

School Bullying and Tackling Strategies in Hong Kong

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Abstract: *In view of the rising problem of school bullying in Hong Kong, scholars have endeavored to study the prevalence, causes, and tackling strategies of school bullying. This article highlights some typical incidences of school violence and reports research results of school bullying. It is noted unresolved school bullying problems are often a precursor of school violence and delinquency. Based on results from local studies of bullying, this article identifies risk and protective factors that contribute to the emergence and continuation of the bully-victim problem in Hong Kong. The article argues that suppressive tactics, such as reprimanding bullies, calling parents to school, and suspension, are ineffective. Other than suppressive tactics, adopting a comprehensive antibullying strategy such as assisting students to develop adequate self-competency, strong social skills, and good relationships with parents and teachers seems to be a useful antiviolence strategy.*

Keywords: *school bullying; youth violence*

Bullying affects a substantial number of children and youth in all schools. As in many countries, bullying is an issue of growing concern to parents, teachers, and social workers in Hong Kong. In general, bullying is defined as repeated oppression, physical or mental, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons. It occurs where there is an imbalance in power between people, and it is a persistent or continued unwelcome behavior (Olweus, 1993, 1994; Rigby, 1996; Smith & Sharp, 1994). It ranges from simple teasing to violent physical acts. The literature on bullying and delinquent behavior suggests that bullying and delinquency are not the same. Delinquency, different from bullying, includes a number of types of antisocial behavior that are prohibited by criminal law, including stealing, violence, vandalism, fraud, and drug use (Baldry & Farrington, 2000). Bullying behavior with violence is definitely a subtype of delinquency, however bullying among students, such as insulting, threatening, or kicking, may not be seen as delinquency. This article illustrates the growing concern with bullying in Hong Kong and the possibility that it may be the precursor of general juvenile delinquency or youth violence. Apart from highlighting some recent incidences and research results of bullying in the community, this article discusses the negative spiral effect of bullying and a comprehensive antibullying strategy for tackling the problem.

RECENT INCIDENTS OF BULLYING IN HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, severe school violence, such as shooting or fighting with weapons, is not frequent, however bullying among schoolchildren, such as spitting, verbal insults, name calling, and taunting, is certainly not a new phenomenon. "Physical bullying," such as hitting, tripping up, kicking, and assaulting, and extortion, such as making students feel intimidated and asking for money with threatening words, are two major threats to students' well-being in schools. These kinds of bullying behavior are rather common in middle schools with lower academic banding, and parents and community leaders worry about how the schools will protect their children. The following are typical examples of physical bullying reported in the mass media.

GROUP BULLYING

Kelvin, a big, 12-year-old boy, often made use of his strong body to bully others. One incident happened when Kelvin was playing on the basketball ground with three friends just after lunch at school. As an 11-year old classmate called Andy passed by, Kelvin and three classmates threw pencils at him for fun. Although Andy stared at them with hatred, they continued, throwing soft drink cans and garbage at Andy. Unable to take it anymore, Andy picked up a broom and hit them. As there were a lot of people on Kelvin's side, and because he was so big in size, they easily knocked Andy down. Andy was extremely angry; he went up to the second floor and returned to Kelvin with a cutter knife (a blade for cutting papers). During the fight, the cutter hurt Kelvin's left eye seriously. Andy was charged by the police for the assault on Kelvin ("Causing a Student," 1999).

SEXUAL ASSAULT

A 13-year-old girl, who had been reported to have bullied others in the past, was sexually assaulted by her classmates and their friends. In the event, which took place after school, 10 boys and girls took the girl to the staircase of a building near her school where they ordered her to take off all her clothes, and one of them burned her underwear with a cigarette lighter. Another one took out a marker and started writing on her. When the girl tried to stop them, she was kicked and punched, and her head was knocked against a wall. After 3 hours of being bullied, her body was covered with cuts and bruises ("Teen Gangsters," 1999).

MURDER

A victim of murder on May 14, 1997, Chi Wai was a skinny 14-year-old boy. A few days before the murder, the group of neighborhood gangsters had beaten up

Ching, an adult friend of Chi Wai who was mentally challenged. Chi Wai suggested that Ching report this to the police, and this led Chi Wai to his death. The night he was murdered, the gang called him with the excuse of seeing Ching in the hospital. Instead, he was led into a flat and was severely punished for thinking of reporting the beating of Ching to the police. After being beaten for 3 hours, Chi Wai died. The gang wrapped the body up in a garbage bag, put it in a box, and moved it to an empty building where they burned it and left the remains in a dump. Although not all the gang members took part directly in the murder, according to law, all of them were charged with murder or serious assault. The ages of the teenagers ranged from 14 to 17 years, and they were considered to be juveniles. They all received a heavy penalty ("The Gang Involved," 1999).

A VICIOUS CYCLE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Although the above three events are different in nature, the underlying factors behind the emergence of these events are all related to a vicious cycle of bullying. In the first two cases, the one who was seriously hurt had been involved in bullying others for a certain period of time. It is noted that the offenders and victims are often classmates or friends before the violence occurs, and physical violence is a result of either the continuing bullying or revenge taken against the bullies by the victim. For example, in the group bullying case, Andy was eventually taken to the police for seriously injuring Kelvin's eye. Ironically, the offender, Andy, was in fact a victim of continued school bullying. This incident is a typical case of school violence that is a manifestation of an abuse of power.

In the murder case, Chi Wai, without friends and not doing well in school, often wandered in the streets with a group of neighborhood peers. The peer group was generally seen as a gang from the eyes of residents because they were school dropouts and frequently wandered around in the nearby neighborhoods. Although Chi Wai was continuously bullied by a number of peer group leaders, he never told anyone about it or thought of leaving the peer group, because he was afraid of revenge and the loss of his "friends." Having encountered little resistance, the peer group leaders stepped up their bullying acts and began a vicious cycle of bullying. The girl victim of the sexual assault had records of having conflicts with classmates and was sometimes involved in bullying others at school before the assault occurred. The sexual assault was revenge taken by her classmates and their friends.

Unresolved conflicts and school bullying problems are often a precursor of school violence and delinquency. A glance at the official statistics of juvenile violent crimes suggests that the situation is alarming. In 2001, violent crimes in Hong Kong accounted for 26.7% of the total juvenile crimes (ages 7 to 15 years). The percentage was higher than that of those aged 16 to 20 years (25.1% of the total youth crimes) and of the adult group (19.9% of the total adult crimes) (Census and

Statistics Department, 2002). Such events and statistics are a source of alarm for the entire community, as it has become evident that many schools are almost impotent in their attempts to stop school bullying.

STUDIES OF SCHOOL BULLYING

Internationally, although there are isolated studies of bullying prior to the 1970s, a systematic study of the phenomenon dates from the late 1970s (see Borg, 1998; Smith et al., 1999; Smith & Sharp, 1994). In 1978, Olweus published an English version of his book, *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*. The book, originally published in Swedish in 1973, marked the opening of a stream of research on bullying, which developed first in the Scandinavian countries. Since then, a growing international interest in, and concern with, the problem of bullying has seen researchers focus on various aspects of bullying (Besag, 1989; Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1978, 1994; Peterson & Rigby, 1999; Siann, Callaghan, Glissov, Lockhart, & Rawson, 1994; Smith et al., 1999; Smith & Thompson, 1991).

In Hong Kong, there was no systematic study on the prevalence of school bullying before 1999. In the past 2 decades, the only relevant studies of bullying have been those on causes or predictors of delinquency, the nature and extent of youth deviant behaviors in local districts, the process of deviation, and the types of unruly and delinquent behavior of students (Cheung & Ng, 1988; Education Department, 1991, 1993; Vagg, Bacon-Shone, Gray, & Lam, 1995; Wong, 1999a, 1999b, 2000). Since the middle of 2000, I have been studying the problem of school bullying. Research teams have been formed to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions of school bullying in local districts as well as at a community-wide level (Wong, 2001a; Wong & Lo, 2002; Wong, Lok, Lo, & Ma, 2002). The main objectives of these studies were to identify the extent and underlying factors of bullying and victimization, and to develop effective ways to tackle the problem.

A questionnaire was designed to investigate the problem of bullying in primary and secondary schools. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts. Part A included subsections measuring (a) frequency of witnessing bullying (being a bystander), (b) frequency of bullying others (being a bully), (c) frequency of being bullied (being a victim), (d) feeling toward a harmony school, (e) contact with violent values, and (f) students' psychosocial conditions. Part B was a section for obtaining participants' demographic data such as sex, age, and place of birth. Having known that bullying may induce a negative spiral of effects on people involved in the incident, either directly or indirectly, questions related to "bystander" were also included. To ensure respondents understood the definition of the terms used, when they were asked about whether they had been involved as a bystander, bully, or victim of physical bullying and extortion, examples of these two types of bullying were quoted beside the terms as seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1
 THE PREVALENCE OF PHYSICAL AND
 EXTORTION BULLYING IN HONG KONG SCHOOLS^a

	<i>Secondary School (%)^b</i>		<i>Primary School (%)^c</i>	
	<i>Physical Bullying (Slapping, fistfighting, hitting, and assault)</i>	<i>Extortion (Asking for food or or money by threats)</i>	<i>Physical Bullying (Slapping, fistfighting, hitting, and assault)</i>	<i>Extortion (Asking for food or money by threats)</i>
Bystander	58.6	34.3	67.6	40.2
Bully	17.2	6.6	22.5	9.5
Victim	18.3	8	31.7	13.2

NOTE: a. Respondents had been involved in bullying over the 6-month period prior to the interview.

b. The study collected 3,297 student questionnaires from 29 secondary schools in 2001.

c. The study collected 7,025 student questionnaires from 47 primary schools in 2001.

The results of the first comprehensive research on secondary school teachers' and students' perceptions of bullying were published in mid-2001. The study collected 905 questionnaires from teachers and social workers, and 3,297 questionnaires from students from 29 secondary schools (Wong & Lo, 2002). Another community-wide research report on the prevalence of school bullying in primary schools in Hong Kong was also released in 2002 (Wong et al., 2002). Altogether 7,025 questionnaires were collected from 47 primary schools. These studies found that more than one half of the respondents were involved in bullying—as bystanders, bullies, or victims (Table 1).

The results from these studies indicate that the problem of physical bullying seems to be more serious than bullying with extortion in primary and secondary schools. It was found that 17.2% of the secondary sample and 22.5% of the primary sample admitted bullying other students at some time during the preceding 6 months. Similarly, 18.3% of the secondary sample and 31.7% of the primary sample reported that they had been the victims of physical bullying.

These figures regarding physical bullying reflect a high prevalence of physical violence compared with those found in the United States and the United Kingdom. For example, based on the analysis of data from a representative sample of 15,686 students in Grades 6 through 10 in public and private schools throughout the United States in 1998, results suggested that a total of 29.9% of the sample reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying (including bystanders), as a bully (13.0%), one who was bullied (10.6%), or both (6.3%) (Tonja et al., 2001).

In 2000, a survey on school bullying of 2,600 students aged 11 to 16 years in England and Wales revealed that in the preceding 12 months, 1 in 3 secondary school students in England and Wales had had to endure bullying (Association of

Teachers and Lecturers, 2000). One in 4 students had been threatened with violence while 1 in 8 had been physically assaulted. One in 10 students said they had missed school for fear of violence.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL BULLYING

How can school bullying be explained? Research suggests that typical bullies are often characterized by impulsivity, a strong need to dominate others, to surround themselves with a small group of friends who possess violence values and support them, and to have little empathy toward victims (Cairns, Cairns, Neekerman, Gest, & Gariepy, 1988; Olweus, 1993; Pulkkinen & Tremblay, 1992). Researchers have found that those who experience more strain at school, such as negative peer relations, negative teacher relations, and having low academic achievement, are more likely to bully and to engage in school crime (Agnew, 2000; Elliott, Hambury, & Williams, 1998; Welsh, Greene, & Jenkins, 1999). In addition, lack of warmth in the family, use of physical violence within the family, and lack of clear guidelines for behavior and monitoring of children's activities are found to be risk factors. Bullies are more likely than other students to follow an antisocial path (Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Olweus, 1994; Patterson, 1986). Research on peer victimization shows that the typical victims are more anxious and nonassertive than students in general. They are often lonely, abandoned at school, more likely to be depressed, overprotected by parents, and have poor self-esteem (Olweus, 1994).

The above-mentioned research findings can be viewed as a reflection of the interplay between two sets of countervailing factors: conditions favoring the enhancement of bully/victim problems and factors controlling the wide spread of bullying. Taken together, factors such as strain at school, peer and mass media influences, and psychosocial conditions of the bully/victim are crucial social determinants of bullying. In the Hong Kong studies on bullying, I included items measuring students' feeling toward harmony within the school, their contact with violent values, and their psychosocial condition. The studies adopted an interactional theoretical model (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, & Jang, 1991) to analyze reciprocal relationships among the variables mentioned above. The studies intended to identify risk factors and protective factors that contribute to the emergence and continuation of the bully-victim problem. These may include social attitudes toward school bullying, perceived strains at school, negative influence from peer and mass media, and poor psychosocial conditions. On the other hand, protective factors that have controlling effects on the problem may relate to the perception of school harmony and regulatory strategies adopted by the schools.

In Table 2, the correlation results reveal that children's psychosocial condition was negatively and statistically significantly related to their bully-victim problems in schools. When children were happy, emotionally stable, satisfied with school performance, and accepted by classmates, their likelihood of engagement in

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SCORES ON THE
BULLY/VICTIM PROBLEMS AND CHILDREN'S PSYCHOSOCIAL
CONDITIONS, THEIR CONTACT WITH VIOLENT VALUES,
AND THEIR FEELING TOWARD A HARMONY SCHOOL^a

	<i>Psychosocial Conditions^b</i>	<i>Contact with Violent Values^c</i>	<i>Toward a Feeling Harmony School^d</i>
Bullying others (more frequent)			
Physical bullying (slapping, fistfighting, hitting, and assault)	.220*	-.308*	.179*
Extortion (asking for food or money by threats)	.144*	-.245*	.155*
Being bullied by others (more frequent)			
Physical bullying (slapping, fistfighting, hitting, and assault)	.222*	-.173*	.152*
Extortion (asking for food or money by threats)	.167*	-.141*	.139*

NOTE: a. The study collected 7,025 students' questionnaires from 47 primary schools.

b. For a measure of children's Psychosocial Conditions, respondents were asked to rate 10 items on a scale from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). The coefficient alpha for this scale was .71. Higher scores on this scale indicated children's poor psychosocial conditions.

c. Contact with Violent Values was assessed by three self-constructed items and the coefficient alpha was .65. Lower scores on this scale represented high accessibility to violent values.

d. For Feeling Toward a Harmony School, respondents rated six items on a scale from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). The coefficient alpha for this scale was .72. Higher scores on this measure indicate children's negative image of their school.

* $p < .01$.

bully-victim problems was less frequent. On the contrary, children were more likely to become involved in peer victimization when their relationships with peers, parents, and/or siblings were unsatisfactory. The same trend was also identified in the relationship between the children's feeling toward harmony within the school and school bullying. The relationship between peer victimization in schools and the children's contact with violent values, however, was in the opposite direction. Students who had frequent contact with gangs, violent comics, and action films were more likely to be involved in various types of bullying.

THE HONG KONG CONTEXT BEHIND SCHOOL BULLYING

Although no survey on the general public's attitudes toward school bullying was conducted, my recent experience of running antibullying campaigns suggests

that prior to the release of the above-mentioned Hong Kong survey results, most people looked on bullying as normal small conflicts between peers.¹ Bullying is commonly perceived to be a rite of passage that everyone has to go through. Some teachers or parents think that if they were able face it themselves, so can their students or children. In addition, in the present-day capitalist societal background of Hong Kong, many people in all social strata are putting too much effort into income-generating and hedonistic activities. This includes not only adults but teenagers, who are becoming more self-centered, overaffectionate or emotional, and do not know how to control their emotions and anger (Wong, 1999b).

In Hong Kong over the past 10 years, schools have been putting a great deal of emphasis on academic results and less on life education. Thus, teenagers easily give vent to their emotions but lack problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. As a result, simple teasing can turn into fistfighting, which is often followed by returned violent and aggressive behaviors. With the education reform that began in the past 5 years, teachers are busy with the academic curricula and have no time for counseling their students. Young students who bully others may be seen as playing "bullying games," and teachers do not have time to deal with what they consider to be minimally aggressive behavior.

The process by which violence is taught is circular. It begins when a child learns violent acts from his or her parents or from the immediate environment during the childhood stage. In addition, it appears that violence values are easily acquired through violent films, song lyrics, and computer games. If a child spends a great deal of time with these media and the cyber world (the Internet), the message of violence is reinforced. As these children grow into their adolescent stage, if their aggressive behavior is seen as getting worse by parents and teachers, they often loosen family bonds and school bonds. They then associate with peers who come from a similar background and begin to engage in bullying acts or minor delinquency. As teenagers begin to enmesh themselves in such bullying subcultures, they become insensitive to others' feelings and do not develop a sense of empathy. They may further weaken their family attachment and school commitment and develop a stronger association with delinquent peers. At the same time, they internalize the violent values of their style of living. Some find themselves engaged in a vicious cycle, which may lead to the continuation of a bully career.

Overall, analyses and research findings seem to confirm that attitudes toward school bullying, perceived strains at school, negative influence from peer and mass media, and poor psychosocial conditions are all interrelated. The findings are in line with the analyses based on the interactional model that has integrated strain, social control, and learning theories to explain the onset and continuation of delinquency (Thornberry et al., 1991; Wong, 2001b).

A SUPPRESSIVE STRATEGY

In Hong Kong, there have been two major strategies for tackling school bullying and violence—a suppressive strategy and a comprehensive antibullying strategy. Broadly, the former values establishing blame and accountability, while the latter values positive effects of multiparty cooperation.

A suppressive strategy is basically a punitive approach that is bully focused and blame driven. In Hong Kong, school managers tend to overly rely on harsh punishment in an effort to deter students from engaging in school violence. Teachers sanction students' wrongdoing publicly, and bullies will normally be shamed and ordered to correct their behaviors. Similar to schools all around the world, reprimanding, calling parents to the school, and suspension are common tactics for stopping bullying.

Recently, supported by the school authority, the Hong Kong police adopted a "zero-tolerance" tactic to tackle school crimes. Police divisional units have stepped-up their strength in police-school liaison work to assist teachers in dealing with school bullying and violence since September 2001 when a total of 33 school liaison officers was added to the force. In normal practice, these school liaison officers from local police are only responsible for community education programs with joint school-police efforts. However, when school violence is particularly prevalent, the police officers work with teachers to reprimand students and to take necessary actions to stop the bullying behavior, behavior that is frequently associated with gangs. On some occasions, with the consent of the school principal, the police may launch undercover-police operations to crack down on the triad gangs. The police reported that young police constables have been sent to infiltrate some secondary schools and triad gangs to collect triad-related criminal evidence. During the 2 years from 1999 to 2001, the Organized Crime and Triad Bureau mounted several major undercover operations against active triad factions that resulted in 141 people being arrested and charged with triad-related offences (Hong Kong Police, 2003).

There is no denying that police and criminal justice professionals play an important role in stopping youth violence acts through suppressive strategies. However, it is argued that the greater the number of adults who keep their eyes and ears open for inappropriate behaviors of teenagers, the more these adults are able to discern powerless, weak youngsters (Cohen, 1985). Furthermore, the heavy use of punitive measures, as opposed to resolving conflicts through restorative practices (Morrison, 2002), may make the relationships between bullies and victims much worst. Scholars have found that overreaction might intensify the delinquent problem and inadvertently promote further delinquency (Gray, 1994; Vagg et al., 1995; Wong, 1999a). The key question then is: Are there other effective ways that can help students stop their bullying acts and manage shame over a wrongdoing?

A COMPREHENSIVE ANTIBULLYING STRATEGY

Unlike the suppressive strategy, a comprehensive antibullying strategy aims to involve many parties to build up a peaceful learning environment for children and tackle risk factors conducive to bullying (Tattum & Tattum, 1996; Morrison, 2002). Because bullying is negatively associated with a harmonious school environment and positively associated with violence-prone values and poor individual psychosocial condition, this strategy is designed to mobilize resources to develop ways of supporting those who are bullied and methods of changing the attitudes and habits of the bullies through restorative practices. This strategy is necessary for creating a counterculture of school violence and breaking the vicious cycle of bullying. To start with, raising awareness and knowledge of the bullying problem at a city-wide level is crucial to motivate the public, including teaching and social work professionals as well as parents, to take the problem seriously. Furthermore, providing training to teachers and parents, teaching students emotional control, and making use of groups and conferences to resolve conflicts are all useful tactics underlying the comprehensive strategy.

Regarding raising public awareness, in Norway, the Ministry of Education initiated the first nationwide campaign against bullying as early as 1983. In connection with the campaign, a large-scale longitudinal study was conducted in Norway. Around 2,500 students were followed over a period of 2.5 years. The results showed that there was a 50% decrease in the rate of bullying after the first 2 years the program was in force. In 2000, the Ministry of Education also established a nationwide network for relevant professionals and developed a central body for resolving bullying and other behavioral problems of students (Arora, 1994; Roland, 2000). In the Netherlands, beginning in the 1970s, psychologists began to advocate policies to tackle the problem of bullying (Limper, 2000). In 1992, one researcher concluded that there were 385,000 children bullied in school (25% of primary school population) (Mooji, cited in Limper, 2000, p. 126). Since then, the National Education Protocol Against Bullying has been initiated in the Netherlands. Elements of this Protocol include

- social skills training for bullies and victims,
- providing information to teachers and parents on causes of bullying,
- actively informing students of the existence and extent of the problem,
- appointing confidential counselors in schools,
- working closely with schools and encouraging the sharing of experiences, and
- signing a Protocol to combat bullying.

Aware that teachers and parents in Hong Kong were not taking the problem of bullying seriously, and based on reports from other countries (Arora, 1994; Bodine & Crawford, 1998; Limper, 2000; Roland, 2000), I initiated the first comprehensive antibullying program in Hong Kong that ran from August 2000 to

April 2001. During this period, with the sponsorship supported by the Quality Education Fund of the Hong Kong Government, I worked with teachers and a team of social workers to promote a harmonious and loving environment in a secondary school. Because it was a pilot program, it only targeted the junior form students of secondary schools.

With reference to the six elements mentioned previously, first, a series of activities for parents to involve their participation in the program was organized. At the beginning of the academic year, our team made good use of the orientation weeks to provide training to parents regarding prevalence and causes of bullying. Parents were publicly invited to join the antibullying movement and to face and prevent the problem of bullying assertively. These talks showed the parents that the school intended to take bullying very seriously. When the school noted that a child was being bullied, it would contact the parents of the children involved.

In the subsequent months, staff development programs for the school principal, teachers, and social worker staff of the school were organized. Recent overseas and local research findings in bullying, and the systematic ways for preventing and tackling bullying, were shared with all parties concerned. During these workshops, a clear message was given to the teachers: "Bullying can grow to become very serious or it can be nipped in the bud" (Sullivan, 2000). If teachers knew of bullying or suspected that it was occurring, they were told to deal with it in a systematic manner.

After the staff development workshops, the school authority set aside a 90-min lesson each week to run a peace education course for all secondary first-, second-, and third-year students; the course was fit into regular time of the formal curriculum. Each student received a total of 21 hr of peace education curricula in the academic year, which seemed to be the first one ever conducted in Hong Kong. The program consisted of four major parts such as self-understanding, emotional control, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal communication skills. To maintain the quality of the course, a number of pre- and postcourse planning meetings with all class teachers from secondary one, two and three classes were organized.

USEFUL TACTICS UNDERLYING THE COMPREHENSIVE ANTIBULLYING STRATEGY

From the above experience, it was found that harsh punishment is not effective for stopping bullying. Indeed, often students will not talk when they are dealt with by authorities and may take revenge afterward. Thus, youth violence and bullying continue. To prevent bullying, setting aside group time for students and their teachers to share joys, celebrate success, and resolve interpersonal conflicts is extremely useful. To stop bullying acts and at the same time address the psychosocial conditions of the bullies-victims, I found the following practical tactics useful.

Encourage victims to tell the truth and develop a strong character. Although most of the victims tell their teachers and parents something about bullying, they

do not tell them everything. Sometimes the victims feel that their own failings in resolving conflicts with classmates are partly or wholly to blame for what has happened. Because of their passive personality, they do not have the courage to face the bully directly. They then become increasingly fearful not only of the bully but of things around them. Teaching teenagers to be assertive is a crucial step in reducing violence and bullying.

Educate bullies who lack social skills. Many first-time or “new” bullies mean no harm. They bully others because they do not know how to get attention or control their emotions. These teenagers lack social skills and do not know how to communicate with others properly. Skills workshops, such as social skills and management of emotions, should be organized to remind them not to seek attention in a teasing way.

Shaming bullies who intend to do harm or who have done harm in a reintegrative manner. Effective discipline can make bullies realize what mistakes they have made and help them learn to improve themselves. This reintegrative shaming technique is one of the methods found to be useful in combating bullying (Braithwaite, 1989; Wong, 1999a). Students are reprimanded by authorities in observable behavioral terms (a positive shaming method) without destroying their self-esteem. Before reprimanding the student, however, one should take into consideration the student’s personality and family background, and it should be confirmed that the student’s emotions are relatively stable. Any reprimand or shaming should be done in such a way that the students’ self-esteem is not hurt.

Promote a peaceful environment by using restorative practices. Teaching students to restore relationships when they have conflicts is one of the important missions in schools. If conflicts arise, a social worker or teacher may be appointed as mediator to assist both parties to restore relationships. This kind of third-party mediation method is restorative practice. In the restorative process, it is hoped that bullies will understand how it feels to be a victim, and realize what they did was wrong. Students who witness bullying can be involved to help both parties understand how bad the conflict was. At the same time, victims can express their feelings during the mediation session. In addition, it provides a chance for bullies to apologize and, if necessary, provide compensation. Peer mediation programs are also useful restorative strategies. Schools should consider training a number of “school harmony ambassadors” to help teachers deal with minor bullying issues (Sharp, 1996).

ANTIBULLYING MOVEMENT: THE WAY AHEAD

In one study of school bullying, Wong and Lo (2002) found that school principals and teachers did not fully understand what a comprehensive antibullying

strategy was, despite the fact that there had been numerous discussions in this area throughout the world (Limper, 2000; Peterson & Rigby, 1999; Roland, 2000; Salmivalli, 1999). Survey results found that programs commonly used overseas in dealing with the problems of school violence and bullying were rarely adopted in Hong Kong (Wong et al., 2002). Not many teachers intended to adopt a comprehensive strategy, which includes cooperation among all parties in the school and covers a wide range of activities for tackling the problem. Only a few mentioned the use of peer mediation tactics or formal curricula, such as antibullying curricula, anger management curricula, or safe school and peace education curricula for preventing and stopping physical bullying.

To summarize, I affirm that a comprehensive strategy, which consists of the following six elements, is essential for dealing with problems of school violence:

- long-term antibullying strategy and procedures,
- training of teachers and parents in handling school bullying,
- providing students with social skills and emotional-control training packages,
- adopting a multidisciplinary cooperation strategy,
- involving students in conflict resolution, and
- an adequate approach for monitoring the situation.

An effective strategy can educate bystanders, deter bullies, and at the same time empower victims. Most importantly, students may develop a resiliency that protects them from becoming violent themselves or that makes them less vulnerable to the influence of violence. Resiliency is related to protective factors, which are crucial for keeping the youngsters from committing law-breaking acts. Good parental monitoring, fair reward and punishment practices, rational parent-child or teacher-student communication, use of forgiveness, and a strong sense of interdependency between child and parents or students and teachers are effective protective factors and insulators of delinquency (Wong, 2001b). Research suggests that resilience can also come from early positive experiences that counter the negative effects of violence (American Psychological Association, 2003). These experiences include positive role models; development of self-esteem and self-efficacy; supportive relationships; a sense of hope about the future; belief in oneself; strong social skills; good peer relationships; a close, trusting bond with a nurturing adult outside the family; great empathy and support from the mother or mother figure; and the sense that one is in control of one's life.

CONCLUSION

No child wants to grow up in an unsafe environment. Other than suppressive tactics, adopting a comprehensive antibullying strategy such as assisting students to develop adequate self-competency, strong social skills, and good relationships

with parents and teachers seems to be a useful anti-violence strategy. To enable implementation of an antibullying policy, school authorities should define procedures and programmes for preventing and treating bullying behaviors. The theoretical underpinning of a comprehensive antibullying strategy is team building and effective communication (Arora, 1994; Humm & Mocoft, 2001; Rogers, 1995). All parties concerned should work hand-in-hand to define policies and procedures for dealing with cases of bullying. As they are implemented, changes will need to be made to accommodate unforeseen circumstances and dynamics (Bodine & Crawford, 1998; Curcio & First, 1993; Sharp & Thompson, 1994).

School violence and bullying prevention and intervention programs must start as early as possible. Studies have confirmed that a substantial number of victims of bullying showed depressive tendencies such as sleeping or studying difficulties. There are also studies that found that victims tended to have a feeling of lack of self-worth and continued to have poor self-esteem. In the long-run, children who are bullied are in continuing misery and may even take part in bullying others (Olweus, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994). School principals, teachers, parents, and related professionals should take the problems of youth violence and school bullying very seriously. In relation to this, educational and social welfare departments should take proactive steps to organize more intensive in-service training workshops for teachers and social workers. Teaching students, parents, and teachers effective, nonviolent coping skills is critical in any intervention program. In the long run, a territory-wide peaceful education campaign is definitely essential.

NOTE

1. Typical is the remark of a school principal who said regarding the research on bullying: "I got bullied in my school when I was small, too, but I don't think there's something wrong with it. You just can't avoid being bullied."

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