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Bullying



On the 7th April 2008, YACSA ran the YOUTHink Forum for young people across South Australia to discuss issues important to them. YACSA identified the issues of **bullying, media, social networking sites, body image, debt and the environment** for discussion.

Participants in the YOUTHink forum regarded bullying, particularly racism and homophobia, as a particularly serious and common problem. They felt that there were a variety of causes, with the media (especially comedy programs which trivialise the experiences of those who have been bullied) identified as being a contributing factor. Participants also felt that bullying is inevitable.

What is bullying?

Bullying is a 'wilful, conscious wish to hurt, frighten or threaten someone'.¹ It is repetitive in nature, requires an imbalance in power, and can be physical, psychological, social or verbal.² There are 5 different forms of bullying, including exclusion, extortion, gesture aggression, verbal aggression and / or physical aggression.³ Bully supporters are those who are aware of and witness the 'bully-victim relationship'. They can fuel the bullying without participating in it themselves.⁴ People who bully tend to pick on young people who are not sure of themselves.⁵ Bullying can be both intentional and unintentional, as the perpetrator might not realise they have caused harm or offence to the victim.⁶

Prevalence of bullying in Australia

Bullying is highly prevalent amongst young people. Research into more than 38,000 Australian school-aged children shows that at least 50% had experienced bullying at school, with approximately one in six children being bullied by another child or group of children at least weekly.⁷ In a more recent study, 88% of young people who responded to a South Australian youth survey stated that they had been harassed or bullied at school, whilst 21% had experienced bullying at home.⁸ An Australian survey by the National Coalition Against Bullying in 2006 found that almost half (42%) of young girls between the ages of 12 and 15 had reported being denigrated or intimidated via mobile messaging or online.⁹ This does not include unreported instances of cyber bullying.

Different types of bullying

Cyber bullying has been defined as involving the use of ICT to support deliberate, hostile, and repeated behaviour by a person or group with the intention of hurting others.¹⁰ It is abusing, annoying, harassing or threatening another person by electronic means, such as the Internet, mobile phones, and pagers.¹¹

¹ Nicholson, 2006, cited in Adams, S 2007, 'Cyber-bullying: an emerging form of student aggression for the "always-on" generation' in *Australian Education Leader*, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 17

² Bothe, 1997, cited in Adams, S 2007, 'Cyber-bullying: an emerging form of student aggression for the "always-on" generation' in *Australian Education Leader*, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 17

³ Stewart & Knott, 1999, cited in Adams, S 2007, 'Cyber-bullying: an emerging form of student aggression for the "always-on" generation' in *Australian Education Leader*, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 17

⁴ Barton, 2005, cited in Adams, S 2007, 'Cyber-bullying: an emerging form of student aggression for the "always-on" generation' in *Australian Education Leader*, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 17

⁵ Bamblett, M 2007, 'Living and learning together: a celebration and appreciation of diversity', in *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, no. 13, pp. 17 - 30

⁶ Kelly, D 2005, 'Review of workplace bullying: strengthening approaches to a complex phenomenon', in *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 21, p. 553

⁷ Rigby, K 1999, 'What harm does bullying do?' paper presented at the Children and Crime: Victims and Offenders Conference, Australian Institute of Criminology, Brisbane, p. 4

⁸ The Advertiser 2005, *Youth survey results 2005*, Adelaide, p. 24

⁹ McCaffrey, K 2007, 'The dark side of the net', in *Access*, vol. 21, issue 2, p. 13

¹⁰ Belsey, 2005, cited in Adams, S 2007, 'Cyber-bullying: an emerging form of student aggression for the "always-on" generation' in *Australian Education Leader*, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 17

Racist bullying is where physical and psychological behaviour that is hurtful causes a person to feel excluded, marginalised, powerless, unwelcome or worthless because of their skin colour, culture, ethnicity, national origin, national status or religious affiliation.¹²

"Young people continue to report homophobic bullying and harassment from peers, in schools, in the workplace and in the wider community, which can be very emotionally isolating and may also prevent young people from accessing information and support services."¹³ It is an unfortunate fact that young people who identify as being gay, lesbian, or bisexual are more likely to experience bullying.¹⁴

Effects of bullying

Negative long-term consequences can be experienced by both the bully and the victim when young people are involved.¹⁵ Recurring bullying can lead to a reduction in health and well-being levels for the victim, as well as an increased risk of developing a mental illness.¹⁶ Young people who are bullied and receive little support are more likely to have suicidal thoughts.¹⁷ Perpetrators themselves also have a higher risk of developing a mental illness, particularly depression, and are more likely to exhibit violent behaviours later on in life, in the workplace, and at home.¹⁸

Recommendations

Overall, participants in the YOUTHink forum felt that the current approach to bullying was ineffective and that better preventative strategies are necessary in order to combat it. They also mentioned that they did not feel that they could talk to their parents about bullying. Friends and older siblings were identified as being a better source of advice on the topic. Some other suggestions that came out of the YOUTHink forum include:

- Supporting the implementation of self-assertiveness training in schools
- Supporting schools to revise current punishments for bullies
- Advocating for teachers to receive training on all form of bullying
- Organising forums on bullying for young people, for people who work with young people, and for parents / caregivers
- Advocating for the education curriculum to incorporate learning about different cultures, particularly in reference to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Tiwi Islander people
- Advocating for gay, lesbian and bi-sexual issues to be addressed in health classes in schools
- Advocating for more awareness surrounding gay, lesbian and bi-sexual issues for young people
- Putting out a press release noting the harm media can do when they trivialise bullying
- Supporting schools to produce anti-harassment or anti-bullying policies that include cyber bullying, and cover incidents of bullying that happen outside of school
- Advocating for continual evaluation of current school and government policies surrounding bullying, harassment, and discrimination to ensure they are up-to-date and effective

Further reading on Bullying:

Australian Institute of Criminology 2007, 'Cyber bullying: issues for policy makers', Australian Institute of Criminology (AICrime Reduction Matters no. 59), Canberra, <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/crm/crm059.pdf>

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¹¹ Belsey, n.d, cited in Hanewald, R 2008, 'Confronting the pedagogical challenge of cyber safety', in *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 33, no. 3, p. 3

¹² Department for Education and Skills, 2006, 'Bullying around racism, religion and culture', DES, England, p. 33

¹³ YACSA Policy Platform 24, p. 55

¹⁴ Fekkes *et al.*, 2006, cited in Boese, M & Scutella, R 2006, 'The Brotherhood's social barometer: challenges facing Australian youth', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria, p. 24

¹⁵ Boese, M & Scutella, R 2006, 'The Brotherhood's social barometer: challenges facing Australian youth', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria, p. 24

¹⁶ Rigby, 2003, cited in Boese, M & Scutella, R 2006, 'The Brotherhood's social barometer: challenges facing Australian youth', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria, p. 24

¹⁷ Boese, M & Scutella, R, 2006, 'The Brotherhood's social barometer: challenges facing Australian youth', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria, p. 24

¹⁸ Rigby, 2003, cited in Boese, M & Scutella, R 2006, 'The Brotherhood's social barometer: challenges facing Australian youth', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria, p. 24

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The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
September 2008