Peer Abuse as Child abuse and Indications for Intervention in Schools

Dr. Jean B. Healey

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Dr. Jean B. Healey

Self Concept Enhancement and Learning Facilitation Research Centre,

University of Western Sydney, Australia

Peer abuse in the form of bullying is now recognised as an endemic feature of school life and in terms of impact, outcomes and intervention requirements can be equated with other forms of child abuse. It is argued in the light of data presented here that the parallels between peer abuse and more generally accepted forms of child abuse must be recognised and addressed with some urgency. The paper discusses the types, frequency and intensity of bullying behaviour reported in high schools in NSW, and comparative data for child abuse reports for this age group. This provides a clear demonstration of the correlations of the behaviours indicating that the behaviours which are currently reported as bullying behaviours are also abusive and equally harmful. It seems evident that peer abuse fits the common descriptors of child abuse across all reported criteria. However, it is also evident that teachers currently often do not interpret the behaviours as either abusive or bullying, but as mutually aggressive interactions between peers, leaving victims unprotected and unsupported. It is suggested that some interventions currently established for dealing with bullying are inappropriate as they do not recognise that bullying is abuse. It is proposed that implementation of legislative requirements for mandatory notification by teachers of all forms of abuse should be considered as a means of intervention.

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Introduction

In defining either peer abuse or the more commonly acknowledged abuse of children by adults the similarities are far more noteworthy than the differences. There is a strong correlation between peer abuse and other forms of abuse in terms of the types of behaviours exhibited, their impact, outcomes and to some extent prevalence and in this regard it can be clearly demonstrated that peer abuse should be considered a form of child abuse. Part of the problem is the uncertainty of the parameters of definitions of child abuse. (National Research Council,1993) including uncertainty about whether to define abuse on the basis of adult characteristics and behaviour. It is no longer possible to utilise traditional parameters of sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect (Tomison,1997).The abuse spectrum has been expanded recently to incorporate more particular types of abusive behaviour including paedophilia in church and educational institutions, internet child pornography, systems abuse related to welfare interventions and ritual or satanic abuse. (James, 2000).Nevertheless, bullying or peer abuse has not yet been considered for inclusion in the child abuse spectrum despite being far more prevalent than some of the behaviours recently incorporated.
There has been a failure on the part of teachers to adequately assess the seriousness of the problem of peer abuse (Besag, 1989; Healey 2002a ; Smith, 1994,) and this seems to indicate that it should be incorporated into the legal procedures and professional processes established for protection of children and include consultation with other professionals. Teachers often do not interpret bullying behaviours as ‘abusive’ but as ‘conflict’. However, ‘conflict’ constitutes mutually aggressive interactions between peers, not the abuse of one individual at the hands of another, more powerful individual. It is a reasonable proposition that many aggressive interactions between peers result from the domination of one child by another in unequal and abusive situations. Consequently, in such cases where teachers

become aware that students are being consistently harmed or harassed by a peer, and therefore reasonable grounds are established for abuse, the behaviour ought to be notified under the mandated legislative procedures for protection.

This paper briefly examines the current discourse about child protection, data describing peer abuse and statistical information in relation to documented child abuse, and discusses the appropriateness of proposed interventions. Professional issues related to mandatory notification and the implementation of child protection legislative provisions are then explored as a means of addressing peer abuse on a more formal protective level.

Defining Peer Abuse as Child Abuse

Not only are the actual behaviours often the same, there is ample evidence that peer abuse can have equally as serious and permanent repercussions as other forms of abuse (Ambert, 1998; Olweus, 1993; Portwood, 1999). Concepts of harm or threatened harm by acts or omissions which expose the child physically, emotionally or morally (Portwood, 1999) are generally used to define abusive behaviours. The injury must be non-accidental and the concept of 'intentionality' is therefore paramount. Furthermore the acts must be *observed* to be inflicted or threatened or they must be *permitted* to be threatened or inflicted (Hodges and Perry, 1996) and it is therefore clear that the abuse of children by their peers, particularly when this is known to teachers, implicates these professionals in terms of child protection mandates. If child abuse can be defined as harmful acts which are perpetrated, tolerated or facilitated by adults, then peer abuse, which has been notified or observed but for which no intervention has been forthcoming, would certainly fit the category of abuse. Teachers could be considered responsible for both appropriate identification of the behaviours observed (as abusive or bullying) and for intervention under the provisions of the Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection Act),NSW 1998.

Peer abuse may be perpetrated by age peers, by older social contacts such as the friends of older siblings (Ambert, 1998), or students in higher year levels at the same school (Healey 2002a ; Rigby , 1996). Higgins (2005) believes that the degree, frequency and severity of abusive behaviours experienced by young people is more relevant to impact than the type of abuse endured, particularly in relation to subsequent psychological problems. It is a reasonable proposition therefore that peer abusive behaviour can be equally as damaging as the more traditionally accepted forms of abuse. Children are generally vulnerable and have few choices about with whom they associate, particularly during the school day and travelling to and from school when bullying often occurs (Healey 2001a; Smith, 1994).They are unable to resist victimisation often because of their lack of physical, intellectual or social maturity (Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman,1994). Peer abuse is facilitated by both the restricted range of social contacts for young people, and by social structures which ensure that age peers spend the majority of their time together. Peer abuse is often differentiated from other forms of child abuse on the basis of the developmental and social status of the perpetrator, but not from other forms of aggressive interactions between peers which result from conflict. It is clear that peer abuse, as with other forms of abuse, depends upon a perceived difference in social status or power of the abuser compared to the victim, even though there may be no obvious power difference between the victim and their age-mate abuser (Marsh, Parada, Yeung and Healey, 2001). In peer abuse the power does not reside necessarily in the physical size difference between the bully and victim, although some researchers have identified inferior physical development as a factor in bullying victimisation, (Olweus, 1993).Rather, it is perceived social position and status which bullies use to their advantage.

Ambert (1995) suggests that peer abuse is seen to differ from other forms of abuse on three key factors: the age of the perpetrator, formal power distinctions and neglect, which she believes are the factors which are generally used to diminish the impact of the behaviour. Since minors undertake the abuse, the abuse is therefore minor; since there is no recognised power differential there can be no abusive relationship and peers are not responsible for their age mates so therefore neglect cannot be attributed to them. As she notes, it is apparent that these arguments are fast losing their credibility as the impact of peer abuse is documented and the legal responsibilities of

teachers and other carers is challenged. Barnett, Manly and Cicchetti (1993) delineate six dimensions on which child abuse can be identified and analysed comprising: type of abuse, severity, frequency, developmental stage interventions and perpetrators. Peer abuse can be measured and analysed on each of these dimensions providing a comprehensive picture of its similar aetiology to other forms of child abuse. Peer abuse corresponds with child abuse across types, severity and impact as the data here demonstrate. Teachers therefore, who are aware of abusive peers but who do not follow mandated procedures for the reporting of the behaviour may well be in breach of the legal and professional guidelines under which they are employed (Healey, 2005).

The capacity of peers to abuse their age mates is not questioned, rather it is the failure to interpret this behaviour as abusive and the subsequent responses of teachers in terms of their mandated responsibilities to report the abuse, which is examined here. While it is self evident in reviews of the current literature regarding child abuse, that peer abuse or bullying unquestionably fits the definitions, there still seems to be some doubt about the application of the mandated legal processes and professional requirements to report abuse. Logistically, because of the prevalence of the behaviours as demonstrated in this study, it may not be possible to offer the same level of protection to all abused individuals under the terms of the legislation. Realistically also, all abused individuals may not require the level of protective intervention afforded through the processes prescribed, and it can be anticipated that for students with some measure of resiliency (Carver , 1998; Kinard, 1998) such support may not be necessary. English (1998) and Tomison, 2002) also caution about the demands placed on child protection agencies and the need to ration their involvement, a consideration which is likely to be compounded by the inclusion of peer abuse as a category of abuse. Other researchers suggest the responsibility for intervention in child protection, though not specifically peer abuse, may need to be spread into the community (Munro, 1998; Schene, 1998; Waldfogel, 1998) rather than simply relying on agency supports. Anti-bullying interventions in many countries, in particular the Scandinavian sector, have produced advertising campaigns, systems - wide programs and specific legislation to prevent peer abuse (Smith, 1994) with documented success, but such approaches are yet to be tried in Australia.

Research Methodology, Data Analysis and Results

In an attempt to illustrate the correlation between peer abuse and other forms of abuse of young people, this study sought to describe both forms of abuse and compare their topography. This involved the analysis of bullying data which recorded the parameters and prevalence of abusive peer behaviours in four NSW metropolitan high schools and the examination of data from the NSW Child Protection Council and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for the same age group in the same period. This yielded a surprising result that peer abusive behaviour is more common and prevalent than others forms of abuse, yet it is not considered in the child protection legislation. The similarity of the bullying behaviours to those described as reported in the child abuse literature becomes evident as the data are presented, and the impact is clarified in both the student responses and the discussion which follows.

Methodology

Research Questions

A series of research questions were posed to address the aims of the study:

Research Question 1. What is the nature and extent of reported peer abuse in NSW secondary school populations?

Research Question 2. What is the nature and extent of other forms of reported/substantiated abuse in the NSW secondary school population?

Research Question 3. What are the notable similarities and differences in the nature and extent of reported peer abuse and other forms of abuse?

Instrumentation: The School Safety Survey

The School Safety Survey was developed over a period of two years through collaboration with schools in order to identify salient aspects of bullying in relation to their individual school contexts. As an outcome of the process of analysing data, seeking input from school colleagues, and scrutinising the research literature, it became apparent that specific categories of information were particularly useful in providing a clear portrait of the nature and parameters of bullying in a school and could serve to inform intervention. The survey yields both qualitative and quantitative data relating to students' beliefs, experiences, attitudes and local knowledge about bullying in their schools. Interactions with school staff during the course of the research also contributed to the development of the Macarthur Model for Comprehensive and Customised Intervention in Bullying (Healey,2004) Quantitative responses from four schools which volunteered to participate were amalgamated to form a substantial base set of data for wider analysis.

Specific categories of information are yielded from the survey, and the following are the categories deemed relevant for this discussion:

Questions 1-3 identify demographic details regarding background information of the respondent including gender, cultural background of students and their parents; and year level.

Question 4 specifies behaviours identified from current literature as typical of those experienced as bullying. In order to establish the intensity and frequency of the behaviours and therefore categorise each student's status as bullied or non-bullied, a five-point response scale was utilised. Students indicated if each behaviour occurred: 1 - never, 2 - occasionally, 3 - weekly, 4 -most days, or 5 - once or more per day. Since bullying is, by definition, an ongoing persistent behaviour not episodic, this enabled the identification of students for whom bullying was a regular part of their school experience. Students who nominated weekly, most days or once or more per day were categorised as bullied for the purposes of this investigation.

Participants and Procedures

The research was undertaken in the greater Sydney metropolitan area, in NSW with a range of schools where bullying was seen as an issue by school administrators. The School Safety Survey was administered to over three thousand high school students in four schools including single-sex, co-educational, denominational, private and state schools over a three year period from 1998 to 2000. These were schools that requested information and assistance concerning bullying in their specific location during the period of this investigation. School 1 (Captain Cook High School) was a metropolitan state co-educational high school, a selective school for sport in northern Sydney (n = 623); School 2 (Mary Immaculate College) was a private Catholic girls' high school in southern Sydney (n = 780); School 3 (Magdalena Anglican College) was a private Church of England girls' high school in south eastern Sydney (n = 916); and School 4 (St. Barnabas Catholic College) was a Catholic co-ed high school in western Sydney (n = 964). This resulted in a large total sample (n = 3,283) comprising 900 (27.4%) males and 2,383 (72.6%) females (see Table 1 for a breakdown of the gender distribution of all participants in each school).

Students were identified as bullied on the basis of their responses to Question 4 of the survey. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the gender distribution of participants who identified themselves as bullied by school. This table identifies 618 students (18.8%) as bullied of the 3,283 in the total survey population.

Question 4 listed nine bullying behaviours with a range of levels of intensity and frequency of experience on a 5-point scale from “never” (1), “occasionally” (2), “weekly” (3), “most days,” (4), “daily or more often”(5). Students who reported they experienced bullying “weekly” (3), “most days” (4), or “daily or more often” (5) in response to any behaviour were classified as bullied.

Behaviours were numbered 4.1 to 4.9 and refer to students being bullied by

- 4.1 being teased and called names.
- 4.2 receiving negative comments about their family, country of birth or religion.
- 4.3 being left out or excluded on purpose.
- 4.4 being verbally threatened.
- 4.5 being physically hit, punched or kicked.
- 4.6 being forced to give money or belongings.
- 4.7 receiving negative comments on their personal appearance.
- 4.8 being touched in ways they do not want to be touched.
- 4.9 deliberate damage to their personal property.

Results

Results Research Question 1. What is the nature and frequency of school bullying in secondary school contexts?

Experiences of being bullied. To address these research questions a series of ANOVAs were undertaken to test whether students’ overall experiences of bullying varied as a function of gender, cultural origins, age and specific school. Table 3 records the results of the overall F-tests, for all respondents and bullied respondents separately, with the gender, country of birth, year level and school as the independent variables and the mean of all types of bullying as the dependent variable. Table 3 indicates that with the exception of year-level (for both all students and for bullied students) all F-tests were significant at least at the .05 level. Thus, students’ overall experiences of bullying varied as a function of their gender, country of birth, and school.

Table 3.

F-Tests for the Mean of all Types of Bullying

Respondents	*F*	df^1	df^2	*p*	^{2}
All Respondents					
Gender	109.76	1	3282	.001	.032
Country /birth	4.62	3	3282	.003	.004
Year Level	2.45	2	3282	.087	.001
School	39.2	3	3282	.001	.035
Bullied Respondents					
Gender	6.68	1	617	.010	.011
Country /birth	2.84	3	617	.037	.014
Year level	.28	2	617	.762	.001
School	3.89	3	617	.009	.019

As suggested by the overall F-Test in Table 3, significant differences with respect to year-level are small or non-existent. Overall, the means in Table 3 are low (typically below 1.5 on a scale of 1 to 5) indicating that students did not generally report being greatly bullied, whether they were included in the bullied category or not.

Examination of the means (see Table 4) suggests that for both all students and bullied students, females reported experiencing less bullying than males. In addition, students from other cultural groups reported experiencing more bullying than Australia/New Zealand students. Also students at the two co-educational schools (Captain Cook and St Barnabas) reported experiencing more bullying than students at the other two schools.

Table 4 ***Mean of All Types of Bullying by Gender, Country of Birth, Year and School***

Category of Data	***All Students***		***Bullied Students***	
	M	*SE*	***M***	***SE***
Gender				
Males	1.46[a]	.01	2.03[a]	.04
Females	1.30[b]	.01	1.90[b]	.04
Country of Birth				
Australia/New Zealand	1.32[a]	.01	1.93[a]	.03
European	1.40[a,b]	.05	2.15[a,b]	.14
Asian	1.32[a]	.03	1.97[a,b]	.12
Other	1.50[b]	.05	2.27[b]	.13
Year Level				
7-8	1.32[a]	.01	1.95	.04
9-10	1.35[b]	.01	1.98	.04
11-12	1.32[a]	.02	1.93	.05
School				
Captain Cook High School	1.40[a]	.02	2.05[a]	.05
Mary Immaculate Catholic College	1.32[b]	.02	1.85[b]	.06
Magdalena Anglican College	1.21[c]	.02	1.83[b]	.07
St. Barnabas High School	1.41[a]	.01	2.00[a]	.04

Nature of bullying. Analyses were undertaken to examine, in more detail, responses of students to Question 4 of the School Safety Survey which sought to identify the nature of bullying by examining whether nine specific types of bullying varied as a function of gender and year level (indicative of age). The responses of bullied students only are presented in the following tables. In four of the five cases where gender differences were significant, the differences indicated males reported experiencing more bullying. Typically, the categories of bullying behaviour which closely resemble other forms of abuse yielded the following results from bullied respondents

Table 5

Q4 part: Type of Bullying Behaviour	% Males	% Females
4.1 being teased and called names.	***64.3***	***52.9***
4.2 receiving negative comments about their family, country, religion	***26.1***	***17.3***
4.3 being left out or excluded on purpose.	19.6	25.5
4.4 being verbally threatened.	***20.8***	***10.0***
4.5 being physically hit, punched or kicked.	***33.3***	***15.7***
4.6 being forced to give money or belongings.	6.0	7.9
4.7 receiving negative comments on their personal appearance.	44.8	51.0
4.8 being touched in ways they do not want to be touched.	***9.0***	***8.2***
4.9 deliberate damage to their personal property	15.4	15.4

Table 6(a) records results of the overall F-test for bullied students with nine types of bullying as the dependent variables and *gender* as the independent variable. This F-test was significant indicating that bullied males and females reported different experiences across the nine types of bullying taken as a whole. Follow-up t-tests were used to decompose the overall gender (main) effect with respect to each type of bullying. Contrary to the parallel analysis for all students, bullied males and females were about equally split in reporting experiencing more of each type of bullying.

Table 6(b) records results of the overall F-test for bullied students with nine types of bullying as the dependent variables and *year level* as the independent variable. This F-test was not significant, indicating that bullied students at different year levels reported similar experiences across the nine types of bullying taken as a whole. Follow-up one-way ANOVAs indicated few significant univariate differences, with experiences of bullying apparently more widely distributed across year levels for bullied students than for all students. Typically, differences across gender, and year level for bullied students with respect to each of the types of bullying taken individually reflect differences with respect to the mean of all types of bullying.

Table 6 (a)

Types of Bullying Experienced by Bullied Students by Gender (N = 618)

Variable Number	**Variable Name**	**Gender**			
		F(1,617) = 6.68, p< .01, . .001			
		Males		Females	
		M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*
4.1	Teased	3.21	.08	2.90 **	.07
4.2	Comments /family/religion	2.00	.08	1.68 **	.07
4.3	Left out	1.91	.08	2.10*	.07
4.4	Threatened	1.84	.07	1.50 ***	.061
4.5	Hit/kick/punched	2.33	.08	1.70 ***	.07
4.6	Forced to give	1.24	.06	1.33	.05
4.7	Comments /looks	2.70	.08	2.80	.07
4.8	Touched	1.38	.06	1.33	.05
4.9	Property	1.71	.07	1.74	.06

Note. * *p*< .05, ** *p*<.01, .01, *** *p*<.001.

Table 6(b)Types of Bullying Experienced by Bullied Students by Year Level (N = 618)

Var #	**Variable Name**	**Year Level** F (2,617) = .27, p< .76, . ˜. 001					
		7-8		9-10		11-12	
		M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*
4.1	Teased	3.20[a]	.09	3.00[a,b]	.09	2.90[b]	.11
4.2	Comments /family/relig/cob	1.63[a]	.08	1.97[b]	.08	1.86[a,b]	.10
4.3	Left out	2.08	.08	1.98	.08	2.00	.10
4.4	Threatened	1.60	.08	1.70	.08	1.71	.09
4.5	Hit/kick/punched	1.90[a]	.09	2.15[b]	.09	1.84[a]	.11
4.6	Forced to give	1.35	.06	1.26	.06	1.23	.08
4.7	Comments /looks	2.75	.09	2.70	.09	2.82	.11
4.8	Touched	1.31	.06	1.35	.06	1.41	.08
4.9	Property	2.20	.08	1.80	.08	1.74	.09

Note: Reading across the rows of Table 6(b), means sharing any identical superscripts are not significantly different at the .05 level.

Results Research Question 2. What is the nature and extent of other forms of reported/substantiated abuse in the NSW secondary school population?

The data described here were extracted from community services department administrative systems as reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Child Protection report1999-2000. They describe Australia-wide statistics, but the relevant data refer to NSW incidence and parameters. It should be noted that there are significant differences in the definitions of child abuse across jurisdictions in Australia and this impacts on the comparability of statistics.(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare,2000). However the impact and outcomes of the abuse are comparable and consistent as indicated in the literature.

Table 7 Number of notifications and substantiations of children and young people 1999-2000

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Children, subjects of notifications	24,889	27,551	14,500	2,392	10,164	239	1,013	1,154
Total notifications	30,398	36,805	19,057	2,645	15,181	422	1,189	1,437
Children, subjects of substantiations	5,876	6,848	4,835	1,065	1,708	79	190	353
Total substantiations	6,477	7,359	6,919	1,169	2,085	97	233	393

Note: Includes children aged 0–17 years and children of unknown age.

Note: some children were the subject of multiple notifications and substantiations

The number of children and young people (0-17 years) across Australia in 1999-2000 who were the subject of notifications and substantiated reports of abuse are recorded in Table 7. This indicates that Victoria, NSW and then Queensland are the states with the greatest number of children for whom reports were received as well as substantiations.

Table 8 Number and % of children and young people (0-17 years) across Australia in 1999-2000 who were the subject of substantiated reports by type of abuse.

Type of abuse or neglect substantiated	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
				Number				
Physical	2,336	1,995	2,019	404	663	46	97	186
Sexual	1,903	608	398	311	223	34	20	42
Emotional	609	3,158	1,743	112	309	5	53	38
Neglect	1,087	1598	2,759	342	890	12	63	127
Other[(a)]	542	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Total substantiations	**6,477**	**7,359**	**6,919**	**1,169**	**2,085**	**97**	**233**	**393**
				Per cent				
Physical	36	27	29	35	32	47	42	47
Sexual	29	8	6	27	11	35	9	11
Emotional	9	43	25	10	15	5	23	10
Neglect	17	22	40	29	43	12	27	32
Other[(a)]	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Total substantiations	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

(a) The category 'Other' used for New South Wales comprises children identified as being at high risk but with no identifiable injury or harm.

Table 8 indicates that in NSW physical abuse is the most prevalent form of abuse of children and young people reported, followed by sexual abuse and neglect. Emotional abuse accounts for only 9% of all reports for this population.

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Table 9. Children and young people aged 0-16 years number substantiated by age per 1000 in 1999-2000

Age	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
<1 year	4.8	9.2	9.8	4.7	8.3	0.2	4.3	12.6
1–4 years	3.7	7.6	6.2	2.4	5.5	0.6	2.1	7.2
5–9 years	4.0	6.0	5.7	2.5	5.4	0.3	2.9	5.5
10–14 years	4.2	5.7	5.6	2.3	5.0	0.6	2.6	5.6
15–16 years	3.1	5.3	2.7	1.0	2.1	0.6	1.0	4.0

Note: Refer to Table A1.2 for number of children.

Source: AIHW Report 1999-2000

Table 9 describes substantiated cases by age category and indicates that in the 10-16 age bracket, which approximates the adolescent age range, 7.3 per 1000 were substantiated as abused in this sample.

Research Question 3: What are the notable similarities and differences in the nature and extent of reported peer abuse and other forms of abuse?

The first distinction to be made is that the AIHW data is recognised as legitimate and substantiated for the purposes of legal, therapeutic and government intervention. The data are collected with the intention that support and protective intervention will be made available to those children and young people in need. Indeed a substantial body of further data is provided in the report to describe the types and parameters of intervention implemented in response to the reports of abuse. Nevertheless, there is also an underreporting of abuse and many victims are not offered assistance. The data gathered at the schools with regard to peer abuse does not hold the same status however, despite being collected for the same purpose. There is no government response anticipated for reports of peer abuse and certainly no funding or services are offered to sustain intervention, other than those initiated at the school level. At the most fundamental level, the existence, impact and validity of the data referring to peer abuse is neither recognised nor recorded other than within the school itself. However, it is evident that peer abuse not only occurs more frequently and therefore has a greater impact than other forms of abuse, it happens more frequently to males ,which is not the case for other forms of abuse. If peer abuse were to be reported under the legislative guidelines for child protection, it may acquire the equivalent status and command similar responsive intervention, and it may afford males greater protection than is currently available to them. The evidence indicates that 36% of abuse of 0-17 year olds in NSW is physical abuse (see table 8) while 33.3% of males and 15% of females in the peer abuse data endured physical abuse(see table 5). The problem of peer physical abuse is very comparable to levels of physical abuse reported and substantiated under legislative mandates, and indeed if the two were combined it would be clear that young people are being abused to a much greater extent than is currently acknowledged. While Table 8 indicates also that 9% of investigated reports of abuse were substantiated as being emotional abuse, it is clear from the peer abuse data that the major source of emotional abuse of young people is peer abuse. This includes: being teased and called names. (*64.3% males, 52.9% females);* receiving negative comments about their family, country, religion (*26.1%, males, 17.3% females);* being left out or excluded on purpose *(19.6%* males, *25.5%* females); being verbally threatened (*20.% males, 10.0% females);* being forced to give money or belongings (*6.0%* males, *7.9%* females) receiving negative comments on their

personal appearance, (*44.8%* males, *51.0%* females); deliberate damage to their personal property, (*15.4%* males , *15.4%* females). Overall there is a close comparability between the nature and parameters of peer abuse as reported in independent research with adolescent populations in schools and the officially recorded data for reported and substantiated abuse perpetrated by adults against young people. Peer abuse can certainly be classified as a form of abuse and should therefore be included in mandated provisions for protective intervention.

Contemporary proposals for intervention- what is appropriate for peer abuse?

A worrying development in contemporary intervention methodologies being discussed, developed and applied in school systems with regard to peer abuse is the introduction of conflict and dispute resolution programs and to a lesser extent mediation as a legitimate means of resolving abusive peer relationships. Some analysis of the inappropriateness of such interventions and suggestions for more relevant, efficacious and protective approaches is indicated.

Fast (2002) explores the boundaries of conflict resolution and suggests that a more clearly defined theoretical and practical foundation now needs to be articulated for the field to advance. Essential to this advancement is a more careful incorporation of impartiality and neutrality in conflict resolution practices. This would be unhelpful for those in abusive relationships who require interventions which provide support and protection. Watson (1998) indicates in a document prescribing guiding principles for a model for intervention in abusive adult relationships states categorically that participants 'should *not* **(**italics by Watson) be referred to or engaged in services in which they must co-operatively participate, such as ….. family counselling services, or alternative dispute resolution and mediation services'. Further, she believes that such practices 'pre-suppose an equal relationship in which both parties are free to openly participate'. Given the obvious imbalance of power in abusive relationships and the abuser's capacity to control and intimidate victims, it is simply not possible to enter into a situation whereby the respective needs of the participants are 'negotiated'. You cannot negotiate what is a non-negotiable issue that being the safety and protection of the victim, irrespective of the need of the abuser to manipulate and control them. Abusive individuals do not have the right to be heard in respect of their motives for abusive behaviour. There is no conflict in the sense of each party having legitimate needs to be met in co-operation with another. There is no legitimacy in the need to abuse others. O'Toole, Burton and Plunkett (2005) have developed a conflict resolution program as a 'new approach to managing bullying and conflict in schools'. A central principle to the program is that 'students can and should learn about conflict, its causes and effects in a morally neutral way, which takes out the blame and focuses on the behaviour.'(page 3). While this may be true of conflict situations, arguably a central principle in bullying or peer abusive intervention must be abuser accountability. Abusers act from personal attitudes and beliefs about ways to interact with others which maintain a self -perception of power and dominance, and this belief is often tolerated and supported in various social milieu. The use of effective sanctions and consequences may be a more effective means of discouraging abusive behaviour and this needs to be considered in relation to intervention in peer abuse.

Other researchers have proposed non-punitive approaches to bullying intervention including Pikas'(1989) Method of Common Concern and Robinson and Maines (1992) No-Blame Approach. These methods are suitable in early intervention since they facilitate the introduction and teaching of appropriate interaction behaviours and some empathy training in young children. However, in senior schools and with more mature individuals it is essential that the responsibility for behavioural choices be clearly articulated and intervention include prescriptive programs for developing appropriate non-abusive interaction repertoires. Morrison (2002) discusses the application of Restorative Justice (Braithwaite, 1989) principles and practices to bullying intervention. The primary principles of this approach involve a capacity to experience shame and the response of the community to the abusive individual in order to sustain their membership in the social context, while addressing their harmful behaviour. As a remedial approach to intervention Restorative Justice has merit as it permits the teaching of more appropriate behaviours with the expectation that the abusive individual will acknowledge and take responsibility for the harm done. However the focus on conflict resolution cited by Morrison

in applying the program to peer abuse situations may need further consideration. There is also the issue of the incapacity of some abusive individuals to actually see the harm in their behaviour or to respond with shame as this pre-supposes an integrated social perspective which may well be lacking. Restorative programs are essentially dispute and conflict resolution focussed and as such may need careful adaptation in order to address the abuse component.

Mediation programs have similar shortcomings as effective intervention in abusive relationships as they also assume an equivalence in terms of the desire of participants to have their own needs met at the expense of, or some loss to the other. Abused individuals are not empowered to engage in discussions with their abusers in order to establish their right to safety and protection. Nor should they be required to state their case in formal proceedings where the mediator must remain neutral. There is no advantage to the abused individual in acknowledging or stating an understanding of the abuser's need to abuse, or attempting to see things from their perspective. Further, it may well be reinforcing for the abuser to hear about the harm and hurt they have caused as this is the main purpose of their behaviour. This is another intervention model which needs very careful consideration before inclusion in bullying intervention.
Peace and peacemaking initiatives also have limited applications as protective interventions in peer abuse. While the intentions are laudable and the need for a peaceful environment and society cannot be denied, the fact that peace evades those being bullied must be recognised and addressed. Spreading a vague and at times spiritual message of the need for peaceful interaction may reach those who desire peace in their lives but this certainly is not the case with bullies, who choose damaging behaviours as a preferred interaction.

Finally, there is the issue of unsubstantiated, un-researched and popular programs being offered by unqualified though well-intentioned individuals with very limited understandings of the key contemporary issues and research. Very few programs have been evaluated to establish their efficacy and fewer still have stated objectives by which they can be assessed for effectiveness.

The preferred approach in intervention programs developed overseas has been "bullying prevention". It is not surprising, therefore, that evaluations of the efficacy of such interventions demonstrate little or no impact in that such interventions could not be readily demonstrated to prevent bullying. The problem lies in the selection of the program emphasis and objectives. Bullying cannot be prevented in the short-term, and certainly not in the short-term offered by a classroom curriculum. Indeed, two studies in Canada demonstrated an increase in reported bullying following implementation of commercially available prevention programs—in one case a rise of 47% was recorded (Artz, 1996). This indicates, in all probability that increased reporting results from the raising of awareness due to the program. The majority of participants remained non-abusive as they were before the program, and those who are abusive continued to engage in harmful acts despite the program. This critical factor validates the educative rather than preventative emphasis in intervention design. Most program participants are not abusive and would not become so even without the program. A clear distinction must be drawn between bullying prevention and anti-bullying initiatives in terms of their objectives, content and impact.

New and effective interventions in peer abuse

It is imperative, that intervention be predicated on specific criteria which aim to provide secure environments for victims, remediation for abusive individuals or an overall, measurable improvement in the social ethos of the school. Only long-term socialisation and education processes will help prevent abuse, as is already the case for most members of society. Social competency, empathy, anger management and respect are all skills usually developed over the years to maturation. For those who do not develop these skills, discrete and specific programs are offered to precipitate or induce their acquisition. Goldstein and his colleagues in particular have been influential in securing credibility for the impact and effectiveness of specific interventions for aggression reduction. The Aggression Replacement Training intervention devised by

Goldstein, Glick and Gibbs (1998) has served many hostile youth as has their work with school-based gangs in the USA.

Whole school intervention is indicated as the most effective intervention in peer abuse in schools. Sullivan, Cleary and Sullivan (2003) outline six stages in the implementation of a whole school approach to bullying based on the original work of Olweus and Smith in Europe. The Macarthur Model (Healey, 2003) capitalises upon and addresses all of the elements advocated by these authors, in a structured and comprehensive intervention initiated at the school level. While many other interventions adopt some of the components, none to date seems to apply them all consistently and progressively over a long enough period of time to be effective in either reducing the problems substantially or developing the attitudes and behaviours necessary to overcome the impact of bullying or violence in schools.

The six key components of the Macarthur Model are:

- Component 1: Determining the nature and parameters of violence or bullying in the school.
- Component 2: Education and training of school personnel, parents and community regarding violence or bullying.
- Component 3: Policy development related to violence or bullying in the school.
- Component 4: Organizational restructuring to facilitate management of violence or bullying in the school.
- Component 5: Curriculum for all students regarding violence and bullying.
- Component 6: Individual interventions for students involved in violence or bullying in the school.

Efficacy is dependent on all six components being addressed in a structured and comprehensive intervention over time within a selected milieu. It is anticipated that the components would be equally effective delivered together within non-education settings including workplaces and social organisations where proximity of personnel provides the milieu for abusive interactions. Having examined a wide range of such interventions both internationally and within Australia, it has emerged that the six key components presented here and addressed throughout the portfolio are pivotal to successful intervention. An approach described as Policy, Education, Action, Coping, and Evaluation (PEACE) (Slee, 1996a; 1996b) initiated in Australia incorporates several of the key components in an educational application to encourage non-aggressive interactions. Smith (1999) reports on the Sheffield project in the UK which addressed “whole-school policy, curriculum work, work in playgrounds and work with individual pupils and small groups involved in bullying situations”(p. 68). The Sheffield co-operative learning project (Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver 1994) utilised a co-operative group-work methodology to create positive changes and provided teacher in-servicing.

The Macarthur Model differs from previous interventions in that it is a customised intervention based on research at the location that is interpreted by school staff and implemented by the school community. The six key components are conducted simultaneously over a long period of time and the policy, procedures and organisational changes implemented are based on school data. The Macarthur Model is presented as an application formulated for educational settings which enables schools to recognise, resist and respond appropriately and thoroughly to violence or bullying. Ideally, a systems approach should be established whereby each component of such a model is required of individual schools within a supportive macro-system of education. However, this level of commitment and service delivery is yet to be considered, in Australia. Whole education systems must commit to a comprehensive intervention at a state-wide level to the same extent as carefully designed syllabi in maths and English are logistically distributed and implemented. Additionally, various protective behaviours programs and child abuse prevention strategies may well have some critical and relevant components to offer in intervention in bullying.

Resiliency training is an approach which is yet to be articulated through a specific program or curriculum , but which is nevertheless now being addressed. There is some discussion in the literature of the notion of protective factors residing within individuals who respond in a more resilient fashion to abusive situations and these include intellect (Carver, 1998), perceived social

support (Byrne, 1993), and effective social skills (Doll & Lyon, 1998).. This perspective is relevant to intervention in that the emotional responses of the victim must be a paramount consideration and be fully understood and accepted if the victim is to be successful in establishing more effective and assertive responses. Individuals who exhibit resiliency in response to bullying cannot be considered less harmed than individuals who exhibit less effective responses. We can assume that the abusive behaviour is just as damaging to these individuals, but that they have developed overt responses which offer psychological buffers rather than passive responses which expose them to further incidents of abuse. Kinard (1998) points out that the factors that define resilience are sometimes also reported as capacities which lead to the development of resilience. Therefore, if ineffective victims can be taught to exhibit more resilient behaviours such as help-seeking, avoidance of the bully or reporting their experience of bullying may have a reduced effect.

The possibility of teaching resiliency skills to individuals who do not demonstrate a natural psychological capacity to recover from abuse is proposed. The notion that resistance to bullying is not simply an intra- or interpersonal skill, but that it resides within a social milieu that may well support the abuser is also given credence through the research data. Resiliency as a set of social skills rather than an innate capacity evolving from psychological character traits is an attractive theory since it proposes a pragmatic origin. Resiliency can be developed and taught if there is enough evidence it comprises specific skills, behaviours and attitudes. Several researchers take this view and examine social problem-solving skills in relation to levels of adjustment and resiliency. Luthar (1997) and other researchers, however, discuss a multi-dimensional model of resiliency whereby stress levels are not necessarily reduced by the demonstration of skills. Resiliency comprises interpersonal, developmental and psychological capacities as well as socially acquired skills and young people may remain competent in some areas such as academic achievement, maintenance of social status through sports and so forth, yet nonetheless be experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety in response to adversity. This theoretical perspective supports the view that overt compensatory behaviours which appear to be effective may well mask underlying severe stress reactions to bullying or other adverse situations and cannot be viewed as evidence that resilience inoculates individuals from stress. Nevertheless, the acquisition and application of resilient behaviours can result in demonstrable resiliency despite internal stress. The purpose of developing resistant behaviours is not to deny the impact of the bullying behaviour, but to provide an interim response which may divert the bully and thereby give some relief from stress temporarily. Victims need to behave as though they are resilient in order to secure relief from the victimisation.

Since negative peer support for abusive peers is seen as a critical sustaining factor in the continuation of the behaviour (Rigby and Slee 1998), the Peer Advocacy program (Healey, 2003a) which trains young people to advocate on behalf of abused peers has been devised. There is corroborative evidence in current literature with regard to the social status of bullies, the unwillingness of peers to act on behalf of those they see victimised, the lack of empathy for bullied individuals and student ambivalence about the capacity of teachers to intervene effectively to assist. Peer Advocacy forms the basis of an anti-bullying program design as it became apparent that a greater emphasis on the process of advocacy was required for effective intervention. A theoretical construct for the process has been articulated (Healey,2003b) as well as a description of the program as a proposed pragmatic application in school settings.

Peer Advocacy is a program of skills development which is placed in the curricula component (component five) of the Macarthur Model for Comprehensive and Customised Intervention . Peer Advocacy is an anti-bullying program which comprises a series of training sessions addressing key interpersonal and interaction skills such as introspection, empathy, help-seeking and reporting, resiliency and advocacy. The Peer Advocacy phase involves a ten-step procedure for representative advocacy undertaken by students who successfully complete the training and who volunteer to advocate for peers who are victims of bullying.
This involves commitment to the seven guiding principles and seven operational principles of Peer Advocacy. It is anticipated that the process can be adopted in schools as a functional and collaborative approach to intervention in bullying.

Advocacy has also been accepted in the literature as an established and effective means of providing qualified support for needy individuals in the quest for improved services otherwise denied them as a consequence of their personal incapacities or lack of skills (Ward & Page-Hanify, 1986). Advocacy is proposed in a range of circumstances including advocacy for children who are abused, neglected or exhibiting mental health difficulties or disabilities (Knitzer, 1996; Paull, 1998; Watkins & Callicut, 1997). It is described as a process whereby a skilled individual acts on behalf of a person with disadvantage to ensure their rights and welfare are protected (Stroeve, 1998). The impact of the process of advocacy is discussed in terms of positive outcomes for individuals including satisfaction through participation (Ward et al., 1986), but also as resulting at times in stress reactions. (Doueck, Weston, Filbert, Beekhuis & Redlich, 1997; Goodley, 1997). There is a strong tradition of advocacy practice in the field of special education and disability services which provides a substantial framework and foundation for the introduction of Peer Advocacy as a bullying intervention in schools. The specific application of Peer Advocacy to bullying intervention also evolved as a result of research which indicates that victims of bullying will seek the help of peers (Rigby & Slee, 1993).

Finally, the application of mandated child protection legislative provisions is suggested here as an innovative and now crucial, ultimate intervention in peer abuse. In this discussion of peer abuse, it is suggested that notification is mandated by the Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection Act) NSW 1998 protective legislation which states that all forms of suspected or reported abuse of children must be passed on for further investigation and intervention. Given the prevalence of the phenomenon within school environments and in associated locations, it may not be practicable to utilise the legislative provisions in any but the most serious and severe instances of persistent and harmful abuse. Nevertheless, there must be a process of last resort which protects teachers and schools from litigation and provides legal protections for abused individuals. Some victims are resorting to the use of anti-stalking legislation (Coate, 2002), and protection orders to prevent access by abusers. For a more in depth examination of this issue see Healey, 2005.What remains as a key, is for teachers to be professionally as well -prepared in the recognition of bullying indicators as they are of other forms of child abuse and for them to accept their responsibility to extend their child protection duties to this issue. The phenomenon of peer abuse must therefore now be viewed in the more serious context of child abuse and an effort made to raise to the conscious awareness of teachers and others with responsibility for the protection of children that peer abuse fits within the child protection framework. The relevant legislation and sanctions must be applied.

Legal, professional and ethical issues

Legislation which mandates the reporting of suspected abuse of children does not discriminate on the basis of the presence, level or type of professional qualifications of the individual concerned with the report. Procedures are standardised for all those in contact with the abused child, irrespective of their perceived or documented professional status Indicators of childhood abuse are rarely overt enough to warrant immediate intervention by teachers and it is generally expected and prescribed in both the legislation and the professional guidelines for reporting that some time may elapse during which observations of the child may lead to a suspicion that abuse is occurring. In the case of peer abuse the problem is a little different as these behaviours may well be overt and even frequently observed-the difference is in the interpretation of the behaviours as mutual conflict rather than abuse. There is some corruption of teacher - interpretations of the behaviour as their frequent contact with children who are often in genuine reciprocal conflict can predetermine their interpretation of the abusive behaviours.

The intimate knowledge teachers have of the interpersonal idiosyncrasies of the children in their care should provide them with some means to differentiate conflict and abuse. For example, children who are not generally -speaking aggressive but whom seem to be "involved' in frequent altercations should probably be identified as victims particularly if they are often injured.

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The issue then is for improved teacher preparation in the area of peer abuse so that behaviours which are obviously abusive can be isolated from consensual conflict and appropriately dealt with . Professional discretion is certainly permissible in the direction of protection, and given that teachers, are more likely to witness this type of child abuse than other forms which occur outside school boundaries and hours their ability to recognise the indicators is a critical factor. If current definitions of bullying are known to the observer: the lack of reciprocity, intention to harm, repeated nature of the actions and obvious distress ensuing (Besag, 1989; Tattum, 1993) there would be no dilemma in addressing the behaviour as abusive and it is not unreasonable to expect such an interpretation despite the social or developmental status of the perpetrators. Name calling, taunting and overt rejection of individual children would readily be interpreted as abusive if inflicted by an adult within the hearing and observation of the teacher, and it is suggested here that no other evidence is needed of abuse when such behaviours are observed in peers towards an individual.

Finally, concerns for the disruption to family and social group cohesion precipitated by notification of abuse have been expressed (Heatherton and Beardsall, 1998; Sheerin ,1998:).While the welfare of the victim is held to be paramount, the individual functions within a complex social milieu throughout which the ripple effect of notification can have very damaging effect. Teachers are concerned to maintain close bonds between peers in the belief that this scaffolds future relationships. Currently it is most unlikely that a safe environment will be provided for the abused child other than temporarily, by removal of the peer abuse perpetrator such as in a school suspension.

The time has come to place peer abuse firmly within the child protection framework, giving access to all of the legislative provisions which are afforded other types of child abuse. It is not difficult to establish the correlation between bullying and other forms of abuse in terms of the behaviours, their impact and outcomes. By combining the literature relating to bullying behaviour and that describing other behaviours traditionally viewed as abusive, a strong case can be made for peer abuse as child abuse. In terms of the perceived impact outcomes and support requirements necessary for the protection of children and young persons from long term damage as a result of abuse, the provisions of the legislation and the procedures and requirements delineated by teacher employing bodies are clearly applicable to severe peer abuse and should now be implemented as a protective intervention. In terms of this discussion it is suggested that the application of the same guidelines proposed for the notification of all forms of suspected or identified child abuse be applied in instances of peer abuse.

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