the data were analysed in line with the ethical principles of the Growing Up in Ireland research project.

Results

The first of the research questions was how many young people in the Irish national sample recognise and seek adult support in their lives. Out of 6216 young people in the sample, 90.1% of young people said they have an adult that they can usually turn to for help and advice. This question is not discriminative of whether those adults are young people's parents or not. When asked who they usually talk to when they have problems or difficulties, 91.3% of young people selected one or more of the offered options (mother, father, another adult). Of the group who answered (n=6126), 81.4% usually talk with their mother, 62.5% talk with their father and 46.2% talk to another adult.

In creating the support profiles, some of the young people indicated that they were not sure or that this question doesn't apply to them which excluded them from the analyses. Of the 5533 who were included in the analysis, the majority are in the group "parent and another adult" (48%), followed by the group "parent only" (36.4%). All subsequent analyses are based on these subsets of respondents.

Thus, all young people included in the further analysis (75% of the full sample, 85% of answers on the selective question) have the support of their parent(s). Some have the support of another adult along with the support of their parent. Of these 4670 young people, 52.7% are females, 96.5% of the sample is still in education and 85.5% comes from a "two-parent household". The largest percentage of primary caregivers was 40-49 years old (49.3%), followed by 50-54 years old (32.4%), older than 55 (12%) and younger than 39 (5.9%). Most of the primary caregivers are employed or in education (70.4 %), 22.4% are retired or engaged in home duties and 2.3% are unemployed.

A series of analyses were carried out to compare differences between young people who received support from parents only with those who received support from parents and an additional adult, on several measurements: sociodemographic characteristics and socioeconomic status, relationships with parents, coping strategies,

socioemotional behaviour and psychological characteristics. Table 1 shows the measures of central tendency, dispersion and range for all included measurements.

Table 1. Median scores, interquartile range and range of responses for responses on aspects of relationships with parents, coping strategies, socioemotional behaviour, self-esteem and identity resolution

Scale/Subscale	Median	Interquartile range	Possible range	Attained range
Parental monitoring	42.00	5.00	0-45	0-45
Disclosure to parents	21.00	5.00	0-25	4-25
Parental control	22.00	9.00	0-30	0-30
Socioemotional difficulties	5.00	6.00	0-30	0-30
Prosocial behaviour	9.00	2.00	0-10	0-10
Problem solving	17.00	6.00	5-30	5-30
Seeking social support	14.00	6.00	4-24	4-24
Avoidance subscale	13.00	7.00	6-36	6-36
Self-esteem	12.00	5.00	0-18	0-18
Identity resolution	8.00	3.00	0-12	0-12

Sociodemographic characteristics and socioeconomic status

To explore whether different support profiles are associated with any sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics, Pearson chi-square analyses were conducted. Pearson's chi-squares were calculated for crosstabs of social support profiles (parent only and parent and another adult groups) with gender, household type, primary caregiver's highest level of education, employment status and equivalised income.

The findings indicate that the gender of the young person ($\chi2(1)=0.23$, $p>0.05$) and the employment status of the primary caregiver ($\chi2(4)=6.625$, $p>0.05$) were not dependent on the adult support profile. There are significant associations between groups with different adult profiles and household types ($\chi2(1)=9.501$, $p<0.01$, phi=0.045). The proportion of youth seeking support from a parent and another adult that come from single-parents households is higher than expected (9% out of 15%).

Significant differences were also found when comparing expected groups by the primary caregiver's highest achieved level of education ($\chi2(5)=64.358$, $p>0.001$, phi=0.118). Youth whose primary caregiver had no formal education or only primary school, lower secondary school or vocational school only were more likely than expected to seek support from parents and another adult while those whose primary caregiver had higher levels of education (primary degree, postgraduate degree) were more likely than expected to seek support from parents only.

To explore differences in household incomes of young people Mann Whitney U test was conducted. There is a significant difference in equivalised household income of families between the groups of youth with different adult support profiles (U=1967104.5, z=-5.087, $p<0.001$, r=0.08). Youth who seek support from parents only have higher family income (Mdn=16000) than youth that seek parent and another adult support (Mdn=14000).

Relationships with parents

There were no significant differences between the groups "parent only" and "parent and another adult" in relation to parental monitoring or perceived control. Mann Whitney U test showed a significant difference between groups regarding the level of disclosure in the relationship (U=2434723.5, z=-3.604, p<0.001, r=0.05) with the youth seeking support from both parent and another adult (Mdn=22) showing higher results on disclosure than those seeking support only from a parent (Mdn=21).

Socio-emotional behaviour

Regarding socio-emotional behaviour, significantly different results were found for both scores of difficulties (U=2401902, z=-5.551, p<0.001, r=0.05) and prosocial behaviour (U=2477891, z=-3.577, p<0.001, r=0.08). Youth who seek support from parents and another adult have higher results on both difficulties (Mdn=9) and prosocial behaviour (Mdn=5) than youth who seek support from a parent only (Mdn=9, Mdn=5).

Coping strategies

Youth with different support profiles were significantly different on all three coping strategies: problem solving (U=2440820.5, z=-4.728, p<0.001, r=0.07), seeking support (U=2356865, z=-6.732, p<0.001, r=0.1) and avoidance (U=2261713, z=-8.736, p<0.001, r=0.13). Youth from the group parent and another adult showed higher results for using problem solving (Mdn=17) and seeking support (Mdn=15) and lower results for avoidance (Mdn=12) than youth from the group parent only (Mdn=16, Mdn=14, Mdn=14).

Self-esteem and identity resolution

There were significant differences between groups on measures of self-esteem (U=2335981.5, z=-6.909, p<0.001, r=0.1) and identity resolution (U=2335981.5, z=-

6.909, p<0.001, r=0.14). Young people who seek support from both a parent and another adult have higher results for self-esteem (Mdn=13) and adult identity (Mdn=8) than those who seek support from a parent only (Mdn=12, Mdn=7).

Discussion

Support from caring and trusted non-parental adults has been highlighted as an important resource to young people, especially those facing adversities (Brady *et al.,* 2020; Cotterell, 2007; Zimmerman *et al.,* 2005). The Growing Up in Ireland dataset has provided the opportunity to gain an Irish perspective on the importance of these relationships for young people among a broad national sample. This research makes an important contribution to the literature by exploring the role of other adults for young people among a normative sample. It is also unique in differentiating parental from non-parental support and exploring the added value other adults can bring to youths' well-being.

In the current study, 85% of the young people reported they would go to their parent for support when they were facing difficulties. Most of them would talk to their mothers, then their father, but a lot of young people would also use the support of a non-parental adult. The results of Irish national study "My world survey 2" (Dooley *et al.*, 2019) found that out of the 76% of young people that have an adult present when in need, 30% say that adult is their mother, only 4% father and 49% other adults (35% being their relative, 8% someone else, 6% reported multiple sources). The remaining 17% didn't report who their special adult is. The differences in percentages might occur because of the construction of the questions or the different age range included in the research. Another reason is that a young person who has the skills or opportunities to form

relationships with non-parental adults might have more than one caring adult they would go to for help (Meltzer *et al.,* 2018), which is somewhat reported in the My world survey 2 (Dooley *et al.,* 2019) but could give different responses if asked more specifically. As both groups in our analysis have parent support, the results are looked at through the lens of the added value of non-parental adult in their lives, acknowledging that other factors could also interfere with these results.

Relating to the gender of the young people, relationships with non-parental adults are present in both young men and women's lives. Whether they seek help for the same type of difficulties is still unknown and further exploration of gender differences in youths' relationships with non-parental adults is needed. Regarding the type of household, we see differences between young people from single-parent and two parent households. As young people from single-parents households could be more inclined to search for a "second attachment figure" they could have more reason to go to non-parental adults (Zimmerman *et al.,* 2005), as shown in the findings.

The results regarding socioeconomic characteristics are not consistent with preliminary data from a US sample which found that lower-income youth rarely have opportunities for connections to caring non-parental adults (Raposa *et al.,* 2018). In the GUI sample, youth from higher-income families were more likely to seek parent support only while those from lower-income families sought support from parents and other adults. However, Raposa et al. (2018) suggest that lower-income youth have more connections to relatives but not to teachers, coaches or employers who are more important as "bridging social capital" in the transition to adulthood.

In the area of relationships with parents where the difference between groups is found in disclosure to parents, some previous findings indicate that young people who have relationships with caring adults would talk more to their parents about "things that

matter to them" (Murphey *et al.*, 2013). Rhodes et al. (2000) argue that other adult support can result in better outcomes by mediating better relationships with parents. Whilst mediation effects weren't tested in this analysis, it's interesting to note that young people who have non-parental support with parental support are disclosing more to their parents. As we cannot assume directionality of this result, their openness with parents is perhaps what brings them to open up to other non-parental adults. Also, it is important to indicate that non-parental adults have been shown to help in revising working models and helping young people better understand adult perceptions without the tensions that are sometimes present in parent- youth relationships, which could be connected to them disclosing more to their parents (Rhodes, 2005). Future research should also include other relationships present in youths' social network like relationships with friends and romantic partners that assume more importance at this stage (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012), and how these relationships are interconnected with youths relationship with non-parental adults (Yu & Deutsch, 2019). Young people that have the support of non-parental adults can talk with them about situations they have with friends and partners and use their advice in resolving difficulties (Mirković, 2018), so those areas could be better examples of youth's social functioning and influence non-parental adults have.

An interesting finding is the link between relationships with non-parental adults and higher levels of both difficulties and prosocial behaviour. This could indicate that those young people who have more difficulties are formally connected to non-parental adults (teachers, counsellors, formal mentors) in relationships that would hopefully help them deal with those difficulties. But those young people are also more connected and more inclined to prosocial behaviours.

Findings regarding coping strategies are in line with the results of the "My world survey" (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) that show an association between "one good adult"

and active coping strategies (problem solving and seeking support). Likewise, Hurd et al. (2014) found that natural mentors could help emerging adults coping abilities through modelling different ways of active coping to young people, providing support and advice about their experience of coping in a way that could motivate young people to use the guidance provided.

Higher levels of self-esteem, which is one of the indicators of mental well-being, for young people with the support of non-parental adults could be related to social approval and emotional support that can be sought through those relationships (Schwartz *et al.*, 2012). The "My world survey" (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) indicated that those young people with low or very low support from "one good adult" have self-esteem significantly below average. Higher adult identity resolution associated with relationships with non-parental adults supports the idea that those relationships bridge young people to adult resources important in their transition to adulthood. Caring and trusted adults often show young people possible identities for themselves and are sometimes seen as role models, thus enhancing positive identity development (Rhodes, 2005). Given that identity formation is seen as one of the main tasks of adolescence and transition to adulthood, this finding is noteworthy.

Limitations

While this study has a number of key strengths, it also has some limitations. Firstly, cross-sectional data doesn't allow causal relationships between variables. Most of the data used was from young person's self-report measures, which could potentially be biased. Although the large sample size yields many insights that could go unnoticed in small samples, the use of big samples brings a lot of challenges. In particular, non-normal distributions of variables require the use of non-parametric statistics. Moreover, the number of tests used, and the large number of participants, inflates significance which could give a higher possibility of Type 1 error. The other limitation is small effects dependable on the sample size. In choosing the selective question and analysing only participants who already have the support of their parent the sample size did become smaller, making it possible that a part of the representative characteristics of the sample was lost. The potential for longitudinal data from the Growing Up in Ireland study to connect parental and non-parental support to previous experiences of young people measured at previous waves of the study was beyond the scope of this paper.

Recommendations for research, policy and practice

To compare parent and non-parental support more effectively, it is recommended that future research include more than the presence of the type of adult support but also the quality and meaning of that support to a young person. Although providing a lot of information on a specific cultural context in time and addressing the need for knowledge about the "social context of development", the Growing Up in Ireland study does not provide in-depth information regarding the definition of other adults who help and support children and youth. These roles can have great variance, from the social roles these adults can have, age-range and the level of connectedness to the young person.

Young people often describe other important adults as having both parent (they give them advice, serve as guidance and models) and friend (they are supportive, non-judgmental, they don't punish, have fun together)-like characteristics (Beam *et al.,* 2002; Chen *et al.,* 2003). This raises the question of whether the support other adults give to young people is a different kind of support than that received from other sources in their social network, such as parents and friends. As they receive support for different areas of their lives from parents and peers, the question is how the support from other adults influences young people's lives. Is it a matter of accumulating support from different sources or receiving the support of a different kind? Dolan and Brady (2012) argue that quality of support is often more important than the quantity or number of people in the social network which makes it of even greater importance to go deeper into the quality of social support non-parental adults can bring to young people. Rhodes (2002) proposes quality characteristics that should be considered in future research: closeness, emotional and instrumental support.

Raising awareness of the value of non-parental support can be used to inform policies, programmes and helpful interventions. One of those could be youth-initiated mentoring, which appears to be beneficial with vulnerable populations. This model

facilitates young people to identify supportive adults in their existing social networks and to further harness the supports offered by these adults (Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman, 2013). Another policy option is to place more emphasis on training adults to better support youth, especially those who are in regular contact with young people.

Given the findings reported here, it could be argued that the goal for policy and practice is in creating environments rich with potential non-parental support, meaning that adults should be more visible and accessible to young people in their communities, schools or organizations working with them (Cotterell, 2007). In addition, stakeholders should be encouraged to recognise the characteristics of youth who have less chance of having non-parental support and identify ways to provide these young people with the support they need.

Conclusion

Analysis of Growing Up in Ireland data provided us with a profile of young people who seek support from non-parental adults in addition to parents. The results show that this group has a different profile to those relying on parent support alone. The group that seeks support from non-parental adults and parents shows more disclosure in their relationship with parents, higher levels of difficulties but also strengths in socioemotional behaviour, uses more active coping strategies, and has better self-esteem and identity resolution.

Findings from a national sample help to fill the gap with regard to our understanding of caring non-parental adult support among the understudied larger population, given that most of the research in the field of supportive adults is done with vulnerable groups. Future advances in this field need to take a deeper look at the profiles of non-parental adults in youth's social networks, the quality of support youth receive from non-parental adults and the processes that happen in those relationships. There is a need to address the question – "Are relationships with other adults a bridge that can help young people transition to adulthood more easily and why?" Research on this topic will help to broaden our knowledge of the support provided to youth and its' importance in the promotion of youth well-being and thriving.

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