



Mentorship in the workplace

Employee participation and perspectives

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[The Diversity Institute](#) conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.

Canada

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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About the Survey on Employment & Skills

The [Survey on Employment and Skills](#) is conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the [Future Skills Centre](#) and the [Diversity Institute](#) at Toronto Metropolitan University. This report draws on results from the sixth wave of the study, which consists of a survey of 5,968 Canadians age 18 and over, conducted between October 13 and November 23, 2023, in all provinces and territories. It was conducted both online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories). The sample includes 3,862 adults who are employed.

Survey reports can be found online at:

- > www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/listing/-in-tags/type/survey-on-employment-and-skills
- > fsc-ccf.ca/research/2020-survey-on-employment-and-skills/
- > www.torontomu.ca/diversity/research/future-skills/survey-on-employment-and-skills/

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Introduction

Workplace mentorship programs can have [numerous benefits](#) for both participants and employers. There is evidence that having a career mentor can lead to greater compensation, more frequent promotions, higher employee engagement and retention, and improved overall job satisfaction. Research from the Association for Talent Development, for example, found that organizations with [formal mentoring programs saw higher employee engagement](#) and retention, more support for growth of high-potential employees, better intra-organizational collaboration, and more knowledge transfer.

Existing literature on workplace mentorship primarily examines the benefits to mentees' career outcomes and makes recommendations for mentorship best practices. For example, the Harvard Business Review [uses data](#) on revenue increases and employee retention to support mentorship, while [another of their articles](#) discusses how a lack of mentorship can hurt organizational performance. However, there is less research available that investigates workers' views on these initiatives. Moreover, as one [2023 study](#) notes, there has been less research examining workplace mentorship across different demographic groups and occupations, although this issue was recently the focus of [a study by the Diversity Institute](#), highlighting the critical role that mentorship plays in advancement opportunities for diverse workers.

Results

The Survey on Employment and Skills aims to fill this knowledge gap by examining how workers perceive the value of workplace mentorship programs (breaking down results by factors including gender, age, racial and ethnic background, and occupation). Specifically, the survey asks whether individuals have a mentor, and if so, whether they perceive that relationship to be helpful in four different dimensions: overall job satisfaction; career advancement; management of workplace conflict; and development of new skills.

The survey found that among Canadians employed full-time or part-time, or who are self-employed, 38 percent had someone at their work who they considered a mentor. In the survey, a mentor is defined as “an experienced person who cares about your career development.” Those who work full-time (40%) or part-time (40%) are much more likely than those who are self-employed (17%) to have a mentor. The likelihood of having a mentor is also a bit higher for those working in office or administrative jobs (42%), in sales or service jobs (40%), or in professional or executive positions (40%), compared to those working in jobs related to skilled trades, transportation or manual labour (34%).

CHART 1A:
Percentage of employed Canadians with a mentor at work

Subsample: employed

Do you currently have someone at work who you consider a mentor - that is, an experienced person who cares about your professional development?

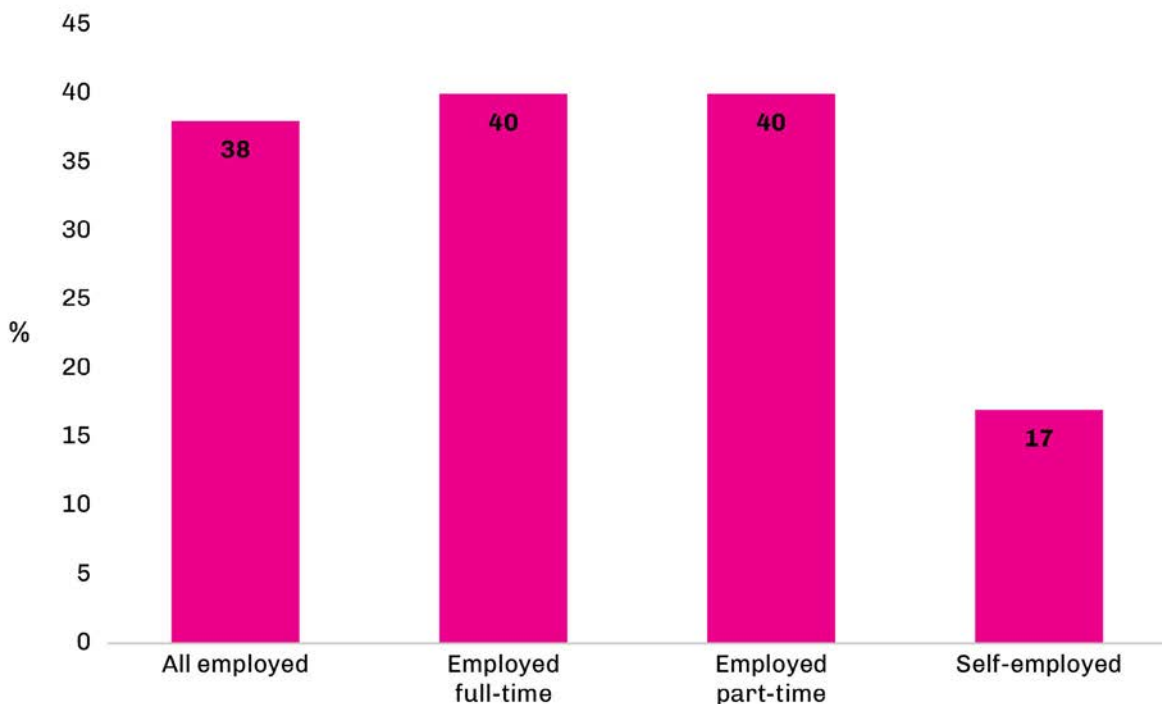
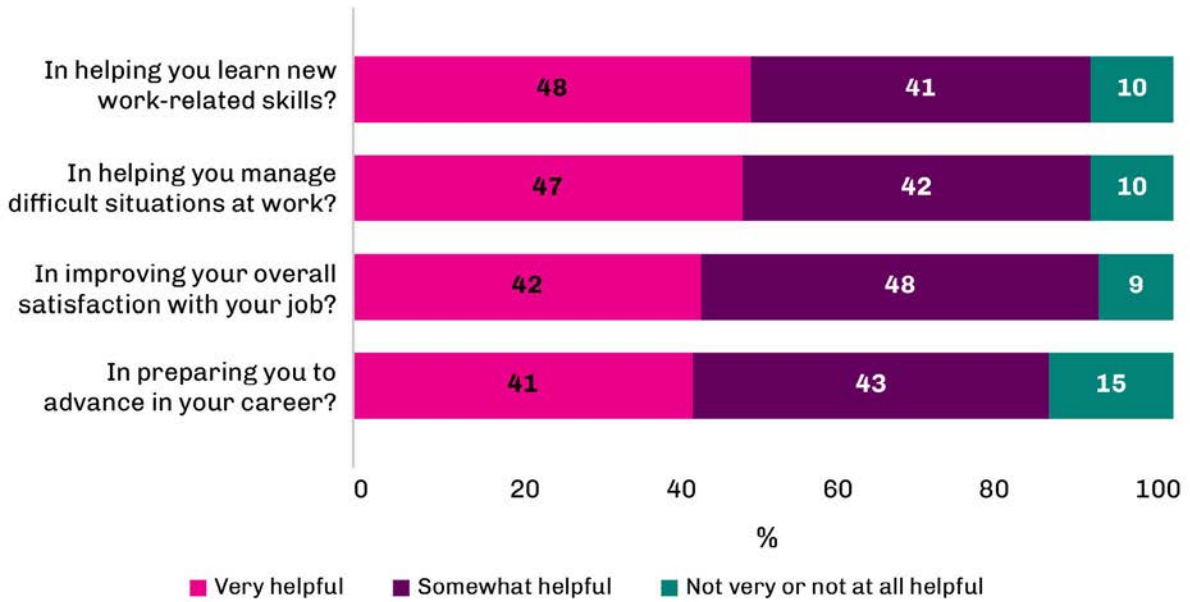


CHART 1B:
Benefits of having a mentor at work
 Subsample: employed, with a mentor at work

How helpful has your mentor at work been to you personally in each of the following:



Most employees with a mentor find that the relationship has been either very or somewhat helpful to them in advancing their careers (83%), in helping them manage difficult situations at work (89%), in learning new skills (89%), and in improving their job satisfaction (90%). But perceptions of the extent of these benefits vary among different groups.

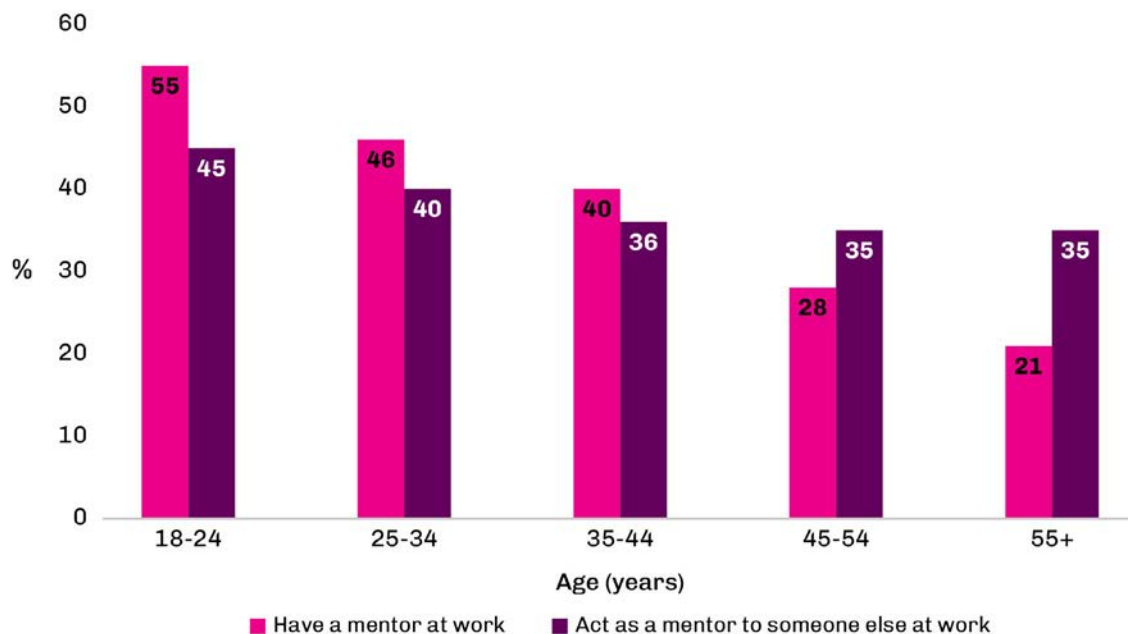


Mentorship and age

Younger workers are about twice as likely as older ones to have a mentor at work. At the early stages of their careers, younger employees often seek guidance to help them navigate their professional paths, acquire new skills, and understand workplace dynamics, making mentorship a valuable resource. Organizations frequently design mentorship programs specifically for entry-level employees and recent graduates to help them integrate into the company culture, provide essential knowledge, and build professional networks. Conversely, those age 55 and older are among those least likely to have a mentor (21%). Older workers may rely more on their accumulated experience and established professional networks, making them less likely to seek out mentorship opportunities.

CHART 2:
Mentorship at work, by age group
Subsample: employed

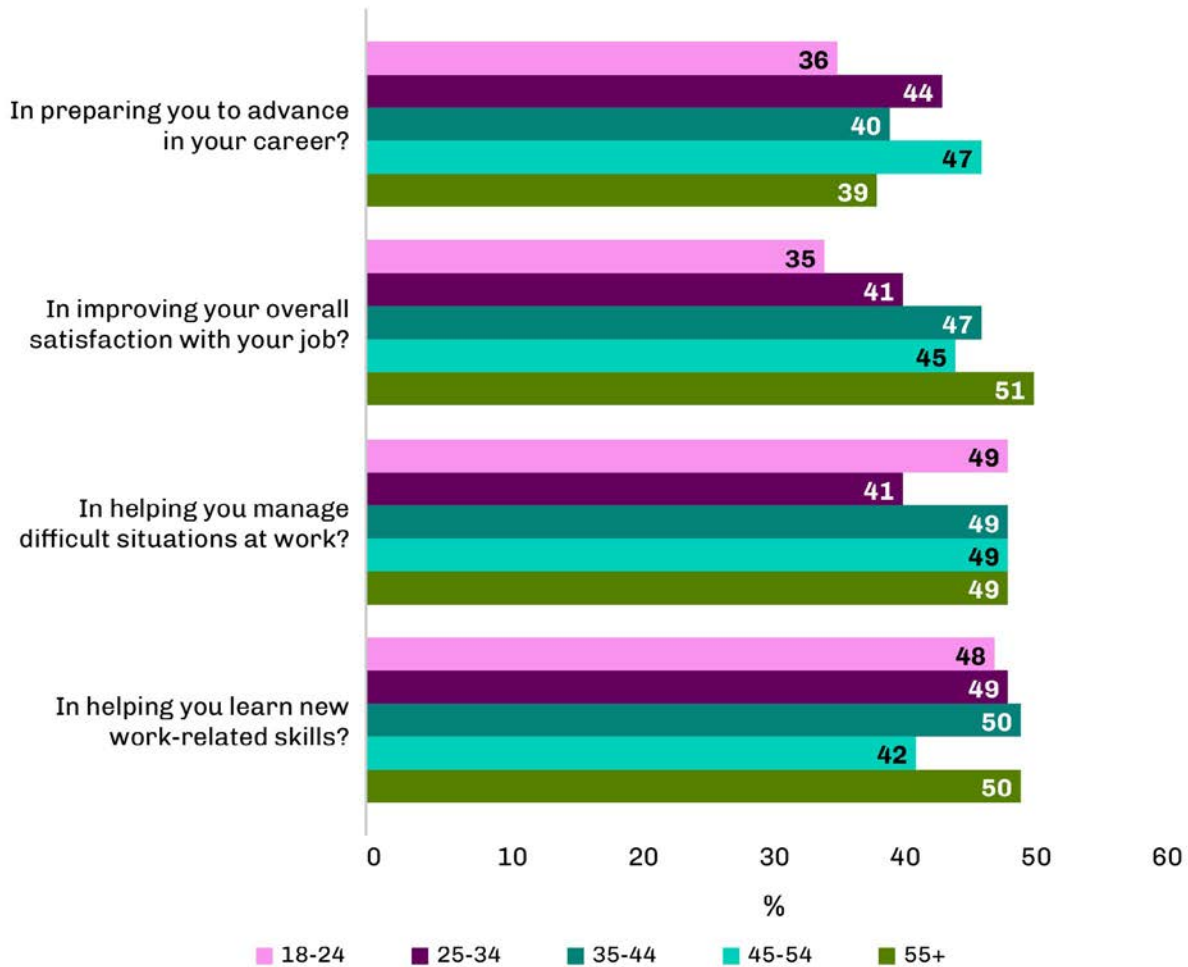
Do you currently have someone at work who you consider a mentor - that is, an experienced person who cares about your professional development?



While younger workers are more likely to have a mentor, they are not necessarily more likely to feel it is beneficial. In fact, among those with a mentor, workers age 18 to 24 are the least likely to say that it has been very helpful to them in improving their overall job satisfaction or in advancing their careers.

CHART 3:
The benefits of mentorship (very helpful), by age group
 Subsample: employed, with a mentor at work

How helpful has your mentor at work been to you personally in each of the following:



Mentorship and gender

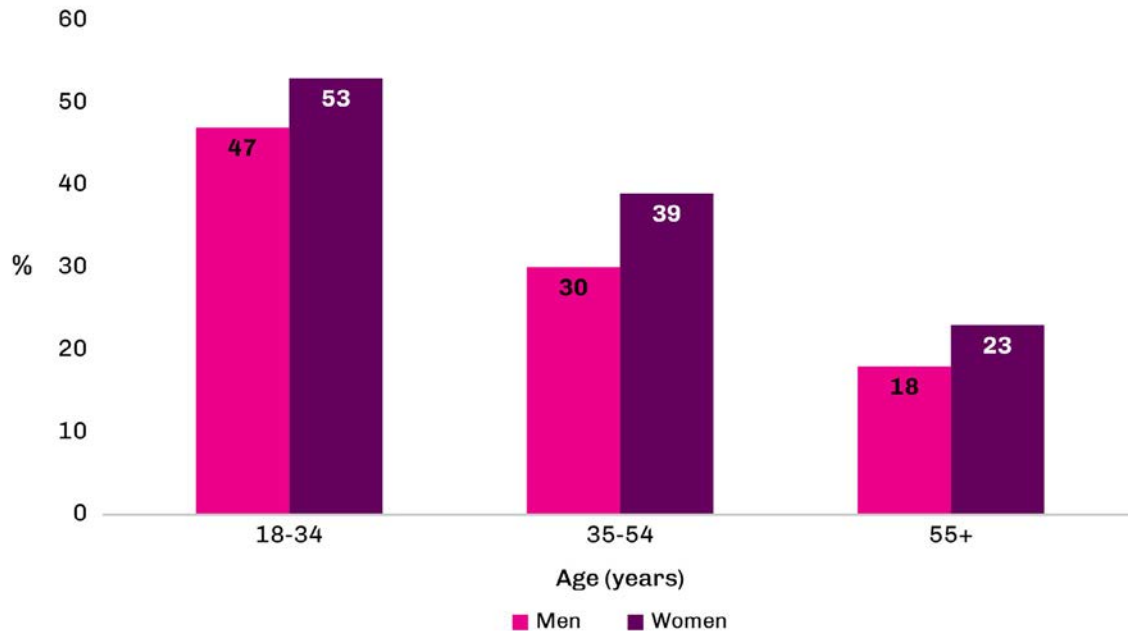
While the age differences in the likelihood of having a mentor may not be surprising, the differences between women’s and men’s experiences of mentorship are more striking.

Overall, women (42%) are more likely than men (34%) to say that they currently have someone at work who they consider a mentor. And within each age group, the likelihood of having a mentor is greater for women than it is for men.

CHART 4: Percentage with a mentor at work, by age and gender

Subsample: employed

Do you currently have someone at work who you consider a mentor - that is, an experienced person who cares about your professional development?

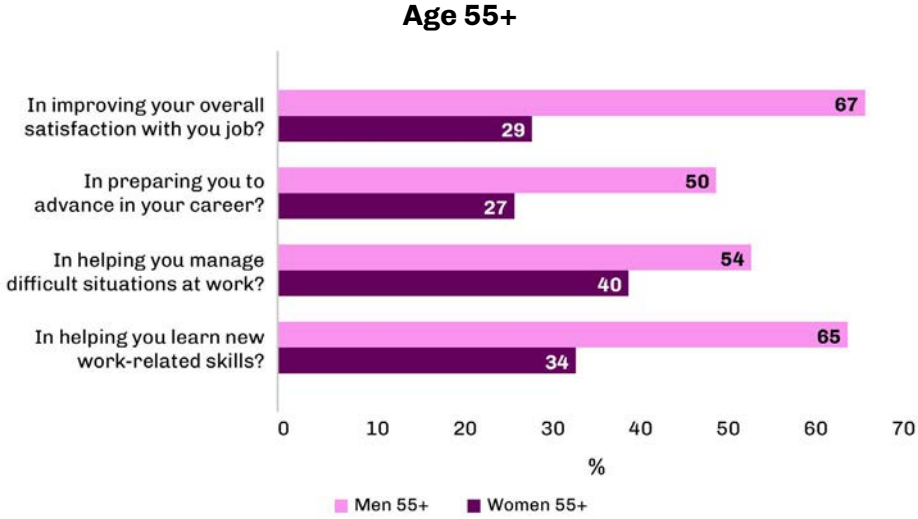
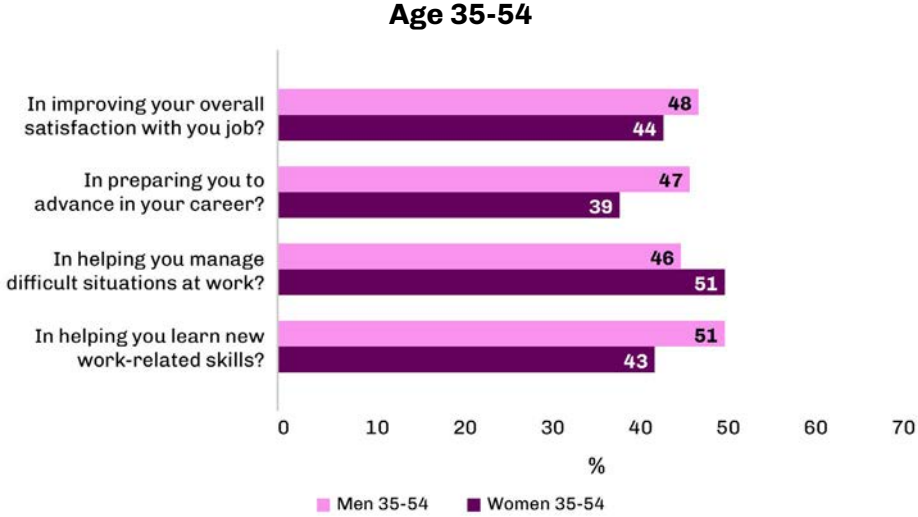
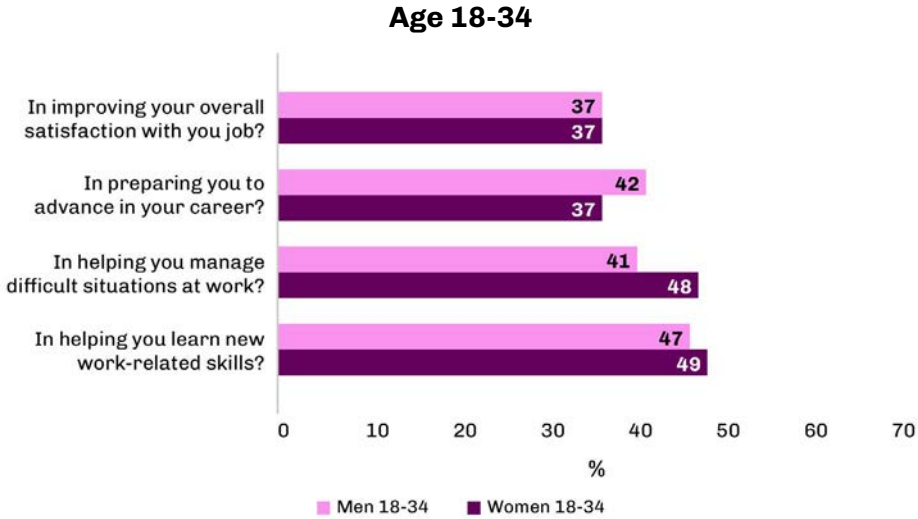


However, among those with a mentor, men are generally more likely than women to say that having a mentor has been very helpful to them. This is the case in three of the four areas mentioned in the survey: in improving their overall satisfaction with their job (45% of men say having a mentor has been very helpful in this area, compared to 39% of women); in preparing them to advance in their career (45% compared to 37%); and in helping them learn new work-related skills (51% compared to 45%). In one area, women are slightly more likely than men to say having a mentor has been very helpful: in helping them manage difficult situations at work (48% of women say having a mentor has been very helpful in this area, compared to 45% of men).

These perceptions, however, vary with age for both men and women, but in the opposite directions. For men, the perceived benefits of having a mentor increase with age; for women, they decline. The result of this pattern is that a large gender gap emerges in the benefits of mentorship as age increases. Among those age 55 and older with a mentor at work, 50 percent of men, but only 27 percent of women, say the relationship has been very helpful in preparing them to advance in their career. Similarly, among those age 55 and older with a mentor at work, 67 percent of men, but only 29 percent of women, say the relationship has been very helpful in improving their overall satisfaction with their job.

CHART 5:
Benefits of having a mentor at work (very helpful), by age and gender
 Subsample: employed, with a mentor at work

How helpful has your mentor at work been to you personally in each of the following:



In short, while both men and women age 55 and older are among those least likely to have a mentor at work, men in this age group with a mentor are among those most likely to say that the relationship has been very helpful to them, while women age 55 and older are among those least likely to hold the same view. What is not clear is whether these differences among older workers reflect gender inequalities in the workplace (for instance, the expectation that men and not women will rise to top leadership position) that were more prevalent among earlier generations, but which will fade with time – or whether they reflect more enduring inequalities that will be reproduced when those currently in younger age groups become older.

The benefits of mentorship for Indigenous, immigrant and racialized workers

Employees who identify as Indigenous are much more likely than average to have a workplace mentor; 62 percent of Indigenous Peoples say this is the case for them, which is the highest proportion of all groups identified in the survey. And Indigenous employees are also among the most likely to say that having a mentor has been helpful. For instance, 52 percent of Indigenous employees with a mentor say that the relationship has been very helpful to their career advancement, compared with an average for all workers of 41 percent.

While Survey on Employment and Skills did not ask about the background of people’s mentors, and so cannot speak to the benefits of Indigenous employees having mentors who are also Indigenous; other research suggests this could be especially beneficial. One [study](#) from 2023 found that Indigenous healthcare workers or medical students had unique cultural beliefs that at times conflicted with the requirements of their work or education, and that mentorship could improve Indigenous people’s experiences in these roles by allowing them the opportunity to discuss concerns about cultural differences with someone more experienced. [Another study](#) on Indigenous mentorship programs found that almost all participants felt the program led them to “find and expand their sense of community,” and that the mentorship network had become “like a second family to them.”

Turning to racialized employees, the survey finds that 38 percent of those identifying as Black report having a mentor at work, the same proportion as the average for all workers. But Black employees with a mentor are the most likely, among all groups in the survey, to say that having a mentor has been very helpful for them when it comes to managing difficult situations at work (64%).

South Asian employees (44%) are more likely than the average (38%) to have a workplace mentor, and just as likely as the average to see the relationship as being helpful. In the case of employees with Black and South Asian identities, as with Indigenous employees, the survey findings draw attention to the significant role that culturally relevant mentorship programs can play in fostering a sense of community and enhancing the professional experiences of underrepresented groups. The benefits of mentorship for underrepresented groups can be observed in other environments as well, such as entrepreneurship and education.



Conversely, those who identify as Chinese (in terms of their racial background) are among those least likely to have a mentor (23%), and, for those who do, are also among those least likely to say having a mentor has been helpful. These findings echo [2022 research](#) by McKinsey & Company, which found that only 27 percent of East Asian employees agreed that their organizations provided them with the coaching and mentorship needed to succeed, compared to 44 percent of white employees.

TABLE 1
Mentorship at work:

Experiences by Indigenous and racial identity

		For those who have a mentor a work: having a mentor has been very helpful to...				
Identity group	Has a mentor at work	Overall job satisfaction	Career advancement	Managing work conflict	Learning new skills	Am a mentor to others at work
Indigenous	62%	60%	52%	56%	55%	64%
South Asian	44%	41%	40%	45%	44%	50%
Black	38%	43%	43%	64%	46%	41%
Average (all employed)	38%	42%	41%	47%	48%	38%
Chinese	23%	25%	25%	34%	37%	22%

Overall, workers who were born in Canada and who arrived as immigrants are equally likely to say they have a mentor at work. But recent immigrants specifically – who have lived in Canada for 10 years or less – are more likely than average (48%) to have a mentor.

Differences across sectors

Workers in the non-profit sector (50%) are more likely to say they currently have a mentor, compared to those working in the public (42%) or private sectors (36%). And those in the non-profit sector who have a mentor are among those most likely to say they have found the relationship to be very helpful to them (for instance, 55% of these workers say having a mentor has been very helpful to them in preparing them to advance in their career, compared to the average for all workers with a mentor of 41%).

Non-profit employees may find workplace mentorship programs particularly helpful due to the alignment of mentors' guidance with the organization's mission, offering opportunities for career advancement and skill development in a context of more limited resources.



Mentorship in the era of remote work

One aim of the survey was to determine whether transition to remote work that many workers underwent during and after the COVID-19 pandemic affected their access to mentorship in the workplace.

The survey found that having a mentor is least common for those who were already working from home prior to the pandemic (25%); note that these workers are more likely than average to be self-employed. However, workers who switched to working from home following the pandemic (44%), either every day or at least some days per week, are more likely than those who continued to work in their regular place of work (36%) to say they have a mentor. The difference between the two groups is less pronounced in some occupations. For instance, among office workers, those who have switched to working from home at least some days (43%) and those who continue to work in the office (40%) are more or less equally likely to have a mentor; the same is true among those who work as professionals or executives (44% and 41% for the two work situations respectively). Furthermore, younger workers (age 18 to 34), who had spent less time in the workplace prior to the onset of the pandemic, are more likely than average to have a mentor, regardless of their work location.

Taken together, these results suggest that working from home has not been an obstacle to developing a relationship with a mentor at work.



Mentoring others at work

As well as asking about having a mentor at work, the survey also asked about acting as a mentor to someone else. Overall 38 percent of employees say they act as a mentor by sharing their experience with someone else at work to help them with their professional development.

Having a mentor, and being a mentor, are experiences that tend to go hand-in-hand: 60 percent of employees with a mentor say they also act as a mentor to someone else, compared to only 25 percent of those without a mentor.

In view of this, it is not surprising that many of those groups more likely to have mentors are also more likely to mentor others. This includes: younger workers (age 18 to 24); Indigenous workers; those who identify as South Asian; and recent immigrants.

Those who work as executives, managers, and business owners (51%) are more likely than average to act as a mentor to others (though they themselves are not more likely than average to have a mentor). Those who are much less likely than average both to have a mentor and to act as one include self-employed workers (17% have a mentor, and 27% are a mentor to someone else) and workers who identify as Chinese (23% and 22%, respectively).

Men (41%) are more likely than women (35%) to act as a mentor to someone else at work. And there are additional gender differences when it comes to those working as professionals or as executives, managers, and business owners, as well as to older workers.

- Among women in these occupations, 44 percent have a mentor and 42 percent are a mentor to someone else – in both cases, above the average for all workers. In the case of men in these occupations, however, only 36 percent have a mentor (close to the average for all workers), though 47 percent act as a mentor (above the average).
- When it comes to older workers – those age 55 and older – men are slightly less likely than women to have a mentor (18% compared to 23%), but are much more likely to be a mentor to someone else at work (40% compared to 27%).

Overall, then, women are more likely than men to have a mentor, less likely to find the relationship to be very helpful, and less likely to act as a mentor. Conversely, while men are less likely to have a mentor, those that do are more likely to experience benefits, while men are also more likely to act as a mentor to someone else. The survey results align with some of the [existing literature about mentorship](#) that has described women's experiences of being "over-mentored". This research shows that women are more likely to have a professional mentor, who might invite them to participate in professional training programs, complete self-assessments, and so on, but are less likely to have a "sponsor", wherein a mentor uses their influence within an organization to advocate for the mentee's career advancement. When men are more likely to reap the benefits of sponsorship while women are limited to receiving career advice and feedback, it could follow that women would perceive these programs to be less helpful.

Job satisfaction and mental health

Employees who have a mentor at work (40%) are more likely than those who do not (24%) to say they are very satisfied with their job. The proportions who are either very or somewhat satisfied with their jobs is 90 percent for those who have a mentor, compared to 73 percent for those who do not. Employees with a mentor are also more likely to report that they feel their mental health is either excellent or very good (46% of those with a mentor feel this way, compared to 36% of those without a mentor).

This does not mean that having a mentor is a direct cause of greater job satisfaction or better mental health. Having a mentor could be associated with other factors – such as working for an organization with a commitment to developing talent and with clear opportunities for advancement – that are themselves associated with better well-being.



Conclusion

This study of employees' attitudes toward workplace mentorship provides insight into how these relationships are used and perceived across different groups in the workplace. The findings underscore the importance of culturally relevant and inclusive mentorship programs, particularly for underrepresented groups such as Indigenous employees, who report the highest engagement and benefits. While younger workers and those in entry-level positions are more likely to have mentors and benefit from these relationships, older employees and those of certain ethnic backgrounds, such as Chinese, are less engaged, highlighting a need for tailored approaches to mentorship.

Gender disparities are evident, with women more likely to have mentors but perceiving fewer benefits compared to men, who are more likely to act as mentors and report positive outcomes. This points to a potential mismatch between the mentorship women receive and the sponsorship that could more effectively support their career advancement.

The transition to remote work during COVID-19 did not significantly hinder access to mentorship, particularly for younger employees, suggesting that digital tools can successfully facilitate these relationships. However, ongoing efforts are needed to ensure mentorship programs are accessible and beneficial to all employees, regardless of their work environment.

Overall, the findings highlight the nuanced ways in which mentorship affects different groups, as well as the need for organizations to adapt their mentorship strategies to meet diverse needs, fostering a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.



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