INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Organisation:	Boystown
Name:	Ms Tracy Adams
Position:	Chief Executive Officer
Date received:	18/03/2009

13 March 2009

The Hon Robyn Parker
Chair
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney. NSW 2000

Dear Ms Parker,

I wish to thank you for your invitation to respond to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 Inquiry into the bullying of children and young people. Bullying is a significant issue for Australian children and young people. This behaviour can have severe short and long term impacts on the emotional health of both the bully and the person experiencing the bullying. I subsequently congratulate you for your initiative in establishing this Inquiry.

Since March 1991 Kids Helpline has been listening to young Australians about a wide range of issues, both big and small, from everyday topics such as family, friends and school to more serious issues of child abuse, bullying, mental health issues, drug and alcohol use, homelessness and suicide.

On average over 300,000 telephone and online interactions are provided annually to children and young people by Kids Helpline counsellors. This submission is based on the 16,750 counselling sessions that have been provided to Australian children and young people since 2004 about bullying.

In addition we are currently researching the most effective ways in which children and young people can be supported and protected against cyber-bullying which is becoming a major concern in our community. Preliminary evidence from an online survey currently being conducted with children and young people about this newly emerging form of bullying is also provided to assist the Committee in developing an understanding of this concern.

Subsequently our submission is based on the direct voice of Australian children and young people. The submission lists two (2) evidenced based recommendations for your Committee's consideration. I believe these recommendations, if actioned, will directly reduce bullying behaviour and its impact on children and youth.

I trust that your Inquiry will produce practical solutions to this problem. As stated we believe that this issue is a critical challenge confronting Australia's children and youth. Consequently in order to provide maximum assistance to your Inquiry I would like to suggest that representatives of BoysTown meet directly with you as soon as practicable to provide a detailed briefing on this matter. This would allow us to provide more specific information and
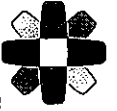
case examples as to the impact of bullying on children and young people that I would be unable to provide in a public setting. I can be contacted on 07 3867 1230.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Adams
Chief Executive Officer

BoysTown

Fresh start.
New hope.

BoysTown

Fresh start.
New hope

Submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 of the New South Wales Legislative Council

Tracy Adams
Chief Executive Officer
BoysTown

Introduction

BoysTown is predominantly a youth specialist agency, our mission is *'to enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life'.*

BoysTown has delivered services to disadvantaged and 'at risk' young people, children and families for more than 48 years. We work with people who have been excluded from full participation in family life, community activity and the labour market due to family conflict, trauma, mental health and substance misuse issues, intergenerational unemployment and disrupted education.

BoysTown currently provides a range of services to young people and families seeking one-off and more intensive support including:

- Kids Helpline which provides a national 24/7 telephone and on-line counselling service for five to 25 year olds with special capacity for young people with mental health issues
- Accommodation responses to homeless families and women and children seeking refuge from Domestic/Family Violence
- Parenting Programs offering case work, individual and group work support and child development programs for young mothers and their children
- Parentline, a telephone and on-line counselling service for parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory
- Paid employment to more than 200 young people each year in supported enterprises as they transition to the mainstream workforce
- Training and employment programs that skill young people allowing them to re-engage with education and/or employment, and
- Response to the needs of the peoples of the remote Indigenous communities of the Tjurabalan in Western Australia.

This submission provides responses to the Committee's Terms of Reference, in particular Numbers 1, 2, 3 and 5. It is based on the 16,750 bullying related counselling contacts received from to children and young people from Kids Helpline in the past five years as well as our case work with young people across our personal development programs.

The trend among males and females in NSW is similar to the national trend.

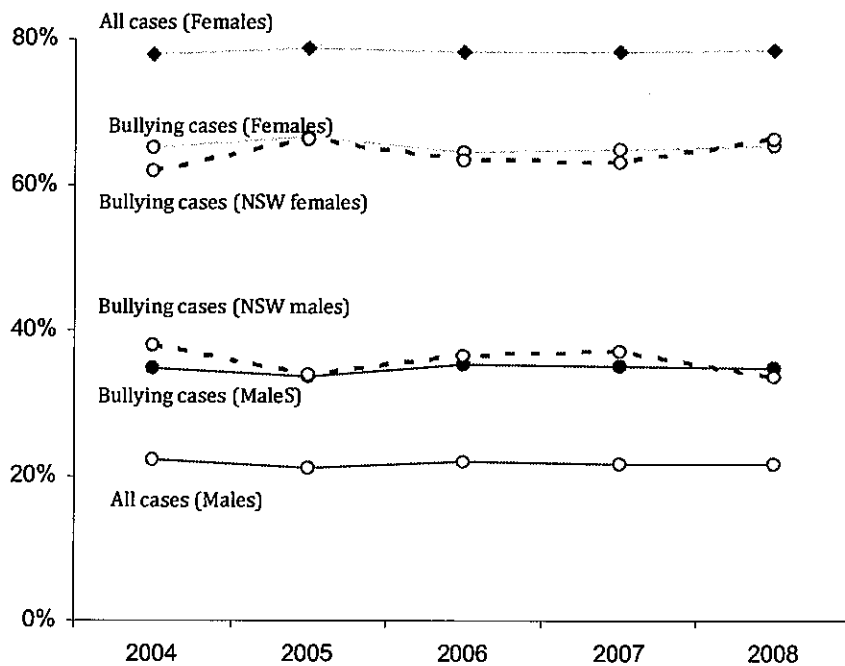**Graph 1: Analysis of Gender – Australia and NSW contacts with Kids Helpline**

Table 1: Contacts from New South Wales about Bullying by Gender

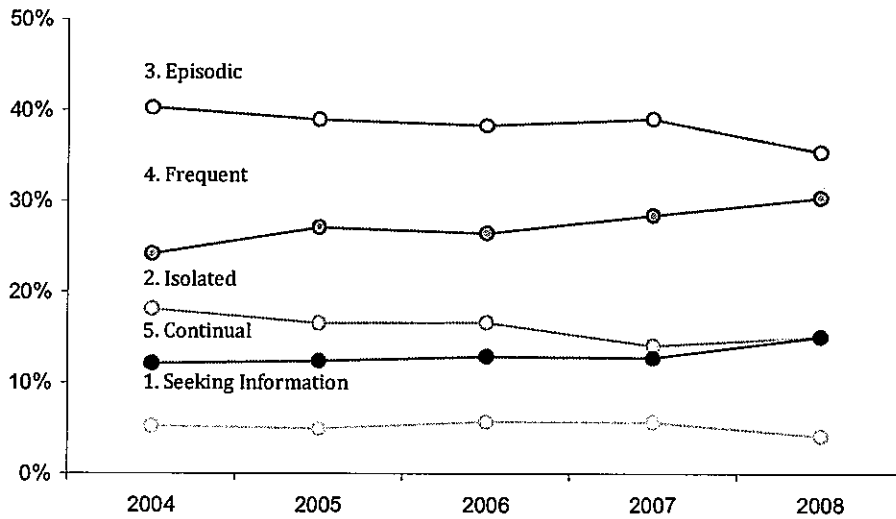|	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Females	62.0%	66.2%	63.5%	63.0%	66.4%
Males	38.0%	33.8%	36.5%	37.0%	33.6%

Age

Regardless of gender, young people in the 10–14 year-old age bracket made up the majority of children for whom bullying was a concern (Graph 2). However, there is a small but noticeable increase in the percentage of bullying concerns from 15–18 year-olds across Australia.

Graph 2: Analysis of Contacts about Bullying by Age group, Australia
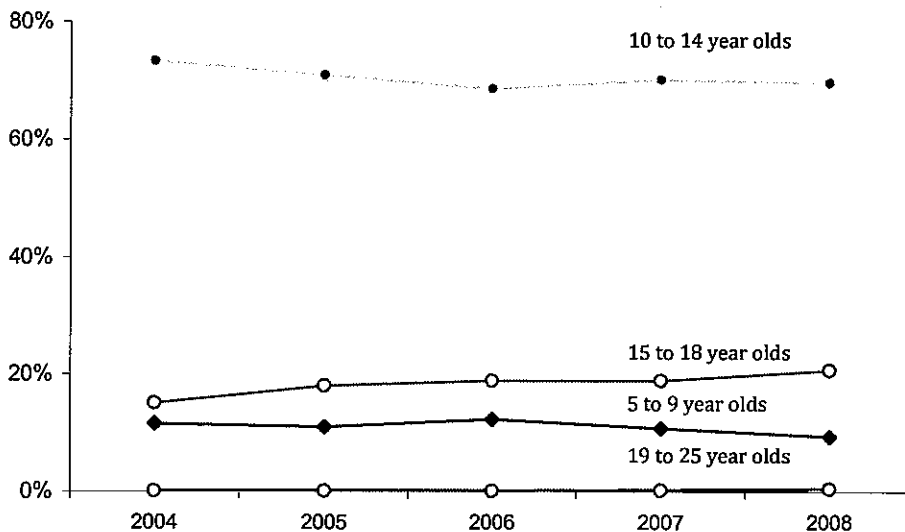
Graph 4: Severity of Bullying Contacts to Kids Helpline: Australia

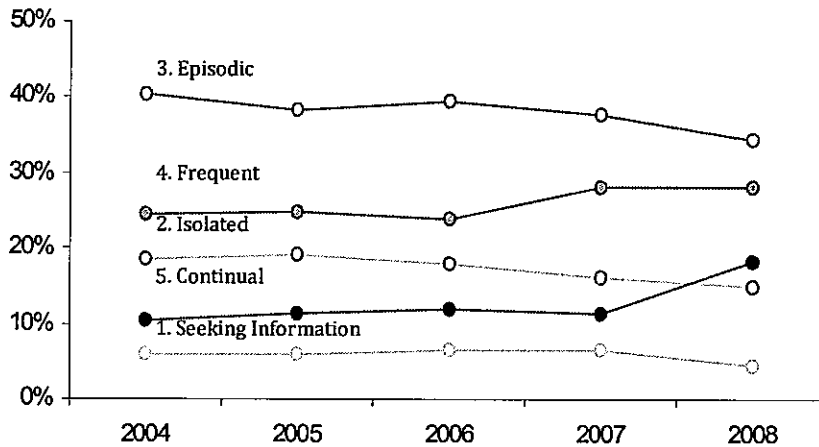**Graph 5: Severity of Bullying Contacts to Kids Helpline: New South Wales**

Table 3: Proportion of Contacts from New South Wales about Bullying by Severity Type 2004-08

Bullying type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Seeking Info	6.0%	5.9%	6.5%	6.5%	4.4%
Isolated	18.7%	19.2%	17.9%	16.2%	14.9%
Episodic	40.4%	38.4%	39.4%	37.8%	34.4%
Frequent	24.4%	25.0%	24.0%	28.1%	28.1%
Continual	10.5%	11.5%	12.1%	11.5%	18.1%

Table 4: Proportional Analysis of Bullying Severity by Age – New South Wales

Age group	5 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 18
1. Seeking Information	2.2%	6.1%	4.4%
2. Isolated	22.4%	15.6%	16.3%
3. Episodic	39.2%	39.5%	36.2%
4. Frequent	27.7%	26.2%	27.0%
5. Continual	8.5%	12.7%	16.4%

Ethnicity

Nationally, the large majority of children contacting Kids Helpline about bullying (for whom ethnicity was known) were from Caucasian backgrounds. The breakdown of young people contacting the service about bullying by ethnicity is consistent with the ethnic breakdown for all Kids Helpline counselling clients (Graph 8). However the proportions within NSW are slightly different, especially with callers from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD). For New South Wales 14.6% of bullying contacts were from children and young people with CALD backgrounds compared to 11.3% for all of Australia.

Graph 8
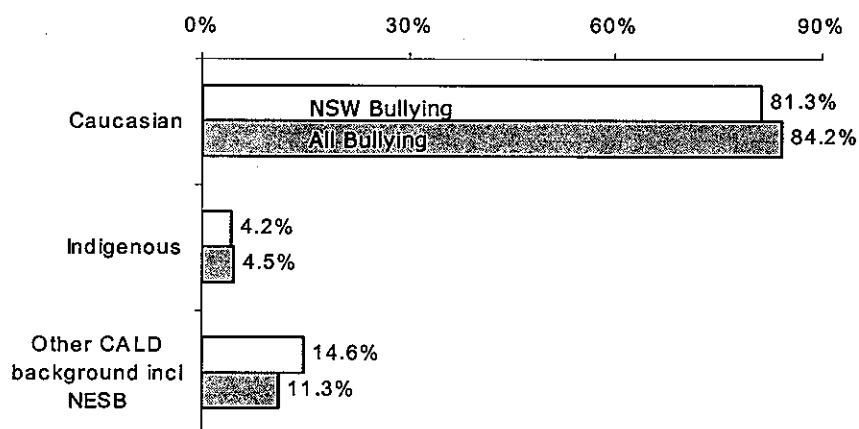
Since July 2008, Kids Helpline has also gathered 40 reports from children and young people on their experiences with being cyber-bullied. The information from these reports have been augmented by data from the current online survey concerning cyber-bullying. This information provides insights into contemporary cyber-bullying behaviour.

The most common technologies and online places used to cyber-bully children and young people in order of highest to lowest frequency are:

- Email
- A chat room
- A social networking site
- Mobile phone including MMS,SMS or phone call
- Other websites
- Other online forms e.g. Twitter, game forums, MSN, Messenger

predisposed the child and or young person in becoming a target of bullying behaviour and therefore, were subsequently reinforced through the experience of being bullied[4].

A further analysis was undertaken of the 40 reports on cyber-bullying collected by Kids Helpline counsellors as well as the results of the previously mentioned online survey. The reactions of children to cyber-bullying are similar to those provoked by face-to-face bullying.

Furthermore, there is evidence indicating that these reactions may be more severe in instances where children are bullied through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Preliminary results indicate that children and young people impacted by cyber-bullying tend to more frequently report suicide ideation as a reaction to this form of bullying than by children dealing with face-to-face bullying. Although it would be problematic to develop generalised findings from this small sample size it does indicate the need for further research. Some researchers have speculated that the nature of cyber-bullying may induce more severe reactions in children and young people.[5] For example, cyber-bullying can involve the public humiliation or embarrassment of a child across a wider audience and the bullying behaviour can be more invasive as the bully can breach the targeted child's privacy through the use of the internet and the mobile phone. The data collected to date by Kids Helpline gives credence to this view.

Case Example:

A 12 year old young female and her mother rang Kids Helpline. Child caller was feeling anxious and upset because someone had hacked into her MSN account and then had sent hostile and abusive messages to her friends. She spoke about being bullied in the past and felt that this situation was similar. Her mother said that she was concerned as her daughter had mentioned suicide as a solution to this current situation

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The negative impacts on the emotional and psychological health of children and young people from bullying behaviour can for some be long-term. Studies suggest that for some victims' feelings of depression can continue into early adulthood.[6] There are also long-term consequences for those that bully. Bullies tend to exhibit higher levels of anti-social and criminal behaviour in adulthood.[7] Their aggressive approach towards personal relationships involving victimisation may also be carried over into their relationships with future partners leading to domestic violence issues.[8] Consequently, unless bullying behaviour is addressed at an early stage long-term harm can occur to both the bullied and the bully which results in ongoing social and economic costs for the community.

Terms of Reference No 2:

Factors contributing to bullying

From the analysis of reports from children and young people about their experiences of being bullied the main factors that seem to trigger bullying behaviour by others include:

- Ethnicity
- Physical differences e.g. hair colour, disability, developmental spurt/delay, accent
- Being new to an area or group
- Sexual orientation
- Resistance to peer norms to behave in a certain way
- High achievement

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4 Campbell, M. 2005: 71

5 Campbell, M. 2005: 71

6 Patchin et al., 2006: 151

7 Espelage, D., Bosworth, K., & Simon, T. 2000, Patchin et al., 2006: 151 & Kulig et al., 2008: 4

8 Kulig et al., 2008: 4

These findings should be considered in the development of effective anti-bullying strategies.

Terms of Reference No 3:

Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying, including 'cyber-bullying'

Terms of Reference No 5:

The evidence base for effective anti-bullying approaches

Considerable research has been undertaken on responses to bullying. Responses in research literature are broad in scope and cover intervention strategies at individual, school, community and legislative levels[12]. From a Kids Helpline perspective we wish to highlight two critical responses that we believe will be effective in preventing bullying in our community.

Increase the help seeking behaviour of children and young people subject to bullying by implementing a communication strategy that:

a) encourages children and young people to 'Speak Out' about bullying, and

b) raises awareness of available services, in particular telephone and online counselling services.

Children and young people will rarely inform adults including their parents and teachers on their own initiative about being bullied[13]. There are various reasons why children and young people do not reach out and seek help. This includes a feeling of humiliation and embarrassment, a belief that they will not be believed or a fear that their concerns will be trivialised[14]. Participants in the online Kids Helpline survey on cyber-bullying confirm this finding. Only 23 of the 47 participants had informed an adult about being cyber-bullied even though this group was actively seeking help as evidenced by their contact with Kids Helpline. Consequently, children and young people require information about why they should seek help about being bullied and who they can safely turn to for this assistance.

In our experience, the provision of information, support and counselling by telephone and online modalities is an effective way to assist children and young people to counter the impacts of bullying. Telephone and online counselling is anonymous, confidential and can be freely accessed through land lines, mobiles and the web. Research demonstrates that children and young people feel more able to discuss their concerns in an environment that can ensure their privacy[15].

Telephone and web-based counselling is also an effective way to empower children and young people to deal with their concerns. For example, children and young people rate highly the effectiveness of counselling received through Kids Helpline. In 2008, 77 clients of Kids Helpline were surveyed in relation to their experiences with the service. Of the total group, 95.6% reported having gained some ideas on how to deal with their problem, thus increasing their confidence in handling the issue(s). Indeed, almost half (44.6%) expressed they 'strongly agreed' that they'd gained ideas on dealing with things. Additionally, 92.7% of clients surveyed reported feeling at least somewhat able to deal with their problem(s) following their call, of whom 17.2% expressed being 'very able"[16]. These results are consistent with the participants in the cyber-bullying survey where 50% reported that their contact with Kids Helpline was 'very helpful' and a further 13% found their contact to be 'somewhat helpful'. These findings are also consistent with international research into the

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12 For a review of the literature please refer to: Campbell, M. 2005: 71-74, Roberts, I. 2008: 6-7

13 Campbell,M. 2007: 5

14 Campbell,M. 2007: 5

15 Coman g., Burrows, G., & Evans, B. 2001: 256, Mallen M., Rochlen, A., &Day, S. 2005: 826, Urbis Keys Young 2003: 63.

16 BoysTown:2008 page 1-3

transition period between primary and early secondary school.[17] Children and young people that bully are also more likely to have friends who have positive attitudes towards violence.[18] Furthermore, children and young people are more likely to disclose their concerns about being bullied and seek support from a peer rather than a parent or another adult[19]. Participants in the online cyber-bullying survey noted that 38% who had told a friend about being bullied found this to be 'very helpful' and 42% felt that this action had been 'somewhat helpful'. Consequently, the most direct intervention technique to prevent bullying is to positively influence the quality of 'peer to peer' relationships and to improve the ability of peers to provide support.

In general, effective peer helper programs involve:

- The teaching of positive social values[20]
- Empathy training so that the bystanders speak out against the bullies instead of silently condoning the behaviour through their passivity[21]
- Assisting young people to enhance their helping skills so they can better support their friends at school
- Understanding the dynamics of bullying and brainstorming how students can end bullying in their school
- Peer mediation skills training, and
- The teaching of web etiquette, known as 'netiquette', to reduce cyber-bullying[22].

There are numerous peer helper programs being implemented across Australia. It is suggested that a review be undertaken to assess the availability of these programs for school aged children in New South Wales with the aim of identifying any gaps in current service provision. This would then provide information for the development of effective remedial strategies.

Recommendation 2:

That the State Government initiate a review of the provision of peer helper programs across New South Wales schools to ascertain current availability and service levels to children and youth and fund gaps identified from this analysis.

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17 Kulig, et al., 2008: 3

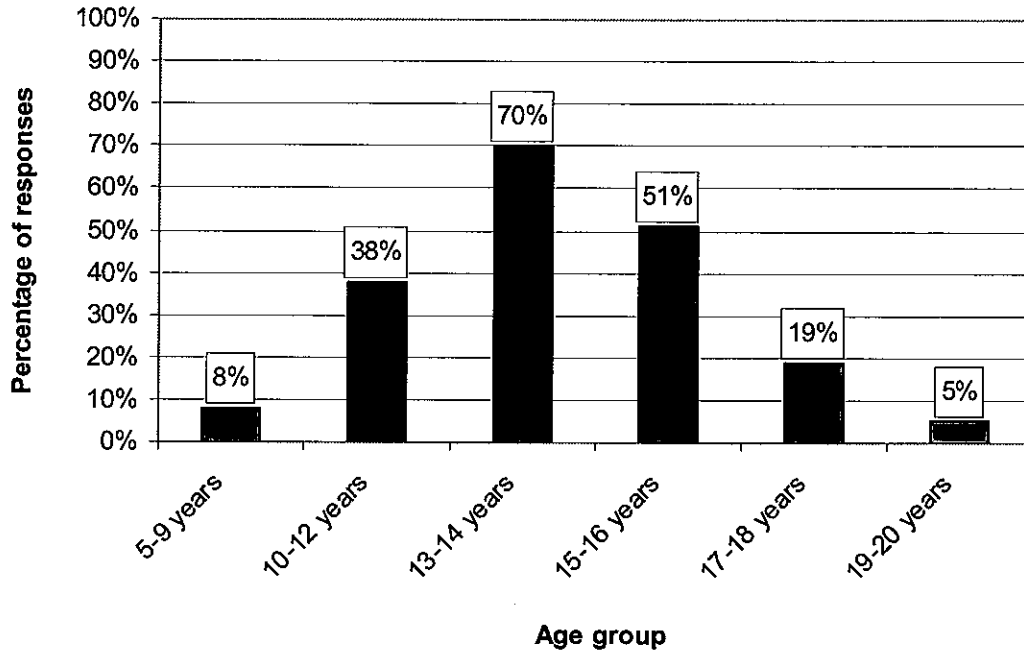18 Kulig, et al., 2008: 3

19 Campbell, M. 2007: 5

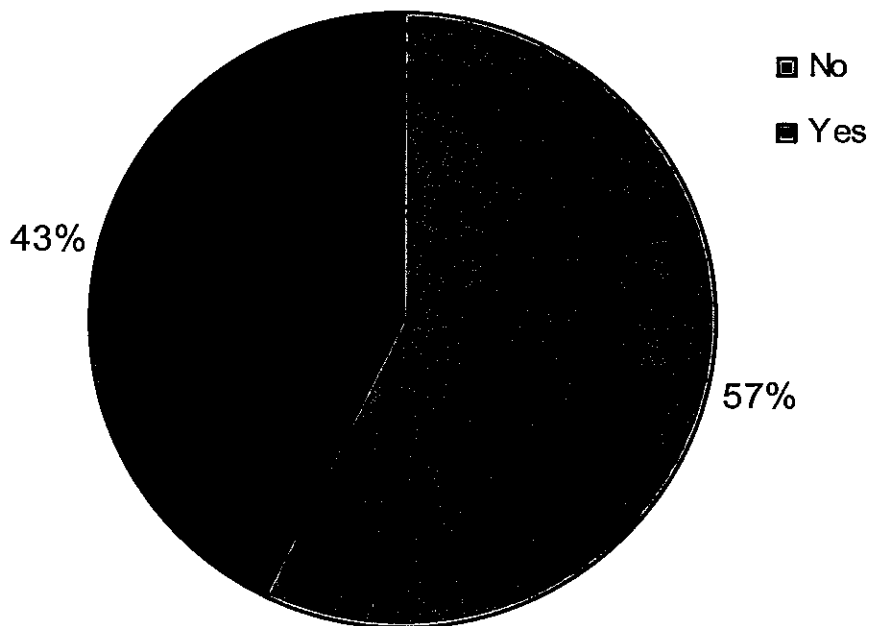20 Campbell, M. 2005: 73

21 Campbell, M. 2005: 73

22 Campbell, M. 2005: 73
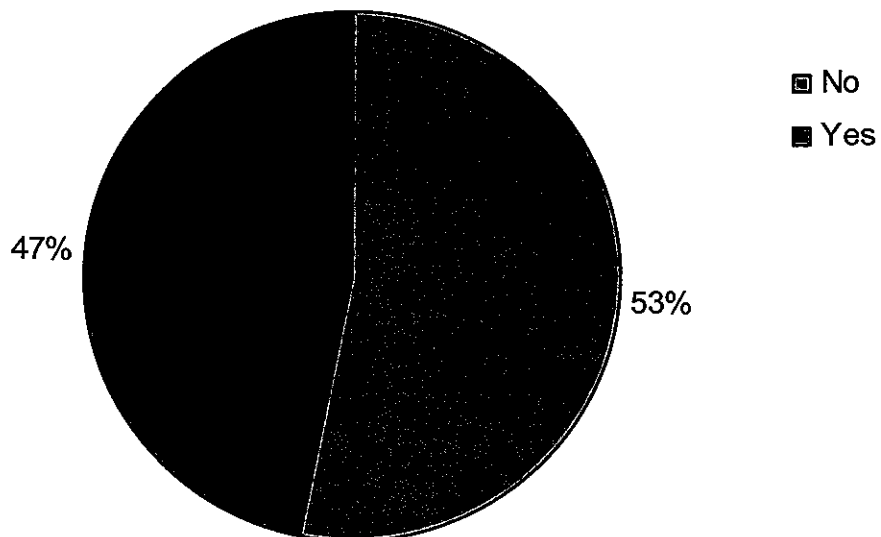
3. Age(s) when cyber-bullying occurred:

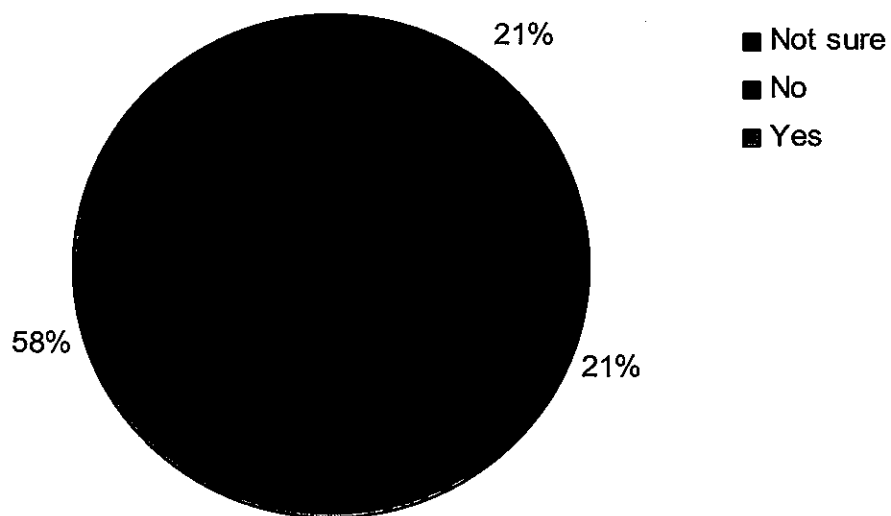NB: Being based on multiple responses, percentages may not add up to 100%.

4. Are you still being cyber bullied?

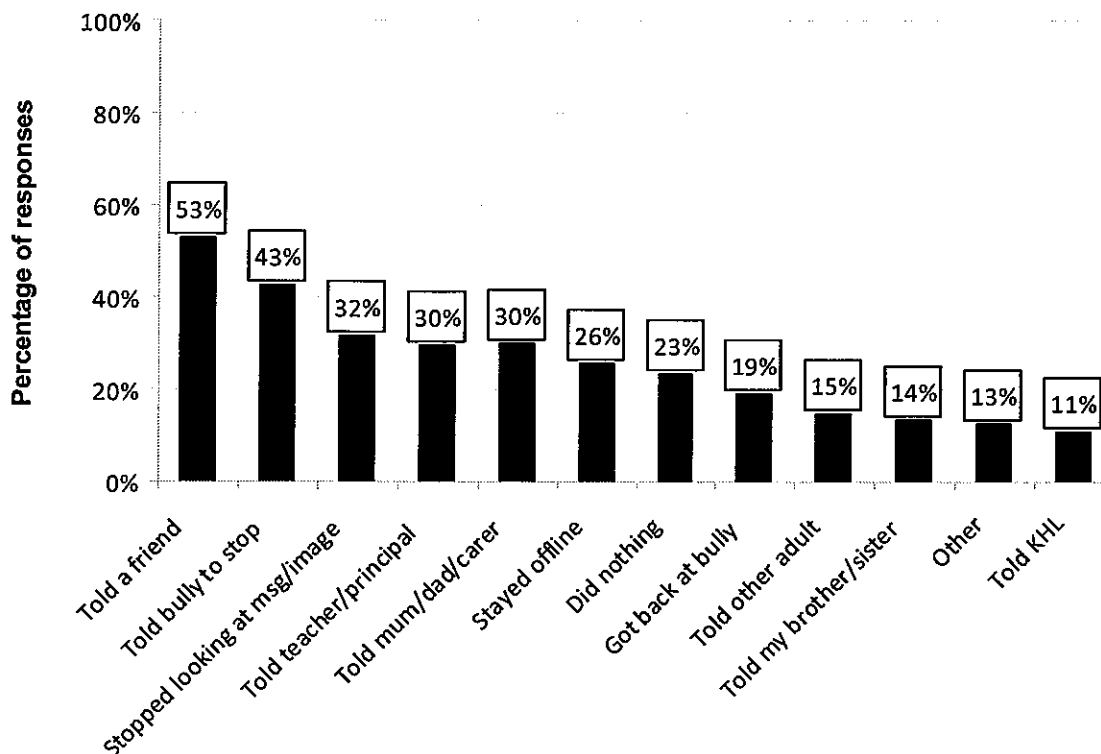**7. Incidence of cyber bullies also bullying the participant face-to-face:**

47%   53%

- ▣ No
- ■ Yes

8. Participants' awareness of who their cyber-bully was:

21%

58%   21%

- ■ Not sure
- ■ No
- ■ Yes

11. Action taken in response to cyber-bullying:

NB: Being based on multiple responses, percentages may not add up to 100%.

Action taken in response to cyber bullying

12. Effectiveness of action taken in response to bullying:

NB: respondents were able to respond to actions on this question regardless of whether they had identified it as an action of theirs in Q11. Subsequently, some discrepancy exists in the sample sizes of the two questions. Percentages do not all add to 100% due to rounding up/down.

Action	N=	Not helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful
Did nothing	14	36%	43%	21%
Told bully to stop	22	73%	18%	9%
Stopped looking at image / message	18	28%	33%	39%
Stayed offline	13	31%	38%	31%
Got back at the bully	10	50%	30%	20%
Told a friend	24	21%	42%	38%
Told a brother / sister	8	38%	25%	38%
Told mum / dad / carer	14	29%	29%	43%
Told a teacher / principal	13	23%	38%	38%
Told another adult	11	36%	18%	45%
Told KHL	8	38%	13%	50%
Other	11	36%	18%	45%

15. Suggested advice to give friends being cyber bullied: (sample of responses)

- Blocking is your best friend!
- Build a bridge.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Don't try and get even.
- Ignore it
- Ignore the bully, if the bully doesn't get a reaction they should stop, because the bullying becomes pointless.
- Just don't take things by heart because they are just jealous of what u have
- Nothing, because I would not say anything. I would just try to be there for him/her.
- Stay strong; there are other people like you and quit often the bully is bullying you because they are jealous about something. 1) B
- Talk about it might make things better
- Talk to kids help line! They are the best!!! *write down the number and hand it to them* and i would make sure that they are ok, and just talk to them... And give them a big hug! :p
- Tell an adult. It's not fair on you and it should be stopped. Don't be afraid of telling, it's the best thing you can do.
- Tell someone
- The moment that they start report it. Don't let it get too far and don't believe what they say.
- To not pay any attention and if it continues to speak to any adult
- To confront the person to find out what reason is behind the bullying...if that don't work then go and c the teacher or tell an adult...
- To tell an adult and maybe they can be helpful. And try to be strong enough to take it. But always tell somebody because it really could to a bad situation. You will get through this.
- Try and ignore it they have to sink that low and pick on u, they have nothing better to do in there life than pick on u.. N that there life must be pretty low with there own lives to pick on u, so they pick on u to make u feel better
- Try not to keep too close to a cyber-bully or regular bully
- Try to stay away from them
- Try to not get worried
- Turn off the computer or get a new email account and if it's via phone messages always make sure you know who you give your mobile number out to.
- You're not alone, it happens to lots of people. Don't let it get 2 u too much, coz it just destroys you, slowly and painfully, which lets the bully win.

References

BoysTown, 2008 NP.**Evaluation of Kids Helpline Counselling Effectiveness and Client Satisfaction**

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Campbell, M. 2007. Cyber-bullying and young people: Treatment principles not simplistic advice. In www.scientist-practitioner.com, paper of the week 23 February 2007.

Coman, G., Burrows, G., & Evans, B. 2001. Telephone counselling in Australia: applications and considerations for use. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 29 (2): 247-258.

D.L. Espelage, K. Bosworth, T.R. Simon 'Examining the Social Context of Bully Behaviours in Early Adolescence' *Journal of Counselling and   Development* Summer 2000, Vol.78 (3)