

Submission
No 41

**INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE**

Name: Professor Kenneth Rigby

Date received: 23/03/2009

Inquiry into the bullying of children and young people

Over the last 15 years great deal of research has been conducted into bullying in schools. The nature, causes and consequences for both victims and bullies have been examined at length. It is known for instance that criminal behaviour in the wider society is correlated with a failure to deal effectively with children who bully repeatedly in schools (Andershed et al, 2001). Much of this research is now available in both educational journals and in books that seek to simplify the issues and provide summaries of what is known. My own books have sought to provide up to date accounts of the state of knowledge with particular reference to Australia (Rigby, 1996, 2002, 2008)

There are many things that can be done by schools along lines indicated by the National Framework for Safe Schools in 2002. These involve the development of a whole school approach guided by an agreed anti-bullying policy, the close surveillance by schools of anti-social behaviour and the inclusion in the school curriculum materials and lessons that can help to develop more social behaviour and attitudes and inform students of ways in which they can be safe from bullying at the school and assist other students who may be targeted.

However, despite extensive work that has been done in many schools throughout the world, the level of school bullying has scarcely been affected. Recently research reports have recorded the degree to which interventions in schools to reduce bullying in schools have been successful. This research is summarised in a recent research publication by Rigby and Slee (2008). It is clear from this and other work that interventions to reduce bullying have frequently achieved little or no success (see Smith, Pepler and Rigby, 2004). On average the rate of reduction following the use of intervention programs has been estimated at around 15%.

Clearly a great deal more work is needed in addressing this problem at different levels, not only by schools, but also by parents and the wider community. However, I think that the most pressing concern is to develop and apply the most appropriate methods of interventions with cases of bullying that come to the attention of school authorities. On this matter I have been impressed by research that estimates the effectiveness or otherwise of counsellors and teachers when they are informed about cases of bullying and seek to stop it.

The estimates based upon responses by students who have reported being bullied to teachers indicate that among adolescents **more than half** the interventions are unsuccessful; that is after the interventions in most cases there has been no reported improvement in the situation for the victims. In 10% or so of cases the bullying reportedly gets worse (see Smith and Shu, 2000 and Rigby and Barnes, 2002). Interventions are somewhat more successful with younger children, which is one reason why early intervention is important.

Comparatively little research has been reported on the effectiveness of **different** kinds of intervention, such as the traditional disciplinary approach, mediation, strengthening the victim (eg through teaching assertiveness), restorative practice, the social support method and the Method of Shared Concern. The main exception to the dearth of evaluation of specific methods concerns the so-called Method of Shared Concern – a

method of intervention, devised by Pikas (2002), that seeks to motivate the students involved in the bullying to act responsibly and solve the problem with guidance from the practitioner. Success rates for this method of around 90% have been reported in Scotland (Duncan, 1996). Similar results have been found in recent research in Australia conducted by Rigby and Griffiths (2009, submitted). This latter study was commissioned by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). A DVD providing training in the use of this method is available through Readymade Productions (2007)

It is unlikely that any one method of intervention in cases of school bullying will prove effective for all cases. In some extreme cases for example strong disciplinary action is required. Where victims of school bullying can reasonably be expected to acquire skills to prevent themselves from being bullied they should be helped to do so. Mediation, Restorative Practice and the Method of Shared Concern can be used appropriately in some cases. However, what is currently needed in many schools is an understanding of when each of these methods can best be applied and the technical skills to apply them effectively. To achieve this end we urgently need to promote much better training of teachers, at both pre-service and in-service levels (see Nicolaides, Toda and Smith (2002). This is clearly in accordance with the recommendation of the National Safe Schools Framework to the effect that relevant content on countering bullying should be included in teacher education and training. Currently there is comparatively little being provided and very little emphasis on methods of handling cases. Remedying this situation should in my opinion be a national priority.

References

- Andershed , H., Kerr, M., Stattin, H (2001) Bullying in School and Violence on the Streets: Are the same people involved ? Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention, 2 31-49.
- Department of Education and Training (2005). The National Safe Schools Framework: Canberra.
- Department of Education and Training, Victoria (2006) Report on the National Safe Schools Framework Best Practice Grants Programme (2004-2005)
- Duncan, A (1996)The Shared Concern Method for resolving group bullying in schools. , Educational Psychology in Practice, 12, 94-98.
- Nicolaides, S. Toda, Y, Smith, P.K (2002) Knowledge and attitudes about school bullying in trainee teachers. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 72, 105-118.
- Pikas, A. (2002) New developments of the Shared Concern Method School Psychology International 23 (3) 307-36.
- Readymade Productions (2007). The Method of Shared Concern: a Staff Training Resource for Dealing with Bullying in Schools: Adelaide: Readymade Productions. (See also: www.readymade.com.au/method).
- Rigby, K (1996) Bullying in schools and what to do about it. Melbourne: ACER
- Rigby, K (2002) New Perspectives on bullying. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Rigby, K (2008) Children and bullying. How parents and educators can reduce bullying at school. Boston: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Rigby, K and Slee, P.T (2008) Interventions to reduce bullying International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, 20,165-183.
- Rigby, K. and Barnes, A. (2002) To tell or not to tell: the victimised student's dilemma Youth Studies, Australia, 21,3, 33-36.
- Rigby, K. .and Slee, P.T. (1999) Suicidal ideation among adolescent school children, involvement in bully/victim problems and perceived low social support Suicide and Life-threatening Behavior, 29, 119-130
- Smith, P. K. and Shu, S. (2000). What good schools can do about bullying. Childhood, 7, 193–212.
- Smith, P.K. and Sharp, S. (Eds).(1994). School bullying: Insights and Perspectives London: Routledge.
- Smith, P.K., Pepler, D. and Rigby, K. (2004) Bullying in schools: How successful can interventions be ? Cambridge: Cambridge University Press