

INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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Immigrant Women's Speakout Association NSW, Inc

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

18th March 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Bullying of children and young people (Inquiry)

The Immigrant Women's Speakout Association (IWSA) is the peak advocacy, research, information and lobby body representing the issues and ideas of women of Non English Speaking Background (NESB) with children in New South Wales. For the past three (3) years IWSA worked with over 300 NESB women with young children. Many of these CALD women shared their concerns of bullying accidents experienced by their children at school.

On behalf of Immigrant Women's Speakout Association of NSW please accept our submission into *Bullying of children and young people (Inquiry)*

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Organization: Immigrant Women's Speakout Association (IWSA)

1. Introduction

The increasing number of Australian cross-cultural research projects over the past few years has served to advance the knowledge about the difficulties faced by Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) children and young people who migrate to Australia. It has recently been highlighted that migrant groups vary in their experiences of cultural adjustment, emotional distress, and coping ability.

2. Methodology:

The projects worker of IWSA gathered information from interviews and notes from meetings with past and present clients of IWSA. All of the families are of Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) with children 18 years and under. The ethnic background of the families ranged from countries in Asia, Middle Eastern and Africa.

All of our clients were provided with information and overview of the purpose into Inquiry into bullying of children and young people and our involvement in submitting a submission. IWSA stressed confidentiality and respect for the integrity of our clients and their family.

3. What is Bullying?

Bullying is defined by Kids Help line as “any deliberate psychological, emotional and/or physical harassment of one student by another or a group of occurring at school in transit between school and home.

Bullying has been identified as one of the major issues facing children, young people, parents, educators and the community at large in recent times. Whilst bullying has always occurred, it is only relatively recently that the extent and the impact of bullying have begun to be appreciated. It has been estimated that one in six Australian children are bullied weekly.

Available information suggests that most bullying occurs in late primary school or in the first years of secondary school. Ongoing harassment however appears to be more likely to be experienced by older students (15-18) according to Kids Help Line data. There is no evidence to suggest that the size of the school, or whether the school is single-sex or co-educational, or government or non-government, makes any significant difference to the amount of bullying that goes on.

4. NESB children and young people

A recent report release by the Human rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (2004) suggest that racial harassment, discrimination and even bullying have increased in Australia in recent years. Further to the report, the recent attached in the America in 2001 and Bali in 2002 was part of the triggering factors in the changes. Perhaps the highest racial despite and bullying have been surrounding asylum seekers from the Middle East and Muslim people. Such events have affected domestic attitude and behaviour, particular towards Muslims and Arab Australians.

Bullying and racially motivated bullying can have a profound impact on young CALD children especially on Muslim and Arab children and young people. It reinforces their feelings of insecurity and creates feelings of disconnection from their wider community. Many feel isolated and confused about their own identity and this sometimes results in rejections of their culture and values in an attempt to fit into the western Anglo - Saxon culture.¹

Bullying, harassment, violence and discrimination are harmful to both victims and perpetrators. Research now confirms what many of us have long known – that bullying, harassment and violence undermine a victim’s confidence, well-being and ability to learn. It’s not good for perpetrators either – there is a strong correlation between bullying in childhood and adolescence, and the use of violent and anti-social behaviours in adult life.

Experiences of bullying and harassment are clearly connected to:

- low self esteem and proneness to depression
- maladjustment
- depression and feeling helpless
- low levels of well-being.²

¹ Findley, Ian, (2006) Shared responsibility: beating bullying in Australian schools Camberwell, Vic: ACER Press

² Gillis, John S; Nadeau, Natalie; Claybourne, Marvin The Child Anxiety Scale as a potential screening device for bullying in young children. Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology v.5 2005: 71-76

5. School Bullying

In a recent finding from *Kids Helpline* (2006)³ of the calls received by the caseworkers school based bullying' was the fourth biggest concern among NESB children, especially aged 10 to 14 years old. The finding from the Kids-Helpline (2006) indicated that compared to Anglo- Australian counterparts, NESB children and young people made more calls about bullying and report more severe to frequent incidents and continual harassment (52%).

Schools play a very important role in supporting families, children and young people in the community. The Department of Education makes it clear and promotes;

'The School as the duty to provide a safe and secure environment for the students. Staff, parents and students have responsibilities and the rights to ensure that all have an opportunity to grow, develop and learn in a safe and happy school environment.'

However, for migrant families, proficiency in English, cultural diversity and differing expectations between schools and migrant communities, can impact on the support that schools feel they could provide. For migrant children and young people, starting school may represent the first opportunity for making new friends and learning new cultural values and practices. For migrant parents, school systems in Australia may be confusing or contrary to their expectations of a proficient education system.⁴

One of African staff member of IWSA named only as 'M' faced bullying incident in her family. M's nine year old daughter was bullied at school. She was bullied because her skin colour was different and she had a foul odor and smell. The girl was very

³ Issues and concerns facing young people from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds' Kids-Helpline 2006.

⁴ A Three-way Partnership? Exploring the experience of CLD families in schools (2006), The Centre for Multicultural Youth issues, Victoria.

distressed and she was very hurt. The bullying was constant and than one day there was a fight at the school between the girl and students who were bullying. M was called to the school but the parents of the bullying students were not called in. The school counselor asked M if her daughter was bathed and cleaned at home. M was very distressed with school counsellor's comments. Eventually the situation became worse and the school did not intervene effectively to manage the situation. M withdrew her daughter from the school and enrolled her into a new school where she is very happy with teachers and students. M commented that everybody at the new school was friendly but most importantly her daughter was happy at the new school. (August 2008)

Many Afghan women from IWSA described how their children have experienced some kind of bullying at school like *"My daughter's friend had their hijab taken off and verbally abused. Many Australian who are not Muslims yell out 'Arabs' 'Bin laden' 'go home' (November 2008)*

6. Early Prevention and early intervention NESB students and young people at school

Develop a school culture curriculum that values cultural diversity which is important for ensuring healthy relationships and an environment conducive to learning. It is proposed that prevention and intervention should involve the development and sustaining partnership between the school, teachers, families and community, underpinning the interventions should be principles of social justice to promote a;

- safe, supportive community
- strengths and capacities of school and community

- Empowerment to address issues of bullying and other forms of harassment in the school.

At IWSA we have consulted with NESB women with children and identified concerns of their children being bullied at school. Many women felt that the school and teachers need to identify and understand that each student is unique and that students are from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. IWSA strongly feels that cultural education and awareness curriculum within the school is vital for the teachers and students to learn and accept other CALD background students. Such recommendations include:

- Enhancing multiculturalism in the class and school

Teachers need to be able to affirm the student's own cultural and group identities and explore their identity as members of Australian society. Curriculum and resources need to reflect the diversity of the school and of Australian society in order to ensure that all students can feel they belong. Encourage students to speak and share about their culture.

- Social inclusion

Active social and community and school activities and full participation of all students. Encouraging mixed groups of CALD background students to increase an opportunity for each student to discover and learn about other student's culture. Link NESB parents with other families of similar background so that parents can feel less isolated. Find out about preferred languages, use professional interpreters to facilitate and appropriate communication. Ongoing contact with the student's family and enquire about family's background including their religion, the status of their

immigration. Search relevant community services that could assist the family to feel welcomed into the community.

7. Policy Recommendations for schools:

1) School

- Develop a comprehensive social inclusion and multicultural policy on relationship among student; teachers and students; parents to parent of students; teachers and other school staff to parents and all relevant people and members.
- Observe the United Nation Convention on the *Rights of the Child*
- Develop policy on complaint procedure on bullying
- Develop policy on prevention and early intervention on bullying at school

Teachers' knowledge of the cultural diversity within their classrooms and within the broader Australian community varies is critical to understand and relate to NESB children and young people and their families. Teachers may have little knowledge or understanding of the home lives and culture of students whose cultures and backgrounds differ from theirs. As a result, some teachers carry with them stereotyped views of what students can achieve or how they are likely to behave according to their culture or ethnicity.

8. Applying Child Protection legislation to Peer abuse/bullying

Bullying or peer abuse has been subject of legal action in Australia although not through child protection provisions. Recent child protection legislation in NSW , the *Children and Young People Act 1998* has raised significant ethical and professional issues involved in determining responses to peer abuse. The Act considers child protection issue for school given well the long history of bullying at schools across NSW.

The Legislation mandates early notification of all forms of abuse, and increases both the level of responsibility and liability for litigation of teachers and schools for failure to offer the appropriate level of protections. The Act states that “all institutions responsible for the care and protection of children and young people provide an environment for them that is free of violence and exploitation and provides services that promotes their health, development needs and dignity’.

Since the NSW Act it mandates that all persons listed, including teachers, must report concerns which includes abusive behaviours of peers which has direct influence of other peers from being physically, psychological and emotionally being harmed.

9. Recommendation on Strategies to prevent bullying

A) Strategies –general

- Teach and train teachers to differentiate bullying as abuse rather than conflict.
- Education and training for teachers to raise consciousness to the point where bullying is more than just fighting and verbal abuse.
- Professional training by legal practitioners to the relevant state legislation in regard to child protection in the school.
- Clarifications of the roles of staff members in reducing conflict, for example in monitoring student behaviour in the schoolyard and reporting where necessary and in modeling and encouraging respectful, pro social behaviour,
- Addressing cases of bullying that rises, taking into account the nature and severity of the problem and the likely effectiveness of possible modes of intervention.

2) Strategies to address issues for NESB students and families

- Check background for students. This information can help to understand the child's culture and their ethnic background
- Prepare student for change into Australian school system. Set up a welcome introduction to the class.
- Observe, supervise and monitor the student playing and interacting with other peers.
- Communicate and keep regular contact with the student's family.
- Encourage student to talk and share about their culture in the class

The development of beliefs and attitudes is a complex process. Students' attitudes are strongly influenced by their families and peers as well as by the values and ideas of the community and society. The role of the school is also critical, through both the formal setting of the classroom and interactions within the wider school community.