

A review of literature (2010-2014) on student bullying by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group



The Safe and Supportive School Communities (SSSC) Working Group is a national collaborative project focussed on supporting Australian schools to implement workable solutions to bullying, harassment and violence. The project includes representatives from all states and territories, including Catholic and independent sectors. It operates under COAG and reports to the Education Council via the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee.

Queensland Department of Education and Training manages all aspects of the SSSC project on behalf of all Australian Education Authorities, including the Bullying. No Way! website (www.bullyingnoway.gov.au) and the annual National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence for Australian schools.

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BULLYING. NO WAY!

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Foreword

About this document

A review of literature on student bullying for Australian educators was commissioned by the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group. It covers literature from 2010 to 2014 on bullying in all forms, including online bullying (cyberbullying).

Audience

The primary audience for this literature review is educational policy developers and educational leaders in Australian schools.

This work was commissioned to ensure the work undertaken by the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group, on behalf of all Australian state and territory educational jurisdictions and sectors, is informed by the relevant Australian and international research. The findings will be of interest to school leaders, teachers, researchers, consultants, tertiary students and school support staff.

National Safe Schools Framework literature review 2009

The document should be read as a continuation of the review of the literature to 2009, published in the *National Safe Schools Framework Resource Manual* (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2011). This review of literature from the mid-1980s to 2009 highlighted several points of interest:

- growing awareness of the long-term harmful impact of school bullying
- an imperative for schools to address the pervasive problem of bullying
- competing agendas associated with reaching broad agreement on a definition of bullying, and by extension related behaviours (e.g. harassment, aggression, conflict)
- concern regarding the use of labels to describe students involved in bullying situations (e.g. bully, victim, perpetrator)
- emergence of technology as a new medium through which bullying is carried out and disseminated
- role of bystanders as agents holding potentially significant influence over incidents of bullying and responses of participants
- modest decreases only in the rates of self-reported bullying for most interventions, with an average improvement of approximately 20 per cent
- the most effective programs in preventing and reducing bullying taking a universal whole-school approach over a long duration involving a multifaceted approach, rather than focusing on one single component

- importance of social skill development within teaching and learning activities (e.g. through the use of cooperative learning)
- classroom activities needing to address bullying and related issues (e.g. through values education) and including the use of video materials
- structural and systemic roles of schools in creating environments which may encourage or discourage bullying.

Research waves from 1970s to present

Since 2009, there has been an extraordinary growth in research interest in the area of bullying and schools, and an enormous number of high quality studies and investigations have been published which further expand our knowledge about bullying.

The initial electronic search of Australian university libraries for journal articles, reports and books published between 1990 and 1999 on the topic of bullying and Australian schools yielded

around 1500 results.

This number jumped dramatically when the search parameters included publications on the same topic in the 2000 to 2009 period, with more than 9497 sources identified,

representing an

increase of more than 500 per cent in just 10 years. Results for the current decade show publications have already surpassed 10,182 for the four years from 2010 to end of 2014. Research interest and community thirst for knowledge about the myriad issues concomitant with bullying and Australian schools show no signs of abating. Smith (as cited in Monks & Coyne, 2011, pp. 36–38) suggests that this growth over time could be conceptualised as a research program with four waves or phases.

1970s to 1988

The landmark book *Mobbing – group aggression against boys and girls* by Heinemann in (1972) was followed by the translation into English of Olweus' text *Aggression in schools: Bullies and whipping boys*. The first version of Olweus' Bullying Prevention Program for schools was developed.

1989 to mid-1990s

There was an increase in international research publications on the topic of bullying in schools, and some large-scale interventions in countries like England and Canada. A major shift during this period was the inclusion

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of non-physical forms of bullying (i.e. gossip, social exclusion) under the term ‘bullying’.

Mid-1990s to 2004

The Columbine massacre in 1999 highlighted the relationship between bullying and violence, and triggered a sharp increase in interest and research into bullying in schools. A focus emerged on the different roles in the bullying dynamic, and on the impact on those involved.

2004 to present

Seen as the ‘fourth wave’, this period saw the expansion of the term ‘bullying’ to incorporate technology and online forms of behaviour, as well as increased public and media interest in the phenomenon. The possible link between bullying and suicide in young people has been another concern for educators. Toward the end of this decade, research on the social functions of bullying began to emerge.

The scale of publications on bullying makes a complete review of all sources impossible. Hence a defined period of 2010 to 2014 has been selected for this work.

Scope

This literature review emphasises Australian research where it is available, and refers to leading international literature to fill out the picture emerging from the research. Caution must, of course, be exercised in extrapolating from overseas studies to schools in Australia, but such studies provide insights that suggest areas of useful future research for Australia.

This review includes peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference papers, case studies and reports published since 2009. In addition, it integrates critical reflections on opinion-based discussion articles with more formal research engaged in conceptual exploration, meta-analysis and primary research. It provides public access to a central and reliable summary of quality research on bullying, including online bullying, for school education sectors around Australia.

This review includes peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference papers, case studies and reports published since 2009.

Given the breadth and scale of the literature on the topic of bullying, making use of this information is no small task. Subsequent work exploring the policy implications for the educational context is available at Bullying. No Way! at <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au>

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Glossary

The nature and rapid evolution of bullying research means that some core concepts and terms are continuing to evolve as research fosters greater understanding. For example, the term ‘traditional’ bullying was first used to differentiate physical from relational bullying. More recently it has been used to differentiate bullying which occurs in a range of person-to-person settings from bullying that occurs online. Hence the term ‘traditional bullying’ has multiple meanings depending on the context and time of writing.

In addition to the evolving meanings of some key terms, researchers also may use terms with meanings specific to their understanding of bullying (Canty et al., 2014). Key perspectives on bullying are:

- the individual perspective, which views bullying and victimisation as an individual, psychological and behaviour problem
- the social-ecological perspective, which views bullying as more than the interaction, but as a sociocultural phenomenon and expression of unequal social status and power between individuals and groups in all social contexts.

Individual perspectives focus on the individual children involved, while the social-ecological perspective looks at children in their social context (ecology), and the interaction between the two. Another view is the systemic perspective, which also encompasses power dynamics within all social institutions and interactions, but no literature specifically using this perspective was accessed for this review.

In general, the original terms from the cited research are used throughout this document, but are changed if necessary to assist readability, with every effort to maintain the integrity of the concept and the research being referenced.

Abrasive teacher

A teacher who displays bullying behaviours towards students (Weller, 2014, p. 2).

Abjection

Process of separating an individual from the group through expressions of disgust and loathing.

Bullying

See chapter 1 for extended discussion.

Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons. Bullying can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert).

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying (*National Safe Schools Framework*).

Bystander

Bystanders can assume a range of participant roles. They can act as (1) assistants, who join the student exhibiting bullying behaviours; (2) reinforcers, who provide support to student or students engaging in bullying behaviours; (3) outsiders, who remain passive bystanders or leave the situation; and (4) defenders, who help the student or students being targeted (Forsberg, Thornberg & Samuelsson, 2014, p. 557).

Contempt production

The process of production of extreme dislike or disgust toward a student/s and their behaviour/s. Often increases exclusion of a student.

Cyberbullying

Bullying in online social contexts. It includes any communication using a digital device or medium (e.g. smartphones and social media sites) with the intent to coerce, intimidate, harass or cause substantial emotional distress to a person. This may include posting embarrassing or harmful photos, videos or rumours relating to an individual, and can include using social media features to actively promote and spread the harmful content.

Dignity production

The process of production of dignity for a student or students which results in greater inclusion and positive emotions.

Empirical research

Research which used experimentation or observation to produce evidence.

Evidence

The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.

Mobbing

Group violence towards an individual or small group, first used by Olweus (mobbing is derived from the Swedish word *mobbning* which translates as ‘bullying’).

Moral disengagement

A set of socio-cognitive processes through which people can disengage from humane acts and instead behave inhumanely towards other people (Forsberg, Thornberg & Samuelsson, 2014, p. 569).

Moral distress

Painful feelings or psychological distress that occur when a person is conscious of the morally appropriate action but cannot carry out that action because of external or situational obstacles (Forsberg, Thornberg & Samuelsson, 2014, pp. 568–569).

Online bullying

Bullying carried out through the internet or mobile devices (sometimes called cyberbullying).

Psychological bullying

Term originally used to contrast physical bullying with other, usually covert, behaviours which have a primary purpose of engendering fear and a sense of impending danger. It is falling out of use because it confuses the action (i.e. physical, verbal or social) with the type of harm (i.e. physical or psychological).

Relational bullying

A form of bullying which involves repeatedly ostracising others by leaving them out, or convincing others to exclude or reject another individual or group from their social connections, making up or spreading rumours, and sharing or threatening to share others personal information (Department of Education, 2009).

School climate

The milieu created by interactions among and between adults and students, as well as individuals' beliefs and attitudes (e.g., feelings about school, approval or disapproval of bullying) (Wang, Berry & Swearer, 2013).

School culture

The basic assumptions, beliefs and practices that are shared by the members of a school community. These assumptions, beliefs and practices mould how a school views itself and its environment. They shape its operations and how it functions (Teach NSW, n.d.).

Social exclusion anxiety

[Feeling of] anxiety associated with the need to belong to a group, [experienced] when there is a perceived threat to the person's membership (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014, p. 54).

Traditional bullying

Term with varying meanings — originally used to describe direct physical forms of bullying, to contrast with direct or indirect social or verbal forms. More recently used to emphasise the difference between face-to-face and online bullying; however, there is no clear reference point for this term.

Whole-school

Events or situations involving all participants in a school community. This includes students, teachers and others employed or volunteering adults, as well as extended members such as parents and visitors. (Sometimes narrowly used to refer to whole student population).

List of abbreviations

ASD

Autism spectrum disorder

KMEC

KidsMatter Early Childhood

LGBT

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (including intersex and questioning for the purposes of this document)

MCEECDYA

Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs

NSSF

National Safe Schools Framework

PBIS

Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports

PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder

SWPBIS

School Wide Positive Behaviour Interventions and Support

SWPBS

School Wide Positive Behaviour Support

Chapter 1: What is bullying, including online bullying?



1.1 Introduction

A clear understanding of how the authors of research define bullying, including online bullying, is fundamental to establishing a sound basis from which to evaluate any research on these phenomena. This chapter covers some of the current debates associated with defining ‘bullying’, and explores some of the issues that researchers raise on this matter.

The effort to define ‘bullying’ generates extensive literature, due primarily to the evolving understanding of the concept itself and the complexity it encompasses. Varying ‘traditions’ of defining bullying focus on the essential features, others focus on the impact, while others use a descriptive approach of observable behaviours.

Compounding the challenge to define bullying is the very nature of the social phenomenon:

- complexity — the term does not represent a simple or single construct
- multiple essential ‘features’ — although there is reasonable agreement that bullying involves actual (or threatened) repetition and a power imbalance between students, there continues to be debate about the concept of ‘intention’ and ‘repetition’
- multiple manifestations — bullying can be overt, covert, direct, indirect, verbal, physical or social in manner
- overlap with related concepts for unacceptable behaviour — for example, harassment, victimisation and violence can each occur in isolation, or within a pattern of bullying
- the need for context-specific information to determine what is and is not acceptable behaviour — the ‘edges’ of bullying are difficult to determine (Katz et al., 2014, pp. 3–4).

A clear understanding of how the authors of research define bullying, including online bullying, is fundamental to establishing a sound basis from which to evaluate any research on these phenomena.

Distinguishing friendly teasing from bullying is explored by Schott and Søndergaard (2014), who suggest that, unlike ‘teasing’, which has an inclusive within-group motivation, bullying seeks to alienate and exclude a student from their social group:

The relationship between a practice like teasing and bullying simultaneously marks a continuum and a difference: they are the same kind of thing, but also different. Teasing ... and certain kinds of harassment and conflict can be seen as strategies to maintain and reproduce the social order by involving someone in the group while, at the same time, ensuring conformity to its norms. ... however when bullying practices emerge, several changes occur: the dignity-producing form of empathy becomes closed off to the target of bullying; the production of contempt increases and becomes focused on the loathed person or thing, either temporarily or for long periods of time; and the empathy that might have been activated instead transitions into an understanding of what will be most painful and humiliating (p. 67).

Distinguishing bullying from other harmful social interactions through a definition has proved challenging, but remains important work to progress. For example, Katz et al. (2014) discuss the range of concepts related to online bullying:

... at the lower end of severity, cyberbullying can be confused with cyber aggression and normal robust teenage language and behaviour. At the higher end some cyber offences such as blackmail, ‘grooming’ by paedophiles, and other coercive sexual behaviour, are not normally categorised as bullying either by young people or authorities (pp. 3–4).

Juvonen and Graham (2014) say the distinctive feature is the power imbalance between the two people involved; this distinguishes bullying from other social conflict.

This chapter provides a summary of contemporary discussions from

education and research about what might constitute a useful definition of bullying and online bullying, and problems inherent in reaching national and international consensus. It also highlights the differences in perceptions between students and adults about bullying and its consequences.

Distinguishing bullying from other harmful social interactions through a definition has proved challenging ...

1.2 Defining bullying

Definitions serve an important communicative and social purpose in our society. They help ensure that different individuals can converse and interrogate phenomena confident in their

knowledge that they are talking about the same thing. A definition helps to set boundaries and clarify what something is or is not, what it includes and what it

might exclude. Sometimes definitions are ubiquitous enough to cover a range of purposes; for example, water has a generally agreed form and characteristic, regardless of the setting. There are, however, greater issues in reaching agreement about definitions relating to social issues, which are fundamentally shaped by the context and purpose for which they will be used. Bullying is an example of a social problem whose definition can be altered by the context in which it is used (e.g. counselling, policy, legal or research contexts).

The definition of bullying has changed over time and continues to change. The efforts to define bullying have required researchers to apply a critical perspective not just to bullying, but to the nature of society and the setting in which the interaction is occurring.

Historically, the focus of defining bullying has been on observable behaviours and the experience of the individual who is bullied. It is particularly useful to include information about the forms of behaviour considered to illustrate bullying when reviewing the findings of research studies. How bullying is specifically described or defined to the participants obviously influences their responses, the results of the study and possible applications.

Shaw and Cross (2012) look to the most well-known definition of bullying, provided by pioneering Norwegian researcher Dr Dan Olweus, when writing on their research into patterns of clustering in Australian schools. This definition, by far the most commonly cited in studies published over the last decade, describes bullying as ‘an aggressive behaviour repeated over a period of time, characterised by real or perceived imbalance of power perpetrated with the intent to harm the target’ (Olweus, as cited in Shaw & Cross, 2012, p. 142). A similar definition is provided in another Australian study by Coffin, Larson and

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Cross (2010), who likewise reference the work of Olweus (1994) when they say bullying is:

... physical, social or psychological in nature but ... always involves unprovoked intent to harm which occurs repeatedly in familiar social settings and incorporates a power imbalance (p. 77).

The work of Olweus (1993) appears again in a US study into the effects of online bullying on school engagement. The study examining the validity of the ‘traditional definition’ in relation to emerging issues of online bullying states that:

... a person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself (Olweus, as cited in Randa & Reyns, 2014, p. 257).

When researchers attempt to define bullying for students in studies, they often refer to a list of bullying behaviour ‘types’ to explain the concept for participants. An enormous variety of descriptions exists. One recent example is that provided by Randa & Reyns (2014, p. 257), who describe forms of bullying in their explanation of the behaviour, citing ‘verbal (e.g. name calling), physical (e.g. hitting, shoving), financial (e.g. demanding money) or psychological (e.g. social exclusion)’, adding that ‘with the ease and increasing availability of online/mobile communications, it can now be carried out in the school setting or online’. Other researchers use other bullying behaviour ‘types’.

Hemphill, Tollit and Kotevski (2012) provided descriptive information to participants for their study of the rates of bullying among Victorian secondary school students. ‘Traditional bullying’ was described as having been teased or called names, having rumours spread about them, being deliberately left out of things, being physically threatened or being actually hurt. ‘Relational bullying’ was described as getting back at another student by not letting them be in the group of friends, and telling lies or starting rumours about other students to make other kids not like them.

Asking participants their definition of bullying provides an important insight into this commonly used term, and goes some way towards explaining the difficulties associated with reaching agreement on a formal definition. For example, the definition supplied by participants in the study by Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010) reinforces the point made by many researchers that definitions of bullying are contextual, with the language and cultural patterns common to the setting in which individuals live

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having a dominant impact on how bullying is perceived and explained:

Bullying was a word that was widely understood by all children and adults in each community. A few adults in the smaller towns referred to it as a *wadjella* (white person) word, but they also explained they had a word with the same meaning in their language. When asked to describe bullying, people included all of the characteristics associated with bullying: prolonged or repeated behaviour such as 'teasing', 'picking on' or 'hitting' by a more powerful person against a weaker, smaller or younger person (p. 80).

The study also found that participant discussion about bullying was geared towards intra-familial dimensions. The authors point out that bullying that happens within the family, including by parents, provided opportunities for children to learn and practise these behaviours. Both children and adults indicated that it was considered 'normal' for older kids to bully younger kids, and many described bullying between siblings or cousins as a regular occurrence (Coffin, Larson & Cross, 2010, p. 83).

In a critique of classical constructs of bullying in schools, Carrera, DePalma and Lamerias (2011) reason that the 'phenomenon of bullying has been conceptualized in various ways, and to some extent, the choices of terminology, along with the associated meanings, connotations, and implications have varied according to the cultural context of the analysis' (p. 480). Citing cultural differences between countries like Italy and Japan, they list the following characteristics as common across definitions of bullying:

- it involves a broad range of actions which are deployed repeatedly over a prolonged period of time and which are harmful to the person at whom they are directed
- it is deliberate in nature; that is, there is a goal of harm
- in general, it is assumed that these actions are not provoked
- the abuse may be enacted by an individual or group, and the object of the abuse may be one or more individuals.

1.3 Online bullying

Into the somewhat fluid environment created by the evolving definition of bullying, the emergence of new technologies and online environments has extended spaces for social interaction and, logically, bullying. 'Online bullying' and 'cyberbullying' are used to describe bullying which occurs online, and which may represent the start of bullying interactions, or a continuation of such behaviours students are already involved in at school or in the community.

Early work on defining online bullying assumed a theoretical coherence in the definition of offline bullying. As discussed below in section 1.5, this assumption was not valid.

In the literature review published in the *National Safe Schools Framework*

Resource Manual

(Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2011), online bullying was discussed as a specific type of covert bullying which was defined as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself.

'Online bullying' and 'cyberbullying' are used to describe bullying which occurs online, and which may represent the start of bullying interactions, or a continuation of such behaviours students are already involved in at school or in the community.

Debate has focused on whether the same key features of face-to-face bullying also define online bullying. This definitional problem was interrogated by Langos (2012), who stated:

... there is some academic debate as to the importance of the four foundation elements of traditional bullying in the cyber context. This being the case, the ordinary meanings of repetition, power imbalance, intention, and aggression ... need revising/redefining to tailor their meanings to the cyber environment if society is to develop a satisfactory response to the phenomenon.

Langos (2012) pointed to a similarity with offline bullying in that online bullying can be both direct and indirect. Direct online bullying includes direct abuse and insults via online communication, while indirect online bullying can include communications that are posted to more public areas of cyberspace.

This is explored further by Spears et al. (2014a), in their recent report, which pointed to features of the online context:

On social media sites cyberbullying can be content-driven, such as posting embarrassing or harmful photos, videos, or rumours relating to an individual. These are often exacerbated by other social media features (such as 'comments', 'shares' and 'likes') which serve to actively promote and spread the harmful content at a rapid rate, and to a wide audience (p. 3).

An international working group of scholars from universities in Switzerland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Netherlands and Portugal (Perren et al., 2012, p. 4) opts for a definition of cyberbullying as 'bullying and harassment of others by means of new electronic technologies, primarily mobile phones and the internet'.

Randa and Reynolds (2014, p. 257) submit that one of the reasons a clear definition has proven difficult to obtain is that there is an 'overlap between cyberbullying and

other forms of online personal victimization ... such as harassment and cyberstalking'. They elect to use 'bullying via electronic communication tools' (Li, as cited in Randa & Reynolds, 2014, p. 257) as the operational definition for their study of the impacts of online bullying on students in school. This definitional debate around online bullying is consistent with the issues raised in the work to reach agreement on the definition of in-person bullying — it is 'bullying', rather than the online context, which has a conceptual boundary 'fuzziness' inherent in the dynamic social interactions within which it occurs.

A Turkish study of self-reported prevalence of online bullying by second to fourth graders suggested that, while in many ways online bullying was simply a different forum in which to continue the well-known forms of bullying, it was impossible to ignore that 'new technologies can exacerbate this power differential, making it easier for bullies to hide their identities and to perform repeated, prolonged harassment with a high level of anonymity' (Arslan et al., 2012, p. 527).

As discussion about online bullying continues, it is becoming clearer that, while bullying which occurs via

... while bullying which occurs via technology has some attributes specific to the online social context, its essential features are shared with bullying which happens in other contexts.

technology has some attributes specific to the online social context, its essential features are shared with bullying which happens in other contexts. However, the evidence of bullying occurring online provides new opportunities to explore and trial

interventions which have a positive impact on all forms of bullying.

Of major concern with the growing body of publications on the topic of online bullying is the availability and popularity of reports which are poorly designed, failing to adequately define their study parameters, terms and purpose.

Eagerness to dip into and contribute to the conversation about online bullying has led to a proliferation of materials which confuse cybersafety and cyberbullying, for example, and assume agreement of behaviours considered to fall into each of these categories. All readers of research need to remain alert to these concerns, which place school communities at increased risk of falling victim to fad ideas or programs that have little or no evidence to support claims made.

The creation of the term 'cyberbullying', commonly attributed to the work of Bill Belsey (Butler, Kift & Campbell, 2009), highlights the new context with its specific characteristics, but has also arguably contributed to a belief that 'cyberbullying' is a new phenomenon, rather than what it is — a new context for bullying. In addition, the creation of a dichotomy between 'traditional' (e.g. physical, verbal

and relational face-to-face bullying) and online bullying is confusing given that online bullying is also verbal and relational bullying. The exploration of the context-specific attributes of online bullying highlights that each form and every social context has specific features.

1.4 Student views on defining bullying

Spears and Kofoed (2013, as cited in Corby et al., 2014) point out that student views have been largely missing in research into both face-to-face and online bullying. Canty et al. (2014) argue that, because children can use the word 'bullying' differently from adults, the definition proposed in research (and potentially also in school policy) may obscure the very phenomenon that researchers (and schools) are aiming to address.

Canty et al. (2014) reviewed previous investigations (Vaillancourt et al., 2008 and others) into whether researchers and young people are talking about the same thing. They said that the review provided evidence of unclear conceptual boundaries, where children's definitions consistently included negative actions, but frequently did not include the elements considered by researchers to be distinctive of bullying — power imbalance, repetition and intent.

In response, some researchers have pointed out the need to provide a definition for young people in research, but Canty et al. (2014) point out that such 'priming' may obscure young people's real world experience. It also neglects the fact that each young person is in an active process of 'interpretation and reproduction of the cultures around them' (p. 7). It is possible that young people may respond to 'bullying' as a loaded term associated with adult-generated concepts.

Davies (2011) recognises there is a dilemma for teachers in the real world distinguishing normal conflict from bullying which required teacher involvement or intervention, and points to the role of a shared definition in influencing interaction and resolution of issues.

A different spin is given to the experiences of young people and bullying in a

conference paper presented at the Oxford Internet Institute's *A decade in internet time: Symposium on the dynamics of the internet and society* (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The term 'bullying' is positioned as an adult language term, with 'drama' seen as more consistent with how teenagers view these situations: 'Drama is a performative set of actions distinct from

The term 'bullying' is positioned as an adult language term, with 'drama' seen as more consistent with how teenagers view these situations.

bullying, gossip, and relational aggression, incorporating elements of them but also operating quite distinctly' (p. 1).

The authors suggest that this drama has now extended to the online world, creating new dynamics and styles of interaction around what adults view as bullying.

They argue that use of the term 'drama' enables young people to separate themselves from the adult construct of 'bullying' and generate new 'empowered' roles for themselves in these dynamics, rather than focus on vulnerability or exposure. Drawing on lengthy interviews with 165 young female students between the ages of 13 and 19 years, they make the claim that:

Most teens do not recognize themselves in the 'bullying' rhetoric used by parents, teen advocates, and mental health professionals. Even the pop cultural depictions in television shows like *Glee* feel irrelevant to many teens. They do not want to see themselves as victims or as aggressors, but as mature individuals navigating their world competently. Even teens who are clearly instigators of drama brush off its significance, enjoying the attention, emulating the excitement of celebrity culture, and unquestioningly reproducing the gender norms around them. These dynamics are different from those described in bullying narratives. We hope that future research will address these distinctions in order to fully understand the realities of teenage interaction in the networked age (p. 23).

More recent research directly involving students continues to challenge the simplistic representations of bullying as a problem of one individual, and considers it more appropriately understood as part of a complex system of social interactions through which young people negotiate the social hierarchies of their school and wider culture.

In terms of young people's views on different forms of bullying (i.e. face-to-face or online), Marwick and Boyd (2011) highlighted in the ethnographic study that young people consider online and offline settings to be connected rather than separate. The connection is their social lives being 'lived' in multiple environments, and with this come the interactions with people they know in both types of settings (Law et al., 2012, as cited in Canty et al., 2014).

Differences between children's definitions and experience of bullying and the conventional definition challenge the assumption that adults' conceptualisation usefully captures children's experience (Canty et al., 2014). The implications of this are enormous for practice and policy, and more work is needed seeking the views of children and young people to extend understanding of bullying.

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1.5 Critical evaluation of the definition of bullying

Canty et al. (2014) remind us that definitions are not absolute; they are partial and reflect the context in which they were created. They claim the axiomatic use of the common definition of bullying does not reflect or acknowledge its origin with an individualist perspective. (Interestingly, they also suggest inherent problems in the term 'school bullying', saying it places too much focus on the school, when the focus should be on the stage of life of the individuals involved.)

In their treatise on current trends in research debates about school bullying, Schott and Søndergaard (2014) advocate a shift away from what they describe as a traditionally individualistic view of bullying as a static, definable and measurable notion to one which instead acknowledges the 'shifting nature of bullying' (p. 7). Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative studies to explain their conceptual model, they point to a more sophisticated understanding of how bullying operates within social groups. They suggest that

... the tendency to focus only on the actions of those being bullied and those doing the bullying has resulted in an individualization and simplification of complex social and cultural phenomena ...

understanding bullying as a relationship between two or more discrete individuals (the student doing the bullying, the student who is bullied and the bystander/s) fails to incorporate the broader and perhaps more pervasive impacts of teachers, school principals, parents, classroom culture, virtual experiences, gender, sexuality, race and class on patterns of communication and behaviour. The authors promote, instead, the understanding of bullying as 'a complex phenomenon that is enacted or constituted through interactive/intra-active entanglements that exist between a variety of open-ended, social, discursive, material and subjective forces' (p. 9).

Schott and Søndergaard (2014) discuss at length the effect of language and culture on how bullying is conceptualised. Tracing the historical origins of some key terms used in this field of study, they demonstrate the necessity of considering both context and social complexity as major factors affecting how bullying is understood in different communities.

Similarly, Carrera, DePalma and Lamerias (2011) also assert that traditional definitions of bullying are often one-dimensional, and suggest that the tendency to focus only on the actions of those being bullied and those doing the bullying has resulted in 'an individualization and simplification of complex social and cultural phenomena, including aspects of social class, race, and gender that permeate school culture' (p. 480).

Work to define bullying is dynamic and evolving, with rich conversations between schools, academics and the community continually influencing our understanding of this complex social phenomenon. It is important to recognise that as we add to our knowledge base about school-aged bullying it is inevitable that changes to definitions will occur. This in itself drives broader conversations and provides impetus for new directions in research. For example, the publication of the *Australian covert bullying prevalence study* (Cross et al., 2009) provided a powerful stimulus to reassess our shared understanding of non-physical forms of bullying, and demanded schools and parents take greater care to watch for more subtle expressions of relational abuse.

... as we add to our knowledge base about school-aged bullying it is inevitable that changes to definitions will occur.

1.5.1 Bullying as an individual issue

The Olweus definition, discussed above, in itself represented a shift at the time from the concept of bullying as a social problem to a focus on individuals through the lens of personality trait psychology (Canty et al., 2014). The focus on the traits of the individuals involved was part of a much wider interest at that time in the exploration of whether aggression was innate to the individual, and generally stable over time. The result was a seemingly clear definition of bullying, and profiles of the characteristics of those who bully others and the individuals who are targeted. This approach was of great interest, and established Olweus' definition as 'the' definition of bullying.

Finkelhor, Turner and Hamby (2012) point out this type of definition has promoted a lot of useful research, and has been used by parents, educators and policy-makers as if it represented a clear and practical concept. However, they also say the large number of limitations have not been resolved despite attention for more than 30 years. They suggest it has in fact interfered with the adoption of more effective school practices.

A legacy of the individualist perspective of professions such as medicine and psychology is the view that bullying is the behaviour of an individual towards another, which promotes a notion of 'treatment' of individuals involved rather than intervention at the level of maladaptive social patterns of behaviour in groups.

The individual/medical model of bullying assumes the core is the two people in the roles of 'bully' and 'victim', with one child imposing power over another and the bullied individual suffering harm. It leads to certain intervention — 'bullies need rehab', 'victims need protection', and the 'blame' for the problem lies with the 'aggressive child who brings the problem with them from home' (Duncan, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013).

The bulk of the research to date has been based on the individual psychological perspective, driving research questions of who the 'bullies' are, what 'causes' them to be aggressive, and how their behaviour can be modified (Payne & Smith, 2013). Within this perspective, bullying is understood solely in terms of the social and emotional development of individuals — the person who bullies and the person who is bullied — without regard for the broader social system, including the other students or adults around them.

A critique of Canadian education policy addressing bullying in schools draws attention to the issue of describing bullying 'as a problem of individuals' (Winton & Tuters, 2014, p. 122). This is viewed as:

... simplistic and problematic ... It fails to recognise that 'bullying is embedded in cultural norms, values, and social status in the whole community' (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). It also ignores historical and systemic hierarchies of power that influence individual interactions, and it negates examination of the related power structures and cultures that privilege certain ways of knowing, being and behaving over other ways and lead to bullying incidents related to membership in a group. Further, decontextualizing bullying relieves schools and school systems of the responsibility to engage students, educators and other members of the community in learning about the complex and conflicting nature of human values and interactions as they relate to bullying (p. 134).

The dominant definition of bullying has led to the tendency to overlook the impact of the social and cultural norms related to gender, aggression and other behaviour (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 1998, as cited in Canty et al., 2014). The individual perspective looks at individuals outside of their context, and locates the 'source' of the issue within the individual rather than as a relationship to existing cultural norms.

The emergence of online bullying, and the resulting extensive debates about how to define it, and its similarities and differences to bullying offline, has highlighted more than anything else the underlying and unchallenged assumption of the individual perspective in the Olweus definition. Given

the social context is minimised (if not ignored) in the individual psychology paradigm, the failure of a definition of bullying based on this perspective to 'transfer' to a new social context resulted in the construction of a 'new term' (Canty et al., 2014). At this time, social models of understanding bullying have opened more options.

The dominant definition of bullying has led to the tendency to overlook the impact of the social and cultural norms related to gender, aggression and other behaviour.

1.5.2 Bullying as a social issue

If bullying is so significantly influenced by the setting, a social theoretical framework to understand it seems imperative (Canty et al., 2014).

The concept of bullying as a social issue is based on a social-ecological perspective, that is, bullying is a feature of social interactions and relationships. Schott and Søndergaard (2014) suggest that, rather than tinkering with the most common definition derived from the individual perspective (psychology), a social-ecological perspective would provide a better fit with the phenomenon of bullying. This concept tends to be adopted by those in professions built on a sociological perspective, such as social work and teaching.

The United Nations Children's Fund 2014 report *Hidden in plain sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children* highlights the need to change attitudes and social norms that encourage violence and discrimination in order to prevent violence from occurring in the first place.

According to Pascoe (2013), a social-ecological perspective on bullying replaces the idea of bullying as a problem of maladjusted individuals with the idea that bullying is the active social process by young people to construct and participate in the wider culture with its range of structural and status differences. This type of perspective has an impact on policy because, by attending to the wider social contexts in which bullying occurs, it points out that bullying is not solely the province of young people, and that positive solutions to bullying may be found with an approach that focuses on broad work around school culture.

One of the most practical texts published in recent years on the topic of school bullying is *Rethinking school bullying: Towards an integrated model* by Dixon and Smith

(2011). They also pick up on the theme of language and definitional implications, suggesting that many standard definitions of bullying, including the definition of bullying proposed by Olweus (1993), contain an underlying presumption that those involved

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are fully aware of an imbalance of power and act with deliberate intent to cause distress when they engage in bullying. In an attempt to offer a more neutral description of these actions, they suggest 'bullying behaviour' and 'undesirable patterns of interactions' as alternative phrases which they believe remove the attribution/

imputation of conscious, intentionally negative action. Given growing appreciation for the true complexity of the causes of bullying, including indications that some students may be unaware of the impact of their behaviour, these terms potentially offer a more unbiased way of describing the events. While acknowledging the need for a generic definition of bullying, Dixon and Smith (2011) also advocate for all definitions to be subject to a regular process of review to accommodate the development of new ideas and research.

Finkelhor, Turner and Hamby (2012) point out that bullying is a concept which does not easily translate into other languages, and may even have different meanings in different subcultures within English-speaking countries.

The social-ecological perspective on bullying provides the basis to interpret work by Davies (2011), which suggests that the consideration of bullying as individual and pathological has limited understanding about the relationship and situation dimensions. Instead, Davies suggests a view of bullying as 'an excessive and misguided defence of a fixed and dominant moral order' (p. 278).

This suggests that bullying emerges as young people interpret, reproduce and become part of the social order around them, and this process highlights the biases, prejudices and moral values of the wider community with their less nuanced social behaviour. These values relate to appropriate gender behaviours, sexuality, cultural homogeneity, ability, and wealth or economic status. This view lies behind programs that actively explore concepts of 'tolerance' and 'inclusion'. Merely asking children and young people NOT to reproduce the social order around them is a fruitless task.

Ringrose and Renold (2009) would challenge the prevailing view, saying 'bullying behaviours are not anti-social but rather highly social acts that maintain the peer boundaries for "normal" gender [and other norms]'. They point to the failure to grasp this concept by adults as the reason anti-bullying programs, zero tolerance policies, character education and other dominant interventions have failed to produce sustainable change.

Thornberg (2011) concludes that, given the complex social basis of bullying, a 'conversation between different perspectives' would result in a better understanding.

... bullying emerges as young people interpret, reproduce and become part of the social order around them, and this process highlights the biases, prejudices and moral values of the wider community ... to appropriate gender behaviours, sexuality, cultural homogeneity, ability, and wealth or economic status.

1.6 Defining bullying for the research community

As mentioned in the opening to this chapter, ‘bullying’ is an example of a social problem that is defined differently according to the context in which it is used (e.g. the contexts of research, education policy and law). No single definition of bullying is currently able to meet all needs, and it is for this reason that academic, education and wider

No single definition of bullying is currently able to meet all needs ...

community members engaged in these discussions are encouraged to clearly detail the definition they are referring

to or drawing from when making comments or claims about these matters.

The needs of the research community in defining bullying were the focus of the paper *Defining bullying: A conceptual definition of school-based bullying for the Australian research and academic community*, published by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (Hemphill, Heerde & Gomo, 2014). As well as an extended discussion about the history and challenges of defining bullying, the paper presents the following for discussion within the research community:

School-based bullying is a systematic abuse of power in a relationship formed at school characterised by:

1. **Aggressive acts** that a reasonable person would avoid directed (by one or more individuals) toward victims;
2. Acts which usually occur **repeatedly** over a period of time; and
3. Acts in which there is an **actual or perceived power imbalance** between perpetrators and victims, with victims often being unable to defend themselves effectively from perpetrators (p. 3).

The authors highlight the importance of a shared conceptual definition for research. Different conceptualisation of bullying can lead to inconsistent approaches to how bullying is researched and measured, pointing in particular to major consequences for prevalence research. They conclude by pointing to the remaining need for operationalising this definition, including the development of agreed measures and indicators.

1.7 Defining bullying for the legal context

Arguably, the experiences of young people with online bullying have motivated movement in legislative systems. High profile deaths which have been linked to online bullying have resulted in calls for legal sanctions. This has highlighted the challenge in arriving at a consensus definition of bullying, including online bullying, for legal purposes.

One of the problems associated with the lack of a nationally agreed definition for online bullying, stressed in *Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia* (Spears et al., 2014b), is the resultant difficulty in drafting legislative protections. The same can be said of bullying that does not occur online. However the ‘trail’ of online bullying leaves evidence to support legal action that personal verbal or social bullying do not.

In Australia, perhaps the most well-known legal change driven by the experience and impact of bullying is the so-called ‘Brodie’s Law’ in Victoria. This anti-bullying legislation was introduced in June 2011 following the suicide of Brodie Panlock, a young woman who was subjected to workplace bullying:

Brodie’s Law makes serious bullying a criminal offence by extending the application of the stalking provisions in the *Crimes Act 1958* to include behaviour that involves serious bullying. The offence of stalking, and therefore conduct that amounts to serious bullying, carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment (State Government of Victoria, 2015).

Srivastava, Gamble and Boey (2013) explored the role of government, courts and schools in addressing the problem of online bullying. The authors drew on the definition of cyberbullying in the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act (US). This Act, which was prompted by the suicide of a 13-year-old American student after weeks of online bullying by someone she believed was a young male friend, but who was in reality the mother of one of her peers (Moreno, 2011), defines cyberbullying as ‘any communication, with the intent to coerce, intimidate, harass or cause substantial emotional distress to a person, using electronic means to support severe, repeated and hostile behaviour’ (Srivastava, Gamble & Boey, 2013, p. 27).

The Australian Government passed the *Enhancing Online Safety for Children Act 2015* on 4 March. The Act establishes a Children’s e-Safety Commissioner with a national leadership role in online safety for children, and a key function to provide an effective complaints system, backed by legislation, to get harmful cyberbullying material down fast from large social media services.

While most countries examined are endeavouring to find some legal approach to the management of online and offline bullying incidents, often in response to youth-related suicides, most

are finding it difficult and complex to do.

What is apparent is that all countries are endeavouring to integrate social and legal responses to

ensure the best approaches to countering this negative behaviour and to support those involved.

... all countries are endeavouring to integrate social and legal responses to ensure the best approaches ...

1.8 Defining bullying for the education policy context

The *National Safe Schools Framework*, available to Australian schools on the Safe Schools Hub website (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015) provides the nationally agreed definition of bullying for Australian schools:

Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons. Bullying can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert).

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

This definition provides schools with a starting point to design school policy to respond to and prevent bullying.

The important differences between this definition and those developed for the research community and the legal context include:

- a primary focus on the existence of relationships and the variation in social status that lies behind a power imbalance
- use of ‘misuse’ rather than ‘abuse’, denoting the possibility of misreading what is acceptable, and acknowledging the fact that children and young people are in the process of learning about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- a distinction between the types of behaviour (e.g. verbal, physical and social) and the types of harm (e.g. physical and psychological)
- the omission of the concept of ‘intent to do harm’ in order to —
 - remove the assumption that teachers and parents are able to establish unequivocally the intention to do harm on the part of children and young people
 - acknowledge (as per Davies, 2011) that students do not necessarily always have the capacity to engage in reflective analysis of their own intentions.

1.9 Conclusions

This chapter has summarised recent discussion from research, educational and community circles about what constitutes a useful definition of bullying, including online bullying.

Like other complex constructs related to human social interaction, it is often assumed a shared understanding exists, until the application of a definition within a research, policy or legal context highlights unresolved

issues. Determining what is and is not bullying is important, and not just a ‘semantic’ diversion. How schools and the community respond to bullying and other forms of conflict will be influenced directly by their underlying understanding of the phenomenon.

General consensus on the central defining features of bullying appears to exist, although the definition of bullying (and online bullying) continues to be discussed in the research literature. The emerging view is that online bullying shares the central defining features with bullying in face-to-face (offline) contexts, albeit with some context-specific attributes (such as ‘faceless’ contact and greater ease in sharing inappropriate content). Contemporary definitions refer to bullying as occurring both in person and online.

Research has highlighted that children and young people can hold very different ideas from adults about what bullying is and why it happens. This suggests a large area of potential research, and also the importance of including students in schools’ work toward establishing a common understanding of bullying for the school community.

The contributions made by researchers working in both the individual and the social-ecological perspectives were explored. These two perspectives consider bullying in very different ways. Both yield insights for different research purposes, but they lead to different recommendations about best practice, and potentially to very different responses by schools.

Slightly different forms of the definition of bullying have been developed in the different contexts of research, the law and education to serve the specific key needs of these different communities.

While fundamental concepts are shared, the differences are related to what aspect of bullying is emphasised.

The national definition of bullying for Australian schools draws on decades of thought and research within Australia, with consideration of the educational context and the aims of schools in referring to the definition. It places an emphasis on the relationships involved, and working with students and the whole-school community to promote respectful relationships.

How schools and the community respond to bullying and other forms of conflict will be influenced directly by their underlying understanding of the phenomenon.

Research has highlighted that children and young people can hold very different ideas from adults about what bullying is and why it happens.

Chapter 2: What is the prevalence of bullying in schools?



2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we explored some of the issues associated with reaching consensus on a definition of bullying, including online bullying. The way in which these terms are used and defined has a significant impact on our ability to make sense of important prevalence research where we attempt to identify the frequency and rate at

This chapter seeks to highlight some of the high quality prevalence studies undertaken in recent years, with the caution that in terms of an overall prevalence rate, the best that can be offered by researchers are estimates.

which bullying is occurring in different forms and settings.

In an important longitudinal study by Baly, Cornell and Lovegrove (2014, p. 217), the question of how prevalence rates are reached was scrutinised. A major point advanced in their work was the

inherent weakness of the data collection methods used in many studies. They suggest that 'because the surveys are anonymous, it is not possible to conduct longitudinal studies to determine whether the same students are bullied over time or whether new students are bullied at different grade levels. Furthermore, it is not possible to determine how more persistently bullied students are affected'.

This chapter seeks to highlight some of the high quality prevalence studies undertaken in recent years, with the caution that in terms of an overall prevalence rate, the best that can be offered by researchers are estimates. In addition to the definition issues, establishing a prevalence rate is complicated further by time scales, short-term versus longer term impacts, subgroups of students who are more likely to be targeted, peak times across school life, transition peak times, the reluctance of students to report bullying, and many other factors.

2.2 Prevalence of bullying

Using a series of measures, including the *School climate bullying survey*, *Youth risk behaviour survey*, and standard academic, behaviour and attendance reports, 495 students enrolled in Year 6 were tracked between 2006 and 2008 (Baly, Cornell & Lovegrove, 2014). They found that, while the majority of bullying experiences were 'transient', approximately 12 per cent of students reported continuous exposure to bullying every year (p. 234). A cumulative effect was also identified for these students, with noticeable differences in attendance, discipline problems, academic achievement and risk behaviours.

Perhaps still the most well-known large-scale investigation which sought to establish prevalence in Australian schools is the *Australian covert bullying prevalence study* (Cross et al., 2009). Researchers in this study reported that:

Being bullied every few weeks or more often (considered to be frequent) overtly and/or covertly during the last term at school is a fairly common experience, affecting approximately one in four Year 4 to Year 9 Australian students (27%). Frequent school bullying was highest among Year 5 (32%) and Year 8 (29%) students. Hurtful teasing was the most prevalent of all bullying behaviours experienced by students, followed by having hurtful lies told about them.

In relation to covert bullying, defined as a 'hidden' form of bullying often not observed by adults, they reported that:

One in six students (16%) reported being bullied covertly every few weeks or more often in the term the survey was conducted. Students in Years 5, 6 and 8 were most likely to report being bullied in this way (18–20%) and those in Year 9 least likely (12%) ... Of those students who had ever experienced being bullied in ways traditionally considered to be covert, more reported being ignored, not being allowed to join in or being left out on purpose (between 40% in Year 4 and 22% in Year 9) than being made afraid they would get hurt (between 27% in Year 4 and 12% in Year 9). Very few students reported they covertly bullied others (5%). Although just over a half (53%) of students who said they bullied others also engaged in covert bullying (either on its own or in conjunction with overt bullying) (p. xxi).

Søndergaard (as cited in Schott & Søndergaard, 2014) offers an international perspective on prevalence, skimming data from several countries:

In a survey conducted in 2009 by the Danish research group eXbus, 13 per cent of the 1,052 students surveyed from across sixty school classes reported having been bullied within the previously elapsed school year, and 17 per cent of the students responding reported having been active in bullying others during the same time frame ... The World Health Organisation (WHO) publishes the International Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) reports, which contain the results of surveys conducted in forty-one countries every four years; these reports indicate a rather varied prevalence of bullying ... for example in the UK in 2006, 20 per cent of the students surveyed reported having been bullied, and 6 per cent had bullied others; in the US, the corresponding numbers were 19 per cent bullied and 33 per cent bullying, whilst 20 per cent of Danish students had been bullied and 9 per cent had bullied others. In Norway, 8 per cent of the students reported having been bullied and 4 per cent bullied others (p. 389).

2.2.1 Age effect on face-to-face bullying prevalence

Australian research suggests patterns and forms of bullying appear to change in relation to students' age. Findings from a longitudinal study of over 3000 Australian students

between the ages of 11 and 14 years (Lester et al., 2013) identified two peaks in prevalence:

- during middle primary school
- just prior to the transition to secondary school and within the first 2 years of secondary school.

Therefore the age range of the students surveyed can influence the findings, and wide age ranges may hide critical details. Lester et al. (2013) point to the value of identifying the more likely times that bullying will happen to assist schools to prioritise interventions for students of this age, and suggest these are critical times to implement a whole-school bullying intervention program (p. 107).

While the definition of bullying remains contentious and methodological variations

... two peaks in prevalence:

- during middle primary school
- just prior to the transition to secondary school and within the first 2 years of secondary school.

are likely to impact on research findings, it seems likely that caveats around the interpretation of prevalence data offered from any source will need to remain in force. Clear explanation of what is considered 'bullying' in each study is essential, as are study participant characteristics, setting

and timing of research if these publications are to be given weight in policy decisions.

2.3 Prevalence of online bullying

In Chapter 1, online bullying was discussed as a relatively 'new' construct, and as such, much of the recent work around prevalence has focused on this form of bullying. The gap between online and offline bullying is closing, however, and as research continues to inform our understanding of how these practices interact and depend on each other, it is likely that prevalence studies will increasingly attempt to include both forms as a way to provide a more holistic picture of the situation. Salmivalli, Sainio and Hodges (2013) suggest that 'electronic victimisation ... [is] almost always accompanied by traditional victimisation' (p. 442).

On the matter of online bullying prevalence, it is important to consider the age at which children typically first have access to the online context, and the recent rapid growth in availability and access to different internet-connected media by young people. The report *Enhancing online safety for children* (Australian Government, 2014, p. 2) reported that:

- 53 per cent of children own or access their first internet-connected device before 10 years old
- around half of 14–17 year olds access the internet through mobile phones, with 43 per cent of them having their own smartphone.

Increased exposure inevitably increases the likelihood that young people will experience online bullying in some way, in any of the roles of being bullied, person who engages in bullying, or witness. In *Like, post, share: Young Australians' experience of social media* (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013), the results of online interviews with 1511 young people between the ages of eight and 17 years indicated that:

The vast majority of eight to 17 year olds surveyed had accessed the internet in the last four weeks, from 95% of the eight to 11 year olds to 100% of the 16–17 year olds. Home computer access is extremely high (93 to 97 per cent), as is accessing the internet at school (64 to 75 per cent). Accessing the internet at a friend's house significantly increases between the eight to nine (nine per cent access) and 10–11 (25 per cent access) year old age groups, and peaks at 33 per cent for 14–15 year olds (p. 6).

It is perhaps unsurprising then that the:

... study found that cyberbullying increased with age up to the 14–15 year group. The proportion of respondents who reported being cyberbullied ranged from four per cent of eight to nine year olds up to 21 per cent of 14–15 year olds. While not statistically significant, there appeared to be a slight decline in cyberbullying for the 16–17 age group (16 per cent). ... when asked if they themselves have ever cyberbullied someone else, the likelihood of saying yes increases generally with age. While only one per cent of eight to nine year olds report having cyberbullied, this rises to 12 per cent among the 14–15 year olds (pp. 10–11).

In a Mexican study of the types of bullying and the media used by 16 to 19 year olds attending high school to bully online (Cuervo et al., 2014), denigration (16.2%) and harassment (16.1%) were the most frequently reported types of online bullying.

A collaborative study between researchers from Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom (Ortega et al., 2012) investigated four different scenarios (direct bullying, indirect bullying, mobile phone bullying and internet bullying). From their wide-ranging research of 5862 students, the results suggested that face-to-face bullying was more common than online bullying in all three countries, and that:

Taking in account all types of bullying, 60.2% of the total number of victims (1,017) were victims of exclusively one type of bullying; 28% (473) were victims of two types; 8.6% (145) of three types; and 3.2% (54) of all four types (pp. 345–346).

The Australian research community has generated a number of large-scale studies into the online experience of young people and bullying since 2009. Spears et al. (2014a, p. 19) looked into the following studies when

seeking to establish a prevalence rate for online bullying in Australia:

- *Australian covert bullying prevalence study* (Cross et al., 2009)
- *Cyberbullying: An evidence-based approach to the application and reform of law, policy and practice in schools* (Australian Research Council Linkage grant 2008–2010 – unpublished government report)
- *High-wire act: Cyber-safety and the young* (Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety, 2011)
- *Risks and safety for Australian children on the internet* (Australian Kids Online Study 2011)
- *Like, post, share: Young Australians' experience of social media: Quantitative study* (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013)
- *Safe and well online study* (Young and Well Co-operative Research Centre 2013).

Problems with the definitions of bullying and online bullying, highlighted in the previous chapter of this

Differences in definitions of online bullying, data collection methods and participant profiles can present major obstacles in a meta-analysis.

literature review, had implications for these researchers when they attempted to synthesise the data to produce a reliable prevalence rate (Spears et al., 2014a). Differences in definitions of online

bullying, data collection methods and participant profiles can present major obstacles in a meta-analysis. This necessitated a carefully worded caution from the researchers:

... it can be extrapolated from all frequencies, timeframes, methodological approaches and definitions that the general prevalence figure for Australian minors experiencing cyberbullying in a year is approximately 20 per cent, with a range from 6 per cent (ACBPS) [*Australian covert bullying prevalence study*] to 44 per cent (SWO) [*Safe and well online study*] (p. 37).

Therefore, the 'best estimate' able to be made based on the data published in recent Australian studies is that approximately 20 per cent of young people experience online bullying in any calendar year. The figure of 20 per cent represents, as the authors highlight, an extrapolation from a number of studies, but as the definitions, age groups and behaviours in each study vary slightly, the figures should be treated with caution. Rather than relying on a specific percentage for prevalence, useful information can be found by considering the ranges in prevalence from a number of studies.

2.3.1 Age effect on online bullying prevalence

While the limited available evidence suggests children under the age of 10 years are less likely than older peers to experience online bullying, young people over the age of 15 are also less likely (Katz et al., 2014, p. 1). In their study into online bullying, Katz et al. (2014) reported that, for children and young people between 8 to 17 years who report being bullied online, the peak occurs for those between 10 to 15 years. This likely represents both increasing availability of technology and the established peak in face-to-face bullying for this age group that has been found in previous Australian research.

Studies indicate the prevalence rate decreases after the age of 15; however, data on the distribution of frequencies across ages is limited, with far fewer robust research projects focused on children under the age of 10 years (Katz et al., 2014, p. 1).

In a study by Arslan et al. (2012) of nearly 400 Turkish school students between second and fourth grade, the self-reported prevalence of online bullying appeared to be much higher in boys than girls in younger years. The results also indicated that, of those students participating in the study:

- 27 per cent had been bullied online
- 18 per cent had engaged in online bullying
- 15 per cent had been bullied online and had bullied others.

A recent 2014 report prepared on behalf of the Australian Government focused on the number of online bullying incidents reported by school staff in Australia, which presents a data source based on actual occurrences rather than surveys or student self-reports common to other studies (IRIS Research, 2014). A total of 384 responses from school principals were received for this study, representing a mixture of primary and secondary school settings. Findings indicated that 72 per cent of schools reported managing at least one incident of online bullying in 2013, with an average of 8.7 reports per school overall (p. 1). A mean of 2.1 reports per 100 students was extrapolated from the data, with the highest number of reports made to schools for behaviours which involved students receiving threatening or abusive emails, calls or text messages (2.4 per school), and behaviour online where the offender (who may or may not be a student) is anonymous (including websites or social networks that allow anonymous postings, and emails or other messages from an unknown person¹) (1.3 per school) (p. 1).

Significant differences in the number of incidents per 100 students were noticed between primary and secondary school settings, with a mean of 1.2 reports per 100

¹ This study did not distinguish between 'bullying' (as defined as a misuse of power between people in a relationship) and other inappropriate online behaviour (of most relevance, single incidents and incidents where the person sending or posting inappropriate content is unknown). These reports by schools, therefore, may or may not constitute incidents of bullying according to the NSSF definition.

students for primary schools and 9.1 reports per 100 students for secondary schools (p. 1).

2.4 Subgroups of students more likely to be bullied

Chapter 1 raised the concept of bullying as a complex social and cultural phenomenon which invokes broader issues of social class, race and gender that permeate school culture.

It follows that students who belong to certain subgroups are more likely to experience bullying. Depending on the environment, some groups of students — such as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) youth, youth with disabilities, and socially isolated youth — may be at an increased risk of being bullied.

A large-scale Boston study investigated the overlap of bullying and discrimination (Garnett et al., 2014). A total of 965 secondary school students contributed to a survey, which explored whether or not bullying was related to a student's race, immigration status, perceived sexual orientation or weight. The study found that, of these characteristics, the students most likely to be subjected to bullying were those with weight-based concerns. It also found that LGBT students reported more bullying and assault than their heterosexual peers (p. 1231).

One section of the school population often overlooked in general studies of bullying is students with disability. For a number of reasons, they may not be included in wide scale surveys of student population, but literature specifically from the disability field indicates that children with disability are at an increased risk of bullying (Zablotsky et al., 2013). Using data from a tranche of an internationally collaborative longitudinal study, Swearer et al. (2012) investigated how students with disability experienced and demonstrated bullying. The study involved 686 students between nine and 16 years of age, of which 130 were recipients of special education services. The results indicated students receiving special education services were more likely to engage in and be subjected to bullying compared to the prevalence rates reported for their same aged, non-disabled peers. These students were also referred for disciplinary attention at a much higher rate than their peers; however, no major differences in relation to year levels and gender were discovered.

A review of the enormous body of disability literature on the topic of bullying for students is beyond the scope of this document. However, it is important to note that a group of students of particular concern are those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). As ASD has a specific and profound impact on an individual's ability to read social signs, it increases their potential for being involved in bullying (Zablotsky et al., 2013). Ratcliffe et al. (2014) summarise the literature exploring these social impacts:

- difficulties encoding social information
- impaired perspective taking

- poor social role functioning
- poor emotional perception
- impaired non-verbal expression of emotion
- poor social problem-solving
- limited prosocial behaviours.

These social-emotional difficulties differentiate children with ASD from those with other development disorders, and explain the increased vulnerability to involvement with being bullied, and in some cases bullying others.

The reasons certain subgroups of students may experience higher rates of bullying are explored in more depth in Chapter 3:.

2.5 Impact of student willingness to report

For all groups of students, one of the major factors influencing how data is collected, analysed and reported is the reluctance of many to actually reveal that they have been bullied. This was the central issue examined by deLara (2012) in *Why adolescents don't disclose incidents of bullying and harassment*. If bullying isn't being reported or acknowledged by students, then the data relied on to form theories and recommendations has an inherent bias within it. The reasons adolescents don't report incidents of bullying are varied, including:

If bullying isn't being reported or acknowledged by students, then the data relied on to form theories and recommendations has an inherent bias within it.

- acceptance of bullying behaviour as 'normal'
- sense of helplessness — adults cannot help even if they are told
- concern about adult reactions to the complaint (overt parental intrusion, apathy shown by adults who witnessed the events, or fear they will not be taken seriously)
- belief they should be able to manage the problem independently
- shame (self-embarrassment, overt mistreatment by adults as a result of requesting help, appearing weak) (deLara, 2012).

Reporting of bullying remains a highly complex and sensitive area to address at both the individual and the whole-school level. Fear of not being believed or not having their concerns appropriately and thoughtfully addressed by adults appears to leave many young people isolated in these negative experiences. This is a major area requiring closer attention and consideration: how best to gather this information from students in order to act appropriately and to prevent future incidents. Given the strong connection between reporting and confidence in the relationship with adults (e.g. parents, carers or teachers) discussed later in

this review, a focus on promoting positive relationships may potentially be more productive than a focus on reporting systems per se.

2.6 Is the prevalence of bullying increasing?

It is understandable for schools and the wider community to want to know just how big an issue bullying is among school-aged children. However, actually quantifying a complex social interaction pattern of behaviour in relationships may be an unrealistic goal (Meyer, 2014).

A 2011 study led by Professor Ken Rigby also sought to measure the prevalence of bullying, searching for evidence to support claims of an increase over the last 15 years (Rigby & Smith, 2011). After conducting a scan of published studies of

prevalence from countries including England, Wales, the United States, Spain, Norway, Finland, Lithuania and Australia, Rigby and Smith (2011) claim that bullying is not increasing,

... bullying is not increasing, and in many countries an observable decrease can be identified ... data indicate some growth in the prevalence of online bullying over the same time period.

and in many countries an observable decrease can be identified. This claim is qualified, however, by an acknowledgement that data indicate some growth in the prevalence of online bullying over the same time period.

Previous reviews of prevalence over time (which did not include Australian data) have also suggested that bullying is not increasing, particularly in countries where focused work has been undertaken to prevent bullying in schools (Molcho et al., 2009). The question of perception in relation to prevalence of bullying is one Rigby and Smith (2011) interrogate in some detail. If the available 'hard' data indicate that bullying is not increasing worldwide, then what might be influencing the broad public opinion that it is? They offer a number of possible causes:

- increased community awareness of bullying and its effects on young people
- more and more behaviours being described as bullying (e.g. the inclusion of relational aggression, or as they describe it '... more and more covert forms of behaviour, such as deliberate exclusion and rumour spreading, are being recognised as forms of bullying and included in estimates of prevalence')
- better understanding of the serious impacts on mental health arising from bullying—
 - confusion associated with the new contexts/forums for bullying behaviours (e.g. online bullying) being viewed as evidence of prevalence increase rather than a shift in the way bullying is exhibited

- social trends towards increased antisocial behaviour in the community overall
- media hyperbole (p. 452).

Whether the increase in access to technology by young people in Australia has contributed to a perceived increase in bullying overall has been considered by a number of researchers. A study of students between the ages of nine and 18 years in Sydney and Brisbane, Australia, sought to capture both prevalence rates and data on the most common forms or media used to bully (Sakellariou, Carroll & Houghton, 2012). Researchers were interested in the experiences of male students in both primary and secondary school settings, and used *The boys bullying at school questionnaire* to collect information from 1530 students attending one of three independent schools in Queensland and New South Wales. They found approximately 87 per cent of students reported they had access to the internet and internet chat lines, with 77.3 per cent reporting access to email over the internet. Some 89.9 per cent of students reported ownership of or access to a mobile telephone (p. 540).

These figures regarding access to the internet are consistent with those reported by Raco (2014), who noted that, based on a sample of 1323 young people, nine in 10 teenagers had internet access in their home, with nearly 100 per cent of these having a broadband connection. Of teenagers without a home internet connection:

- 77 per cent used the internet at locations such as schools, their workplace, a library or a friend's house
- 50 per cent went online via their mobile phone
- 11 per cent did not use the internet at all.

Of considerable interest, given the high levels of access, is the finding that 90 per cent of students surveyed reported that they had never been subject to online bullying (Sakellariou, Carroll & Houghton, 2012).

Of those students who did report being bullied online, the internet was identified as the medium most commonly used to convey this behaviour, with 11.5 per cent of participating students reporting they had experienced this behaviour in the last 12 months. Email (8%) and text messages (6.6%) were the next most common media used. In terms of age and year levels, those students in junior secondary (Years 8 to 10) were most likely to report being bullied via text message (9.2%), compared to 3.1 per cent of those in primary school and 6.9 per cent in senior secondary school. The least common form of bullying online was the dissemination of electronic images, with less than 4.8 per cent of participants indicating they had experienced bullying of this type.

2.7 Conclusions

This chapter has summarised the recent research into the prevalence of bullying, and also explored the issues around attempts to establish a prevalence figure.

There is no firm prevalence rate for bullying that might be offered without being heavily loaded with caveats and cautions with regards to interpretation. Differences in research design and methodology — including varied reporting and data collection tools, varied population characteristics, and differing forms of bullying investigated — hamper this aim. Where single figures are proffered as prevalence, it must be remembered that these are often extrapolated from wide prevalence ranges identified and collated through meta-analysis studies, and as such should be used with this in mind.

There is no firm prevalence rate for bullying that might be offered without being heavily loaded with caveats and cautions with regards to interpretation.

A single prevalence figure can hide complexity and important details which, left unacknowledged, could contribute to the failure of anti-bullying strategies. Research has established that not only does bullying prevalence vary at different times of the year, there is a need to distinguish between time-limited and persistent bullying (Hemphill, Heerde & Gomo, 2014). Prevalence also varies across student age ranges, with well-recognised peaks at various stages of certain ages and at times of social transition. As well, some subgroups of students appear more likely to experience bullying than others. These factors underpin the inherent problems in a single ‘student population’ prevalence figure in informing responses to bullying. With this complexity potentially obscured, there may be limited value for schools in an externally derived single prevalence

A single prevalence figure can hide complexity and important details which, left unacknowledged, could contribute to the failure of anti-bullying strategies.

figure. This also points to the critical importance of rich local school data to inform practice.

Research has also revealed additional problems in establishing the prevalence of bullying due to students’ unwillingness to report, or

reluctance of many to share, this information with adults. Students report that fear of not being believed or not having their concerns appropriately and thoughtfully addressed by relevant adults is a factor. Different understandings of what constitutes bullying may also contribute to a failure to report. Not only does this mean that many young people remain isolated in these bullying experiences, with potentially significant negative impacts on their wellbeing, it clearly affects data sources and research findings. A lack of sufficiently reliable reporting could potentially misinform research hypotheses and recommendations for practice because they are based on only the experiences of those who are willing to report bullying.

The best estimate extrapolated from research is that one student in four reports bullying occurring in person, and one student in five reports online bullying, but these figures should be used with caution. Debate continues on whether the rate of bullying is increasing, or whether the community’s general shift against tolerating bullying has resulted in greater awareness and higher levels of reporting.

The need to ‘know’ the scale of the problem of bullying is understandable, but quantifying a social relationship dynamic is indeed challenging. As a social phenomenon, bullying is dynamic and generated through social interaction between people. It is not static, and some authors would suggest it is not quantifiable (Canty et al., 2014).

The best estimate extrapolated from research is that one student in four reports bullying occurring in person, and one student in five reports online bullying ...

Chapter 3: Who is involved in bullying?



3.1 Introduction

The question of why some students are involved in bullying is raised frequently by parents, teachers, researchers and, indeed, students in schools. Is there something about individual students which might lead them to engage in, or be targeted for, bullying? What explanations are there for higher rates of bullying experienced by certain subgroups of students? What relationship is there between bullying and social positioning?

This chapter explores new work relating to individual and interpersonal dynamics that appear to influence the different roles students may take in bullying incidents, and the possible motivations for their actions.

3.2 Roles in the bullying dynamic

Bullying can be highly dynamic, variable and highly contextual. Salmivalli (2010) suggests that the actions of individuals in bullying are more than aggressive interactions, but resemble a number of social roles within a group. These roles can vary across interactions and social groups.

Children and young people face pressure to adhere to the norms of their friendship groups, which may include involvement in bullying. Therefore, the existing social networks within and outside a group are an important aspect of school bullying (Padgett & Notar, 2013).

Students can occupy different roles in any bullying situation. One individual can take the role of being bullied by others in one context, while taking the role of bystander in another. No relationship is static, and various events and social and personal developments affect student actions and interpretations. Three roles are frequently identified – a student bullying others, a student being bullied, and students who witness bullying (the bystanders). The term ‘bully-victim’ is sometimes used to describe students persistently involved in both bullying and being bullied, but the term implies a fourth role, when an alternative view is that many students might occupy more than one role.

Salmivalli (2010) suggests a larger number of roles within bullying, reflecting the complexity of the social interaction and social status of children and young people. These roles include the individual being bullied, those bullying others, assistants, reinforcers, outsiders and defenders. Other descriptive terms have also been suggested by researchers studying students’ interactions, but all conceptualisations focus on the peer group context and the various, often malleable roles within and immediately around this group.

Students can occupy different roles in any bullying situation. One individual can take the role of being bullied by others in one context, while taking the role of bystander in another.

This review avoids the use of terms ‘bully’ and ‘victim’, although these terms are commonly used in the literature to meet the needs of the researchers to identify specific cohorts of students. Davies (2011) suggests that, through the activity of labelling children as ‘bullies’, teachers are asked to make a judgment about the individuals’ characters based on a reading of their intention and whether their behaviour accords with the ‘rules’ of the social context. She suggests that it is more productive to discover: ‘How it is that the normative social order itself contributes to the production of the behaviour identified as a “punishable” offence against another.’ Likewise, Thornberg (2011) and others report the term ‘victim’ can ‘stick’ and become part of the individual’s social identity, and they can be stigmatised further by this status.

A study by Turkish researchers Duy and Yildiz (2014) explored associations between student loneliness and school attachment, and the role of the student in a bullying dynamic (i.e. student who engages in bullying, student subject to bullying, and observer or bystander to these events). Using a range of questionnaires and assessment tools (revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, School Attachment Scale, Children’s Loneliness Scale), they elicited data from 415 upper primary school students with an average age of 12.82 years. Their findings reveal that, compared to students subjected to bullying and bystanders, students who engaged in bullying have a low level of attachment to school. Bystanders were also identified as having stronger peer attachment than the other two groups, but no significant differences to any of the student groups when focusing on attachment to teachers. Further to this, ‘boys and girls did not differ in terms of school attachment and loneliness ... (and) grade level, age and academic success did not have significant effect on bully status’ (p. 181).

...compared to students subjected to bullying and bystanders, students who engaged in bullying have a low level of attachment to school.

3.3 Why do some students bully others?

There are two core questions that have been asked when considering why some students appear to engage in bullying more than others. The first: What intrinsic features do these students have in common? This line of questioning is taken up by researchers who seek to profile characteristics of students who bully others, which has been a prevailing area of research to date. The second and perhaps more significant question in terms of why bullying happens, is: What motivates or drives some students to engage in bullying in particular social contexts? In other words, what social function/s does bullying play, and what is the role of the social situation in how likely bullying is to happen? This is a relatively new area of research and is providing some interesting new insights into how environment and context act as levers for behaviour.

3.3.1 Characteristics of students who bully others

The report *Hidden in plain sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children* (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014) cites the following factors as associated with an increased likelihood that a child will engage in bullying towards others:

- parental maltreatment, especially physical and sexual abuse
- witnessing domestic violence
- hyperactivity and attention disorders
- quickness to anger.

The large-scale longitudinal study undertaken by Hemphill et al. (2012) of 700 Victorian secondary school students looked for predictors of future bullying based on survey responses from students in Year 5, then later in Year 7, and again in Year 9. Findings from follow-up surveys with these participants suggested that only prior engagement in relational aggression (such as spreading rumours about another student) predicted online bullying. For face-to-face bullying, previous relational aggression was also predictive, as was having been a target and perpetrator of face-to-face bullying, family conflict, and academic failure (Hemphill et al., 2012, p. 59).

Arslan et al. (2012) reported that exposure to online bullying (both being bullied or bullying others) was

significantly associated with self-reported low levels of school satisfaction and achievement. Paternal unemployment was also associated with a three-fold increase in the likelihood of bullying others online.

The term 'moral disengagement' is highlighted as a key indicator in an Italian

... exposure to online bullying (both being bullied or bullying others) was significantly associated with self-reported low levels of school satisfaction and achievement.

study of 819 secondary school students (Renati, Berrone & Zanetti, 2012). The researchers define moral disengagement as 'a set of eight cognitive mechanisms that allow individuals to endorse behaviors conflicting with their system of moral values without feeling guilty' (p. 391). A strong relationship was found in this study between moral disengagement and students who engaged in online bullying, in addition to lower levels of affective empathy. This concept of moral disengagement is explored in more depth in Section 3.6 in relation to bystanders.

Another Italian study by Ciucci and Baroncelli (2014) reported on findings from a self-reported survey of 529 middle school students with an average age of 12 years. Looking at personality traits and social standing with peers, the research found that 'in girls, an uncaring disposition was directly associated with cyberbullying behaviors,

whereas in boys this association only emerged for those with low perceived popularity' (p. 584). The themes of disengagement and emotional distancing repeatedly emerge from studies of students who engage in bullying, and in the profiles of those who witness the bullying (bystanders).

Research about factors such as previous exposure to violence, or other immutable characteristics like parental status or gender, can

suggest where to target interventions, but do not indicate the nature of appropriate approaches. Likewise, identifying that student disengagement is related to the

likelihood of bullying others is a valuable starting point, but does not suggest how to respond appropriately.

The themes of disengagement and emotional distancing repeatedly emerge from studies of students who engage in bullying, and in the profiles of those who witness the bullying (bystanders).

3.3.2 Student motivations and purposes for bullying others

Duncan (2013) reviewed articles addressing school and bullying published since 2010 and found that, with rare exceptions, researchers were continuing to look at the nature, frequency and distribution of bullying in young people to the exclusion of the context in which bullying may occur and the social function it may service within schools environments.

Potential lies in the emerging work on student motivations and purposes for bullying others.

Moving beyond the common, individualistic analysis of bullying patterns, Runions (2014) interrogates the function of bullying, exploring what students who engage in bullying might 'get out' of this type of behaviour. He makes a distinction between reactive and proactive aggression and, similar to Renati, Berrone and Zanetti (2012), draws on the work of Bandura (2002) on moral disengagement to explain the co-active relationships between motive, cognitions, disengagement and behaviour.

The motivation of students and the social function of bullying for children and young people as they see it are discussed further in 3.5.

The motivations of people who bully others online may, in part, be impacted by the specific features (e.g. screen names, quick share buttons) of the online context. The anonymity of online bullying and its correlation to increased displays of bullying was explored in a US study of 274 students in Years 7 and 8. Wright (2014) found that the belief that material posted online is short-lived (and simply disappears), confidence about not getting caught, beliefs they were anonymous, and normative beliefs regarding online aggression were all correlated with more confidence in conducting this behaviour through email, text messaging and chatrooms (p. 431).

Runions (2014) suggests that the necessary and pivotal role of an ‘audience’ to bullying is part of the technology itself. He considers that the absence of non-verbal information from participants involved in bullying interactions and a drive for increased risk-taking by adolescents in particular are major contributors to ‘recreational social aggression’.

3.4 Why are some students more likely to be bullied?

In Chapter 2, the fact that some student subgroups are more likely to be bullied than their same aged peers was raised. Delving into this topic, we look first at the characteristics (e.g. physical, social, behavioural) of these students, but then move to a broader focus on what motivates others to target these characteristics in others.

Factors associated with being bullied by others were flagged in the *Hidden in plain sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children* report (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2014) as:

... not having many friends (particularly those who can be trusted) and loneliness. Particular groups of children, such as ethnic minorities and those with disabilities, can be especially vulnerable to bullying. Teenagers may also be targeted because of their sexual orientation. For example, one study in the United Kingdom found that between 30 and 50 per cent of adolescents in secondary schools who were attracted to the same sex experienced homophobic bullying (p. 120).

This claim is supported by the work of Juvonen and Graham (2014), who, in their review of literature, suggest ‘several non-behavioral characteristics increase the risk of being bullied’, including students who are:

- obese
- off-time pubertal maturation
- disabled
- LGBT (p. 166).

... any condition or characteristic that makes youths stand out from their peers increases the likelihood of them being bullied ...

Earlier research has also identified that students who have additional learning needs, or come from a cultural background different from the dominant culture, are also more likely to be targeted (MCEECDYA, 2011) but no research published between 2010 and 2014 was found on this topic in the literature.

Juvonen and Graham further assert that:

... any condition or characteristic that makes youths stand out from their peers increases the likelihood of them being bullied ... (and) research on rejected social status (i.e., being disliked and avoided) shows that any non-normative behaviors or physical characteristics that set a child apart from the group place them at risk of being shunned by their group (p. 166).

This point is further exemplified in the findings from a study (Richard, Schneider & Mallet, 2012) of nearly 20,000 secondary school students in France, which demonstrated that students who are well accepted by their peers and who have friendships of higher quality are victimised less frequently than students with lower social standing. Conversely, students who reported greater impulsivity, anxiety and friendship conflict also reported greater verbal, social and physical victimisation. Findings also suggest that higher achieving students are at greater risk of being victims of verbal or social bullying. Higher achieving students may be particularly at risk in lower achieving schools (p. 277).

Lester and Cross (2014) used data from a longitudinal study, the Supportive Schools Project, to examine the relationship between emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary school and the experience of what they call ‘chronic victimisation’ in the transition to secondary school settings. The emotional and behavioural difficulties examined covered ‘emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, pro-social and total emotional difficulties’ (p. 366). Boys scored higher than girls in screening assessments for externalising behaviours (e.g. conduct disorder, hyperactivity), while the reverse was true for internalising behaviours (e.g. emotional symptoms).

... students who are well accepted by their peers and who have friendships of higher quality are victimised less frequently than students with lower social standing.

Based on data from 1800 students enrolled in schools in Western Australia, Lester and Cross (2014) concluded that students who exhibited externalising behaviours were more likely to be bullied than their peers:

Students with conduct problems were more likely to be in the stable or increasing victimisation groups, with females reporting hyperactivity more likely to be in the stable or increasing victimisation groups than not victimised (p. 366).

In contrast, a Turkish study of 389 secondary school students identified submissiveness as a characteristic common to those students who were bullied (Atik, Özmen & Kemer, 2012). Perhaps these variances are explained in the proposal by Juvonen and Graham (2014) that separation of the individual from their social group is

It appears that, for students, a fine line needs to be walked between being an individual and conforming sufficiently to the norms for behaviour and appearance. Each individual must aim to be perceived as ‘normal’ if they are to avoid exposure to bullying.

strongly associated with increased risk of more severe and prolonged exposure to bullying — too externalised or too internalised. Students who experience social and emotional difficulties, including depression, are also cited as being more likely to be the focus of bullying, but it may well be that these students are perceived as socially unpopular and isolated in the peer community.

Separation from the group is not always associated with a negative personal characteristic, as O'Neill, Calder and Allen (2013) found in their study of bullying experienced by 19 Australian school-age high-performance athletes. The athletes were interviewed as part of a research study into 'tall poppy syndrome'. Nine participants were still enrolled at a school, while 10 had completed secondary education and were reflecting on their school experiences during the interviews. The results were remarkable in terms of the gender differences — all 12 female participants indicated they had been subjected to bullying, yet not one male interviewee reported any problems in this area.

While male students with sporting prowess were considered to be of higher status, female students who were exceptional in terms of their sporting achievements were singled out for particularly harsh and unrelenting abuse from peers. The forms of bullying reported by the female students included marginalisation, name calling and mean behaviour (p. 215).

Davies (2011) suggests the function served by bullying is predominantly social 'policing' of the behavioural norms within the school culture. This is supported by Payne and Smith (2013), who suggest there is a process they call 'gender policing' through bullying — the 'work' done by young people within their social interactions to reinforce the dominant culture values about appropriate gender and sexual behaviour. 'Policing', in this situation, is the social process of enforcing the wider cultural expectations for 'normal' behaviour. They state that the further from the dominant or normalised forms of masculinity and femininity that young people

diverge, the more vulnerable they are to bullying.

It appears that, for students, a fine line needs to be walked between being an individual and conforming sufficiently to the norms for behaviour and appearance. Each individual must aim to be perceived as 'normal' if they are to avoid exposure to bullying.

Thornberg (2015) cautions that explanations for why bullying happens that focus on the attributes of those targeted can potentially lead to a 'blame the victim' mentality. He points out the practice of blaming the 'victims' for their fate allows others to distance themselves from the harm or hurt caused. A focus on oddness and

difference as the reason a child or young person is bullied can lead to a narrow interpretation of the phenomenon, and inadvertently reinforce a culture that confirms an intolerance of diversity.

3.5 Student views on why bullying happens

As with bullying research in general, the voice of children and young people about why bullying happens has been largely overlooked.

This oversight is hard to excuse or countenance, as the way children and young people understand bullying is a major factor in how they will act when they witness

or encounter bullying (Thornberg, 2015, p. 2).

Thornberg (2015) asked a group of 350 teenagers why they thought bullying happens. Participants were provided with three possible explanations, the first two of which dominate research literature:

1. The person targeted is different, odd or deviant in some way.
2. The person doing the bullying is 'distressed' or has psychosocial problems.
3. The person doing the bullying is trying to maintain or enhance their social status.

The young people agreed that all three explanations were plausible, but they were most inclined to think that bullying occurs because the individual wants power or status. The gender of the participants, and the experience of the participants in relation to whether they had been bullied, bullied others or witnessed bullying, had an impact on which explanation they thought most likely.

This aligns with research with an ethnographic approach, observing and talking with the students involved, which has shown that peer harassment, including bullying, often has the purpose of social positioning (Thornberg, 2011). An emphasis on status and popularity in the school social environment promotes a rigid social hierarchy within the student group. His research has indicated that bullying is either a reaction to perceived 'deviance' or a struggle for status, power or friends. He explains:

In the complex process of peer culture, bullying was a part of making and maintaining friendships by defining and excluding non-friends ... often produced indirect and verbal bullying (p. 262).

... the way children and young people understand bullying is a major factor in how they will act when they witness or encounter bullying.

... explanations for why bullying happens that focus on the attributes of those targeted can potentially lead to a 'blame the victim' mentality.

... *bullying is either a reaction to perceived 'deviance' or a struggle for status, power or friends.*

The common theme of social position and the struggle for status and power, identified by young people as their own

explanation, has important implications for schools. Thornberg (2015) says it is important 'to seriously listen to as well as address children and young people's explanations of bullying' (p. 11).

3.6 Why some bystanders intervene

Bullying at school usually occurs with an audience of others — students and educators — known as bystanders (Padgett & Notar, 2013). Far from being a passive or inert role in the bullying dynamic, the influence of the bystander on the actions of those directly involved can be significant. Padgett and Notar (2013) state that bystanders are important in the overall social dynamic, and have the capacity to influence the occurrence and also ameliorate the demoralising and damaging impacts of bullying. This is an area of research which has grown in depth over recent years, and offers perhaps some of the most positive opportunities for change in schools.

The research in general warns against assuming that teaching other students to speak up is a simple matter, and instead attends to reasons that bystanders give for not taking action:

- fear of getting hurt
- becoming a new target for bullying
- making things worse
- simply not knowing what to do (Padgett & Notar, 2013).

Discussion about these reasons can be the starting point for changing the behaviour of those who witness bullying.

A Swedish study of students between Years 4 and 7 attempted to understand what bystanders did when involved in a bullying situation, and what influenced their actions (Forsberg, Thornberg & Samuelsson, 2014). While a relatively small study, with only 43 participants, it offers an interesting perspective on the question of why some students remain inactive bystanders to bullying incidents. The relationship of the bystander to the student who is being targeted with bullying has proven to be a major influence over the decision to act. Students expressed their belief that bullying was wrong; however, in real-life situations, there are a number of

Students expressed their belief that bullying was wrong; however, in real-life situations, there are a number of complex factors ... which drive their behaviour choices.

complex factors operating on each participant in the event which drive their behaviour choices. These include:

- relationships — relationships to the student/s demonstrating the bullying, to the students who are subject to the bullying, and to others involved in the situation
- perceived seriousness — students assess and judge the situation to determine the degree of harm being perpetrated (with physical violence being the most readily acknowledged form of harm, while relational aggression was often seen as 'no big deal')
- distressing emotions — the empathic evocation triggered when witnessing or hearing about bullying towards another and a desire to stop experiencing these emotions
- social hierarchy — sensitivity to the social status of those involved, and a desire to protect the self
- contribution of the student targeted — bystanders also engage in an evaluation or assessment of what role they perceive the student subjected to bullying may have in bringing the situation on themselves
- social roles and responsibilities — assigning responsibilities to peers based on the relationships assumed to exist, for example, bystanders with no relationship to the student being subjected to bullying see intervention as the responsibility of that student's friends.

The concept of 'moral distress' is introduced in this study as a way of explaining the conflict or dilemma experienced by bystanders who are unsure how to act because of their relationship with, and feelings of responsibility to, different parties involved in a bullying incident. Moral distress is defined 'as painful feelings or psychological distress that occur when a person is conscious of the morally appropriate action but cannot carry out that action because of external or situational obstacles' (p. 569). Moral distress impacts on the

actions of bystanders. Forsberg, Thornberg and Samuelsson (2014) found that being against bullying was a common statement among the students. At the same time, many bystanders reported experiences of insecurity in how to deal with the situation, or a feeling of being incapable of doing anything because of who is involved or present, for example, the person doing the bullying is a friend or is more powerful.

The concept of 'moral distress' is ... the conflict or dilemma experienced by bystanders who are unsure how to act because of their relationship with, and feelings of responsibility to, different parties involved in a bullying incident.

Moral disengagement, as articulated in the work of Bandura (2002), is also explored in this study (Forsberg, Thornberg & Samuëlsson 2014). Moral disengagement is defined as a 'set of socio-cognitive processes through which people can disengage from humane acts and instead behave inhumanely towards other people' (p. 569). Bystanders who believe the bullying incident is not sufficiently serious, or that responsibility to intervene belongs to friends of the student experiencing the bullying, or even that the student targeted has triggered the situation, can morally disengage and remain fixed in a passive bystander role. Padgett and Notar (2013) suggest that moral disengagement combined with normative beliefs about aggression reduced the likelihood that bystanders would intervene.

A detailed study undertaken by Belgian researchers Van Cleemput, Vandebosch and Pabian (2014) looked into the personal characteristics and influence of contextual factors on the decision of bystanders to online bullying electing to help, join in or do nothing. Surveying 519 primary school students and 1814 secondary school students, researchers found that adolescents who joined in with online bullying were older, had lower levels of empathy, and were more likely to have been involved previously in bullying others, both online or in person. Adolescents who did nothing when they witnessed online bullying were also older, showed lower levels of empathy, and were less likely to have been bullied previously. Those who helped the person being bullied were younger, had higher levels of empathy, and were more likely to have been bullied, either online or in person, in the past months. Social anxiety was not related to joining in, helping or remaining passive (p. 383). Moral disengagement theory was again articulated in this study as part of the reflection on possible reasons for the passivity of some bystanders.

In a study of around 1000 students in a secondary school in South Australia, the attitudes of bystanders in the online environment were interrogated (Price et al., 2014). In the context of data on face-to-face forms of bullying, which suggest less than half of bystanders to such incidents are willing to intervene, researchers sought to understand the attitudes and behavioural intentions of this group of students in terms of intervening online. Moral disengagement was a repeated theme throughout the discussion of research findings in this study, and the observation that bystanders operated similarly across online and offline settings. The authors suggested that educators need to recognise the interconnectivity between the online and offline environments, and that young people do not distinguish between the two. The moral thinking across contexts expressed by young people was similar in terms of who should engage to support the victims (pp. 12–13).

While participating students indicated that they believed bystanders in the online environment should intervene, they also explained some of the reasoning behind a reluctance to do so, with a strong theme of anxiety about upsetting social dynamics in their immediate environment.

Another South Australian study, conducted by Rigby and Bortolozzo (2013), attempted to take research into the role of bystanders one step further in their investigation of self-concept and acceptance in 212 young Australian students between the ages of nine and 14. Their study 'examined whether student pro-victim attitudes are related to more basic attitudes to self and attitudes to others' (p. 181). Findings suggested that:

Mostly, students adopted positive attitudes towards themselves, others, and victims ... only a minority of students held negative attitudes towards either themselves or others. Nevertheless, those with relatively low levels of acceptance of others were significantly less likely to have pro-victim attitudes. A substantial correlation of .55 between acceptance of others and pro-victim attitude suggests that those students with more positive attitudes to others in general were more likely to be favourably disposed to giving help and support towards students who are being victimized by peers (pp. 192–193).

Interestingly, Thornberg (2015) found in his survey of 350 young people that, while the enhancement of social status was the most common function of bullying, the more a young person attributed psychosocial problems to the person doing the bullying, the more likely they were to intervene as a bystander. These findings have implications for what social skill activities school intervention programs focus on when attempting to influence positive changes in student behaviour. Based on this research, those interventions which emphasise acceptance of others are more likely to result in change than those which attempt to improve individual student self-esteem and attitude.

In summary, the motivations of bystanders are an additional part of the complexity of the social dynamic between peers that manifests as bullying. Some research suggests that bystanders do not need to necessarily intervene directly to have a positive effect, and that providing personal support and talking with and encouraging the person who has been bullied can also be effective (Padgett & Notar, 2013). Expectations that students will intervene if they witness bullying are unrealistic without the provision of support and skilling,

... those students with more positive attitudes to others in general were more likely to be favourably disposed to giving help and support towards students who are being victimized by peers

and without acknowledgement of the complex challenges of students who witness bullying.

The perceptions and concerns of the bystanders must be acknowledged in the implementation of anti-bullying programs for schools. Bystanders have the potential to shape the broader social context to move away from acceptance of bullying and to circumvent incidents of bullying by intervening appropriately. This is a potential area for intervention, with suggestions that working with bystanders may be more successful than working only with those students directly bullying or being bullied. In fact, Padgett and Notar (2013) state that bystanders are the 'key' to stopping bullying.

... those interventions which emphasise acceptance of others are more likely to result in change than those which attempt to improve individual student self-esteem and attitude.

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter summarised the recent literature about students who are involved in bullying.

The discussion has deliberately avoided reproducing the labels used in the original research (except in quotes). It is recognised that researchers need to be able to study distinct cohorts, so the labels of 'bully', 'bully-victim' and 'victim' serve this research purpose. (Some researchers do use descriptive terms like 'students who bully' and 'bullied students'.) However, in school environments, these labels can lead to rigid or essentialist thinking (i.e. the 'problem' is permanent and existing within an individual), and to blaming and punitive approaches.

In reality, bullying can be highly dynamic, varying and contextual. Individuals play a range of roles in bullying which can vary across interactions and incidents. These roles include the individual being bullied, those bullying others, assistants, reinforcers, outsiders and defenders. One individual can play the role of assistant in one context while taking the role of the person being bullied in another. Other descriptive terms have also been suggested by

Understanding how children and young people make sense of bullying within their peer social cultures is central to understanding their actions, and to developing appropriate anti-bullying approaches with them.

researchers studying students' interactions, but all conceptualisations focus on the peer group context and the various, often malleable roles within and immediately around this group.

Moving away from a focus on the nature of individual characteristics of those involved in

bullying, recent research is exploring the social purposes of bullying in the complex social dynamic of students' interpersonal and social development. This work provides productive insights into the reasons some students are more likely to be involved.

Overall, the research into the large range of reasons for which students may be targeted for bullying shows that the existence of any non-normative characteristics that set a child apart from the group places them at greater risk of being bullied. This points to a critical function of 'policing' social norms through bullying within students' social groups.

Understanding the motivations, values and beliefs of all students in all roles involved in bullying provides a basis for intervention, and helps to ground schools' work by acknowledging bullying as a social dynamic. Understanding how children and young people make sense of bullying within their peer social cultures is central to understanding their actions, and to developing appropriate anti-bullying approaches with them. Young people commonly identify the key motivator for bullying as that of enhancing social status, therefore, school policies and practices must encompass the social hierarchy and competition in schools.

The themes of disengagement and emotional distancing repeatedly emerge from studies of students who engage in bullying, and those who witness bullying without intervening. These findings have led to recommendations for schools to focus on student engagement and on social-emotional development.

Research into the role of bystanders to bullying and their motivation to intervene has been a key focus in recent years. In fact, it has been proposed that bystanders are the key to stopping bullying. Although most incidents of bullying are witnessed by peers, most will not intervene to stop it, thus providing tacit approval for the behaviour. Bystanders consider a number of factors in making a

... it has been proposed that bystanders are the key to stopping bullying.

decision to act, including their relationship to others involved, the apparent seriousness, the emotional impact, the social

hierarchy, the perceived 'contributing' role of the student being bullied, and the social roles and responsibilities of everyone present. Students commonly express a belief that bullying is wrong, but may experience concern about upsetting the social dynamics and losing social status themselves through intervening. This highlights potential areas for intervention, and suggests that working with bystanders may be more successful than working only with those students directly bullying or being bullied.

Given the potential value of adopting the social-ecological perspective to consider bullying as a social peer group phenomenon, it seems appropriate to focus research on the roles and group-level processes supporting bullying. Understanding the perceptions, roles and motivations of all students appears to be central to countering bullying.

Chapter 4: What are the impacts of bullying?



4.1 Introduction

Historically, the focus of concern in relation to bullying has been directed toward those who are subjected to it, but increasingly the negative effects for the students who exhibit or witness bullying is also being recognised.

This chapter explores the evidence about the impacts for those who are involved in or witness face-to-face and online bullying, both of which have been shown to have ‘lasting effects on individuals and their families’ (Katz et al., 2014, p. 4).

4.2 Bullying is harmful for all

The United Nations Children’s Fund report *Hidden in plain sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children* (2014) makes clear that research findings point to ‘a wide range of negative long-term outcomes of bullying on both victims and perpetrators ... The social, emotional and psychological effects of bullying can be severe and can persist throughout childhood into adulthood’ (p. 120). Evidence suggests a strong correlation between experiences of bullying and:

- depression
- anxiety
- suicidal ideation
- low life satisfaction
- heightened risk of eating disorders
- social and relationship difficulties (e.g. withdrawal, loneliness)
- academic difficulties (e.g. underachievement, absenteeism) (p. 120).

Further evidence of a link was reported by Tariq and Tayyab (2011), who found in their comparative study of the effect of bullying on adolescents and adults in Pakistan that ‘bullied adolescents have less life satisfaction, more depression, less self-esteem and more social isolation’ (p. 22).

The existence of a correlation between these factors and bullying is important, but this link alone does not explain which comes first, or whether there is a dynamic interaction not fully explored yet.

The significance of the prior relationships between students involved in bullying, and the harm inflicted on bystanders or witnesses to bullying, is receiving increasing attention from school staff and researchers. Understanding how these relationships might change following involvement in bullying, and the often unobserved negative effects or lasting harm for different students, has become a major focal point in this field of study.

4.3 New thinking about harm

Harm from bullying may be caused both intentionally and unintentionally. Some forms of harm are highly visible, including harm committed through direct and indirect forms of bullying (e.g. harassing, physical assault, online abuse). Other less obvious forms of harm may also be experienced by those (e.g. other students, teachers and parents) who hear about such incidents. In schools where there is perceived to be a ‘culture’ which tolerates bullying, a sense of fear, wariness and anxiety could be pervasive and have a negative impact on students not directly targeted by bullying.

Harm as a result of bullying is not, as many might like to believe, transitory or temporary. It can become ensconced within the psyche of an individual and permeate their lives for many years after the event ...

Harm as a result of bullying is not, as many might like to believe, transitory or temporary. It can become ensconced within the psyche of an individual and permeate their lives for many years after the event, as demonstrated in the following quote from a young person subjected to bullying:

Words cannot possibly describe the feelings that I suffered — isolation, rejection, insecurity, depression, the list goes on. I think the isolation hurt the most, had the biggest, most harmful effect. I felt so alone, so afraid as if I was trapped in a nightmare I just couldn’t get out of. I didn’t feel safe anywhere, not even at home because no matter where I was there was so much going on in my head I could never escape the torture. I could stand for hours and describe all the feelings but you couldn’t even begin to understand how tough it actually was. (Doyle, as cited in O’Moore, 2011, p. 177).

In their philosophical analysis of existing research on the topic of bullying in schools, Schott and Søndergaard (2014) suggest a number of new concepts which could better articulate some of the emotional dimensions they believe are associated with bullying. These include ‘social exclusion anxiety’, ‘contempt production’, ‘dignity production’ and ‘abjection’. Social exclusion anxiety is described as:

... a socio-psychological concept of human beings as being existentially dependent on social embeddedness ... the assumption that people need this kind of community belonging is highlighted in order to focus on the anxiety that arises when social embeddedness becomes jeopardised and a person’s hope and longing to be part of a community is threatened (p. 54).

Contempt and dignity production are discussed in terms of outcomes of prevention or intervention strategies — that is, do the actions encourage greater exclusion (contempt) or inclusion (dignity) (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014)? This may affect everyone in the bullying dynamic, but in particular the student engaged in the bullying and the student/s they are directing their attention toward. The intense dislike (contempt) exhibited by a student towards another is shown in their actions aimed at humiliating or demeaning their target (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014). These concepts may also be useful in considering the impact of adults in responding to bullying. When adults intervene, their actions may trigger further contempt production or generate dignity production, depending on the strategy they adopt. The fear of adults ‘making things worse’ has been reported by students as one reason they choose not to report bullying (deLara, 2012).

When adults intervene, their actions may trigger further contempt production or generate dignity production, depending on the strategy they adopt.

Abjection as a term to describe actions of disgust and loathing is perhaps the most complex concept raised in the work of Schott and Søndergaard (2014). It relates to the idea that, in establishing any group, there is necessarily always an ‘outside’ of the group, making the group distinct with specific characteristics and features:

The notion of abjection in the context of bullying points to the need for group borders as well as the fragility of these borders, with the latter provoking intense feelings of disgust. Since every group creates an outside to make its internal order possible, then every individual is at risk of being set outside or placed on the border ... from this perspective, the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are central to groups and cannot be eliminated, although they may simultaneously create feelings of anxiety in group members ... shifts in position both inside and outside of the group occur relatively frequently, so these positions are not rigid ... but when the positions do become rigid — when certain individuals become fixed as the ‘other’ and lose the potential to become part of the group — then they also lose the social meaning that is bound to recognition ... when this occurs systematically and over time, this experience can be compared to ... [a form of] torture (p. 41).

These new concepts have potential to shed light on the experience for children and young people who are involved in bullying, and to assist adults to look beyond the immediate physical or psychological harm that can be observed by others.

4.4 Impact of persistently bullying others

In considering the broad range of impacts associated with bullying, it is critical not to dismiss the experience of those who engage in bullying. Looking at the trajectory of mental health, education and future life chances for this particular group of students provides a strong rationale for intervention and preventative systems of support.

In its international review of bullying research literature, the United Nations Children’s Fund (2014) flagged concerns about the association between children who engage in bullying and an increased likelihood of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. Further, it points to strong evidence that:

Bullying (of others) has been linked to future engagement in juvenile delinquency, including theft and robberies, vandalism, arson, physical attacks, gang involvement and the selling of drugs. Children who bully others also report increased rates of risky behaviours, including smoking and drinking, fighting, being injured in physical fights and carrying weapons (p. 120).

These (and other) findings related to life trajectories do not provide unequivocal evidence of a causal relationship between bullying and, for example, criminal behaviour. Such trajectories result from a wide number of factors, of which bullying may be only one. However they do suggest that bullying others is an important ‘signal’ that warrants attention and action from parents and schools.

A large-scale dataset collected from 3112 students in Australian primary and secondary schools in three states was used as a basis for an investigation of students who engaged in online bullying and their ‘perceptions of the impact and harm they thought their actions had on the students they had cyberbullied’ (Campbell et al., 2013, p. 617). Participants aged between 10 and 19 years were surveyed, and the focus question related to this study was: ‘Have you cyberbullied someone this year?’ (p. 618). Only 8.9 per cent of surveyed students reported that they had engaged in online bullying during the previous 12 months (p. 619).

However they do suggest that bullying others is an important ‘signal’ that warrants attention and action from parents and schools.

Unpacking the data from this Australian study of the perceptions of students who engage in online bullying further:

- 57 per cent did not consider their behaviour to be harsh
- 74 per cent did not believe their behaviour had a significant impact on the student/s they targeted.

In terms of the students who engaged in online bullying, the researchers found that they 'reported more social difficulties and higher scores on stress, depression and anxiety scales than those students who were not involved in any bullying' (p. 614). This is consistent with a German study of students in Years 8 to 9 which found that students bullying others directly and relationally showed enhanced externalising problems; the negative effects of bullying and victimisation on their psychological adjustment were made worse by the lack of coping mechanisms or support among these students (Hampel, Manhal & Hayer, 2009, p. 474).

Results from a longitudinal study of 700 Australian students examining consequences associated with engaging in bullying (Hemphill et al., 2011) adds further weight to this association:

... bullying perpetration in Year 7 was associated with an almost three-fold increase in weapon carrying, and approximately a two-fold increase in theft, violent behaviour, binge drinking and marijuana use. Bullying perpetration in Year 10 showed stronger associations with Year 11 outcomes. For example, bullying perpetration in Year 10 predicted a four-fold increase in carrying a weapon in Year 11 and over a three-fold increase in theft and violent behaviour. Weaker but significant associations were found between Year 10 bullying perpetration and outcomes including school suspension, marijuana use and binge drinking (p. 112).

Similar results were found from another longitudinal study of 500 boys (and their mothers) in the US who were tracked from six to 19, with twice-yearly screening using the Child Behaviour Checklist and specific questionnaires focused on the experience of bullying (Ttofi et al., 2011c). Results demonstrated that engaging in bullying, as reported by both the boys and their mothers, was strongly correlated with delinquency in adolescence. In a separate longitudinal study of 500 German children, interviewed at nine and then 14 years of age, researchers also found a strong relationship between girls who engaged in bullying and later reports of antisocial behaviour (Ttofi et al., 2011a).

The association between health complaints and involvement in bullying was examined in a study of 2427 Greek adolescents (Politis et al., 2014). Using data from a computerised survey, researchers found that students who engaged in bullying were more likely than other students to report backache and fatigue. This supports previous studies that also found an association between somatic symptoms and bullying perpetration. The researchers suggest that stressful, prolonged violent interactions can weaken the immune system of the child involved through a physiological route (p. 7).

Caution is recommended when considering findings which suggest a causal relationship between bullying others and adverse mental health, crime and behavioural development outcomes. Such studies are, however, invaluable in pointing out possible influences on how bullying is

demonstrated and responded to that are common across communities, and serve an important role in progressing research and practice.

4.5 Impact of being bullied

4.5.1 School engagement and academic achievement

One of the most immediately observable effects on the lives of students who are subjected to bullying relates to their engagement and achievement with schooling. Using data collected from a nationally representative cohort of 4000 students who participated in the 2008–2009 *National crime victimization survey – school crime supplement* in the US, Randa and Reyns (2014) were able to clearly demonstrate that:

... the strong direct relationship between cyberbullying victimization and school avoidance, net of the effects of traditional bullying victimization and school fear, supports recent work which suggests that the online context has a powerful impact on the real physical movements and motivations of students at school. Subsequently, the cyber-social (online), traditional social, and physical contexts are impacting students' lives and routines at school (p. 270).

While the avoidance of school as a coping strategy obviously presents a serious problem in terms of engagement in learning, it is also important not to overlook the minute-to-minute struggles of students who continue to attend school in spite of the threats they face from bullying (Randa & Reyns, 2014). The strategies these students use to cope also rely on avoidance behaviours, with the study showing that 'victims of cyberbullying are more likely to engage in avoidance behaviors while at school (e.g. avoiding certain hallways, bathrooms)' (p. 270).

The ongoing concern regarding lower school attendance and completion rates for Indigenous students in Australia makes findings from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) especially relevant to the current discussion. Results from the 2008 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social survey* indicated that one in 10 Indigenous children reported being bullied at school and:

Of those children who had been bullied, 34% said that their school attendance had been affected and 17%

While the avoidance of school as a coping strategy obviously presents a serious problem in terms of engagement in learning, it is also important not to overlook the minute-to-minute struggles of students who continue to attend school in spite of the threats they face from bullying.

said that the bullying had impacted on their progress at school. Likewise, more than one-third of children (38%) reported having trouble either making friends, playing with other children or taking part in sport/leisure activities at school as a result of the bullying behaviour (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

4.5.2 Mental wellbeing

Idsoe, Dyregrov & Idsoe (2012) consider the effects of bullying from the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Using data from a nationally representative survey of Norwegian students in Years 8 and 9, researchers examined the relationship between students' self-reported involvement in bullying and their outcomes on The Children's Impact of Events Scale. Results from the 1104 participants indicated that males were more than twice as likely as females to be exposed to repeated incidents of bullying. It also showed a strong association between frequency of bullying and PTSD. For those students who were bullied, they found:

Slightly more than one third of the students who reported being bullied had scores within the clinical range for PTSD symptoms. When splitting for gender, we found that girls had significantly higher average levels and clinical range levels of PTSD symptoms. The chance of falling within the clinical range for PTSD symptoms was about twice as high for girls as for boys (p. 907).

The impact on students who both engaged in bullying and were subjected to bullying was assessed as more significant than for those students who were subjected to bullying only:

... we found that belonging to this group had an additional effect on PTSD symptoms. This is in accordance with well-established findings involving other psychiatric problems like depressive symptoms, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts. Furthermore, it was only being involved in frequent bullying (on a daily basis) that added to the variance explained in PTSD symptoms (p. 907).

Similarly, 'being bullied, victimised and/or ostracised by peers is a significant predictor of mental health difficulties in children and adolescents with disability, regardless of the severity of the disability' (Dix, Jarvis & Slee, 2013, p. 15).

A comparative investigation into differences in the impact of in-person bullying and that conducted online was carried out using a dataset of 3112 students surveyed about their experiences with bullying (referring to in-person bullying as 'traditional') (Campbell et al., 2012). They found that, although students who had been bullied in person reported that they felt their bullying was harsher and had more impact on their lives than those students who had been bullied online, the correlates of their mental health revealed that those bullied online actually reported significantly more social difficulties, and higher levels of

anxiety and depression (p. 389). Spears et al. (2014a) suggest the outcomes from this study are consistent with other international research which found that peer victimisation was related to both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among children and adolescents, and that online bullying was more strongly related than face-to-face bullying.

Suicidal ideation and truancy were examined in a Singapore study of 3382 students in primary and secondary school exploring gender differences and access to technology as mediators in experiences of bullying (Holt et al., 2013). Findings indicated that a strong relationship exists between students absenting themselves from school and experiencing suicidal ideations in response to all forms of bullying. The authors of the study suggest this is further evidence of the significant impact online bullying can have in the 'real world' for students.

4.5.3 Impact for students in schools where bullying is the 'norm'

A study undertaken by Dutch researchers tested the relationship between the prevalence of bullying in a classroom and its association with subclinical psychotic experiences by students who engaged in or were targeted by bullying (Horrevorts et al., 2014). The prevalence of bullying in a classroom was calculated as the percentage of students in the class who engaged in bullying, were subjected to bullying, or both.

Findings from the analysis of 5509 questionnaires administered to students between the ages of 12 and 16 suggest that, in addition to increased risk of subclinical psychotic experiences for those engaged in and subjected to bullying, the climate of the classroom had a measureable effect on student wellbeing. Contrary to what might be expected, students who were bullied in classrooms where bullying was more common experienced fewer negative effects than those in classrooms with less bullying. The authors pondered whether this was because:

... in these classes victims find more support from other victims, which may buffer the negative effect of bullying on their psychological functioning. Victims may reach out for each other and get support from the fact that they are not the only ones who are being bullied. This is in line with the ethnic or group density hypothesis ... [and other research] in which victims of bullying reported higher levels of anxiety and had a lower self-esteem than children who were not bullied. However, when they witnessed someone else being bullied, they felt less anxious and had a higher self-esteem on days when they were bullied themselves. They only felt humiliated and angry when they saw themselves as lone targets. Some victims blame themselves for being bullied. Witnessing someone else being bullied in a classroom could also reduce their thoughts of self-blame: 'it's not only me, so I'm not the one to blame'. This could also partly explain the fact that the interaction with bully climate is only

found for victims and not for bullies and bully-victims. Victims are personally affected when they are being bullied, as some of them tend to blame themselves for it. The more other kids are being bullied, the less they need to blame themselves and thus the less it may personally affect them (p. 770).

The importance of school climate will be discussed in Chapter 6.

4.5.4 Long-term effects

Participants in the aforementioned study of Greek adolescents (Politis et al., 2014) who reported being subjected to bullying were found to have a higher, independently associated rate of health complaints including backache, dizziness and fatigue. The impact on mental health and wellbeing was investigated in a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies concerned with the relationship between depression and exposure to bullying in childhood (Ttofi et al., 2011b). Findings from this extensive review suggested that the long-term effects can be identified in adults up to 36 years later. Being subjected to bullying was found to be a significant risk factor for later depression, with those who were younger when involved in the bullying incidents more likely to have a greater difficulty with their mental health.

Data from a comprehensive longitudinal study conducted in North Carolina captured the experiences of three cohorts aged nine, 11 and 13 when the study began in 1993 (Wolke

Being bullied is not a harmless rite of passage or an inevitable part of growing up but throws a long shadow over affected children's lives.

et al., 2013). Students in these cohorts were reinterviewed annually until they reached the age of 16 years, and then, as the students moved into adulthood, were followed up at ages 19, 21, 24 and 26

years. Of the original 1420 students who commenced the study, only 147 did not complete the sequence of data collection time samples, providing researchers with a full dataset for 1273 individuals. In this study, researchers examined the contact with bullying these individuals experienced as students, and then assessed the status of their health, behaviour, finances and social wellbeing as adults, reporting that:

Involvement with bullying in any role was predictive of negative health, financial, behavioral, and social outcomes in adulthood. Once we adjusted for family hardship and childhood psychiatric disorders, risk of impaired health, wealth, and social relationships in adulthood continued to be elevated in victims and bully-victims. The greatest impairment across multiple areas of adult functioning was found for bully-victims. In contrast, pure bullies were not at increased risk of poor outcomes in adulthood once other family and childhood risk factors were taken into account ... Being bullied is not a

harmless rite of passage or an inevitable part of growing up but throws a long shadow over affected children's lives (pp. 1967–1968).

It is important to note that correlation is not enough evidence that one

causes the other; it is not clear whether bullying experiences cause these adjustment problems, or whether early signs of these problems make individual students stand out. Some personal attributes of 'victims' may make them a 'safe target' and allow the person doing the bullying to feel powerful (Juvonen & Graham, 2014, p. 165).

The research indicates that the most important thing is to avoid simplistic assumptions about causality as the basis of unsophisticated intervention programs. It is likely the relationship between being bullied and later problems is reciprocal, possibly reflecting a cyclical process which occurs over years.

... the most important thing is to avoid simplistic assumptions about causality as the basis of unsophisticated intervention programs. It is likely the relationship between being bullied and later problems is reciprocal, possibly reflecting a cyclical process which occurs over years.

4.5.5 Are some types of bullying more harmful than others?

A scientific approach to investigating relative harm involves defining the types of actions and behaviours, and then studying the various contextual features that make such acts, in some situations and relationships, more harmful than others (Finkelhor, Turner & Hamby, 2012). These features can include the type of action, the status of the people involved and the type of relationship. The lack of consistency in naming the types of actions, the roles of participants, and various other aspects of bullying have complicated this area of research, so the picture is not clear.

A range of ways of labelling the types of actions in bullying continue to exist in research. The most commonly described types of actions within bullying fall into one of the following categories:

- verbal actions: name-calling, mocking, exaggerated mimicking, threatening etc.
- physical actions: punching, kicking, pinching, biting, slapping, tripping, shoving, damaging property etc.
- social or relational actions: starting rumours, gossiping, excluding from groups, sharing private information or images to undermine or destroy relationships.

Verbal, physical and social actions in bullying can be overt or covert, direct or indirect, face-to-face or online.

A German study of 409 students in Years 8 and 9 sought to discover if verbal, physical and social forms of bullying affected children differently in terms of coping and

Verbal, physical and social actions in bullying can be overt or covert, direct or indirect, face-to-face or online.

adjustment responses (Hampel, Manhal & Hayer, 2009). Being subjected to any of these forms of bullying was associated with greater difficulties in coping and increased likelihood of emotional and

behavioural problems. In this study, the greatest problems were identified in students who had been subjected to direct and social forms of bullying.

The ability allowed by technology to continue bullying at all hours has led to suggestions that online bullying is more 'harmful' than bullying which occurs in face-to-face encounters because it is inescapable. Corby et al. (2014) used the concepts 'omnipresent', 'anonymity', 'lack of nonverbal cues' and 'unlimited audience' as possible explanations for why online bullying could cause greater harm.

In their discussion of harm-creating processes associated with online bullying, Slonje, Smith and Frisé (2012) point out:

... differences exist between the two types [online and offline] as well ... such as the 24/7 (that someone can be bullied at any and every time and/or place) aspect in cyberbullying, or the larger breadth of audience. Another difference is due to the nature of information and communication technologies (ICTs). That is, the bullying may more readily 'snowball' out of the bully's initial control.

Australian research has found a correlation between online bullying and more significant negative outcomes in mental health, including more social difficulties and

... the greatest problems were identified in students who had been subjected to direct and social forms of bullying.

higher levels of anxiety and depression than young people who experience face-to-face bullying (Campbell et al., 2012, p. 389; Spears et al., 2014a). Measures of negative outcomes is an important way to investigate harm, however,

in determining which types of bullying are more harmful, the perspective of young people in relation to bullying is essential.

Few studies have directly asked students about their perceptions of harm. An exception is a survey of 156 students between 10 and 17 years of age by Corby et al. (2014), which found that a majority of students (59%)

considered face-to-face bullying was 'more harmful', a substantial number said they are the same in terms of harm (26%) and the remainder (15%) considered online bullying to be worse.

Those who would then suggest that the pervasiveness with which online bullying can envelop a student's life is more serious or significant than other forms of bullying perhaps fail to acknowledge the varying impacts different bullying experiences may have on individuals. The impact is not predicated solely on whether the bullying is face-to-face or online — there are other factors at play, as suggested by Corby et al. (2014). They identified the relationship with, and opinion of, the person doing the bullying as critical in the perception of harm, and the presence of, and negative responses from, bystanders in 'real time' as having an impact in terms of how hurtful an incident was. Interestingly, survey participants did not identify the potential scale of the online audience as having an impact.

Unsurprisingly, the types of actions, proximity of the person doing the bullying and the intensity of the bullying influenced perceptions of harm. Physical attacks as part of bullying were mentioned as 'worse' than online bullying, as students continued to feel fearful of further attacks. The ability (or inability) to take action was a final factor mentioned in young people's assessment of harm, with the inability to take action and a strong feeling of helplessness or powerlessness in face-to-face bullying a critical issue. This complexity means it is impossible to accurately anticipate or measure harm for each type of bullying across the dimensions of physical/verbal/social, in-person/online, direct/indirect, covert/overt; the effects of bullying are specific to the individual and each incident.

... it is impossible to accurately anticipate or measure harm for each type of bullying ... the effects of bullying are specific to the individual and each incident.

The relative anonymity offered by technology for those bullying others online was examined by Bryce and Fraser (2013). Focus group discussions with 108 youths aged between nine and 19 were held to gauge their perceptions and experiences of online bullying, with semi-structured research and probe questions used to burrow into the qualitative detail for some of the conversations. Results suggest that online bullying is seen by young people as 'routine, inevitable, and an unfortunate feature of their online interactions' (p. 786). Participants did convey, however, a belief that they could manage these situations — a finding inconsistent with some other studies (Corby et al., 2014), but which Bryce and Fraser (2013) believe may reflect the success of educational strategies addressing online bullying, appropriate behaviour online and possible responses.

The results suggested that the seriousness with which online bullying was regarded varied when the source or identity of the person engaged in the behaviour was known — while participants were concerned about anonymous forms of online bullying, they reported greater distress in relation to that carried out by individuals they knew. Interestingly, participants also commented that while anonymity was obviously an influential factor in the behaviour of some young people engaging in online bullying, it was the distance from those affected by the behaviours that appeared to be more significant. Participants considered that the lack of face-to-face interaction and not witnessing the impact on the other person had greater importance than anonymity (p. 785). Canty et al. (2014) suggest a word more useful than ‘anonymous’ would be ‘faceless’, that is, the removal of non-verbal cues from the social interaction, and the consequent disinhibitions which have been widely reported in research, and referred to above by young people.

... while anonymity was obviously an influential factor in the behaviour of some young people engaging in online bullying, it was the distance from those affected by the behaviours that appeared to be more significant.

Regardless of type, the effect on students subjected to it can be serious, including problems in academic engagement, psychosocial problems, depression, low self-esteem and externalised hostility.

In summary, the question of whether some types of bullying are more harmful than others has not been answered. Regardless of type, the effect on students subjected to it can be serious, including problems in academic engagement, psychosocial problems, depression, low self-esteem and externalised hostility (Ortega et al., 2012), as discussed previously.

4.5.6 Exposure to other violence

Students who are exposed to multiple forms of violence in their lives, crossing home–school–community boundaries, may be particularly vulnerable to adverse outcomes. Children who experience bullying have a higher risk of poor educational outcomes. In particular, children who are bullied by peers at school while also experiencing abuse at home or in their community are at considerably higher risk of poor academic performance. Additionally, one study found that children experiencing multiple forms of violence were highly likely to engage in bullying as well as be

targeted by bullying, extending the consequences of child abuse from the individuals themselves to their school-based peers (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2014, p. 10)

4.6 Impact of being a bystander to bullying

It is worth noting the growing body of evidence pointing to the impact of witnessing, or occupying the role of bystander in relation to, bullying (Rivers et al., 2009). Rivers and Noret (2013, p. 532) note in their study of 1500 secondary school students in England that those ‘who observed bullying behaviour were significantly more likely than those not involved in bullying to report symptoms of interpersonal sensitivity, to indicate greater helplessness and potential suicide ideation’.

The study of bystanders by Forsberg, Thornberg and Samuelsson (2014), discussed earlier, also explored this issue, and used the term ‘moral distress’ as a concept to describe ‘painful feelings or psychological distress that occur when a person is conscious of the morally appropriate action but cannot carry out that action because of external or situational obstacles’ (pp. 568–569). They note that while many students may state they are against bullying, the experience of having to act when involved or witnessing such an event is much more complex and difficult than many are prepared for — including confusion about loyalty to friends in these situations.

Bystanders can experience distress in dealing with the dilemmas in working out what is occurring, how they feel about the situation, and what moral frame — or construction of morality created and maintained in the school setting — they might take (Thornberg, 2010). The moral frames the author suggested included:

- the ‘good’ student
- institutionalised moral disengagement
- tribe caring
- gentle caring-girl morality
- social hierarchy-dependent morality.

The desire or awareness of the characteristics associated with each of these moral frames appears, at least in part, to serve as both a mental template for students to consider what role they could take, and a reminder of their failure to meet the expectations they themselves have set for those positions in a group situation. This is what Carse (2013) calls ‘moral distress’ — anxiety or concern about one’s capacity to meet challenges to one’s integrity, and the sense that one has failed to meet these challenges, betraying fundamental moral values or

Bystanders can experience distress in dealing with the dilemmas in working out what is occurring, how they feel about the situation

commitments. When the sense of moral failure is compounded by feelings of frustration or impotence, of being constrained or impeded in acting as one believes one ought, the results is a sense of moral disempowerment.

More work is needed in this complex area.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that much of the available evidence on impacts and harm is derived from research conducted in the Western world (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014, p. 119). A cultural and language gap may exist in available research, with potential patterns and impacts not yet fully realised as a result.

4.7 Conclusions

This chapter explored the impact of bullying on student wellbeing, educational engagement and long-term mental wellbeing.

Research has identified negative impacts for not only those who are bullied, but those who bully others, and those who witness bullying. Given the social dynamic nature of bullying, individuals are particularly harmed through experiencing contempt and exclusion from peer relationships.

The negative social and health outcomes observed in children and young people who persistently bully others suggest that such behaviour is a warning signal to educators for closer attention and action from parents and schools. The correlation of student bullying with a range of adverse later impacts provides a strong rationale for intervention.

The immediate and long-term impacts of being bullied are perhaps the most researched aspect of bullying. Negative impacts have been observed in school engagement, academic achievement and many aspects of wellbeing while at school, and long-term impacts have been identified for physical and mental health. It is likely the relationship between being bullied and these later problems is complex and reciprocal (rather than simply causal), possibly reflecting a cycle of harm over years.

In terms of negative impacts, the most significant problems have been noted in students subjected to direct and relational forms of bullying. While some previous research has suggested that online bullying leads to more significant negative outcomes, the majority of students in a recent study considered face-to-face bullying more harmful than online bullying. Many factors have been identified in students' assessment of harm, and it seems likely the effects of bullying are specific to the individual.

The impact on bystanders to bullying is an area that has only recently been investigated. For many students, the moral distress and social anxiety experienced by witnessing or having to act in response to a disturbing incident which they consider to be wrong, while feeling concerns about

their own status or safety, is more difficult and complex than they are prepared for.

In summary, a large body of research has provided evidence of the various negative impacts associated with involvement in any aspect of bullying at school. It would be overly simplistic to attribute poor life outcomes to a single aspect of a student's life, ignoring the complex influences of other environmental, personal and developmental differences. However, it is clear that bullying is associated with numerous and lasting negative impacts on individuals' physical and mental wellbeing into adulthood.

Chapter 5: What role do parents and carers have in relation to bullying?



5.1 Introduction

The role and influence of families in relation to all forms of bullying is significant (Baek, 2013; Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013; Holt, Kaufman Kantor & Finkelhor, 2008; O'Moore, 2011). Based on his long background in research on bullying in schools, Dr Olweus (2013) voiced his opinion

... parents are essential partners with schools in changing the behaviours of children who engage in bullying and in helping children who have been bullied by others.

that parents are essential partners with schools in changing the behaviours of children who engage in bullying and in helping children who have been bullied by others.

This chapter explores both the influence of the home and parental background

on the likelihood that bullying will happen, and also the important role of parents and carers in addressing bullying if their child is involved in any way. (The term 'parent' will be used throughout to encompass parents and other carers).

5.2 Influence of home environment and parent–child relationships

Cross and Barnes (2014) point out that families are dynamic, interactive, interdependent systems with all members (including children) contributing to the development of patterns of behaviour and norms about aggression, conflict resolution and bullying. Children and young people develop ways of behaving through interactions with the family in private at home, in extended family contexts, with service providers and with the wider society.

The home environment and the quality of the relationship between children and young people and their parents have a significant influence on their risk of experiencing bullying.

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A number of parenting style or family-related factors have been acknowledged as influential in relation to students engaging in bullying, including:

- paternal unemployment — associated with a threefold increase in the likelihood of a child bullying others online (Arslan et al., 2012)

- parent–child conflict — higher likelihood of child engaging in bullying at school or being subjected to it (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013)
- closer monitoring of child's activities by mother — reduced likelihood of engagement in bullying or being subjected to it (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013)
- children who feel able to openly discuss their daily school experiences with parents — unlikely to be involved in any form of bullying (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013).

Holt, Kaufman Kantor and Finkelhor (2008) suggest relational characteristics within the family appear to influence how children behave at school and talk with their parents about behaviour. The research related to parenting behaviours suggests those children who were bullied had homes more likely to be characterised by higher levels of criticism, fewer rules and more child maltreatment, and those children who bullied others had homes more likely to be characterised by lack of supervision, child maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence (pp. 42–43). In this research, children reported their involvement in bullying at much higher rates than their parents indicated was occurring, supporting the suggestion that communication is not always open and reliable in families.

For children who are bullied, the nature of the parent–child relationship can provide a degree of protection. A study by Hemphill, Tollit and Herrenkohl (2013, p. 125) investigating protective factors related to adolescent involvement in bullying at school found that opportunities for

... person-centred approaches used by parents are more effective than autocratic, punishment-based strategies to address problems ...

prosocial involvement in the family lessened subsequent involvement in nonviolent antisocial behaviour. Having strategies to cope with stress reduced young adult depressive symptoms for participants who had been bullied. In a similar vein, social and health assessments of nearly 600 students in the US revealed that 'both parental warmth and teacher support were uniquely associated with a lower risk for peer victimization' (Karlsson et al., 2014, p. 773).

In a qualitative study of family factors and their impact on adolescent bullying (Bibou-Nakou et al, 2013), 90 Greek secondary school students were interviewed in groups about how their friendships and relationships functioned. The researchers were deliberate in their planning not to ask questions about bullying, as they wanted to avoid influencing the students' perceptions about the topic, and to instead capture student-initiated conversations on the

matter. Three themes emerged in relation to family-related factors and bullying:

- difficult home environment with many conflicts between the spouses or between the parents and the young adolescents
- parenting styles such as parental overprotection, lack of supervision, or excessive control, and
- domestic abuse.

This provides further evidence to support claims made in the Coffin, Larson & Cross (2010, p. 83) study in Indigenous communities, where researchers unpacked some of the intra-familial dimensions to the problem of bullying, reporting that 'Bullying that happens within the family, between siblings, cousins and also parents, provides opportunities ... to learn and practise these behaviours'. In this study, attitudes of parents towards physical violence as an effective way of dealing with problems of bullying were frequently expressed (p. 83), both as a punishment for bullying and to fight back against being bullied.

Perren et al. (2012) suggested that person-centred approaches used by parents are more effective than autocratic, punishment-based strategies to address problems associated with online bullying, and that:

... child-centred, authoritative parents seem to have a positive influence, for example, by reducing the actual time spent online, by monitoring internet use, by negotiating boundaries and by demonstrating a helpful interest in the interpersonal and social lives of their offspring. Researchers need to ask questions about the parenting practices adopted within families before making generalisations about the role of parents in prevention, reduction and protection against negative effects.

The connection between abusive or aversive home environments and bullying at school was also explored in a literature review by Hong et al. (2012). Their review looked at four factors that appeared to be associated with a higher risk of involvement in bullying at school — emotional dysregulation, depression, anger and social skills deficit. Based on their review of current literature, they claim that strong relationships at school can ameliorate many of the negative outcomes associated with negative home environment (p. 179). This will be explored further in Chapter 6.

Cross and Barnes (2014) conclude that 'blaming' parents, carers and other family members for the behaviour of children or young people is not useful. Instead, they suggest a focus on how these behaviour patterns can be adjusted through support and interaction with the school.

5.3 Family history of bullying

Family histories are also proving to be informative in mapping patterns of bullying over time, and understanding intra-familial characteristics that may place some children at higher risk of exposure to bullying (Allison et al., 2014).

A South Australian study interviewed 1800 parents about their childhood

reflections on bullying, in particular their personal contact with traumatic bullying. The purpose of the research was to establish

... parental victimisation remained a strong predictor for the children's victimisation at school.

whether a parent's history of being bullied had any influence on the likelihood of their own children being subjected to similar experiences. Results suggest that children whose parents were subjected to bullying in their childhood are at an increased risk of experiencing similar abuses. Even when:

... controlling for the parents' age, gender, socioeconomic status and health-related quality of life (physical and emotional components), parental victimisation remained a strong predictor for the children's victimisation at school (relative risk=2.00). In 9.3% of the sample, both parent and child experienced bullying during their schooling ... Parent and child dyads can be exposed sequentially to school bullying. In some instances, they may share familial characteristics that are exploited by bullies (p. 149).

Parent histories were also the focus of research by Cooper and Nickerson (2013) who surveyed 260 families in the US about their involvement in bullying as children and their current views and thoughts on coping with these experiences. While some parents disclosed their role in performing acts of bullying toward others (17.6%), more reported that they had themselves been subjected to bullying (38.2%) or

had observed bullying occurring (34.5%).

Involvement in bullying previously, either as a participant or observer, appeared to have a strong influence on the current attitudes expressed by

Involvement in bullying previously, either as a participant or observer, appeared to have a strong influence on the current attitudes expressed by parents ...

parents, with the majority expressing their belief that it is unacceptable behaviour and that positive, prosocial interventions are needed to address the issues.

5.4 Parental knowledge that bullying is occurring

Parental support is, in some regards, dependent on the awareness parents have of how bullying is conducted, including technology used to deliver online bullying (Karlsson et al., 2014, p. 773). Children may be experiencing forms of bullying not obvious to adults (e.g. covert social bullying), and some online bullying may occur without parents being aware, with it only coming to their attention when actively reported by the child or another individual.

A US study of concurrence between parents and children in relation to involvement in bullying revealed that parents of children who engage in bullying appeared unaware of their children's behaviour (Holt, Kaufman Kantor & Finkelhor, 2008). Researchers surveyed 205 students in Year 5 and their parents, and found that:

In terms of reporting teasing or picking on others, 31% of students indicated that they had teased or picked on others whereas only 11% of parents thought that their child had teased or picked on others. With respect to concordance, among children who reported teasing others only 2% of their parents also indicated that their child had teased others, whereas 11% of parents did not believe that their child had teased others (p. 54).

It should be noted that only a few quality studies are available to inform this aspect of bullying and relationships.

Parents were identified as the most likely adult for students in Years 5 and 6 to seek out for comfort when they felt they were being bullied, according to an Australian study investigating help-seeking patterns (Dowling & Carey, 2013). Using a self-reporting questionnaire, researchers collected data from 259 students attending a mix of government and non-government schools in a metropolitan location. Years 5 and 6 were chosen as the focus stages for the study as researchers relied on evidence suggesting bullying was at a peak during this time. The results of the questionnaire indicated that 73.7 per cent of students did not report every instance of bullying they experienced; however, when students did seek assistance, the people they sought out were:

- parents — 77.8%
- close friend — 72%
- classmate — 48.4%
- teacher — 45.3%

Parents were identified as the most likely adult for students in Years 5 and 6 to seek out for comfort when they felt they were being bullied...

- sibling — 36.5%
- another school staff member — 18.5%.

The assistance sought by students (i.e. who they went to) varied depending on the goal that they hoped to achieve by disclosing their experiences:

The goal endorsed by most victims regarding the bullying was to have it stop as well as getting back at the bully ... Interestingly, although getting back at the bully was endorsed quite frequently, it was not one of the most strongly desired goals. The two most strongly desired goals were stopping the bullying and feeling better. With regard to reporting the bullying, students felt teachers were the most likely to stop the bullying, yet a close friend was the easiest to talk to about the bullying, and a parent was reported as being the most concerned (p. 806).

As students grow older, the reliance on friends and peers as confidants becomes stronger, and they become less inclined to disclose their experiences with bullying to adults (Dowling & Carey, 2013). In British Columbia, 315 parents were interviewed about their familiarity with social networking and their alertness to online bullying (Cassidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012). The results showed that

... those young people who expressed reluctance to tell parents about being bullied online feared punishment, removal of privileges or confiscation of phones and computers.

parents were not very familiar with forms of online social networking, such as Facebook, blogs and chat rooms. Further, they are not overly concerned about the problem of bullying in these contexts, nor were they aware of the extent of online bullying among their children (p. 415).

This lack of awareness may be subtly encouraged by their children, as Perren et al. (2012) suggest that those young people who expressed reluctance to tell parents about being bullied online feared punishment, removal of privileges or confiscation of phones and computers. This has been found by a number of studies. Holt et al. (2013) stress the critical importance of supervising children's use of technology. They suggest that children are less likely to report bullying via mobile devices if they are concerned they may lose the device altogether. Thus, parents must carefully educate their children on the risk of bullying via mobile phones, tablets and other devices and increase the likelihood of reporting by ensuring that children feel safe to speak to one or both parents about negative experiences (p. 36).

O'Moore (2011) acknowledged that it can be a challenge for parents to get information from young people about being bullied. O'Moore (pp. 180–194) suggests parents should

aim to keep communication with their children open so they can support them to raise issues if they occur by:

- talking regularly and openly with children about bullying, including online bullying, and ways to respond to these situations if they arise (e.g. what the child might do in response if bullying were to happen)
- encouraging children to tell, to report what is happening to them
- discussing peer pressure and its effects
- helping them become assertive individuals
- supporting their development of empathy
- providing opportunities for children to build their self-esteem
- strengthening resilience by supporting children to cope with setbacks and to bounce back
- encouraging friendships
- involving them in sport
- building their skills in conflict resolution and mediation
- advocating for them to take a role in defending others.

... parents should aim to keep communication with their children open so they can support them to raise issues if they occur ...

Kozina (2014) also promotes positive interaction at home through placing limits on young people's recreational time on computers and the internet, and involving them instead in household activities.

Examining the correlation between serious mental health issues and online bullying, Holt et al. (2013) stressed the role of parents in remaining alert to changes in their child's demeanour as a potential symptom of bullying experiences. A comprehensive list of observable behaviours which parents should remain alert to is provided in Appendix A.

5.5 Helping children who have been bullied

No quality empirical research on the relative effectiveness of different parenting approaches specifically related to bullying was found in the period for this review (2010–2014).

Most research involved interviews with parents and opinions of adults about effective responses. Parents' approaches to dealing with bullying fall into two groups:

- those who felt control and punishment were necessary
- those who felt a collaborative method of working with children, teachers and others was more productive (Cassidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012).

In their study of 315 parents in British Columbia, Cassidy and colleagues (2012) surveyed participants about social networking and technology, their awareness and

experience with online bullying, and ideas they had for addressing these situations. While not overly familiar with contemporary social networking technologies or concerned about online bullying exposure, the majority of parents shied away from interventions that were punitive in focus. Parents suggested instead that a more effective way, in the long term, was for adults in the home and school to model the right behaviour, provide opportunities for discussion with youth and develop lessons on this theme at school (pp. 415–416).

In a review of literature about recommended actions for parents, Lovegrove et al. (2013) highlighted what they considered to be effective and ineffective approaches, including those which may inadvertently cause more harm, for example, telling the child to fight back, or parents directly confronting the child doing the bullying. They pointed to the lack of empirical research on the effectiveness of strategies commonly recommended to parents. While critical of the lack of published material about how parents do respond when faced with issues of bullying involving their child, they found that the following recommendations were supported by some evidence in research:

... a more effective way, in the long term, was for adults in the home and school to model the right behaviour, provide opportunities for discussion with youth and develop lessons on this theme at school.

- keep communication with the child open
- be alert to warning signs
- act as a role model in being kind
- work positively with the school
- promote the child's strengths.

Olweus (2013, pp. 97–99) advises parents who suspect or know their children are being bullied by others to:

- inform the school immediately
- focus attention on activities that build the child's prosocial attributes
- encourage physical fitness, including group sports
- facilitate social contact with positive peers
- avoid becoming overprotective or sheltering the child from social interactions outside of the family
- help the child understand behaviours that can attract negative attention of peers
- seek specialist assistance from child psychiatrist or psychologist.

These 'good practices' are suggestions only, without strong evidence into their effectiveness in dealing with bullying. However, as mentioned in Section 5.2, the broader research into effective parenting and contemporary shifts in proactive and reactive parenting suggests that person-

centred, authoritative approaches are more effective than autocratic, punishment-based strategies to address problems associated with online bullying (Perren et al., 2012).

5.6 Helping children who demonstrate bullying

As part of the series of information sheets published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Lodge (2014) lists 10 steps for parents of children who are engaged in bullying. These are general points drawn from wider behavioural research, and while not grounded in empirical evidence related specifically to bullying, they offer some practical strategies to approach the issue:

- stay calm — avoid blame and focus on potential solutions
- talk with the child — let the child know firmly that bullying is unacceptable, and that it must stop
- ask why — try to find out if there is something troubling the child either at school or at home
- get on board — take it seriously; support the school policy
- set clear, but reasonable rules — reward good behaviour and follow through with consequences
- monitor the child — supervise and give immediate feedback on their progress
- create a respectful home — encourage respectful and kind actions between family members
- spend time with the child — nurture the relationship and model positive ways of dealing with conflict
- make a commitment — support the child's efforts to improve
- get help if things don't improve — it's a good idea to seek professional advice.

Similar suggestions come from Olweus (2013), who says parents of children who display bullying towards others are encouraged to:

- make it apparent that the behaviour is unacceptable
- ensure their child understands it is a serious matter
- work with the school to ensure consistency in negative responses to the child
- have clear, posted family rules
- punish misbehaviour
- become more familiar with the peers and activities of their child
- spend more time with their child (pp. 95–96).

5.7 Collaboration between home and school

One of the findings repeatedly highlighted in research about preventative actions parents and schools can take to address bullying in schools is the importance of cooperation and communication between home and school (American Educational Research Association, 2013; Holt, Kaufman Kantor & Finkelhor, 2008; Kyriakides & Creemers, 2013). However, such cooperation between home and school can be difficult to establish and sustain over time.

5.7.1 Parental views about working with the school

Reluctance or failure of parents to engage with the school when issues of bullying arise may leave children vulnerable. Waasdorp, Bradshaw and Duong (2011) found that parental views of school climate have an impact on the willingness of parents to engage around the issues of bullying (see section 6.2.2 for more discussion). Differences were noted, however, as children aged through the school system — with parents of older children less willing to leave management of these types of behavioural issues to the school.

It is also important for school staff to acknowledge the varying capacities of families to contribute or collaborate with them in ways that schools view as effective or productive. For some parents, their own experience of bullying in schools or cultural histories (e.g. seeing schools as authority) may serve as barriers to participation in school events, activities or meetings.

O'Moore (2011) draws attention to another aspect of parenting which is not often discussed or considered in research related to bullying in schools. The emotions experienced by parents of children who have been subjected to bullying can be intense and traumatic, and can trigger a desire to seek revenge against those who have hurt their child. O'Moore (2011) says that anger, and guilt about not having been aware of what was going on, need to be acknowledged as understandable responses in parents who discover their child has been bullied. School staff have a role to play in creating positive networks of communication and relationships with parents, and while parental willingness to engage with the school can be an issue, ensuring collaboration occurs is the school's responsibility.

5.7.2 Practical strategies for collaboration

The need for joint home and school efforts in preventing and responding to bullying were raised in a study of 90 students in five Greek secondary schools (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2013). Students participating in focus groups were questioned about how they felt about and managed different social relationships, conflict and difficult interactions. The pervasiveness of the relationship issues discussed by these students led researchers to promote the

extension of intervention strategies for bullying beyond the classroom to the broader community. Families need to be seen as essential partners in dealing with the problem of bullying. However, it is important to take into consideration the strengths and the limits of students' families when planning intervention programs for the prevention of bullying (p. 64).

The long-term cost of bullying report from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2014) in the UK suggests

... national awareness campaigns have an important role in raising awareness of parents about bullying within families (siblings), as well as that occurring with peers, and provide practical strategies of how to talk to children, and constructive ways of supporting children and communicating with the school.

there is value in wider community integration of interventions for bullying (e.g. involving sporting clubs), but does not offer specific practical suggestions on how to operationalise the recommendations related to parental and community engagement. The report also says national awareness campaigns have an important role in raising awareness of parents about bullying within families (siblings), as well as that occurring

with peers, and provide practical strategies of how to talk to children, and constructive ways of supporting children and communicating with the school. It suggests that such broad community awareness campaigns support cooperation between home and school.

The value of schools collecting and sharing data (school opinion or safety surveys) on bullying incidents with parents is suggested as a practical means of engaging parents in this work (O'Moore, 2011). The use of reach-out communications for this work is highlighted for parents or families who are not usually closely involved in school activities, ensuring no section of the school community is left out. Olweus (2013) suggests that informal study groups could be created within existing parent-teacher associations to regularly review research publications or materials on the topic of bullying in schools. The aim is to improve parent and school staff knowledge about research-informed approaches to dealing with bullying in schools, and to provide a structured forum for open discussions between home and school.

Collaboration between home and school is advocated by numerous researchers, who promote the idea that parents are vital partners in countering school-based bullying. No research was found, however, on the impact of involving parents directly in the development of a school's bullying policy, a common suggestion for parental collaboration.

5.8 Conclusions

Bullying seeps into and out of the school context, and it is impossible to ignore the role of families and communities in this situation.

Research has established that both the quality of the parent-child relationship and parenting style have a significant influence on their risk of experiencing bullying. Child-centred, authoritative parents appear to have an overall positive influence. Interestingly, children whose parents were bullied in their childhood are more likely to be bullied, suggesting familial patterns of behaviour and social interaction may be involved.

Parental warmth (and also teacher support) was associated with a lower risk of being bullied and with reducing the impact of bullying. Parents and carers were the most likely adults for students up to Year 6 to tell about bullying, with friends and peers being relied on as confidants as students grew older.

In terms of particular strategies adopted by parents in response to bullying, research cannot provide empirical evidence regarding effectiveness. Most practical strategies suggested to parents are based on what is considered good practice drawn from a range of wider behavioural research. In general, person-centred approaches by parents are considered more effective than autocratic, punishment-based strategies to address bullying.

While the central importance of cooperation and communication between home and school is repeatedly highlighted in research about preventing bullying, establishing and maintaining genuine collaboration is challenging. Some parents may be reluctant or unable

It would be naïve to attempt to address bullying cultures and experiences in isolated silos of practice, where school and home are treated as separate and distinct settings without overlap. Parents are vital partners in countering school-based bullying.

to engage with schools, some are unaware of issues due to their child's unwillingness to disclose bullying, and some grapple with their own emotional responses to their child's bullying experience. The responsibility rests with schools to accommodate parents' involvement as much as feasible. Community services have a role in complementing the work done by schools, providing targeted support to young people and their families outside the school setting. Wide-scale community engagement, including national awareness campaigns about bullying, supports parents to develop skills and knowledge and contribute to positive collaboration between home and schools.

It would be naïve to attempt to address bullying cultures and experiences in isolated silos of practice, where school and home are treated as separate and distinct settings without overlap. Parents are vital partners in countering school-based bullying. Collaboration between parents and carers and schools, despite its challenges, is central to positive solutions to bullying.

Chapter 6: What is the role of school culture and climate in countering bullying?



6.1 Introduction

It would be useful if research could provide a list of factors in the environment which are proven to be effective in terms of prevention and intervention across various settings; however, in reality the link between environment and bullying is complex. The features of the school environment, particularly school culture and school climate, are the focus of a sizeable body of research into countering bullying.

This chapter explores a range of factors in the school climate that research suggests have influence on the occurrence of bullying in school settings.

6.2 Influence of school culture and school climate on bullying

The relationship between school culture, school climate and bullying is observable and measureable; numerous studies have provided strong empirical data demonstrating the nature and strength of the correlation between in-school codes of interaction and socialisation (Kyriakides & Creemers, 2013).

‘School climate’ refers to the observable milieu created by interactions among and between adults and students. Skinner, Babinski and Gifford (2014) suggest that school climate encompasses factors such as safety and physical facilities, the organisational systems and processes, the quality and consistency of relationships in the school setting, and critically, the values and norms shared by members of the school, also known as ‘school culture’.

School culture encapsulates the dominant assumptions, beliefs and practices that are shared by the members of a school community. These mould how a school views itself. School culture is articulated in school documents and statements of ethics or values, and manifests in the way people in a school behave and relate to each other. Subcultures, which do not share the dominant values, can exist within the broader school culture.

School climate is the manifestation of such values, and is apparent to visitors to the school. School climate in turn influences individuals’ feelings about, and attachment to, the school, including their responses and expressions of approval or disapproval of bullying (Wang, Berry & Swearer, 2013).

In a US study accessing data from 11,674 students, 960 parents and 1027 staff at 44 schools, the association between witnessing bullying and various school-level indicators of disorder, norms regarding bullying, student, parent and staff perceptions of safety and belonging was investigated (Waasdorp et al., 2011, p. 115). They

identified the following features as strongly correlated with school-level predictors of safety and belonging:

- high teacher to student ratio
- more staff present to notice incidents of bullying and react accordingly
- socially dominant feature of disgust exhibited for students who exhibited bullying
- lower rates of indirect bullying (e.g. spreading rumours).

Richard, Schneider and Mallet (2012) specifically focused on school climate in their large-scale investigation of nearly 20,000 students in French schools. Data collected from a questionnaire about physical, verbal and social bullying were matched with the results from one querying the social climate of the school.

Analysis of this study revealed that schools with lower levels of bullying demonstrated more positive student–teacher relationships, and to a lesser extent had students with stronger bonds to

... the explicit involvement of teachers in anti-bullying actions and interventions as a major factor in addressing bullying in schools.

the school (i.e. liked school). Consistent with earlier studies, the Richard, Schneider and Mallet (2012) investigation also identified the explicit involvement of teachers in anti-bullying actions and interventions as a major factor in addressing bullying in schools. ‘... there was less bullying in schools that are perceived as safer, that have higher achieving students, and that have more positive student–teacher relationships’ (p. 276). The advice offered in relation to these research findings is for school based anti-bullying initiatives to ‘incorporate interventions designed to promote positive social interactions between students and teachers in particular, and between all members of the school community’ (p. 278).

... incorporate interventions designed to promote positive social interactions between students and teachers in particular, and between all members of the school community.

The focus on positive interactions and relationships with adults is also emphasised in a South Australian study into the influence of home and school factors on bullying (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010). A total of 888 students and

621 teachers from 22 schools (primary and secondary) participated in a study examining student feelings about peer, family and teacher support. Data collected from teachers provided another source of information to validate student perceptions of ‘fitting in’ or adaptive behaviours. While confirming findings from earlier studies of a correlation between difficulties in peer relationships and

children involved directly in bullying, researchers were also keen to stress that:

... relationships with teachers exerted an equally powerful influence on students' reports of bullying. Teachers need to be made aware that developing strong supportive relationships with students has a flow-on effect of reducing bullying ... the role of teachers as agents of change. Teachers are clearly in a strong position within the school context to make a significant impact on students' lives at school beyond the obvious, that is, on academic learning. It may seem self-evident to those who are aware of, and knowledgeable about, the connectedness between well-being and learning, that positive or negative relationships between teachers and students are an essential ingredient in optimizing the students' overall experience of school. However, it is likely that the direct connection between teacher relationships with students and bullying in particular, and between relationships and students' social/emotional well-being in general, is still under-represented and undervalued (pp. 271–290).

As discussed in Chapter 5, Hong et al. (2012) claimed that strong relationships with peers, students, and teachers and staff in classrooms and schools can ameliorate many of the negative outcomes associated with a negative home environment.

... the direct connection between teacher relationships with students and bullying in particular, and between relationships and students' social/emotional well-being in general, is still under-represented and undervalued.

These findings are echoed in the review of literature undertaken by Wang, Berry and Swearer (2013, p. 300), who reported that 'positive relationships among students and teachers, and negative attitudes toward inappropriate behaviour (e.g., bullying)' were two key elements of a positive school climate. They recommend that schools seek to counter bullying by fostering a positive school climate, with suggestions that focus on relationships, including:

- ensuring collaboration between students, parents and school staff
- ensuring adults (teachers and parents) demonstrate prosocial attitudes and behaviours
- ensuring adults (teachers and parents) do not engage in disruptive or inappropriate social behaviours (e.g. adult to adult verbal abuse or bullying)
- acting quickly and consistently to address any reports of bullying
- embedding strategies to promote a positive school climate within the regular curriculum

- using incidents as 'teachable moments' to explicitly address complex social and behavioural topics.

Padgett and Notar (2013) suggested that efforts to shift a school's climate away from permitting or supporting bullying should primarily target bystanders. Whole-school approaches will obviously include students and educators who may at some time find themselves witnessing bullying. The growing body of research into the role of school culture and climate in fostering or countering bullying suggests that the focus of anti-bullying efforts must expand beyond the focus on individual students to the entire school community. Whole-school approaches involve all members of the wider school community. Schools need a systemic, proactive and positive approach to dealing with aggression, including bullying, at all levels within the school.

... using incidents as 'teachable moments' to explicitly address complex social and behavioural topics.

Schools need a systemic, proactive and positive approach to dealing with aggression, including bullying, at all levels within the school.

6.2.1 Explicit teaching of values

One aspect of the school curriculum which appears to have both a direct and an indirect link to fostering a positive school climate is the teaching of values. Lovat et al. (2011) reported on Australian research that showed the explicit teaching of values for students can impact positively on the whole school community, resulting in a number of outcomes, including strengthened teacher–student relationships, positive classroom climate and ethos, improved student attitudes and behaviour, and high levels of student achievement.

The finding of a link between explicit values education and positive teacher–student relationships is relevant to the discussion above on the protective role of a positive teacher–student relationship with regards to bullying. Lovat et al. (2011) promote the idea of schools where values are thought about, taught, talked about, reflected on and enacted through the school through all school activities. They propose that the creation of a safe and inclusive environment which directly promotes positive student behaviour also indirectly promotes improved student learning, through greater student motivation to engage and learn. The authors state that, with less time required for teachers to manage inappropriate behaviour and deal with student conflict, and less time required by students in dealing with these things, more time is freed for the core purpose of schools. Other effects of the explicit teaching of values reported in the Australian research were a sense of calmness in the school, increased social cohesion, more consistency in staff responses to students, a clearer sense

of shared purpose, and enhanced respect for, and inclusion of, diversity.

6.2.2 Impact of school climate on parental intervention

While the factors and features of school climate which relate to bullying in schools are receiving scrutiny in research, the perspective of those external to the school and the impact school climate has on their behaviour are not typically acknowledged (James, 2012; Waasdorp, Bradshaw & Duong, 2011). Waasdorp, Bradshaw and Duong (2011) say the way in which parents perceive the school climate can affect their willingness to engage with the school. This may impact on cooperation and communication between home and school, which is considered necessary to countering bullying (American Educational Research Association, 2013; Holt, Kaufman Kantor & Finkelhor, 2008; Kyriakides & Creemers, 2013).

Using data gathered from an online survey of 700 parents, researchers were able to demonstrate that parents who held a favourable view about the climate at the school their child attended were *less likely* to interfere or inject themselves into any communication with the school about incidents of bullying involving their child (Waasdorp, Bradshaw & Duong, 2011):

Contrary to our hypothesis, parents who perceived the climate more favorably were less likely to contact the teacher and administrator or talk to their child. This suggests that parents of victimized youths who view the school as safe and supportive of their child may feel that the school is effectively and efficiently handling their child's victimization and consequently do not alert the school of their child's victimization. Conversely, the less positively the parents perceived the school climate, the more likely they were to talk to their child about the victimization (p. 331).

This is concerning on several levels, the most conspicuous being that parent perspectives of school climate and those experienced by their child may be quite different, and the reluctance or failure of the parent to engage with the school when issues of bullying arise may leave their child increasingly vulnerable.

More research in this area is essential to inform school policies around engagement with parents.

6.3 The role of teachers

A theme common to several studies of school factors impacting on the occurrence of bullying is the reaction or response of adults, and particularly in the school context, the response of teachers. This is a multifaceted issue.

6.3.1 Teacher ability to identify bullying

Adults, both parents and teachers, appear to be less aware than students of the true picture of bullying among children and young people in schools (Demaray et al., 2013). This is demonstrated in a recent US survey conducted of 137 students, their parents and teachers, which sought to compare their perceptions of bullying in one school. Findings from this small study indicated that students:

... reported significantly more victimization than their parents' reports or their teachers' reports. Parents reported significantly more victimization for their children than did their child's teachers ... While it is clear that parents are more aware of their child being victimized than teachers, both parents and teachers underestimated the extent that victimization occurs at school. This was especially apparent regarding parents and boys. It could be that the type of victimization that boys are more likely to experience may occur outside of the classroom (e.g., cafeteria, playground) where an administrator is more likely to intervene and call parents (pp. 2098–2100).

Given these patterns of low levels of disclosure, and the previously noted reluctance of some students to report bullying, parents and teachers need to provide a consistent message to students about the importance of reporting bullying (Dowling & Carey, 2013) and provide clear information about how to do so.

Teacher confidence about identifying bullying was explored in a Queensland-based study of early childhood educators' knowledge and attitudes towards bullying (Goryl, Neilsen-Hewett & Sweller, 2013). Survey data from 188 early childhood educators working in long day care and childcare centres, kindergartens and pre-Prep programs revealed that staff with university level qualifications were more confident in identifying and addressing bullying incidents than those with TAFE training alone. This suggests that length of years in service as an early childhood educator is related to increasing confidence in identifying and responding to incidents of bullying.

The study above involved self-reporting of confidence by teachers, but there was no measure of the accuracy of identification. The ability of school staff to determine the veracity of student claims about bullying presents yet another important element to the interactive nature of these situations (Gomez-Garibello et al., 2013). A group of 93 teachers aged between 19 and 65 years were shown video clips of young children recalling or reporting incidents of bullying, and were then asked to identify those they

... parents and teachers need to provide a consistent message to students about the importance of reporting bullying and provide clear information about how to do so.

believed were telling the truth from those who were being dishonest. Findings indicated that teachers' scores were only minimally better than those that would have been achieved through chance alone. Years of experience as a teacher did not appear to improve their accuracy; however, perhaps the most concerning finding was:

Educators were not very confident in their abilities to distinguish between children's true and false reports [of bullying] ... (but) all were significantly more confident in their overall ratings of false stories than true stories. While educators are not accurate in detecting deception, the current findings suggest that they may be over confident when assessing false accounts of bullying; condemning students that are falsely accused of bullying could have negative consequences for (the) student, their classmates, and for the teacher (p. 3).

Therefore, teacher confidence in identifying bullying seems to be related to years of experience, but accuracy is unaffected by years of experience alone. Specific training appears to be necessary to assist teachers to distinguish between bullying and other types of conflict which may appear superficially similar. Beyond the teacher's intervention to stop any immediate inappropriate behaviour and prevent harm to a child, the analysis and interpretation of any single act as part of bullying requires teachers to 'read' the intent of the students involved and interpret this with an understanding of the students' developmental stage (Davies, 2011). However, as discussed in Chapter 1, the determination of an individual's intent to do harm is usually the remit of the law.

Educators were not very confident in their abilities to distinguish between children's true and false reports [of bullying] ... (but) all were significantly more confident in their overall ratings of false stories than true stories.

6.3.2 Teacher beliefs about bullying

A German study of the different ways in which teachers responded to incidents of bullying found that beliefs held about the possibility that student aggression can be changed had a significant influence on the action taken by teachers (Grumm & Hein, 2013). 97 teachers from a diverse range of school settings participated in an online survey designed to elicit their attitudes towards aggression, normative beliefs about aggression, beliefs about the changeability of aggression and handling bullying strategies. The researchers identified two distinct response strategies from teachers:

One that is more adaptive — acting vs. ignoring, and one rather less adaptive — ascribing responsibility to either the victim or the bully. If a teacher would focus primarily on ascribing responsibility it is hardly imaginable that he

or she will be able to create a positive and cooperative classroom environment and thus prevent future bullying. If, however, a teacher uses proactive problem solving approaches in cases of bullying behavior in the classroom then pupils will recognize this and it helps to restore a positive and cooperative classroom environment (p. 306).

The findings provided strong evidence of a correlation between views held by teachers that aggression should not be tolerated and their willingness to take an active role in intervention (Grumm & Hein, 2013).

Teachers who are inclined to believe that aggression is an inherent personality feature are less likely to engage in interventions, and more likely to assign blame to those students involved. The researchers suggest that taking such personal perspectives and beliefs of teachers into account when preparing bullying prevention and intervention strategies may improve the efficacy of such work.

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6.3.3 Teacher capacity and responses

The National Program Standards for Initial Teacher Education – Elaboration of Priority Areas (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014) clearly expects tertiary education providers for pre-service teachers to ensure their graduates demonstrate knowledge and:

... understanding of anti-bullying strategies and how to identify and respond to bullying, including cyberbullying, in different contexts and cohorts ... knowledge of responsible and ethical use of digital information including in relation to plagiarism, copyright, censorship, bullying and privacy (and the) ability to develop strategies to minimise physical and emotional bullying, and to support students who have been victims of bullying and to respond to perpetrators (pp. D3–D4).

Urgent attention to in-service teacher education is almost ubiquitous in contemporary studies about changing bullying in schools (Barnes et al., 2012). One Australian study into staff attitudes towards covert forms of bullying, encompassing over 100 schools, found that:

... on average, nearly 70% of staff strongly agreed with statements suggesting that staff in their schools needed more training to deal with covert bullying. Further, 50% felt poorly or not at all skilled to address cyberbullying, and primary and female staff were particularly likely to feel unskilled to address cyberbullying. This lack of perceived skill is concerning, as self-efficacy to address bullying is strongly associated with the likelihood of effective intervention (p. 220).

Work by Sairanen and Pfeffer (2011) examined the way in which teachers in junior secondary schools responded to students and situations involved in bullying. Using the *Handling bullying questionnaire* (Rigby, 2006) to collect data from 136 teachers in Finland, researchers found

Anti-bullying training was found to be a significant factor in explaining teachers' handling of bullying.

teachers were most inclined to discipline the students doing the bullying, followed by enlisting other adults, working with students who bully, working with students who have been bullied, and finally ignoring the incident. Anti-bullying training was found

to be a significant factor in explaining teachers' handling of bullying. Teachers with over 20 years of experience were more likely to report that they would work with the students who bully others than teachers with less than 10 years service (Sairanen & Pfeffer, 2011, p. 330).

In a survey and focus group structured study of students in 13 Seattle public high schools, participants reported the two most common intervention strategies by teachers for verbal bullying included stopping the harassment and explaining why it is wrong. Teachers directly intervened in physical bullying by trying to stop it. Students said teacher interventions would be stronger if they were more consistent and included follow up. Students also noted a need for more focus on educating those who bully others, rather than just asking them to stop (Hillard et al., 2014, p. 1).

6.3.4 Teacher views on what works

Teacher perception that they would be supported by their principal was strongly related to their sense of self-efficacy in working with students involved in bullying

Rigby and Barrington (2010) promote the value of grounded research, sourced directly from teachers who are working in school every day and managing situations of bullying. Drawing on data from teachers in 40 different schools across Australia, they summarised teachers' views as:

- the need for openness to the issue of bullying
- the importance of obtaining reliable information about bullying in the school
- the need for a whole-school approach, a shared understanding of the problem and a commitment to address it
- the importance of leadership in a school
- adopting approaches that are child-centred
- the need for clear expectations of students
- the value of promoting prosocial behaviour
- the relevance of compassion, understanding and morality
- the need for resources (p. 44).

A shared belief that students and teachers working together could effectively stop bullying was associated with increased bystander intervention by students (Padgett & Notar, 2013). Skinner, Babinski and Gifford (2014) asked teachers of students in Year 6 what they considered to be the most important components of school climate in terms of dealing with bullying. Teacher perception that they would be supported by their principal was strongly related to their sense of self-efficacy in working with students involved in bullying. Factors within the school climate that influence the teachers' ability to respond appropriately to students are important to address in school-wide interventions.

Factors within the school climate that influence the teachers' ability to respond appropriately to students are important to address in school-wide interventions.

6.4 Adults exhibiting bullying

The involvement of adults, particularly teachers and parents, in bullying at school is another dimension to consider in relation to school climate. James (2012) investigated parent-teacher bullying in an American International School based in Bangkok. Parents reported that some teachers engaged in bullying towards students through the use of school processes, some parents bullied teachers, and some parents bullied each other. The sense of lack of safety was highlighted in personal interviews.

A thesis study by Weller (2014) looked at principal responses to bullying exhibited by teachers towards students. The term 'abrasive teachers' is used by the researcher to describe a 'teacher who displays bullying behaviors towards students', and the study says they are 'a threat to that environment, impeding student academic progress and decreasing student perceptions of safety' (p. 2). This is an area of school bullying research that is not often discussed or even acknowledged as a problem, which is curious given the familiar recommendation for schools to prioritise positive teacher-student relationships in an effort to reduce bullying incidents.

... pay attention to all forms of aggressive behaviour occurring at all levels of the school systems, and 'work to identify it in all its forms since some forms may be camouflaged by the assumptions of the community, and some forms may be tolerated by those who cannot imagine better means to necessary ends'.

Weller (2014) suggested that schools need a systemic approach to dealing with aggression on all levels within the

school community, after finding in interviews of over 500 school principals of schools in the US that:

- (a) abrasive teachers were present in a large majority of schools,
- (b) anxious principals were less likely to use interventions that required action with tangible outcomes (p. 4).

The challenge is clearly to develop ways to maintain professional teacher protections without sabotaging student learning. Recommendations arising from Weller's findings (pp. 339–340) draw attention to the need for school communities to:

- pay attention to all forms of aggressive behaviour occurring at all levels of the school systems, and 'work to identify it in all its forms since some forms may be camouflaged by the assumptions of the community, and some forms may be tolerated by those who cannot imagine better means to necessary ends' (p. 339).
- understand how different student behaviours, which may be classically viewed as 'acting out' (e.g. fighting) or teenage sullenness (e.g. withdrawal) may in fact reflect fight or flight responses to conditions of bullying
- directly confront and address, via the school principal, abrasive teachers through an appropriate code of conduct or supervision protocols
- move quickly to enforce sanctions if professional conversations with, and support for, abrasive teachers are ineffectual
- work collaboratively with teacher unions to address teacher behaviours, ensuring employment rights are accommodated while also protecting students from further harm.

Sercombe & Donnelly (2013, p. 500) summarise the issue of school climate:

Organisations and institutions need to take responsibility for the development and maintenance of their internal cultures to promote non-violence. This includes the dominance practices of senior people within the organisation, and the way that adults as carers or educators interact with children and young people. The message that bullying is never acceptable, that it is wrong, that it is not a normal part of growing up, needs to be upheld.

The message that bullying is never acceptable, that it is wrong, that it is not a normal part of growing up, needs to be upheld.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter has considered school climate as a factor in the occurrence of bullying. Patterns of social interaction, including bullying, do not occur in a vacuum — they are influenced by the setting in which they occur. Classroom and school climate factors appear to be the main source of variables between schools seen as effective or ineffective in dealing with bullying.

School climate is generated through the behaviour and relationships of everyone within the school community. Children and young people create and participate in their peer cultures by appropriating information from the adult world to address their own concerns and experiences. Through their social interactions, children and young people incorporate the social world around them. They make sense of the school and the wider social world through their interactions.

Researchers suggest the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs may depend on awareness of the school climate, and point out that anti-bullying approaches need to address the school 'ecology'.

Because bullying occurs within a multi-layered context — individual, peer and school — successful school-based interventions need to take a multi-level

approach, and involve both students and staff (Skinner, Babinski & Gifford, 2014, p. 73). The explicit teaching of values to students has been shown to promote a positive school climate.

Because bullying occurs within a multi-layered context — individual, peer and school — successful school-based interventions need to take a multi-level approach, and involve both students and staff.

Teachers have a central role in countering bullying in students. Strong correlations have been found between positive teacher–student relationships and lower levels of bullying and greater levels of students feeling safe. Teachers' skills, knowledge and beliefs about bullying have been explored in various studies. The research frequently recommends taking teachers' personal perspectives and skills into account in implementing anti-bullying approaches. Specific anti-bullying training is a significant factor in teachers' ability to effectively respond to incidents. Calls for urgent attention to in-service teacher education are almost ubiquitous in contemporary studies about countering bullying in schools (Barnes et al., 2012). In addition, teachers' perception that they would be supported by their principal has been found to be strongly related to their sense of self-efficacy in working with students involved in bullying. Research has also flagged the need for greater consideration of adult learning preferences when preparing and communicating expectations about prevention and intervention.

Teachers (as well as other staff and parents) have a key role in modelling appropriate behaviour to students. A strong link between adult behaviour and the frequency of student bullying has been highlighted in research, emphasising the importance of considering whole-school and community relationships in tackling bullying. This document has not addressed workplace bullying for teachers and other staff, but the issue is clearly relevant and important. Workplace bullying represents an enormous body of literature beyond the scope of this work, but addressing student bullying through whole-school, multi-level approaches would need to involve staff relationships and behaviour as well.

Chapter 7: What is the role of school policy?



7.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look at some of the research into broad policy frameworks, highlighting current trends and issues around school policy as it relates to preventing and intervening in bullying. General information about the role of policy and the Australian policy context is provided as an introduction. Unfortunately, research into the important question of the role of policy in relation to countering bullying is not extensive.

This chapter is not intended to offer a comprehensive template for educational policy; this is the role of education authorities.

7.2 The role of school policy

Policy serves a number of important roles in schools; most critically it operates as a functional guide to meeting the requirements of legislation. School policies are written with a practical focus, balancing articulation of the responsibilities and expected behaviours of members of the school community with sufficient flexibility in implementation of the necessary actions.

7.2.1 Operationalising the school's legal responsibility with regards to bullying

Education authorities operationalise the state and Commonwealth legislation relevant to the practice of schools through agency-level policy statements.

Legislation relevant to bullying includes the various states' Education Acts, legislation around physical and online safety, and Acts which address duty of care for children on the part of school staff. These are codified in education authorities' policies, which articulate the requirements under law, and also integrate mandated or recommended frameworks for good practice (see section 7.3).

Each state and territory education jurisdiction and the non-government sector authorities provide policy development advice to schools. Schools use agency-level policy statements as the basis for developing their individual school policies. Education authorities often provide templates and advice about content and procedures which must be incorporated within local policy.

7.2.2 Articulating the school's perspective on bullying

The process of developing school policy about student behaviour is an exercise in articulating the school's philosophy and beliefs about students and about bullying. To do so, schools need to be cognisant that there are various perspectives on countering bullying, which differ in their perspective on what bullying is, why it happens and how it can be stopped. The two dominant perspectives (Canty et al., 2014) are:

- the individual approach, which sees bullying and victimisation as an individual behaviour, psychological profile and interpersonal relationship problem
- the social-ecological approach, which sees bullying as a broad sociocultural phenomenon and expression of the broader unequal social status and power between individuals and groups in all social contexts.

Advocating the adoption of the social-ecological perspective in school policy related to bullying, Side and Johnson (2014) see a need for school communities and policy developers to recognise that:

... previous research and school policies focused on the behavioural aspects of bullying, neglecting the subjective meanings that it had for those who experienced it. The research findings suggested that a more open approach by adults to what bullying means to individuals, and clearer guidance to teachers on how to work with them about subjective meanings, may provide a new direction in supporting young people who have been bullied (p. 217).

Effective policy — policy which influences the attitudes and behaviour of school community members — is founded on all members of the school community sharing the same perspective on countering bullying. Establishing a shared understanding of

bullying in a school requires a robust collaborative process, inclusive of all members of the school community, in the process of developing a school policy.

... clearer guidance to teachers on how to work with [students] about subjective meanings, may provide a new direction in supporting young people who have been bullied.

Establishing a shared understanding of bullying in a school requires a robust collaborative process, inclusive of all members of the school community, in the process of developing a school policy.

7.2.3 Articulating the school's agreed approach to countering bullying

School policy articulates the school's approach to implementing bullying intervention and prevention

Including statements in policy about the schools' values, perspective and agreed approach to countering bullying helps to reduce repetition or reliance on unproven fad programs ...

programs as a guide to practice. Including statements in policy about the schools' values, perspective and agreed approach to countering bullying helps to reduce repetition or reliance on unproven fad programs by busy staff unable to assess the evidence base for different programs.

For example, the American Educational Research Association (2013) suggested schools could effectively '[c]reate a "living" and dynamic school policy on bullying that all embrace' if they:

- provide training for students, staff, and parents on creating common norms and ways to deal with bullying incidents
- emphasize the social and emotional mission of the school in communications with all constituents and integrate it into the curriculum
- create and maintain open lines of communication to report and respond to incidents
- facilitate opportunities for staff, students, and parents to discuss the topic and its solutions across academic and social contexts
- address mental health needs linked to persistent or extreme bullying situations
- educate and involve parents and other community members in the identification of bullying behaviors and responses that reduce such behaviors and
- establish clear and developmentally appropriate consequences for peer groups that encourage or instigate bullying behaviors.

While seemingly obvious and somewhat generic in nature, these fundamental considerations may not always be implemented in ways necessary to effect change. Schools are advised to honestly measure the degree to which these are in place in their setting when reviewing the effectiveness of their school policy (American Educational Research Association, 2013).

Implementing these types of suggestions may be a major challenge for schools given competing demands and issues of higher immediate priority. Efforts focusing on countering bullying which require extensive additional work and time may be unrealistic. Rather than added or 'stand-alone' programs, schools that take a social-ecological perspective on bullying tend to embed anti-bullying initiatives within civic and humanities subjects or relationship education. For

example, *Friendly Schools*, *MindMatters* and *School Wide Positive Behaviour Support* (discussed in section 8.6) are designed to be incorporated into busy school timetables without replacing important curricular work. It is important to articulate in the school policy how the school's approach to countering bullying is integrated within overall practice.

7.3 Policy development frameworks

There is no 'one size fits all' approach recommended for addressing issues of bullying in schools. Each school is a unique community, a diverse and dynamic social system, with particular characteristics, histories and routines that need to be included in the development of the school's policies.

Frameworks outline the steps for schools to take to develop policy, and provide guidance in effectively managing changing circumstances and knowledge about prevention and intervention of bullying. In the area of student behaviour policy and bullying policy, the significant national framework for Australian schools is the *National Safe Schools Framework* (NSSF) (Cross et al., 2011; Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2011). The NSSF identifies bullying as a key issue and provides a framework made up of nine elements for a whole-school approach to address the issue. It recommends evidence-based planning, implementation and monitoring across the school community.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach recommended for addressing issues of bullying in schools. Each school is a unique community, a diverse and dynamic social system, with particular characteristics, histories and routines that need to be included in the development of the school's policies.

Guidelines for the development of policy are provided in Element 3 of the NSSF:

1. Leadership commitment to a safe school
2. A supportive and connected school culture
3. Policies and procedures
4. Professional learning
5. Positive behaviour management
6. Engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum
7. A focus on student wellbeing and student ownership
8. Early intervention and targeted support
9. Partnerships with families and community.

The NSSF unpacks Element 3 on policies and procedures with the following key strategies and activities (with bolding added to highlight key terms):

3.1 Whole school, collaboratively developed policies, plans and structures for supporting safety and wellbeing.

Examples of actions/practices include:

- The school's policies on safety and wellbeing have been drafted, refined and reviewed **in collaboration** with teachers, parents, carers and students.
- The policies include **clear plain language** definitions of terms including student wellbeing, aggression, violence, bullying, cyberbullying, cyber harassment and acceptable use of technology.
- The policies should include information about:
 - the school's **expectations about students' positive behaviour** towards others in the school, including when outside school hours and off school grounds
 - all school community members' **rights to and responsibilities for safety and wellbeing**
 - the **school's role in managing** any behaviours that occur that are not consistent with school policy
 - **procedures for dealing with critical incidents** that impact on the effective operation of the school or create a danger or risk to individuals at the school or on school related activities (i.e. a critical incident management policy).
- School policies on safety and wellbeing are **communicated to all members** of the school community at regular intervals (e.g. through assemblies, house meetings, school website, diaries).
- **Students have an opportunity to voice issues and concerns** on emerging safety and wellbeing policies (e.g. use of mobile phones, acceptable use of technology and uniforms).
- Staff implementation of safety and wellbeing policies is **fair and consistent**.
- **School regularly audits** its obligation to mandatory legislation and jurisdiction policies on safety and wellbeing at regular intervals.
- The school maintains **easily accessible and current comprehensive information** on aspects of safety and wellbeing (e.g. road safety, water safety, first aid, sexual safety, drugs and alcohol and OHS).

Some other frameworks to guide policy development (and other actions) are available in various packages available in Australia. For example, *Friendly Schools* (2014) includes a framework for the development of a whole-school policy and a plan for the prevention of bullying. *Friendly Schools* has involved extensive research with Australian children and adolescents (see Chapter 8:).

7.4 Critical literature on school policy

As mentioned, research into the impact of school policy is thin on the ground. Very little new Australian work was found in the period for this review (2010–2014).

A content analysis of schools' anti-bullying policies in the United Kingdom by Smith et al. (2008) suggested that major gaps exist in specifying what staff are required to do:

... many policies are weak in crucial areas, including other definitional issues (e.g. cyberbullying and homophobic behaviours); responsibilities beyond those of teaching staff; following up of incidents; management and use of records; and specific preventative measures such as playground work and peer support (p. 10).

Similar issues were identified in a comparative content analysis of anti-bullying policies in New Zealand and Victoria, Australia (Marsh et al., 2011). Reviewing 253 New Zealand and 93 Victorian anti-bullying policies, researchers found that:

... definitions rarely included bullying on the grounds of homophobia, religion or disability; or bullying between adults and students. Policies also lacked detail about the responsibilities of non-teaching staff in dealing with bullying, and rarely described follow-up after a bullying incident. Few policies explained how the policy would be evaluated, and many failed to mention preventive strategies (p. 172).

Jones and Hillier (2014) compared international education changes towards more explicitly inclusive policy for students with diverse sexualities (often referred to as LGBT students) with the existing policy environment in Australian schools.

Reviewing 80 Australian education policies and their relevance to the circumstances or needs of students, researchers reported that sexuality was mentioned indirectly, or not at all,

in most Australian education policies and legislation. They say this policy silence has an effect on the exposure of students with diverse sexualities to bullying in school. This is highlighted by the findings of the *National school climate surveys* (cited by Jones and Hillier, 2014, p. 56), in which LGBT students in those schools with school-level policy explicitly stating their rights reported somewhat lower levels of homophobic remarks and higher levels of staff intervention in response to homophobic remarks.

... policy can fail to make any practical difference in the daily lives of students who are being subjected to bullying, unless the policy is well developed, appropriately implemented, and used as a 'living' document by the whole-school community.

In *Bully: An action plan for teachers, parents, and communities to combat the bullying crisis* (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012), the writers suggest that policies need to be explicit in stating that bullying is unacceptable, and that consequences are clearly outlined and followed consistently. The messages from the students in the 2011 film *Bully* directed by Lee Hirsh and from those cited in the action plan documents (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012) are that policy can fail to make any practical difference in the daily lives of students who are being subjected to bullying, unless the policy is well developed, appropriately implemented, and used as a 'living' document by the whole-school community.

In their review of a previous version of the NSSF, Cross et al. (2011) found that:

... schools appear not to have widely implemented the recommended safe school practices, teachers appear to need more training to address bullying, especially covert bullying, and bullying prevalence among students seems relatively unchanged compared to Australian data collected 4 years prior to the launch of the NSSF (p. 398).

This is a significant problem for those responsible for attempting to guide school processes and policy. If a framework like NSSF has not influenced any school policy development, then it is likely the shift of evidence-informed strategies into schools is also not occurring, leaving students, teachers and parents engaged in out-of-date and ineffective cycles of action. This should not be viewed as a lack of willingness or commitment on behalf of the school communities, but rather as a research–policy–practice gap that requires further attention.

Further research is needed to inform both development and implementation of policy, and to explore its role and value as the document whereby schools articulate their approach to countering bullying.

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7.5 Conclusions

This chapter has briefly explored the intersection of legislation, research, policy and practice that takes place in schools. School staff must make sense of theory and research on bullying while operating within the legal framework, jurisdictional requirements, standards for best practice in learning and teaching, and the complex reality of children's and young people's personal and social development.

Limited research has focused on the role and effectiveness of schools' anti-bullying policies. It is important for education sectors to remain alert to policy research within Australia and overseas, including policy in education, health and social welfare as they relate to bullying and schools.

This chapter has reinforced the need for a shared definition and a shared perspective on bullying discussed in Chapter 1. The school's anti-bullying policy is the vehicle to articulate the school community's shared understanding of bullying and how best to respond, and the types of preventative and responsive strategies implemented by the school on the basis of this understanding.

Each school is a unique community, a diverse and dynamic social system, with particular characteristics which need to be reflected in their own policy. The very process of developing a school policy is an exercise in exploring, developing and articulating the school community's philosophy and beliefs about students and about bullying.

Guidelines for good practice in policy development and implementation are provided for Australian schools in the NSSF, which is based on extensive expert consultation. Research into bullying reinforces the importance of school policy being relevant to students. Enhancing understanding of how children and young people make sense of bullying within their peer social cultures provides a basis for developing relevant anti-bullying policies and approaches.

Policy can fail to make any practical difference unless it is relevant, representative, well developed and used as a 'living' document. Students' involvement in development and implementation helps to create a policy document with guidelines for all members of the school community.

Chapter 8: What evidence-based practices can schools adopt?



8.1 Introduction

One of the continuing challenges faced by school communities is the lack of empirical evidence (i.e. evidence of observed and measured change) for the claims made by many approaches for preventing and responding to bullying.

This chapter focuses on recent research that has bullying as its central focus. It does not revisit work done prior to the period of this literature review or explore the extensive work on related areas. Specific approaches explored are limited to those developed in the Australian context.

8.2 Strategies for preventing bullying

Smith and Thompson (2014) draw on research from the UK and Scandinavia to explain definitional issues, effectiveness of approaches like the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme and the Finnish KiVa Programme, and the increasing availability of public support services for families. In terms of preventing bullying, they suggest there is evidence the following strategies can be effective:

- promoting adults as positive role models
- open door policy for parents
- using assemblies to reinforce anti-bullying messages
- developing an effective reporting system
- embedding anti-bullying messages in the curriculum
- adjusting the playground environment to reduce risk, and train lunchtime supervisors
- using peer support strategies, mediation and online mentoring.

Thinking in the field of bullying research is shifting beyond behaviourally focused interventions to addressing the more broadly based motivational, attitudinal and social purposes of bullying (Porter & Smith-Adcock, 2011; Rigby, 2012; Wearmouth et al., 2013; Yoon & Bauman, 2014). This is an emerging field, and one to watch in coming years as research ideas continue to develop.

Prosocial approaches (e.g. teaching conflict resolution, communication and cooperation skills) are widely acknowledged as effective strategies to reduce the incidence of bullying in schools (Baek, 2013; Domino, 2013). In the research paper *A qualitative exploration of cyber-bystanders and moral engagement*, Price et al. (2014) suggested that:

Educational settings need to continue to promote moral responsibilities that characterise true friendship, skilling students in initiating and sustaining quality friendships. Additionally ... exploring the nature of social groups, norms, membership, hierarchy and power, may empower students in navigating such complex influences. Skilling individuals in awareness of their agency, social identity, influence on others, and levels of moral engagement and

responsibility may potentially enhance the agency of every ... bystander, ultimately not leaving action to others. The absence of agency of the 'popular' people may inform an educational focus on promoting moral responsibilities of social groups holding considerable power.

Based on the premise that schools have an important role to play in raising healthy children and young people by fostering not only their cognitive development, but also their social and emotional development, considerable attention has given to the impact of social-emotional learning programs in schools. While programs vary in design and targeted ages, they all aim to develop the core competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Weare, 2010). Greenberg (2010) points

... exploring the nature of social groups, norms, membership, hierarchy and power, may empower students in navigating such complex influences.

out that, through structured teacher-led lessons and extensive real opportunities for students to practise skills in the challenging situations they face every day in school, social-emotional learning programs build caring, safe school climates that include everyone. Social-emotional learning programs take a positive skills-based approach, rather than a problem-based approach, but students can apply these skills in dealing with specific problems such as interpersonal violence and bullying (Greenberg, 2010; Weare, 2010). Social-emotional learning programs are discussed in section 8.7.

The large-scale investigation reported in *Coping with cyberbullying: A systematic literature review* (Perren et al., 2012) emphasised their

finding from multiple studies that where there was a whole-school approach to all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, and a climate that fostered dialogue about relationships and promoted restorative practices with regard to conflict resolution,

... classroom interventions that incorporate lessons on bullying into life skills and bullying prevention classes, and also include effective social skills, empathy training and conflict resolution education.

it was more likely that students would feel safe enough to tell someone when they were being cyberbullied and to feel confident that the school would take action. Further research into the impact of an emotionally literate climate at home and at school is required.

Perren et al. (2012) recommend a range of effective strategies based on their extensive investigation, including:

- curriculum programs to incorporate the direct teaching of values education, empathy training and the use of stories and drama
- more effective programs for students including specific social skills training that are part of the school curriculum
- classroom interventions that incorporate lessons on bullying into life skills and bullying prevention classes, and also include effective social skills, empathy training and conflict resolution education
- a focus on ongoing education for adults in identifying and responding to bullying
- community activities to bring together family, educational, third sector and policy-making ideas within and throughout the community context
- inclusion of questions about online experiences in routine wellbeing checks
- general positive parenting styles to prevent and address bullying.

Lester et al. (2013) suggest that a concentrated effort just prior to the transition to secondary school and within the first two years of secondary school may produce the largest positive effect.

Many of these recommendations are repeated throughout *Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia: Synthesis report* (Katz et al., 2014). While keen to promote a preventative approach to dealing with online bullying, the researchers also stressed that rapid responses were particularly important in online bullying due to the ease of sharing potentially harmful material.

8.3 Strategies for responding to bullying

Smith and Thompson (2014) summarised over 30 years of research into responding to bullying and suggest there is evidence the following can be effective:

- direct sanctions
- restorative approaches
- Seven-Step Support Group Method
- Pikas Method.

... community activities to bring together family, educational, third sector and policy-making ideas within and throughout the community context ...

The authors mention that while these types of responses can work, there can be pitfalls along the way, and teacher training in how to respond appropriately remains essential. They conclude that there is still

much to learn about which interventions are most effective and in which circumstances (Smith & Thompson, 2014).

Research into the effectiveness of strategies that are structured approaches (called 'Confronting') versus those that are ad hoc or laissez-faire (called 'Non-confronting') revealed neither approach to be more successful than the other (Garandeau, Poskiparta & Salmivalli, 2014). This finding needs to be unpacked, as findings varied according to student age. Drawing on data from 339 severe incidents of bullying with 319 children in Years 1 to 9, the researchers were able to demonstrate that:

The Confronting approach worked better than the Non-Confronting approach in secondary school (grades 7 to 9), but not in primary school (grades 1 to 6). The Confronting Approach was more successful than the Non-Confronting Approach in cases of short-term victimization, but not in cases of long-term victimization. The type of aggression used did not moderate the effectiveness of either approach (p. 981).

Rigby (2014) recently completed a review of the effectiveness of common intervention approaches used by teachers to respond to bullying. These interventions included:

- direct sanctions (i.e. punishment)
- restorative practices
- mediation
- Support Group Method
- Method of Shared Concern.

In terms of effectiveness, he says that 'a conservative interpretation of the reported findings is that the most widely used method of intervention, the use of direct sanctions, is no more likely than either restorative practice or the Support Group Method to lead to a resolution' (p. 418).

One of the areas Rigby (2014) draws attention to in his analysis of each of these approaches is the amount of engagement or involvement of the students/s affected by bullying. The methods differed markedly in the extent to which they enabled a degree of creative engagement between teachers (or school counsellors) and students in the resolution of bullying. The most commonly used method, the use of direct sanctions, does not involve any contribution other than compliance. This comment suggests that interventions that do not involve or encourage contributions from the students are potentially leaving issues arising from the bullying incidents unresolved.

The extensive review of online bullying research funded by the Australian Government (Keeley et al., 2014) did not nominate specific appropriate approaches, instead highlighting the need to consider a response appropriate to each situation. However, given the 'crossover' between face-to-face and online bullying, it is suggested that responses to online bullying also focus on group dynamics to address the attitudes, beliefs, social contexts and cultures which encourage bullying (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014; Winton & Tuters, 2014).

8.4 What doesn't work

Hirsch, Lowen and Santorelli (2012) advise against punitive measures such as zero tolerance, and suggest that these actions may in fact trigger more problems. They also suggest that students who have difficulty following the required policies or rules need support to better understand what is expected of them and the impact their actions have on others.

While suggesting early intervention, legal resolutions and therapy for those involved in online bullying, Keeley et al. (2014) also reported on the approaches that stakeholders interviewed in their study had found less effective:

- telling children that they should not go on the internet
- contacting parents who were uninterested
- contacting social media providers in relation to anonymous postings
- heavy-handed police responses/AVOs (p. 36).

According to Katz et al. (2014) there is little empirical

Information on what doesn't work is as valuable as knowledge about what is effective, and should not be overlooked as an area for research to report on.

evidence for the effectiveness of criminal laws or civil regimes in combating online bullying or similar behaviours in young people.

Information on what doesn't work is as

valuable as knowledge about what is effective, and should not be overlooked as an area for research to report on.

8.5 Systematic whole-school frameworks

When addressing bullying in school settings, all members of the school system contribute to shared expectations and patterns of behaviour, therefore a whole-school approach is required (Cross & Barnes, 2014), including engagement with families.

Katz et al. (2014) suggest interventions to address bullying need to assume a 'multi-pronged' approach involving cooperation between all stakeholders (parents, teachers and students), and require investment in resourcing and capacity building for schools, police, legal services and community agencies to support their involvement in preventative and responsive actions against bullying. A 'multi-pronged' approach needs a systematic and whole-school organisational framework to focus the efforts of all, and to ensure actions and programs are directed toward the goals within the school. Piecemeal approaches, lack of coordination and the use of specific strategies or programs with no evidence are not only a waste of time, they may have negative outcomes for students.

Comprehensive frameworks support schools to take a systematic whole-school approach to decisions about best practice, the collection and use of data, and the implementation of interventions with fidelity. McGuckin and Minton (2014) explain that, given the complex variables and various environmental factors impacting on the occurrence of bullying:

A framework can provide school professionals with a parsimonious approach to organising, synthesising and understanding all the information that needs to be considered in relation to a child within a particular environment (p. 36).

In their review of the *Validated guidelines for school-based bullying prevention and management* published in 2004 by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre in Australia, Pearce et al. (2011) examined empirical research evidence on the effectiveness of various approaches to preventing and responding to bullying. Their work confirmed the importance of a systematic whole-school approach to effectively prevent and manage all forms of bullying in schools (including online bullying), and the need to strengthen capacity supports to enable schools to put evidence into informed practice.

The systematic whole-school frameworks linked to preventing bullying that have been developed or widely used within an Australian context include:

- the *National Safe Schools Framework* (Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, updated 2013)
- *School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support* (SWPBS) (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS), 2015)
- *Friendly Schools* (which has a whole-school framework as well as program content) (Edith Cowan University, 2013)
- *KidsMatter* (KidsMatter, 2015)
- *eSmart Schools* (The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, 2010).

... importance of a systematic whole-school approach to effectively prevent and manage all forms of bullying in schools (including online bullying), and the need to strengthen capacity ...

... research into frameworks per se can investigate whether the framework has influenced schools to adopt strategies and programs that are informed by sound theory and research evidence.

Determining the effectiveness of a framework is challenging, as the specific practices and programs that individual schools implement within the structure of the framework can vary enormously. Given the local adaptations and flexibility possible within the guidance provided by a whole-school framework, research into frameworks per se can investigate whether the framework has influenced schools to adopt strategies and programs that are informed by sound theory and research evidence.

Cross et al. (2011, p. 398) reported that, despite being based on best practice and sound theory, the NSSF had not, to that point, influenced schools' practice widely. They were concerned that many issues remained in improving schools' responses to bullying, and that bullying prevalence among students seemed relatively unchanged. The NSSF has since been revised, but no new research into its impact was found.

Research conducted in schools into SWPBS (in the US) and *Friendly Schools* (in Australia) has yielded evidence of a measured reduction in bullying (see sections 8.5.1 and 8.5.2). The research on the *KidsMatter* framework does report improvements in the areas of staff practices, positive engagement with the school, and personal skills in children and young people, but does not report empirical evidence of a subsequent reduction specifically in bullying (see section 8.5.3).

The *eSmart Schools* framework evaluation (Pope et al., 2015) reported that principals believed *eSmart Schools* contributed to positive cultural change; teachers reported feeling more confident; and students said they felt safer and more likely to engage in smart, safe and responsible online behaviour. However, the number of reported bullying incidents did not change from 2013 to 2014 (with an average of four per school per semester). Therefore, while schools reported seeing value in the framework, many schools had not progressed beyond initial stages, and no school reported a measured change in bullying in students.

In summary, evaluation of frameworks which use only a survey methodology are useful to a point, but do not actually investigate the effectiveness in terms of real (measurable) change at the level of students' behaviour and experience of bullying.

8.5.1 School Wide Positive Behaviour Support

The whole-school framework known in the US as *Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports* (PBIS) or *School-wide Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports* (SWPBIS), and in Australia as *School Wide Positive*

Behaviour Support (SWPBS), has substantial empirical evidence relating to reducing bullying:

Whole-school approaches within a PBIS framework ... appear to be effective because they focus on behaviours and the results that effective management of the environment produces. Bullying is part of a continuum of aggression, which makes adaptable approaches like PBIS attractive as the appropriate foundation for bully prevention programs in schools (Pugh & Chitiyo, 2012, p. 51).

SWPBS is rapidly gaining traction in many states and territories in Australia (Good, McIntosh & Gietz, 2011; Mooney, 2008; Pugh & Chitiyo, 2012). Research in US schools examining the effectiveness of bullying prevention strategies within the SWPBIS framework has shown a 72 per cent decrease in reported incidents (Ross & Horner, 2014). Based on data drawn from a small sample of three primary schools with approximately 500 students:

... preliminary results indicate that explicit instruction of a simple response to disrespectful behavior along with conspicuous strategies for the generalization of those skills, when embedded within a framework of PBIS, may be an effective and sustainable strategy for reducing bullying behavior. Because the BP-PBS (Bullying Prevention – Positive Behaviour Support) strategies were embedded in schools that had already established Tier I PBIS, the intervention was substantially less intrusive. Each school had previously invested in a school-wide PBIS team, explicit school-wide instruction on expected behaviors, and formal systems for recognition of that expected behavior. As all students in the schools already understood the common behavioral expectations, it took relatively little effort on the part of the staff to teach the added instruction of BP-PBS – what to do when someone is not following those expectations (p. 232).

Similar results are also apparent in a randomised controlled effectiveness trial conducted with 12,344 students across 37 primary schools in the American state of Maryland (Waasdorp, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2012). The study found that children in schools that implemented SWPBIS displayed lower rates of teacher-reported bullying and peer rejection than those in schools without SWPBIS. A significant interaction also emerged between the age of first exposure to SWPBIS and outcome, suggesting that the effects were strongest among children who were first exposed to SWPBIS at a younger age (p. 149).

8.5.2 Friendly Schools

Friendly Schools was an initiative of the Child Health Promotion Research Centre at Edith Cowan University, and was informed in its development by the extensive longitudinal research conducted in Australia since 1999 (Edith Cowan University, 2013). *Friendly Schools* includes a systematic whole-school framework and a bullying prevention program based on fostering social-emotional

learning skills and resilience. The framework consists of six interrelated components within which schools undertake a number of actions to effect positive change and the prevention of bullying.

The research supporting this program over the last decade is detailed on the *Friendly Schools* website (Edith Cowan University, 2014). Only the more recent work is included in this review. The research does not distinguish between the impact of the framework and its various components and the specific program content related to social-emotional skill development, so it is included within this section on frameworks.

Cross et al. (2011) reported on a three-year trial into the efficacy of the *Friendly Schools* program in reducing student bullying. Self-reported data on the frequency of being bullied, bullying others, telling if bullied and observing bullying were collected in 29 schools over three years from a cohort of 1968 eight–nine year olds. Results indicate students in schools which implemented *Friendly Schools* were significantly less likely to observe bullying or to be bullied, and more likely to tell if bullied than comparison students. No differences were found for self-reported perpetration of bullying.

A second study was conducted into the *Friendly Schools Friendly Families* program by Cross et al. (2012). This initiative added a component specifically for parents and carers. They used a group randomised controlled trial over three years to determine the impact on bullying among 2552 primary school children in Years 4 and 6. Significant positive effects were found which varied across the age groups. The authors concluded that the capacity building and parental involvement components were essential elements in reducing bullying.

In 2014, the National Health and Medical Research Council, Commonwealth Department of Education and Macquarie University announced plans to evaluate *Friendly Schools* (Centre for Emotional Health, n.d.) against another program, *Cool Kids: Taking Control*, in NSW and Western Australian primary schools. This evaluation will represent some important, new and independent research on the effectiveness of *Friendly Schools* as a whole-school prevention and intervention program operating in Australian schools.

8.5.3 KidsMatter and MindMatters

KidsMatter is an Australian-designed mental health framework for primary schools (KidsMatter, 2015). While not directly addressing bullying, it offers a broad structure through which participating schools can develop a whole-school approach to teaching social and emotional learning skills, engaging parents and creating networks of support for students with mental health difficulties (KidsMatter, 2015). It is a partnership between the Commonwealth Department of Health, beyondblue, the Australian Psychological Society, Principals Australia Institute, Early

Childhood Australia and the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (KidsMatter, 2015).

A large number of evaluations and research papers has been published on the operation and impact of *KidsMatter* over the past eight years.² All have attested to its value in terms of positively influencing change in school culture and potentially reducing reported incidents of bullying, but no recent empirical research specifically focused on the impact on bullying was found for this review.

KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC) is an adaptation developed for early childhood services. KMEC provides a framework to enable services to plan and implement evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies. These strategies aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children from birth to school age, reduce mental health difficulties among children, and achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties and their families. KMEC was trialled in 111 long day care services and preschools during 2010 and 2011 (Slee et al., 2012). Results of the evaluation were positive but mixed, and the authors highlighted the critical importance of fidelity of implementation for success (see section 8.10).

MindMatters is an intervention program in Australia designed to promote mental health in secondary school students (Khan, Bedford & Williams, 2012; beyondblue, 2015). Research underpinning the *MindMatters* program is largely anecdotal. It draws on the work established in the *KidsMatter* project (MindMatters, n.d.), and has not been independently evaluated specifically in terms of its impact on bullying.

8.6 Specific ‘anti-bullying’ programs

The broad research over decades into the effective strategies and whole-school frameworks presented above indicates that countering bullying does not necessarily require a specific ‘anti-bullying’ program. A number of strategies considered effective for preventing or responding to bullying have been discussed above. In addition, encompassing bullying prevention as part of a school’s overall approach to promoting student wellbeing and positive behaviour, using a systemic whole-school approach, may mean there is no need for ‘add on’ programs. However, there may be occasions when schools wish to adopt specific and targeted programs within the context of their whole-school work to promote a positive school climate.

... countering bullying does not necessarily require a specific ‘anti-bullying’ program.

2 (Askell-Williams et al., 2008a; Askell-Williams et al., 2008b; Dix, Jarvis & Slee, 2013; Dix et al., 2010; Slee et al., 2008; Slee et al., 2009; Spears & Dix, 2008)

Empirical evidence (measured change in bullying) for individual anti-bullying programs is not extensive. This document does not attempt to report on the evidence base for all programs, given the enormous number of specific anti-bullying programs. Guidelines to assist schools to choose evidence-based programs related to bullying that best suit their specific needs are provided by *KidsMatter* in Australia, and by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and Blueprints for Violence Prevention in the US.

Ttofi and Farrington (2011) reported on a systemic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs in schools. They found 89 studies which met their inclusion criteria with sufficient data for calculation of an effect size for bullying. These studies described 44 distinct evaluations. The authors found that overall, school-based anti-bullying programs resulted in an average of 20–23 per cent decrease in bullying. They found that more intensive programs were more effective, as were programs that included parents and carers, clear disciplinary method and

... school-based anti-bullying programs resulted in an average of 20-23 per cent decrease in bullying ... more intensive programs were more effective, as were programs that included parents and carers, clear disciplinary method and high levels of playground supervision.

high levels of playground supervision. They found negative impacts from programs that focused on working with peers. Ttofi and Farrington (2011) conclude with a call for ongoing research into program effectiveness, saying there is much yet to learn. While the question of what programs work, and why, may be resolved with better research, many researchers point to the issue of implementation

rather than program design (see section 8.10).

Extensive research in school and community settings has led to recognition that how programs are designed and implemented is just as important as the content. In their meta-analysis of programs to promote personal and social skills, Durlak, Weissberg and Pachan (2010) identified that programs are more likely to be effective if they feature a step-by-step approach, use active forms of learning, allow sufficient time on skills development and have explicit learning goals. These practices form the acronym SAFE — sequenced, active, focused and explicit. The authors recommend that all programs for children and young people should be structured according to SAFE features.

8.7 Social-emotional learning based programs

A particular category of school-based programs is deserving of comment. Evidence is strengthening regarding the effectiveness of social and emotional learning programs in reducing or preventing bullying. Durlak et al. (2011) undertook a wide-ranging meta-analysis into 213 school-based universal (for all students) social and emotional learning programs. They found that students in schools that implemented whole-school social-emotional programs delivered by school staff demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, improved behaviour, and an increase in academic performance ...

... students in schools that implemented whole-school social-emotional programs delivered by school staff demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, improved behaviour, and an increase in academic performance ...

school staff demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, improved behaviour, and an increase in academic performance that reflected an 11 percentile-point gain. They highlight this finding, suggesting the potential to achieve higher academic outcomes through focusing on non-academic areas of development. They suggest such programs can be effective at all ages and in a range of school settings. However, the authors highlighted the need for considerable attention to how the programs were implemented (see section 8.10).

A second meta-analysis on this topic was conducted by Sklad et al. (2012). These authors considered 75 studies on universal, school-based social-emotional and behavioural programs. An increase in social skills and decrease in antisocial behaviour were the most often reported outcomes in the studies. The authors reported considerable differences in effectiveness, but an overall beneficial effect on social skills, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, positive self-image, academic achievement, mental health and prosocial behaviour. As with Durlak et al. (2011), Sklad et al. (2012) pointed to the need for careful implementation.

Ratcliffe et al. (2014) explored the effectiveness of a structured social-emotional intervention with 217 children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). As previously mentioned, these students have specific and profound impairments in social and emotional skills. The authors found a large effect when using their specific measures of emotional development, and improvements were sustained six months later. However, more general measures of social skills (for children without ASD) did not detect significant change.

In addition to explanations of change in behaviour at an individual level as a result of well-implemented social-emotional learning programs, Durlak et al. (2011) pointed to resulting changes at the overall school ‘ecology’ level. These include peer and adult expectations for academic

success, positive teacher–student relationships, proactive classroom management, effective cooperative learning, and safe school environments that support and foster positive behaviour. The authors of the program RULER (Rivers et al., 2013) suggest that work directed at improving classroom climate may help address the ‘group’ features which act as catalysts to bullying. These factors have previously been discussed as important in explaining the effect of a positive school climate in countering bullying (see Chapter 6).

One social-emotional development program with extensive research is the *PATHS (Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies)* program (Greenberg, 2010). *PATHS* aims to promote social and emotional competence, prevent violence, aggression and other behavioural problems, improve critical thinking skills and enhance the overall classroom climate. Over the last three decades, multiple studies have reported positive behavioural outcomes, including the sustained effects one year after the program ended. During the period covered by this review, only one new study was found (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010). This research involved 2937 children of multiple ethnicities in Years 1, 2 and 3, and indicated varying positive effects across age, gender and schools. Most intervention effects were moderated by school environment, with effects stronger in less disadvantaged schools, and the effects on aggression were larger in students who showed higher baseline levels of aggression. The authors conclude that well-implemented multi-year social-emotional learning programs can have significant and meaningful preventative effects on the population-level rates of aggression, social competence, and academic engagement in the elementary school years.

Another personal skills program used in Australian schools is the *Aussie Optimism Positive Thinking Skills Program (AO-PTS)*. AO-PTS is a mental health program for middle primary, upper primary and lower secondary school students with three components for students and a family-based component for parents and families. The focus is on building competencies, rather than alleviating problems. Programs which focus on positive thinking, like AO-PTS, have been found to increase students’ subjective wellbeing (Mazzucchelli, Kane & Rees, 2010); however, more research is needed into whether improvements are sustained. A study into the impact of AO-PTS on targeted personal and social skills of 683 Year 4 and 5 students (Myles-Pallister et al., 2014) found no impact compared with matched control schools.

Recognising that costs are associated with any preventative services, Jorm (2014) highlights the longer term economic benefits:

... prevention of conduct disorder through social and emotional learning programs was estimated to pay off \$83 for every dollar expended. School-based interventions to reduce bullying were estimated to pay off around \$14 for every dollar expended (p. 800).

Further work into the area of social-emotional learning is warranted, as well-designed and well-implemented social-emotional learning programs which focus on positive skills development within the framework of social learning theory are compatible with the core work of schools.

8.8 Exploratory work into coping strategies

Research around coping strategies and support for students involved in bullying is only beginning to emerge, and further time will be needed to gather sufficient evidence to warrant the inclusion of these practices as part of a school’s array of prevention or intervention strategies. The relatively new research discussed below comes with a caution to readers — it is not recommended that any strategies be incorporated without additional evidence of its particular suitability or likelihood of effectiveness for the school population.

The role of bibliotherapy — the use of literature to support students during or following stressful events — as a coping strategy for students subjected to bullying was investigated in a unique review of 73 storybooks (Flanagan et al., 2013). While based in the fictional world of children’s literature, the study identified important differences between the coping strategies promoted to characters, and those they actually used. Coping strategies were sorted into adaptive (e.g. prosocial, seeking assistance, distancing) and maladaptive (e.g. seeking revenge) (p. 691). The coping strategies most commonly in the books were:

- bystander intervention (16%)
- befriend the person who is bullying (15%)
- trick the person who is bullying (11%)
- scare the person who is bullying (10%)
- verbal confrontation (10%).

The scenarios presented in these stories were largely unstructured social situations, which the researchers suggest reflects published research findings on the likely location for most bullying incidents (Flanagan et al., 2013). There was a strong bias in the children’s books towards the representations of bullying as physical or confrontational, while relational forms of bullying were significantly under-represented (when compared with known prevalence rates reported in research literature). The recommendation made by these researchers in relation to coping strategies and support systems offered to school-aged students is directed at other researchers in the field of bullying in schools:

... coping through active acceptance of bullying was found to be utilized in many books, but historically has not been present on any coping measurement instruments. Additionally, revenge seeking strategies were divided into tricking-the-bully and scaring-the-bully. As researchers, we believed that this distinction

would lead to a clearer understanding of the coping utilized. This distinction did lead to a finding that tricking the bully is the most commonly implemented revenge seeking strategy (in these books). Future research may benefit from an expanded range of coping responses and exploration of the more nuanced aspects of previously identified categories (p. 700).

8.9 Voice of students

As mentioned in previous chapters, the voice of students is muted in this area.

A small, focused study of American children between the ages of seven and 12 years, their parents and a sibling produced first-person opinions on what these children, who had themselves been subjected to incidents of bullying, found most effective in terms of parent and school action (Honig & Zdunowski-Sjoblom, 2014). The researchers were scathing in their criticism that posters alone ‘do not change child behaviours ... and that automatic expulsion policies as the main approach do not decrease bullying’ (p. 15). They report the approaches suggested by children and parents included:

- a focus on school safety
- an early start in schools to teach empathy and caring in relationships
- improved digital sophistication for teachers and parents
- storybooks that awaken compassion and caring
- education about school social hierarchies
- a buddy system for reassurance
- school meetings to promote parent–teacher partnerships to decrease bullying
- finding community therapists to help
- special meetings to increase understanding between students who have been involved in bullying
- school-wide programs that decrease bullying.

In terms of the voice of young people about online bullying, the generational gaps in the use of technology can cause problems for parents, teachers and students when

intervention strategies are designed without appropriate cooperation and consultation across different age groups. In the extensive study *Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia*, the question of evidence-based deterrents was discussed with each of these groups

... advice from students ... Learning about respectful behaviours and developing programs that focus on positive online behaviours. Increasing awareness of people’s motivations, choices and decision-making in relation to cyberbullying.

(parents, teachers and students) (Spears et al., 2014c). The advice from students perhaps offers the best starting point for adults responsible for designing policy interventions:

- Making the social impacts of cyberbullying explicit for young people
- Don’t blame the technology: The importance of understanding the behaviour of cyberbullying, rather than focus on the technology, which mediates the communication
- Let’s look at behaviour — and behaviour change: Learning about respectful behaviours and developing programs that focus on positive online behaviours. Increasing awareness of people’s motivations, choices and decision-making in relation to cyberbullying
- A range of diverse concerns, including: concerns related to criminalising cyberbullying, the need to focus also on building resilience for the victim, a sense that adults are nagging without any real action, plus scepticism about a resolution to the problem through another awareness campaign or through changes to the law
- Some tips and advice, including the use of a reporting system to identify only bullies and other ‘nasty characters’, getting off the device, practical online strategies to empower young people
- Don’t ignore the complexities and the importance of working together with young people to design solutions and ways forward
- Raising awareness, increasing support and sharing experiences to communicate the realities of cyberbullying to young people (p. 29).

8.10 Effectiveness is determined by implementation

Interest has grown recently into the impact of optimal versus sub-optimal implementation of programs as a factor in the outcomes for students. Durlak et al. (2011) stated that, in order to be effective, programs must be well-designed and well-conducted. Problems encountered during program implementation can limit the benefits that participants might derive from the program in more optimal situations.

As with all interventions, the fidelity of implementation is paramount for the successes that are suggested in research. Shortcuts and adaptations will inevitably lessen the positive effects of intervention programs if they erase or change the fundamental elements that research has identified as essential for effectiveness. The keenness with which many schools start out, and accompanying good intentions, can quickly be

... the fidelity of implementation is paramount for the successes that are suggested in research.

consumed or overtaken by other priorities in the school — which only receives attention when another incident triggers renewed focus on the problem of bullying as a social issue rather than an individual one.

Rigby and Griffiths (2011) examined some of the implementation difficulties experienced with the Method of Shared Concern in a small study of 17 schools in Australia. They stated that the Method of Shared Concern was viewed as effective with both overt and covert forms of bullying, but that not all of the practitioners carried out the method in the same way, despite explicit instructions provided

Shortcuts and adaptations will inevitably lessen the positive effects of intervention programs if they erase or change the fundamental elements that research has identified as essential for effectiveness.

about implementation. Various reasons were given for the variations, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of the solution arrived at in the modified method. They acknowledge that the pressure of ‘business’ at a school means it is understandable that the full procedure may at

times not be used, but are concerned that long-term positive outcomes could be jeopardised.

This is a valuable aspect often missing from quality research — documenting the vulnerabilities or weaknesses inherent in transferring programs into practice with fidelity.

Dix et al. (2012) argued for the need for explicit attention to the quality of implementation of school-wide mental health promotions when they examined the impact of implementation quality on academic outcome measures in *KidsMatter*. After controlling for differences in socioeconomic background, a significant positive relationship existed between quality of implementation and academic performance. The difference between students in high- and low-implementing schools was equivalent to a difference in academic performance of up to six months of schooling.

Effective implementation also requires collaboration between schools and

parents. While focused on the school setting for implementation, whole-school programs require parent and community support to maximise their effectiveness for the student population. In a recent evaluation of the *MindMatters* program in Sydney,

Australia, representatives from schools using the approach were interviewed about ‘factors that facilitated or impeded

While focused on the school setting for implementation, whole-school programs require parent and community support to maximise their effectiveness for the student population.

implementation, strengths and weaknesses of the scheme and suggestions for further improvements to the service’ (Khan, Bedford & Williams, 2012, p. 322). *MindMatters* was considered a valuable addition to the services of many schools, but participants were quick to highlight that:

... external support is needed to run additional programmes, as schools have competing priorities. They understood the link between the well-being of students and staff and good mental health. The achievements identified included less bullying and more student participation, connectedness, networking with outside agencies and increased confidence in showcasing their programmes. The challenges included: engaging culturally and linguistically diverse and indigenous communities; resources; support from the school executive; and staff transitions, time, skills and motivation. Factors that enabled schools to achieve positive outcomes were: partnership with the health service; *MindMatters* training; a positive staff attitude; and support from within the school (p. 320).

Likewise the evaluation report into KMEC points to the need to know about any discrepancy between what is planned and what is actually implemented when investigating program or strategy effectiveness (Slee et al., 2012). A key feature of this study was to develop and use a measure of implementation quality which allowed them to establish clearly that implementation quality was an important influence on outcomes. The development and use of an Implementation Index enabled them to identify that only half of the participating services implemented KMEC as intended with regards to fidelity, dosage and quality.

Pearce (2014) presented initial findings related to the implementation of *Friendly Schools* (Edith Cowan University, 2014) and gaps in the research-to-practice transition. Investigating ‘How school capacity to effectively implement evidence-based action to prevent bullying behaviours can be built and sustained in a “real world” school setting’, the research looked at the translation of research to practice using a trial program called Strong Schools Safe Kids. Initial interviews with participating schools identified the following influences on implementation:

- schools as complex, ecological systems in which student wellbeing is a priority, but not core business
- additional funds needed to support implementation; need to mobilise existing resources
- cross-sector collaboration and leadership at a system level is critical, but also consultants to provide individual school support
- fear of ‘ownership’ of bullying
- history of implementing whole-school interventions which have not worked

- schools mostly reactive — need for simple, preventative approach with practical tools that will save time and resources
- support for school leadership teams to choose evidence-based practices and engage all staff
- accessible tools to build student, staff and parent competencies without out-of-school training costs
- lack of local data to support school decision-making.

Preliminary findings from the Strong Schools Safe Kids implementation study indicated the need for:

- a change process that embeds and sustains the intervention in a real-world setting (stage matched activities and drivers to build infrastructure and capacity)
- improvement processes and flexibility that enable the schools to change their way of doing things — context to support effective intervention
- implementation teams to make it happen (Pearce, 2014).

A better understanding of the challenges of implementation could add enormously to the daily work school

... implementation study indicated the need for a change process that embeds and sustains the intervention in a real-world setting (stage matched activities and drivers to build infrastructure and capacity).

communities are conducting to address bullying, and further work on this aspect would help schools to select and implement programs that are feasible and suitable for the long term. This is important research for schools at every level, from individual schools through to systemic policy development, as it explores the practical issues schools faced in implementing an evidence-informed approach

to combating bullying in schools. Understanding of the essential aspects influencing whole-school implementation of programs or strategies to address bullying is critical (Pearce, 2014).

8.11 Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed recent work on determining the evidence for anti-bullying practices promoted to schools. While research evidence for some Australian whole-school approaches to prevent and respond to bullying is now available, a large number of bullying programs exist that have no research evidence.

A sense of urgency about finding solutions to bullying can tempt some to advocate for untested or un-researched programs and interventions to be rapidly adopted. This urgency may stem from a serious incident which has drawn widespread attention, or from a strong drive to ‘do something’. It is perhaps at these times that most caution is needed, and the advice noted in this chapter regarding

effectiveness, implementation and barriers to success is worth reflecting on. In this situation, information about what does not work is at least as valuable as information about what is effective.

Strategies to counter bullying are often considered as either preventative or responsive, but many are a combination. Schools need approaches that cover both prevention and appropriate responses in the event that bullying occurs.

While the desire to ‘do something’ is understandable, there is no magic ‘quick fix’ program. The emerging evidence suggests that well-managed, comprehensive, whole-school, multi-pronged and integrated approaches, that necessarily require time, skills and resources to implement effectively, are the most likely to result in sustained positive change in the school and wider community.

A social-ecological view of bullying leads to prevention and responses in which children and young people are encouraged to learn about how relationships work, and how society’s values and norms are formed (and reformed) in each generation. Exploring the nature of social groups, norms, membership, hierarchy and power all seem important attributes of empowering students to navigate their social world. Approaches which focus on social-emotional learning and equipping students with skills to deal with problems, conflict and other adversity show considerable promise in terms of countering bullying. As repeated in each chapter of this document, the views of students have not yet been sufficiently explored in terms of what works.

Even for those approaches and programs for which evidence exists, effectiveness ultimately rests with appropriate implementation. The most frequently identified issues in implementation are the ‘shortcuts’ or changes that schools make to suit their context and capacities, unknowingly compromising the fidelity of the program to such a degree that effectiveness is also compromised.

The growing field of implementation science reveals a whole world of research about how to influence practice and support change in schools (only briefly touched on here). Implementing programs as intended takes time and determination, and requires a well-planned systemic approach that is effective and sustainable (Cross et al., 2012).

The emerging evidence suggests that well-managed, comprehensive, whole-school, multi-pronged and integrated approaches, that necessarily require time, skills and resources to implement effectively, are the most likely to result in sustained positive change in the school and wider community.

The opportunities for students, teachers and families to benefit from the large and dynamic pool of research related to bullying

Work is still needed to find positive lasting solutions to bullying, but the idea that addressing bullying requires the whole community is now well understood.

are dependent on this information being accessible. However, research findings alone do not necessarily influence practice. Genuine support and agreement from

educational sectors, at all levels, is fundamental to gaining wider use of research-informed practices in schools. Understanding the realities of the school context and teachers' necessary focus on delivering curriculum is also important to establish reasonable expectations of everyone within the wider school community, including parents.

In addition to formal research, school-directed and school-initiated studies on the effectiveness of various approaches to respond to and prevent bullying will refine and bolster knowledge. This sort of practice-based evidence, combined with the best evidence already provided by research, equips schools to take on the challenge of addressing the pervasive cultural phenomenon of bullying.

Research over the past four decades on bullying at school has significantly enhanced the understanding of the complexity of the problem and the challenges in addressing it. Simplistic solutions have no place and may add to the harm. Work is still needed to find positive lasting solutions to bullying, but the idea that addressing bullying requires the whole community is now well understood.

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Appendix A: Behaviour indicators

The following is taken from Rivers, Duncan and Besag (2009) in their text *Bullying: a handbook for educators and parents*. These behaviours can be related to other factors, but are useful to indicate the need for sensitive questioning and reassurance of support by parents. These indicators are for both children who may be engaged in bullying of others, and those who are subjected to bullying, and cover primary through to later secondary education (pp. 131–136).

Behavioural indicators – primary (Years 1–6)	Behavioural indicators – secondary (Years 7–12)
<p>Being bullied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased quietness • Withdrawal from family interaction • Visible sadness • Withdrawal from friends and from activities once enjoyed • An increase in days off school (complaints of headaches and stomach-aches) • Poor school performance (drop in grades) • Loss of appetite • Sleep disturbance (including bed wetting) • Only uses bathroom at home (school bathrooms are places where lots of bullying takes place away from the view of teachers) • Torn clothes or unexplained cuts and bruises • Requests for extra money for lunch or additional allowance • Letters from school enquiring about homework that is reported lost, or reporting behavioural problems such as fights with other students <p>Bullying others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in friendship groups (particularly the loss of a friendship group) • Expressing a dislike of school and teachers • A desire to ‘show off’ • Acquisition of items or goods that could not have been bought without parental knowledge • Unexplained outbursts of anger • Becoming easily frustrated • An unwillingness to do homework • Hitting or trying to dominate younger brothers or sisters 	<p>Being bullied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unspecified headaches, stomach-aches (frequent requests to stay at home) • Outbursts of anger • Unexplained cuts and bruises, torn and mud-splattered clothing • Hitting out, flinching • Tiredness (often linked to sleep disturbance) • Loss of appetite • Unexplained crying • Unwillingness to walk or travel to school alone • Avoidance of students once classed as ‘friends’ • Staying at home on evenings and at weekends • Stealing money • Staying late at school (to avoid encounters with students outside of school) • Becoming introverted, sullen and self-effacing • Expressing self-doubt • Greater uneasiness with expressing physical affection • Becoming easily distracted, forgetful (an indication that they are preoccupied with something else) <p>Bullying others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in friendship groups (particularly the loss of a friendship group) • An unexplained but overall decline in grades • Expressions of disaffection with school • Desire to ‘show off’, especially in front of others • Ownership of items or goods that could not have been bought without parental knowledge • Expressed anger or irritation with fellow students (including making disparaging comments about them or threatening to hit them) • Frustration with homework • Domination or subjugation of siblings

