

SYLFF Leadership Initiative (SLI) Final Report

One-day conference on Bullying: Identifying effective prevention and intervention strategies

Project Highlights:

Bullying is a major health issue for youth in New Zealand, with international statistics indicating that out of 50 countries, New Zealand ranks 46th in terms of bullying prevalence. Researchers, practitioners, and policy makers understand this is an imperative issue for youth well-being. However, there is little dialogue amongst experts that seeks to bring together our knowledge and form actionable strategies to combat the occurrence and negative outcomes of bullying. Therefore, this project undertook to bring together subject matter specialists from across New Zealand in order to discuss the future directions for prevention and intervention of school bullying.

The event began with a key-note speech on the relationship between bullying and health by Associate Professor Simon Denny. This was followed by a presentation on an intervention programme, KiVA, being run in New Zealand schools and the first set of three workshops which examined, in turn, cyber-bullying, the relationships between bullying and family violence, and a group mentoring framework for intervention being carried out in a school in Auckland, New Zealand. Excerpts from a New Zealand documentary on bullying were then shown, and then the last three workshops followed. These included discussion of a youth-led programme to stop bullying, examination of research into youth understandings of bullying, and an outline of the anti-bullying work being undertaken by the Ministry of Education. The day ended with a panel discussion involving a youth worker, a public servant, a member of the police, a young person, and a guidance counsellor, who all discussed future directions for action against bullying in New Zealand.

The event was attended by 75 individuals from government agencies, research institutions, and community organisations who work with youth and their families. Due to the generous funding by SLI the event raised approximately \$1200 for the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, a charity which works to raise awareness of bullying and its negative effects on both victims and bullies. The outcome of this event was the production of video resources, and the development of a virtual network of associates who are interested in producing actionable strategies to improve the health and well-being of youth in New Zealand. Furthermore, the main findings from the conference are currently in the process of being collated and presented to the Bullying Action Research Group in order to inform social policy on school bullying.

Short Article

Background

Bullying is a serious social problem that impacts not only those directly involved, but on a larger scale, affects schools, families and communities. Research has consistently found that youth who engage in, witness, or are targets of bullying are at risk of adjustment difficulties during adolescence and that there are long-term and potentially fatal repercussions for both perpetrators and victims. Bullied students are likely to suffer poor health and experience a range of psychological and behavioural symptoms and bullies have a greater risk of serious injury, and are likely to abuse substances, and criminally offend. In addition, there is

evidence that peers merely witnessing bullying can be negatively affected, indicating that everyone is worse off when bullying is prevalent.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that it is a fundamental human right that children should be ensured healthy development, have good quality of life, and be protected against all forms of discrimination and abuse. Unfortunately, this goal is being compromised by the increased prevalence of childhood exposure to bullying and victimisation. Indeed, research has estimated that approximately 75% of school-aged children experience bullying, 50% feel bullying is a problem in their lives, and around 10% experience persistent, serious harassment worldwide.

The recent Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reported that New Zealand has one of the highest rates of school bullying internationally. In fact, nearly 70% of children aged 8-12, and 50% of students 13-17 say that they experience bullying at school and this does not seem to be changing over time. In line with this finding, results from recent research examining prevalence rates of bullying in New Zealand schools revealed that 94% of principals and teachers believe that bullying occurred in their school, and 75% reported that bullying was a serious problem for New Zealand youth. Based on these indicators, it is imperative that effective prevention and intervention strategies aimed at reducing bullying be developed for the New Zealand environment in order to maintain Children's Rights and lower the incidence of youth harm.

The Conference

The objective of the conference was to encourage dialogue amongst policy makers, researchers, and practitioners regarding effective intervention and prevention of bullying victimisation. The major outcome of this day was to produce an evidence base for the public sector to leverage from in order to provide guidelines for effective intervention and prevention to families, schools, and communities.

Outline of Events

The following section outlines the speakers and workshops that were held throughout the day.

1. Associate Professor Denny was the conference key note speaker. Dr Denny specialises in research which illuminates the effects of social issues and health and well-being for New Zealand youth. He has published extensively on the relationship between school characteristics, bullying and health outcomes. In this keynote Dr Denny will discuss his research on the relationship between supportive schools, bullying, and health for adolescents in a population representative sample from the Youth2012 study.
2. Representatives for Accent Learning, an educational consultancy based in the School of Education at Victoria University of Wellington presented on an intervention, KiVa that they implement in New Zealand schools. The KiVa programme is an internationally renowned intervention for school bullying developed in Finland by Professor Christina Salmivalli. To date 90% of Finnish schools are KiVa schools and bullying incidents have been significantly reduced. In this session the KiVa

programme was discussed and the preliminary results of its success in New Zealand were be outlined.

3. *Workshop 1. Cyberbullying.* In this workshop four presented discussed the impact of cyberbullying, or intentional act of online/digital intimidation, embarrassment, or harassment, on youth in New Zealand. Cyber-bullying is reported to affect between 9 – 40% of all adolescents and incidents are becoming increasing prevalent with growing access to online technologies. What sets cyberbullying apart is that online perpetrators can remain completely anonymous and technology allows them to infiltrate a range of environments beyond school. These features make addressing cyberbullying particularly difficult. This session drew together research, policy and NGO efforts to reduce the incidence and negative impact of cyberbullying for youth in New Zealand with the aim of identifying future directions for intervening in cyberbullying.
4. *Workshop 2 The Girls' Project.* In this workshop Dr Donna Swift outlined New Zealand research that examines the ways girls are socialized into violence, their use of this behaviour as a tactic for survival, and how this can then impact on social interactions at school or in the community. She highlighted the way in which girls can become both victims and perpetrators of violence, with violence so entrenched in their lives that intervention needs to address the significant layers of its complexity. This workshop concluded by recommending approaches to help girls overcome their challenges, and acknowledges that without effective strategies the potential exists for their violent behaviour to continue into their adulthood and future families.
5. *Workshop 3 Safe and Peaceful Schools.* In this workshop the establishment and implementation of undercover anti-bullying teams at Edgewater school by Mike Wilson, the school guidance counsellor was discussed. These teams provide encouraging counter stories that change negative relationships into positive relationships. The victim of bullying and the counsellor work together to select anti-bullying team members, which consist of 6-7 students. Since implementation of this programme, there have been reductions in bullying and past bullies have now become senior school leaders. This strategy enables bullies to develop peer mediation skills, and reform their reputations. By addressing conflict, such as mocking, teasing and put-downs, teams can model positive behaviours to bullies, eliminate violence, and transform students into positive citizens.
6. *Workshop 4 Te Punanga Haumarū.* This workshop outlined a Ministry of Social Development initiative which aims to foster community commitment and ownership for addressing bullying by encouraging projects that are collaborative and building on what already exists. Key to the approach is involving children and young people in the planning and implementation of projects to increase effectiveness by ensuring approaches are relevant and appealing. Project teams found that young people

bring a range of perspectives, energy and passion to the work. They have great local knowledge and their views are key to getting traction in community. Despite the benefits, not all project teams have managed to engage youth well in their projects. The challenges and successes identified by project teams were discussed.

7. *Workshop 5 Misconceptions about Bullying.* This session was focused on understanding discourses of bullying in New Zealand, from young people's everyday talk about bullying to representations in the media. This session outlined three research projects that attempted to investigate the social influences on bullying for young people in New Zealand in order to see if we really do live in a 'culture of violence'. The first project examined responses to stories about bullying victimisation in the New Zealand media, focusing on how we talk about power and weakness. The second project investigated young people's definitions of bullying behaviour and how these diverge from policy and academic definitions. The third project examined how young people talk about everyday instances of bullying as witnesses, perpetrators, and victims.
8. *Workshop 6 Anti-bullying Guide for Schools.* The Ministry of Education introduced their practical guide for schools on how to prevent bullying and respond effectively when it occurs. This guide is based on research and evidence about effective practice and includes specific information as requested by schools. It provides information and resources, and highlights the importance of working closely with students, parents, whanau and the wider community to address all forms of bullying behaviour. This session covered 4 major topics; safe and positive school environments, understanding bullying, bullying policies and processes, and responding to bullying behaviour.
9. *Panel Discussion.* A panel of stakeholders was invited to discuss one or more of the questions listed below. The panel consisted of a youth representative, a policy representative (from the Ministry of Education), a police representative, a youth worker, and a guidance counsellor. The panel members were each be given a chance to discuss their point of view, which will be followed by questions and general discussion.

Outcomes of Conference

The conference was a great success that participants have referred to as "one of the best workshops I have been to in my professional career". Many connections were made among participants, and a substantial amount of money was raised for the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand. Video resources were produced of the event and are in the process of being edited into a user friendly resources. Furthermore, as a number of members of the Bullying Prevention Action Group were in attendance, a set of recommendations from the workshop will be presented at their meetings.