

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Bullying in Schools

Purpose

This paper summarizes the relevant research findings on the causation and management of bullying, and outlines the policy and strategies of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in tackling bullying.

Background

2. At the Panel meeting on 16 February 2004, Members proposed that the Administration should appoint an independent academic institution to conduct a study with a view to identifying the problems of bullying at school and making recommendations for implementation in the longer term. The Administration undertook to provide further information to facilitate Members' consideration.

Research on Bullying

3. Bullying is not a new problem nor is it unique to Hong Kong. The subjects on the causes and the characteristics of the bullies and the victims have been widely researched and the more recent research studies are those conducted by Olweus of Norway, Chang of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Wong of the City University of Hong Kong. (See Appendix 1 for some background information on these academics.)

4. The findings of these research studies are consistent. They pointed to some commonalities in the character of the bullies and the victims. The former are usually from families without support but much freedom while the latter are usually characterized by timidity, anxiety, and having insecure feelings. (See Appendix 2 for a list of the research studies quoted below.)

5. Chang, Schwartz, Dodge and McBride-Chang (1) studied the relation of harsh parenting to children's emotion regulation and aggression. The results indicated that harsh parenting from fathers had a stronger effect on children's aggression. The longitudinal research findings of Boulton (2)

indicated that for children, high levels of time “alone” predicted greatest increases in bullying scores.

6. Chang (3) has looked into the variable effects of children’s aggression, social withdrawal and prosocial leadership as functions of teacher beliefs and behaviour. It pointed out that teachers’ aversion to aggression and empathy towards withdrawal enhanced the self-perceptions of both aggressive and withdrawn children. Hence the role of teachers is important in anti-bullying strategies and measures.

7. The above findings are also supported by experts in other parts of the world, e.g. Coie et al (4) and Poulin et al (5)

8. In reviewing two decades of research on bullying in school, Smith ((6) & (7)) made the following observations -

- (a) Victims telling someone, especially teachers and family do help prevent deterioration of bullying incidents. Teachers’ decisive and prompt interventions are needed. A definite school policy on anti-bullying is pertinent.
- (b) Teachers need training in working with individual pupils, facilitating peer support schemes and helping to change the role of the bystanders and ethos of the peer group.

9. A resource package on bullying has been produced by EMB on the basis of the above research findings and Smith’s recommendations. Bullying incidents at school happen when there is inadequate supervision. Experts in the field considered that for the purpose of prevention, we should focus on the awareness of the teachers and the public.

The Policy

10. Schools should be a safe and harmonious place for students. EMB has therefore adopted a zero-tolerance policy on bullying in schools and is committed to support schools in managing bullying. Schools are reminded and supported to take a positive and proactive stand in managing and preventing bullying in schools by adopting a whole school policy. With a whole school policy, all school personnel, parents and students will have consensus and a clear understanding of the objective, intervention strategies, preventive measures and evaluation mechanism in tackling

bullying. There should also be a close collaboration among all the stakeholders in effecting all the relevant measures with a view to building a harmonious school ethos.

The Strategies

Resource Package on Bullying

11. In support of EMB's commitment to tackling the problem of bullying, a resource package entitled "Co-creating a Harmonious School" has been produced and was issued to schools in January 2004 with a view to presenting to teachers a systematic and comprehensive set of reference materials and tools in dealing with bullying in school. This package aims at enhancing teachers' awareness and knowledge on bullying, and supporting schools to assess the problem and formulate intervention and follow-up support and preventive strategies on bullying. The identification questionnaire and the programmes presented in the package are based on actual events at school and the research recommendations of experts studying bullying. A series of teacher training workshops on the usage of the resource package is scheduled for March and April 2004 to further support the teachers on the application of the identification, intervention and preventive measures in schools. Overseas studies using a similar package reported a reduction rate in school bullying by 15 to 20%.

School-based Assessment Data vs Territory-wide Research

12. A validated assessment tool for schools' use in assessing the situation of bullying in their own schools has been developed by EMB. In the process of constructing this assessment tool, 42 local schools were involved in the sampling and norming work. The tool has high reliability and validity. The data collected by the schools using this tool will reveal the types of bullying behaviour, the location and time when bullying takes place, and the students' means of coping. Compared with territory-wide research data, this school-based information is more useful and revealing as it would serve as a useful reference for the individual schools in the planning of a whole-school policy and related intervention and prevention measures. This assessment tool has been made available to all schools through the resource package of "Co-creating a Harmonious School". EMB would support schools to conduct school-based assessment with a view to setting up a whole-school policy on bullying.

Case Studies on Bullying Cases

13. The School Development Officers and Educational Psychologists of EMB are committed to provide on-site support to schools in the handling of reported bullying cases. In order to come to grip with the problem of bullying, officers of the School Development Division of this Bureau would investigate into each reported case and conduct an in-depth case study by analyzing the school-related factors, the social background of the students concerned and other possible causative factors leading to bullying. This would form a very useful pool of data that could guide our support and intervention work in the future.

Enhanced Support to Schools

14. To assess the support required by schools in managing bullying, a survey was conducted recently whereby all primary and secondary schools were required to furnish this Bureau with information on the physical bullying cases handled by school from September 2003 to February 2004. The survey revealed that 72% of the schools reported no such cases, 23% reported having to manage 1 to 3 cases and 5% reported four or more cases. Those schools which reported having difficulties in managing the cases will be provided with intensive support by the Educational Psychologists and School Development Officers of EMB. Schools with cases which required teachers' long term follow-up support to the students involved will also be provided with support by EMB through the regional network of training and exchange activities. The total number of such cases reported is 460*. Irrespective of the number of such cases reported, the schools concerned will be accorded with higher priority and intensity of support services by EMB as well as other government departments and non-government organizations (NGOs).

(*For comparison, the number of bullying cases handled/followed up by discipline and guidance teachers of primary and secondary schools in the 2000/01, 2001/02 and 2002/03 school years are 1 136, 1 215 and 1 042.)

Parent Pamphlet

15. In stopping and preventing bullying, parents have a significant role to play. A parent pamphlet on "Help Your Child Develop a Harmonious Relationship in School" was issued to all parents in

early March 2004 with a view to raising parents' awareness on the issue of bullying and educating them on the importance of early detection and prompt intervention to stop and prevent bullying through working in close cooperation with schools. A list of possible warning signs of children involved in bullying and means of managing and preventing bullying are also included for the parents' reference.

Inter-departmental Meeting on Bullying

16. We need the concerted efforts of schools, teachers, parents, students and the community at large in order to combat bullying. This Bureau has convened an inter-departmental meeting on bullying with representatives from the Hong Kong Police Force, Social Welfare Department, Department of Justice, relevant school councils and professional organizations to review the situation and discuss further measures to be taken to prevent school bullying. We would also explore –

- (a) increasing the intake for the Smart Teen Challenge Project, subject to the manpower situation of the various disciplinary forces; and
- (b) engaging volunteers from the Police to assist in school guidance and discipline work in schools that warrant intensive support.

Way Forward

17. We accord high priority to rendering support to schools in managing and preventing the problem of bullying. Based on the large number of research studies available on the problem of bullying, EMB has produced a resource package to raise the awareness of the teachers and improve their skills in managing and preventing bullying. We would continue to make the best efforts to implement all necessary measures and work closely with schools, parents and other government departments and NGOs to curb bullying. We would monitor the situation closely and review our support strategies as and when necessary.

Appendix 1

- (1) **Olweus, Dan.** Professor of Psychology at the University of Bergen, Norway is acknowledged as a leading world authority on problems of bullying and victimization. He has conducted research in the area for over 20 years and is regarded as the “Founding Father” of research on bully/victim problems. He has published many books and articles on the topic.
- (2) **Chang, Lei.** Professor, Department of Educational Psychology of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is a local expert in the field and has researched widely on bullying, aggression, social behaviours and so forth.
- (3) **Wong, Dennis Sing-wing.** Associate Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong. His study on School Bullying in Primary Schools in Hong Kong published in May 2002 presented surveyed data on the subject. Another relevant piece of work is “The School Bullying and Responding Tactics: A Life Education Approach” Jan 2003.

Research Studies

- (1) Chang, L., Schwartz, D., Dodge, K.A., & McBride-Chang, C. (2003). Harsh Parenting in Relation to Child Emotion Regulation and Aggression. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17, 598-606.
- (2) Boulton, M.J. (July/August 1999). Concurrent and Longitudinal Relations between Children's Playground Behavior and Social Preference, Victimization, and Bullying. *Child Development*, 70, 944-954.
- (3) Chang, L. (March/April 2003). Variable Effects of Children's Aggression, Social Withdrawal, and Prosocial Leadership as Functions of Teacher Beliefs and Behaviors. *Child Development*, March/April 2003, 74, 535-548
- (4) Coie, J.D., Cillessen, H.N., Dodge, K.A., Hubbard, J.A., Schwartz, D., Lemerise E.A., & Bateman. H. (1999). It takes two to fight : A test of relational factors and a method for assessing aggressive dyads. *Development Psychology*, 35, 1179-1188.
- (5) Poulin, F., & Boivin, M. (2000), Reactive and Proactive Aggression : Evidence of a Two-Factor Model. *Psychological Assessment*, 12, 115-122.
- (6) Smith, P.K. & Brian P. (2000). Bullying in Schools: Lessons From Two Decades of Research. *Aggressive Behaviour*. 26, 1-9.
- (7) Smith, P.K., Junger-Tas, M.J., Olweus, D., Catalano, R., & Slee, P. (eds.) (1999). *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*. London: Routledge.

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schools. *Educational Psychology*, 23, No. 5.

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