violenceinterventionproject

Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Dating Violence -

A Youth Engagement Approach to Prevention

in Middle and High Schools:

A Review of the Literature

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Violence Intervention Project
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   INTRODUCTION

The key focus of this review is bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence among middle and high school students and, in particular, best practice strategies for school-based prevention. A second focus is youth engagement, and how that approach can be useful in efforts to address bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence in schools. The purpose of the review is to provide current background information to support the development of an effective peer-led, school-based bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence prevention program utilizing a youth engagement approach.

2.   BACKGROUND

2.1   Bullying: Part of a Developmental Continuum

Bullying can be defined as physical, verbal and/or psychological aggression, repeated over time, by a more powerful perpetrator against a less powerful victim. Bullying involves the bully's intent to harm the victim, and distress on the part of the victim.

Bullying is a part of a developmental continuum of aggressive behaviour that extends from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood. As there is a developmental relationship between bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, prevention and intervention efforts in early to mid-adolescence are critical.

Bullying is a pervasive problem. In Ontario, about one-third of middle and high school students are bullied at school, and about one-third report taking part in bullying other students.

Cyberbullying or *electronic bullying*, a rapidly growing trend, involves the use of technology such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal websites and on-line personal polling websites with the intent to harm, harass, demean or humiliate others.

Nearly one in five Canadian internet users have been threatened while using instant messaging, and nearly one in six admit to posting hateful comments themselves. Electronic and social bullying is highest in Grades 8 to 10. Reported bullying underestimates the issue.

Bullying changes across the transition from elementary to high school. Youth who bully their peers report more experiences of physical and verbal/social aggression with their boyfriend or girlfriend, compared to their peers who do not bully. Adolescents who bully their peers learn a style of interaction whereby they obtain power through aggression.

Sexual harassment is associated with the processes of developing sexuality and mixed-gender socialization. Sexual harassment can most simply be defined as unwanted sexual attention. Peer sexual harassment is pervasive among adolescents, with over 80% of female Canadian students having experienced some form of sexual harassment in schools. It seems that boys and girls experience harassment victimization at about the same rate in early adolescence, but girls experience higher rates later on. While homophobic harassment is an understudied form of sexual harassment, evidence suggests that it is pervasive in elementary, middle and high schools in Canada.

Dating violence is any intentional sexual, physical or psychological attack on one partner by the other in a dating relationship. Dating violence is a serious issue in Canada, and researchers have begun to document that it is part of many heterosexual dating relationships. Young people revealing high rates of dating violence are described by their teachers as frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment. As sexual harassment in adolescence is pervasive, universal prevention programs are recommended.

Few studies have examined all three forms of dating violence (physical, sexual and psychological) amongst the same group of adolescents, and even fewer studies have included adolescents as young as 12 and 13 years old, the age when dating violence may begin. Results from Canadian studies have shown that: among high school students in Quebec, 16% of the girls and 25% of the boys reported having experienced some form of physical violence; 24% of girls and 16% of boys attending high school in Ontario had had a dating partner use "verbal force" against them; among Quebec 15 to 19 years olds, 54% of the girls and 13% of the boys reported having experienced sexual coercion in a dating relationship.

The behaviour of young children who learn to gain power through aggression may develop over the lifespan from bullying, to sexual harassment, delinquency, gang involvement, dating violence, workplace harassment, marital abuse, child abuse and elder abuse. Prevention efforts at the middle and high school levels are critical to address established, and possibly escalating and diversifying patterns, prior to adulthood.

2.2   Effects of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Dating Violence

Given the developmental relationship among bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, it is not surprising that the effects of all three problems are similar, and can have significant and long-lasting effects. Those who bully may display aggression, sexual harassment, academic problems, school dropout, etc. Those who are victimized may display anxiety, withdrawal, school dropout, etc. Adolescents who have been victims of peer sexual harassment report that it made them reluctant to go to school, reluctant to talk in class, inattentive at school, academically unmotivated, and led them to achieve lower grades than they expected. Victims of dating violence may suffer damage to their self-esteem and sense of safety, and experience increased risk of substance use, unhealthy weight control behaviours, sexual risk behaviours, pregnancy, and suicidal behaviour. Clearly, the nature and extent of the effects of bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence point to a need for timely prevention strategies targeting all of these behaviours.

2.3 A Social Ecological Perspective

Bullying can be viewed from a social ecological perspective as a systemic problem occurring within interacting social systems. Complex interactions between children and their environments work to develop or inhibit prosocial and antisocial behaviours.

2.3.1 Family Factors

While many young people who bully come from families characterized by conflict and violence, young people who are victimized may have high and positive family involvement. Parents are generally unaware of the extent of bullying and victimization problems.

2.3.2 School Factors

School culture is a potential contributing factor in promoting or inhibiting bullying, because issues such as students' feelings of belonging and respect at school play a role in how students treat each other. Students entering high school, including those who might be deemed to be "at risk" in terms of bullying and victimization, may be particularly open to influences of their new school environment.

2.3.3 Community and Society

Bullying is a community problem, as it occurs in all contexts where individuals come together to play, study or work. Prevention programs need to raise awareness of the risk of learning violence from cultural or societal influences such as the media.

2.3.4 Peer Factors

Typically, bullying takes place in the context of the peer group, with schoolmates being involved in approximately 85% of bullying episodes. Effectively promoting more positive bystander behaviour needs to be a key focus for prevention. This promotion might best originate from within the peer group itself, i.e., with young people who are trained and committed to encouraging their peers to shift their attitudes and behaviour.

3. PREVENTION

3.1 Best Practices Research on Bullying Prevention and Youth Leadership

To determine whether bullying or other violence prevention programs are effective, there is a need for carefully designed, experimental studies. There are few such studies, and among those, results have been mixed. There are, nevertheless, common principles and program components that can be considered as current best practices. Efforts need to be systemic, multifaceted, and long-term, and must target behaviours, attitudes and beliefs of students, school staff and parents.

Research concerning the effectiveness of engaging youth as leaders in bullying and dating violence prevention efforts is very limited and therefore inconclusive at this stage. Nevertheless, utilizing youth in prevention strategies regarding youth violence is considered as, at the very least, a promising strategy.

3.2 Systemic Principles for Bullying and Victimization Prevention

There are systemic principles to support the development of successful prevention and intervention efforts:

- Change needs to occur with the student who bullies, the student who is victimized, peers, school staff, parents, and the community.
- There is a need to recognize the roles and responsibilities of students who bully, students who are victims, peers, parents, school staff and administrators, and community.
- Adults in the school must change their attitudes and behaviour in order for students to do so.
- Leadership to address bullying is essential for change.

3.3 Key Strategies

3.3.1 Youth Engagement

In relation to school anti-violence programming, there is some research support for the view that peer support systems can benefit the helpers as well as those in need of help. Peer support systems enable young people who would otherwise be bystanders to take prosocial action to help peers in distress. Students who are engaged, i.e., identify with the school, and accept school values, have clear potential to take an active role in helping their peers and influencing the school's culture.

3.3.2 Whole School Policy

A whole school policy is the foundation of anti-bullying prevention and intervention. It identifies the rights, roles, and responsibilities of all members of the school community, including a commitment to address bullying, and processes for prevention and intervention. A whole school approach involves students, teachers, school administrators, and parents, in challenging existing social conditions that tolerate, and inadvertently promote, bullying and victimization within the peer context.

3.3.3 Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Students

Prevention efforts need to be universal and reinforced over a long period of time, within a milieu that values and promotes positive school culture. The focus should be on fostering more prosocial and respectful behaviours, and promoting healthy relationships. Furthermore, given the developmental relationship among bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, prevention efforts need to start prior to high school, and address all

three of these issues. Engaging students to join and promote prevention efforts in various capacities can be expected to have exponential benefits.

Peers are both part of the problem and part of the solution. Young people need guidance, a mandate to change their patterns of response, and strategies to help them in responding prosocially in situations. More specifically, school-based intervention efforts should be aimed at peers to reduce their reinforcement of the bully and encourage their support of the victim.

3.3.4   Youth Leadership and Peer Education

Youth development efforts focus on helping adolescents to become engaged, competent and responsible adults. Youth leadership can be a means of promoting the positive development of students, including those who may be at-risk. Engaging youth leaders, with appropriate adult support, to dedicate their energies and creativity to issues such as prevention of bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, benefits the school community, the school culture, and the youth leaders themselves.

There are various potential youth leadership models for developing and implementing a school-based bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence prevention program, but there is a paucity of good evaluative data on what works under what circumstances. In substance abuse education, the use of peers as the primary source of instruction has been found to be more effective than the use of adults in influencing both knowledge and attitudes. As well, youth-led programs that are interactive versus didactic prove superior. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that trained youth leaders have significant potential to influence their peers to understand issues related to bullying and victimization, and the need for empathy and intervention on behalf of students who are being victimized.

Several findings from the literature may be instructive for the development and delivery of youth-led bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence prevention efforts:

- Institutional support, e.g., from the school community, influences the success of students' formal interventions.
- Youth require training and adult support in order to succeed as peer leaders.
- Contextual characteristics, e.g., teacher enthusiasm, may influence the effectiveness of training sessions.
- A male and female presentation team can work well.
- It is important to find presentation strategies and styles of interacting that ensure that girls can participate actively.

Opportunities for meaningful involvement, including leadership experiences that may help to shape the culture of the school, are important strategies to support healthy outcomes for students. Leadership opportunities may be particularly valuable for those youth who are otherwise not involved or "at risk" in the school environment. Youth leadership "passes the torch" by involving a new generation in prevention efforts.

3.3.5 Collaboration with Community Resources

Schools can elicit needed therapeutic support for young people, and collaborate with community partners on school-based prevention policies and programs. In return, student leaders can offer valuable insight and experience with respect to bullying and other forms of violence, and become anti-violence champions in the larger community.

3.3.6 Supervision

An essential component of a whole school bullying prevention policy is the provision of increased supervision, monitoring and follow-up to reports. The social context and level of supervision play a major role in the frequency and severity of bullying incidents.

1. INTRODUCTION

The key focus of this review is bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence among middle and high school students and, in particular, best practice strategies for school-based prevention. A second focus is youth engagement, and how that approach can be useful in efforts to address bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence in schools. The purpose of the review is to provide current background information to support the development of an effective peer-led, school-based bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence prevention program utilizing a youth engagement approach.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Bullying: Part of a Developmental Continuum

Bullying is a part of a developmental continuum of aggressive behaviour that extends from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood. Of particular relevance to this review is the existence of a developmental relationship that becomes apparent in adolescence between bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence. Prevention and intervention efforts in early to mid-adolescence are critical as "Patterns of bullying established in childhood and adolescence may become consolidated as a foundation for problematic future relationships" (Craig & Pepler, 2004).

Bullying can be defined as physical, verbal and/or psychological aggression, repeated over time, by a more powerful perpetrator against a less powerful victim. Bullying involves the bully's intent to harm the victim, and distress on the part of the victim. Negative acts can be direct, such as name-calling, or indirect, such as exclusion (or shunning) and gossip (O'Connell, Pepler & Craig, 1999; Pepler & Craig, 2000). At the high school level, bullying might involve behaviours such as: fighting, assault, intimidation, threatening (with or without a weapon), robbery or extortion or taxing, swarming, etc.

Cyberbullying or *electronic bullying*, a rapidly growing trend, involves the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others (Belsey).

Bullying is a pervasive problem. In a series of surveys of Canadian elementary and middle school children, 38% reported being bullied at least "once or twice" during the term; and 15% reported being bullied "more than once or twice" during the term. Twenty-nine per cent reported bullying others "once or twice" during the term and 6% reported bullying others "more than once or twice" during the term (O'Connell et al., 1999). In Ontario, about one-third of Grade 7 to 12 students (33%) are bullied at school, and about one-third (30%) of students report taking part in bullying other students at

school (OSDUS, 2003). By the end of high school, percentages of girls and boys who report bullying their peers are roughly half of the percentages at the end of elementary school. It must be noted, however, that related research indicates that behaviour diversifies for some troubled youth, e.g., into sexual harassment or dating aggression, rather than disappearing (Craig & Pepler, 2004).

There are various findings reported on the prevalence of bullying according to gender. Pepler, Craig, Yuile, & Connolly (2004) report a rate of observed episodes with approximately 35% for girls and 65% for boys. According to the 2001-2002 WHO survey, victimization rates show only small gender differences (Totten, 2004). While boys are more likely to use physical aggression, girls are more likely to use exclusion or gossip as forms of aggressive behaviour (Pepler, Craig, O'Connell & Atlas, 1998). For girls, the proportion who report bullying others and being victimized reaches its peak in Grade 9, perhaps due to girls' attempts to establish their sense of belonging and acceptance in the transition to high school (Craig & Pepler, 2004).

A recent, very concerning trend, is the use of the internet for bullying. In Canada, 48% of Canadian students use the internet for at least an hour each day, and nearly 60% use chat rooms and instant messaging. According to a recent survey, nearly one in five young Canadian internet users have been threatened while using instant messaging, and nearly one in six admit to posting hateful comments themselves (The National, CBC, 2002). The first Canadian study to report on electronic bullying in schools found that rates for electronic and social bullying were highest in Grades 8 to 12 with 88% being in Grades 8 to 10 (Totten, Quigley, & Morgan, 2004).

Reported bullying underestimates the issue as many young people do not admit to being victimized and adults are often not aware. When asked when and where bullying occurs, students often respond, "whenever there aren't any adults" (Sharp, 1996, p.17).

Less is known about bullying among adolescents than among younger children, but it has been shown that bullying changes across the transition from elementary school to high school. As they reach the end of high school, the percentages of girls and boys who report bullying their peers are about half of the percentages at the end of elementary school. It must be noted, however, that analyses of other forms of aggression, e.g. sexual harassment and dating aggression, "suggest that the behaviour diversifies for a proportion of troubled youth, rather than disappearing" (Craig & Pepler, 2004, p.11). Girls and boys who bully their peers are more likely to sexually harass and perpetrate dating aggression than those who do not report bullying (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000; McMaster, Connolly, Pepler & Craig, 2002).

With adolescence, sexuality and romantic or dating relationships become increasingly important. As children move into this phase, they develop styles of relating with their friends and within the context of their peer group that may generalize into romantic relationships. According to Canadian research, by Grade 8, 20% of students have experienced a romantic relationship. Youth who bully their peers, seem to begin

involvement in romantic relationships earlier than young people who do not bully (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000).

Young people who bully have less positive and less equitable views of their friends than do non-bullying peers. Similarly, they see their romantic relationships as less emotionally supportive, less affectionate, less committed, and less equal than their no-bullying age-mates. They also report more experiences of physical and verbal/social aggression with their boyfriend or girlfriend (Ibid). Adolescents who bully their peers learn a style of interaction whereby they obtain power through aggression. "Without active intervention, there is a high risk that youth who bully others will persist in this behaviour in new relationships" (Ibid, p.307).

Sexual harassment among peers is frequent as children enter adolescence and is associated with the processes of developing sexuality and mixed-gender socialization. Sexual harassment can most simply be defined as unwanted sexual attention. This definition includes a range of behaviours from sexual assault to sexual jokes and comments (McMaster et al., 2002). Although understandable within a developmental framework, sexual harassment is not a necessary or healthy aspect of adolescence, and is humiliating and distressing for victims (Ibid).

Peer sexual harassment is pervasive among adolescents. In Canada, over 80% of female students have experienced some form of sexual harassment in schools (Larkin, 1994; Staton & Larkin, 1993). It seems that boys and girls experience harassment victimization at about the same rate in early adolescence, but girls experience higher rates later on (McMaster et al., 2002). While homophobic harassment is an understudied form of sexual harassment, evidence suggests that it is pervasive in elementary, middle and high schools in Canada (Ibid). More victimization experiences of bullying, sexual harassment and physical abuse are reported by sexual minority and questioning youth than by heterosexual adolescents. Boy to boy homophobic harassment is common in school settings, beginning in early adolescence (Totten et al., 2004). Sexual harassment gradually increases from Grades 5 to 8, as the peer group becomes increasingly blended along gender lines. Cross-gender harassment, but not same-gender harassment, increases from Grades 6 to 8.

Dating violence is any intentional sexual, physical or psychological attack on one partner by the other in a dating relationship (Health Canada, 1995). Dating violence may be a single act, such as sexual assault or "date rape", or it may be a pattern of abusive behaviour and mistreatment that is repeated – and often escalates – over time (Department of Justice Canada, 2003).

Dating violence is a serious issue in Canada with psychological, physical, and sexual abuse being involved in many heterosexual dating relationships (Connolly et al., 2000; Price, Byers, Sears, Whelan, Saint-Pierre, 2001; Suderman & Jaffe, 1993). In a study involving 189 students, almost all of the male and female students reported at least one incident of dating violence (Connolly et al.).

Price, Byers et al. (2001) summarize results from some important Canadian studies: Gagné and Lavoie (1995) surveyed high school students in Quebec and found that 16% of the girls and 25% of the boys reported having experienced some form of physical violence. Similarly, Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel, and Killip (1992) found that 24% of girls and 16% of boys attending high school in Ontario had had a dating partner use "verbal force" against them. Poitras and Lavoie (1995) studied adolescents in Quebec who were between 15 and 19 years old and found that 54% of the girls and 13% of the boys reported having experienced sexual coercion in a dating relationship. Unfortunately, few studies have examined all three forms of dating violence (physical, sexual and psychological) amongst the same group of adolescents, and even fewer studies have included adolescents as young as 12 and 13 years old, the age when dating violence may begin.

Preliminary findings of the Teen Relationship Project (2003) indicate that nearly one in five students are victims of major physical aggression in their dating relationships; one in four students are victims of minor physical aggression; half of students are victims of verbal aggression; and boys experience more incidents of all forms of aggression than their romantic partners.

A large-scale London, Ontario study of high school students found that students reporting the highest rate of dating violence were Grade 9 and 10 girls who were involved in steady dating relationships. One out of two experienced verbal or emotional abuse; one out of three experienced physical abuse; and one out of three experienced sexual abuse (Suderman & Jaffe, 1993). In a U.S. study, 40% of high school girls reported that they had experienced their first incident of dating violence when they were 12 or 13 years old (Mayer & Stein, 2001).

Young people revealing high rates of dating violence are described by their teachers as frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment (Wolfe, Wekerle, Reitzel-Jaffe, & Lefebvre, 1998). Of additional note is that domestic violence in young couples is often preceded by verbal or psychological insults (McMaster et al. from Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). As sexual harassment in adolescence is pervasive, and as it is difficult to identify those young people for whom harassment will precede future problems in relationships, prevention programs that are universal, i.e. delivered to all youth, are most valuable (McMaster et al.).

The behaviour of young children who learn to gain power through aggression, may develop over the lifespan from bullying, to sexual harassment, delinquency, gang involvement, dating violence, workplace harassment, marital abuse, child abuse and elder abuse (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Prevention and intervention efforts at the middle school and high school levels are critical to address established, and possibly escalating and diversifying patterns, prior to adulthood. Specific approaches or strategies, however, require some consideration of the social and developmental contexts of the middle and high school experience.

2.2   Effects of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Dating Violence

Given the developmental relationship among bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, it is not surprising that the effects of all three problems are very similar. All three can have significant and long-lasting effects on healthy individual and relationship development.

Bullying and victimization affects children and youth to varying degrees. For 70 to 80%, problems are minor and short-lived. For 10 to15%, experiences of bullying and victimization may be more serious and ongoing. For about 5 to10% of children, issues are very serious with bullying and victimization tending to be more severe, frequent, chronic and pervasive (Ibid).

There are a number of serious mental health outcomes associated with chronic problems of bullying and victimization, including a number that are related directly to students' functioning in relation to school:

Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Bullying
- Externalizing problems (i.e. Conduct Disorder)
- Aggression
- Delinquency
- Early dating experience
- Sexual harassment
- Academic problems and school dropout
- Internalizing problems (i.e. anxiety)
- Victimization
- Negative peer reputation
- Continued problems through adulthood

Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Victimization
- Internalizing problems
- Anxiety
- Somatization problems
- Withdrawn behaviours
- Victimization by sexual harassment
- Aggression
- Peer reputation as someone who can be victimized
- School problems (i.e. school refusal, poor concentration, school dropout)

(Pepler & Craig, 2000)

Some bullies are also victims, and these students demonstrate both internal and external behaviour problems, for example, depression and aggression (Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001). In early adolescence, these children report less closeness and more conflict within their friendships compared to other youth, and in middle adolescence they tend to experience more aggression in their romantic relationships.

"Without the capacity for positive relationships, these children may be at particularly high risk for relationship problems in their later roles as spouses, parents, and employees" (Craig & Pepler, 2004).

Over the last decade there have been a number of tragic, high profile incidents in North America where adolescents have taken their own or others' lives in connection with peer victimization. In Canada, victimization by and perpetration of serious bullying was a key factor in the childhood of 19 youth convicted of homicide and murder (Kelly & Totten, 2002).

Adolescents who have been victims of peer sexual harassment report that it made them reluctant to go to school, reluctant to talk in class, inattentive at school, academically unmotivated, and led them to achieve lower grades than they expected (McMaster et al. from AAUW, 1993). For female students, effects of sexual harassment include anxiety, depression, feelings of guilt, shame, worthlessness and even suicide attempts (Larkin, 1994). A strong association has been found between sexual harassment and other forms of interpersonal aggression, and substance use (alcohol and drugs), for both boys and girls (Pepler et al., 2002).

Victims of dating violence may suffer damage to their self-esteem, confidence and sense of safety. For young women there is an association with increased risk of substance use, unhealthy weight control behaviours, sexual risk behaviours, pregnancy and suicidal behaviour (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, Hathaway, 2001). As reported by the Department of Justice Canada (2003), dating violence can also lead to physical injury, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, or death. As well, women who are physically abused by their dating partners tend to experience more physical and emotional harm than men, while also being victimized more frequently and experiencing more severe consequences such as injuries, emotional trauma, fear and anxiety.

Clearly, the nature and extent of the effects of bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence point to a need for timely and focused prevention strategies, targeting all three of these behaviours as parts of the same continuum.

2.3   A Social Ecological Perspective

To understand bullying and victimization, and consider appropriate prevention strategies, it is useful to view bullying from a social ecological perspective, i.e., as a systemic problem that occurs within multiple, interacting social systems, including the individual, the peer group, the school, and the broader community (O'Connell et al., 1999; Totten & Quigley, 2003). The relationships among these factors are extremely complex, characterized by many mediating factors (Totten & Quigley, 2003).

From an ecological perspective, children develop in various domains while accommodating to their immediate social physical environment. This environment, in

turn, is interacting with more remote forces in the larger community and society (Swearer & Doll, 2001, from Capra, 1996). Complex interactions between children and their environments work to develop or inhibit prosocial and antisocial behaviours in each child. Problems, therefore, are the result of ongoing transactions between children and the contexts in which they are embedded. While a number of factors are discussed below for purposes of providing background information, the focus of the current study is on those relating to schools and peers/youth.

2.3.1   Family Factors

Family dynamics and characteristics can interact with other factors to increase the likelihood that young people will engage in bullying or be victimized at school (Craig & Pepler, 1996). Family contributions to bullying behaviours are indirect and long-term (Swearer et al., 2001).

Many young people who bully come from family situations characterized by conflict and violence and these individuals tend to learn aggressive behaviours more than prosocial behaviours at home from parents and siblings (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998). Fathers are more likely to have bullied, and are less likely to have stayed in the home. Various studies indicate that young people who bully come from homes where there is harsh discipline and lack of warmth. Children who bully and those who both bully and are victimized, tend to come from single-mother families with low cohesion, i.e., they are more likely to be distant or disengaged. Relations between siblings are more likely to be negative, and children who bully tend to perceive their siblings as powerful (Smith & Myron Wilson 1998; Craig & Pepler, 1996; Pepler & Craig, 2000). A majority of youth who bully at school and who both bully and are victimized, also engage in bullying behaviour with their siblings (Swearer et al., 2001 from Duncan, 1999).

Young people who are victimized have high and positive involvement with their parents and siblings. Some parents of children who are victimized are more likely to be overprotective, particularly mothers. Parents of may inadvertently increase their child's risk of victimization by not encouraging the child's independence and sociability (Pepler & Craig, 2000; Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998).

Youth who both bully and are victimized have a different profile from those who bully or are victimized. They seem to have the most troubled relationships with their parents, and come from families characterized by marital conflict, restrictive discipline and physical abuse (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998).

Parents are generally unaware of the extent of bullying and victimization problems, and may inadvertently encourage bullying by believing that:
- It is a normal part of growing up
- Young people who bully will grow out of it
- Children should be left to resolve their own conflicts

- The school should not be contacted due to the student's fears that the situation will get worse, and
- Their own child could never be a bully

(Pepler & Craig, 2000)

2.3.2   School Factors

Schools have a vital role to play in the development and socialization of children to ensure that they do not learn "the primary lesson of bullying: Those who have the power have the right to use it aggressively" (Craig & Pepler, 1996, p.251). Features of the school context that relate to the prevalence of bullying include: commitment of the principal to address bullying; the rapport among school staff; the academic emphasis; the school climate; supervision; and the policies, rules, and regulations regarding bullying. In schools where there is bullying, students are likely to report feeling unsafe and unhappy. When bullying is not addressed, many children are exposed to repeated incidents, reinforcing the view that aggressive behaviour is acceptable (Ibid).

Bullying incidents may be verbal, indirect, brief, and at low monitoring times. Low teacher intervention may occur because teachers are not aware of bullying occurring, or they might not know how to respond (Craig, Pepler & Atlas, 2000). Furthermore, similar to the influence that families have on the attitudes and behaviours of young people, school staff may inadvertently encourage bullying by believing that:
- Bullying is a normal part of growing up
- Children will grow out if it
- Children are always best left to resolve their conflicts
- Sometimes victims provoke attacks, and
- Adults should not encourage tattle-taling

(Pepler & Craig, 2000).

The school social environment both influences and is influenced by the attitudes and behaviour of students. "School factors can interact with individual, family, and peer group risk factors to influence the likelihood of bullying and victimization" (Totten, 2003, p.20). While there is inconsistency in the literature regarding definitions of *school climate* and *school culture*, for purposes of this review, *school climate* refers to factors such as organizational size and resources, demographic and socio-economic status of students and teachers. *School culture* refers to the set of norms and beliefs shared by students and staff. There is evidence that school culture can change, and that positive changes in school culture can result in significant improvement in student outcomes (Totten & Quigley, 2003).

Several studies have addressed school culture and student behaviour. Although there is less research that examines school culture and bullying behaviour specifically, school culture is a potential contributing factor in promoting or inhibiting bullying, because issues such as students' feelings of belonging and respect at school do play a role in how students treat each other (Swearer et al., 2001; Totten & Quigley, 2003). Positive school culture is linked to academic and behavioural outcomes, specifically, students who

perceive the culture of their school in positive terms are more likely to perform well academically, display fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety, and report fewer incidents of in-school problem behaviour such as truancy and disciplinary referrals (DeWit, McKee, Fjeld, & Karioja, 2003). "Programs and policies aimed at improving the learning environment of students in Grades 9 and 10 have the potential to protect students against a range of negative outcomes and at the same time foster warm, trusting and supportive relationships amongst students and teachers" (Ibid, p. 6).

An important element of school culture is school membership, i.e., student perceptions about acceptance and belonging at school (Totten & Quigley, 2003). Students reporting a strong sense of school membership appear to be less likely to report academic and behavioural difficulties and poor mental health (DeWit et al., 2003). Support from teachers and peers is integral for student health and success. In a recent Canadian study, substantially more students who lacked support were involved (as perpetrators and victims) in bullying, sexual harassment and racial discrimination (Totten & Quigley, 2003).

The presence of aggressive students in the same or slightly higher grade, lack of supervision during breaks and time before and after school, indifferent or pro-bullying attitudes of teachers and students, and uneven, inconsistent application of rules contribute to an unsafe school environment (Ibid, from Olweus et al., 2002). Students who report feeling unsafe at school have lower self-esteem than students who indicate that they are safe at school (Ibid, from Adlaf et al., 2002; McCreary Center Society, 1999; Rigby, 2000; Welsh, 2000). Low self-worth is associated with a number of outcomes, i.e., poor physical and mental health, and poor school and personal achievement (Ibid, from Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Mechanic & Hansell, 1987).

As discussed above, bullying changes in the transition from elementary to high school. Students entering high school, including those who might be deemed to be "at risk" in terms of bullying and victimization, may be particularly open to influences of their new school environment. This is a key time to provide a prosocial culture and plenty of opportunities for positive engagement, including leadership opportunities.

Research does indicate that when adolescents feel cared for and a part of their school, they are less likely to engage in violence and other risky behaviours. As school culture influences how students and staff view violence, "prevention and intervention programs need to consider the school [culture] as a potential contributing factor in promoting or inhibiting bullying" (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p.378).

2.3.3 Community and Society

In addition to possible exposure to aggressive behaviours in the family and peer group, young people are exposed to aggressive behaviours and role models in the broader community. Bullying is a community problem, as it occurs in all contexts where individuals come together to play, study or work (Craig, Pepler, Hymel & Bovin, 2004).

Although the influences of community and society will be addressed to some extent in the current project's curriculum, these influences have not been targeted for change.

Cultural or societal tolerance for aggression is communicated through various channels, in particular the popular media, music and video games. The message in media representations and political actions such as war, is often that aggression is an effective strategy for gaining power and solving social problems. Young people who are predisposed to aggressive tendencies may be more likely to model aggression around them, perhaps in the form of bullying (Prevention of Bullying among Children and Youth in Hamilton, from Helping Kids Adjust- A Tri-ministry project and School Violence, an interview with Dan Offord, 1994). "Children and youth need to experience supportive attitudes and consistent responses from all systems: at home, at school, in sports, in recreation centres, and in the neighbourhood" (Craig et al., 2004, slide 51). As well, prevention programs need to raise young people's awareness of the risk of learning violence from the media (Eron & Slaby, 1994).

2.3.4   Peer Factors

Typically, bullying takes place in the context of the peer group. Schoolmates of those involved in bullying and victimization are involved, in some way, in approximately 85% of bullying episodes. Despite this high rate of involvement, peers actually intervene in only 11 to 19% of episodes (O'Connell et al., 1999). Students in Grades 7 and 8 are less likely to say that they would offer support for victims, compared to students in younger grades. Concerns are that this relative lack of intervention by peers is likely to reinforce those who bully, who might interpret peers' behaviours as condoning bullying, and contribute to the power differentials in the bully-victim relationship. The influence of modeling is also at play, where peers have the opportunity to observe the powerful individual who bullies and, in most cases, is not punished. Peers might be influenced to become active participants. So, through their observation of bullying, peers might reinforce the aggressive behaviours of those who bully, and they might begin to bully themselves, but they might also shape the behaviours of those who are victimized by intervening in or ignoring the bullying behaviours (Ibid). Significantly, when a bystander actually objects to bullying behaviour, on 57% of occasions the bullying stops (Hawkins, Pepler & Craig, 2001).

With regard to readiness to help those who are victimized, it seems that the expectations of the peer group, especially friends, are more important than perceived expectations of parents. This is true for both primary and secondary level students. Also important is the extent to which students have empathic feelings for victimized individuals. Promoting more pro-active bystander behaviour is difficult, particularly for secondary students, with teachers' expectations having little or no influence. The tendency of a student to help to discourage a bullying incident appears to be related to the expectations of the peer group, particularly the bystander's friends (Rigby & Johnson, 2004). Clearly, effectively promoting more positive bystander behaviour needs to be a key focus for intervention. As discussed below, this promotion might best originate from within the peer group

itself, i.e., with young people who are trained and committed to encouraging their peers to shift their attitudes and behaviour.

Peer influence is also linked to dating violence. The manner in which adolescents handle new roles and expectations in relation to dating may reflect their exposure to appropriate and/or inappropriate role models, and lessons about healthy relationships, including conflict resolution (Justice of Canada, 2003). Attitudes and beliefs play an important role, e.g., men with patriarchal beliefs and attitudes are more likely to be physically, sexually, and psychologically abusive toward their dating partners. Guidance or advice to men from peers to sexually, physically or psychologically abuse their dating partners is an important influence on behaviour. As well, men who have friends who physically, sexually or emotionally abuse their dating partners are more likely to do so (Ibid).

2.4   Youth Engagement

Youth engagement is "the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself" (The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2003). As adolescents work towards finding their identity, they become increasingly active in shaping their world. Their most significant relationships are with their peer group, whom they both influence and are influenced by. Given these social and developmental influences, a youth engagement approach to healthy individual and relationship development and bullying prevention warrants consideration.

A key element of school culture is *school engagement*, i.e., "the extent to which students participate in academic and non-academic school activities, identify with the school, and accept school values" (Ibid, p.9, from Willms, 2002). There is a need to address the attitudes and behaviour of aggressive students early, with a view to avoiding school exclusion and enhancing possibilities for school engagement. School exclusion (e.g., due to frequent absenteeism, dropping out, suspension or expulsion) by its very nature, leads to low school engagement. Of concern, is that excluded students are highly likely to become involved in crime, violence and drugs, and experience academic failure (Ibid). According to a recent Canadian study, schools with the highest rates of participation by students in out-of-class activities had the lowest rates of student problems, regardless of whether a formalized anti-bullying program had been implemented. "Although one cannot imply causality here, it seems that providing the vast majority of students with meaningful opportunities for engagement in school life is linked to healthy peer relations" (Totten, Quigley & Morgan, 2004, p.9 & p.36).

The Centre of Excellence (COE) for Youth Engagement's review of empirical research focuses on youth engagement in relation to health outcomes. In that review, health is an inclusive concept that emphasizes social and personal resources (e.g., youth's success at school, support networks, and participation in civic society) as well as physical capabilities. While causal relationships with health outcomes are not yet empirically supported in the youth engagement research, links have been identified. The COE's review of the literature identifies strong support for the existence of a link between prosocial youth engagement and positive health outcomes. "Youth who were engaged in

structured activities (ranging from extra-curricular school involvements to community service to organizational work in their church or community) were less likely to use cigarettes, marijuana, hard drugs and alcohol, less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour or become pregnant, less likely to engage in violent behaviour or be arrested, less likely to drop out of school, and more likely to complete a college degree, than youth who were not engaged in these kinds of activities. Moreover, there was also evidence that engaged youth were less depressed, had higher self-esteem, were more physically active, obtained higher grades in school, and showed a greater commitment to their friends, families and communities" (pp.14-15). Of particular interest is that involvement in extracurricular activities is related to a substantial reduction in school drop-out, and that this association is strongest for students considered to be "at-risk" in regard to socioeconomic status, and social and academic competence, as rated by their teachers.

In relation to school anti-violence programming, there is some research support for the view that peer support systems can benefit the helpers as well as those in need of help. Peer support systems enable young people who would otherwise be bystanders to take prosocial action to help peers in distress. They empower the helpers by enhancing their sense of social usefulness and self-esteem. In addition, there is some evidence that, over time, they improve the social climate of the school (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000 from Carr, 1998; Cowie & Sharp,1996; Sharp et al., 1994). Students who are engaged, i.e., identify with the school, and accept school values, have clear potential to take an active role in helping their peers and influencing the school's culture.

Engagement in worthwhile projects enables young people to learn new individual and interpersonal skills, develop leadership abilities, build confidence, develop a sense of empowerment and agency, and engage in critical thinking and continuous learning (Barnard, Campbell, Smith, 2003). Although specific strategies to enhance students' engagement with school have not been studied (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002), opportunities for interesting and meaningful involvement that help youth to gain competence and knowledge, and provide a sense of purpose, worth and accomplishment, would appear to have good potential to contribute to school engagement. Students' feelings of belonging and respect do play a role in how students treat each other (Swearer et al., 2001; Totten & Quigley, 2003; McNeely et al., 2002), so whole school bullying prevention efforts should include a focus on enhancing opportunities for positive school membership and youth engagement.

3. PREVENTION

3.1 Best Practices Research on Bullying Prevention and Youth Leadership

"Best practices are the elements and activities of intervention design, planning, and implementation that are recommended on the basis of the best knowledge currently available" (National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control, 2002).

To determine whether bullying or other violence prevention programs are effective, there is a need for carefully designed, experimental studies where the incidence of the targeted behaviour is measured reliably before and after implementation of a specific program. There are few such studies, and among those, results have been mixed, i.e., some positive and some negative results. Furthermore, it is unclear which kind of program has been more successful, and which components have been most important (Smith, Ananiadou & Cowie, 2003; School-based Violence Prevention Programs, 2002; Totten, 2004).

Many intervention models have been based on the anti-bullying intervention that was developed and evaluated by Dan Olweus in the 1980s in the Bergen area of Norway. Considered to be a good model, it was subsequently adapted to educational settings in a number of other countries, but has met with varying degrees of success. The Bergen program focuses primarily on increasing adults' and students' awareness of problems of peer aggression and victimization, and active involvement of adults and peers in resolving incidents (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij & Van Oost, 2001). More recent research suggests that anti-bullying efforts at schools should also include: a clear overview of the learning objectives of the specific target population; more attention to parental involvement and family intervention; and additional information about the adoption and implementation processes of the interventions within schools (Ibid).

So, despite mixed results of outcome studies across anti-bullying programs, there are common principles and program components that can be considered as current best practices. Overall, due to the complex, dynamic and developmental nature of bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, interventions need to be systemic, multifaceted, and long-term. More specifically, best practices research supports a proactive, whole school approach that targets behaviours, attitudes and beliefs of students, school staff and parents.

Research concerning the effectiveness of engaging youth as leaders in bullying and dating violence prevention efforts is very limited and therefore inconclusive at this stage. Nevertheless, utilizing youth in prevention strategies regarding youth violence is considered as, at the very least, a promising strategy (Minnesota Institute of Public Health, 2003; University of Maryland, 1997).

3.2 Systemic Principles for Bullying and Victimization Prevention

As discussed above, there is very consistent support in the research literature for a social ecological perspective, and a systemic approach to understanding and addressing bullying and victimization. Due to its systemic nature, implementing an anti-bullying program in a school is a complex and prolonged process, but there are underlying principles to support the planning and development of successful prevention and intervention efforts:

- As bullying does not occur in isolation, change needs to occur with the student who bullies, the student who is victimized, peers, school staff, parents, and the community.

- There is a need to recognize the roles and responsibilities of students who bully, students who are victims, peers, parents, school staff and administrators, and community.
- Adults in the school must change their attitudes and behaviour in order for students to do so.
- Leadership to address bullying is essential for change.

(Pepler & Craig, 2000)

3.3 Key Strategies

Consistent with the above systemic principles, the literature identifies a number of key strategies for school-based bullying and dating violence prevention efforts:

- Assessment of the school's needs and goals
- Development of a whole school policy (to define the rights, roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community)
- Information and training for school staff
- Involvement of parents
- Involvement of students in various aspects of bullying prevention
- Integration of anti-bullying themes and activities into curriculum
- Identification and cooperation with community resources
- Provision of increased supervision, monitoring and follow-up to reports

(Adapted from Prevention of Bullying Among Children and Youth in Hamilton, 2002; Swearer et al., 2001)

3.3.1 Assessment of the School's Needs and Goals

Baseline information needs to be gathered from students, teachers and parents about the type, frequency, location, and extent of bullying and other victimizing behaviour at the school to develop a suitable program and evaluation plan (Pepler & Craig, 2000; Safe & Responsive Schools Project, 2002). It is important to determine what issues are affecting students' aggressive behaviours, e.g., does harassment appear to be related to gender, race, or other factors? From that information, appropriate learning objectives and intervention strategies for that particular target population and school community can be developed.

3.3.2 Whole School Policy

A whole school policy is the foundation of anti-bullying prevention and intervention. It identifies the rights, roles, and responsibilities of all members of the school community, including a commitment to address bullying, and processes for prevention and intervention. A whole school approach involves students, teachers, school administrators, and parents, in challenging existing social conditions that tolerate, and inadvertently promote, bullying and victimization within the peer context.

The involvement of warm and committed adults, in partnership with students as far as possible, is essential to establish expectations within the school (policy and consequences), to apply sanctions when required, and to support the overall plan for bullying and dating violence prevention and intervention. This can include liaising with community agencies and services to support the school in its efforts (Craig & Pepler, 1999; Swearer et al., 2001). Youth leadership can play an important role.

Sharp (1996) indicates that research has demonstrated that levels of bullying can be reduced by the implementation of an agreed set of procedures for both prevention and response to bullying behaviour, and that these procedures need to be implemented consistently and thoroughly throughout the school community. "The key ingredient for achieving consistent and thorough implementation seems to be the involvement of all staff and all pupils in discussion and debate about what such guidelines should consist of...In secondary schools in particular, higher levels of pupil involvement led to larger reductions in levels of bullying behaviour and an increase in the number of pupils willing to tell a teacher if they were being bullied.." (p18). She goes on to say that longer-lasting changes on levels of bullying, after the initial impact of intervention, seem to relate to shifts in the social behaviour of pupils.

The school community needs to be involved in developing both an understanding of bullying problems and interventions to address these problems. Short and long-term responsibilities should be clearly defined so that problems that arise can be effectively and consistently addressed. A comprehensive approach needs to provide victims of bullying with protection and a safe place at school. As well, this approach must provide those students who persistently engage in bullying with support to change their behaviour patterns before they become more serious ones (Craig & Pepler, 1999).

A whole school policy defines the specific goals for the particular school community and includes:

- A definition of bullying: types, severity, dynamics
- Strategies for preventing bullying (development of awareness and prosocial attitudes; teaching students to avoid bullying; promotion of cooperative interactions; modeling of positive conflict resolution by staff / leaders)
- Reporting (steps for students and staff to report; communication, recording, follow-up)
- Responding to bullying (consequences, who is responsible for follow-up; strategies for supporting bullies and victims; when to involve parents)
- Implementation (changes required in school organization and interactions; resources required; strengths; necessary training)
- Assessment (strategy to monitor effectiveness of policy, prevention, and intervention)

(Pepler & Craig, 2000)

3.3.3 Training of School Staff

Teachers, administrators, counsellors and other school staff require information, training and opportunities for discussion, to promote support for anti-bullying policies and programs. With regard to dating violence prevention and intervention, training for school staff should provide information on dating violence, specific program information, and how to speak with young people who have been involved as victim or perpetrator within a dating relationship (School-based Violence Prevention Programs, 2002).

Adults in the school must be perceived as interested and receptive to concerns expressed by young people. They need strategies to increase their awareness and ability to respond to situations, including:

- Education about the definition of bullying, the nature of bullying, secrecy around bullying, and students' reluctance to report bullying and harassment.
- Help to develop strategies to detect and intervene in incidents
- Information on differentiating play and bullying or teasing and bullying
- How to recognize power imbalance, which can be subtle in bullying.

(Pepler & Craig, 2000)

Bullying, as a form of disrespectful behaviour, needs to be confronted constructively and seized as a "teachable moment" (DiPasquale, 2004). As discussed above, teachers and other adults may inadvertently encourage bullying if they do not actively intervene.

In dealing with aggression or bullying incidents, staff members need to react promptly and with a clear message that bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Appropriate action needs to be taken to protect the young person who is victimized and deal strategically with the perpetrator. At the same time, when a group of students is involved in any capacity, even as an audience, school staff need to focus the consequences on the group and promote more positive bystander behaviour. There is considerable support in the literature for teachers to use, where possible, a non-punitive approach, such as the Method of Shared Concern of Pikas (1989) or the No Blame Approach of Maines and Robinson (1992). These methods reduce the likelihood of resentment towards informants that can lead to more bullying (Rigby & Johnson, 2003), make the peer group culpable, and stress that the group can influence bullying episodes (O'Connell et al., 1999).

In situations of extreme or repeated bullying, young people who have informed teachers need to be protected. Close and ongoing observation and monitoring of the behaviour of students involved, as well as contact with parents might be required (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003).

3.3.4 Parent Involvement

Involvement of parents is a critical component of a whole school approach to bullying and victimization. Parents need information and training about bullying, e.g., through

meetings and clear, user-friendly pamphlets. They also need encouragement to be in contact with the school if victimization is suspected. Information sessions for parents should also address dating violence and how to help adolescents that might be involved in a violent relationship (School-based Violence Prevention Programs, 2002).

Given the importance of family contributions to the development and maintenance of attitudes and behaviours of young people regarding aggression and relationships, and the limited awareness of families of the bullying/victimization of their children, plans for school-based prevention must consider appropriate ways of involving families. Despite the increased influence that peers have in comparison to adults during adolescence, a young person's problems are unlikely to change if there is consistent reinforcement at home. Identifying parents as part of the solution will support open communication and cooperation between the home and school (Craig & Pepler, 1996).

Within a whole school approach to bullying and victimization, parental attitudes and behaviours may require various types of attention. Parents need to be educated to recognize bullying behaviour and the possibility that their child might be involved as either a bully or a victim. As well, advice needs to be available, along with strong liaison with the school and involvement of parents in the school policy on bullying (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998).

Relevant family issues need addressing and support for change must be enlisted. Inadvertently, parents might support bullying if they model power and aggression and do not monitor, set limits and intervene with consequences for bullying at home (Pepler & Craig, 2000). In particular, educating parents about cyberbullying is critical to support appropriate supervision of on-line activities at home and use of electronic text messaging. Parents need to understand the importance of speaking with their children about responsible and safe use of electronic forms of communication.

Parents of young people who bully might need assistance in shifting to less harsh discipline, being more consistent in discipline, and using a more negotiating style for resolving family issues. Positive types of parental involvement should be encouraged for families of bullies, and for families of victims with disengaged or under-involved fathers. For victims' families that are overprotective or enmeshed, encouragement of family members to do more things independently of each other is appropriate. Assertiveness training may be helpful for the children (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998, from Hazler, 1996).

Engaging the families of bullies to address their son's/daughter's behaviour and need for help can be extremely challenging (Chan & Rauenbusch, 2004). The school, however, cannot deal effectively with a student when the family's influence remains unchanged. For some families, referral for clinical intervention that can address family relationships and perhaps individual issues of parents might be required.

3.3.5 Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Students

Given the social context and dynamics of bullying, harassment and dating violence, prevention efforts need to be universal, i.e., delivered to all students, within a milieu that values and promotes positive school culture. The focus should be on fostering more prosocial and respectful behaviours, and promoting healthy relationships. An early, key objective is to raise peer support to the status of "a whole school issue" with a view to everybody acknowledging the contribution that such a system can make in establishing an "ethos of care" (Naylor & Cowie, 1999). Furthermore, given the developmental relationship among bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, prevention efforts need to start in earlier grades, i.e. prior to high school, to help curtail the development and escalation of an aggressive relationship style (Craig & Pepler, 2004). Engaging students to join and promote prevention efforts in various capacities can be expected to have exponential benefits.

Aggressive and non-aggressive young people differ in the value that they place on aggressive acts or expression, and their acceptance of the behaviour as appropriate (Cairns & Cairns, 1991). As discussed above, these values are generally shared by the family and the peer group, so increasing awareness and influencing attitudes are critical to the success of prevention and intervention strategies. Given the relationship among bullying, harassment and dating violence, addressing all of these issues might be most effective in creating climates of positive individual and relationship development for young people (Conolly, Pepler, Craig & Taradash, 2000).

Bullying is an antisocial, aggressive behaviour that should be replaced by prosocial behaviours. A proactive, prosocial approach teaches students to respect each other, show consideration, interact cooperatively, and honour the individual rights of peers (Colvin, Tobin, Beard, Hagan, & Sprague, 1998; Pepler & Craig, 2000). Interventions need to promote attitudes that value tolerance and caring over power and dominance (Swearer et al., 2001). Not surprisingly, interventions to change attitudes and patterns of behaviour call for reinforcement over a long period of time for changes to be sustained (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Pepler & Craig, 2000).

Within a systemic approach to prevention of bullying and victimization, peers are both part of the problem and part of the solution. Peers are nearly always present or aware of bullying incidents, and they sometimes intervene, so they have the potential to play a positive role. When they intervene, peers successfully stop bullying about half the time, but, without guidance, they are just as likely to intervene aggressively as prosocially (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Young people need guidance, a mandate to change their patterns of response, and strategies to help them in responding prosocially in situations (O'Connell et al., 1999). This applies to situations of electronic bullying as well as to "real" time and place incidents.

More specifically, school-based intervention efforts should be aimed at peers to reduce their reinforcement of the bully and encourage their support of the victim. Development of empathy for the victim, i.e., understanding the victim's distress, can move peers to

intervene on behalf of the victim (Pepler et al., 1999; Rigby & Johnson, 2004). This strategy requires increasing students' sensitivity to victimized peers, and developing an ethos of peer support (Craig et al., 2000; Naylor & Cowie, 1999). Peers might identify that there are potential risks involved in intervening (physical, psychological and/or social). These need to be acknowledged and steps must be taken to minimize these risks (Rigby & Johnson, 2004).

Peers also require information about the definition and various forms of bullying, and strategies and a script for intervening (Craig et al., 2000). Just as teachers require training on how to intervene effectively, peers need developmentally appropriate language and skills with which to respond.

As conflict is inevitable in close relationships, conflict resolution skills are important for the development and maintenance of healthy relationships among young people. Although conflict is different from bullying, harassment and dating violence, all of these phenomena can occur in the context of friendships and peer groups. Social skills training can address skills needed by young people in forming and maintaining friendships (Mishna & Muskat, 2004), and can complement other anti-violence program elements focused more specifically on reducing reinforcement for aggressors and increasing support for victims.

Given that sexual harassment increases through Grades 6 to 8, and that interventions are more effective when they prevent behaviour patterns rather than after they have been established, interventions for sexual harassment need to be in place *prior* to high school (McMaster et al., 2002). Similarly, as many girls report having experienced their first incident of dating violence at 12 or 13 years of age, dating violence prevention needs to begin, ideally, in middle school (Mayer & Stein, 2001). As young people who mature early are more likely to become involved in sexual harassment, particular attention should be given to protecting them. Nevertheless, it is important to provide universal programs, to help all adolescents to develop appropriate relationship skills, or ways of interacting with cross-gender peers, and to learn non-harassing ways of relating (McMaster et al, 2002).

School-based dating violence programs have been in existence in North America since the mid-1980s and are usually directed at students in Grades 7 to 12. The overall goal is to reduce violence in dating relationships and promote healthy, respectful relationships. Program objectives include knowledge, attitude and skill-building, with prevention programs incorporating feminist, health promotion and ecological perspectives. Changing attitudes is a key target. Content provides information on healthy relationships, control and power in relationships, gender inequality, gender stereotypes and roles, media/advertising depictions of violence and gender, dynamics of bullying and aggression, communication skills, handling peer pressure, sexual harassment, dealing with disappointment and anger in non-violent ways, and community resources for victims and perpetrators of dating violence. While there is no consensus on what comprises a comprehensive dating violence prevention program, many of these elements are used in

programs that have successfully reduced violence in dating relationships (School-based Violence Prevention Programs, 2002).

Although dating violence prevention programs tend to be presented to mixed gender groups of students, researchers suggest that female students might know more before the program and show greater knowledge gain and attitude change after the program than do male students. Some research has shown a "backlash", with young men tending to reflect less appropriate attitudes after the program than they did before. It has been suggested that, at least initially, some prevention topics be addressed in separate gender groups (School-based Violence Prevention Programs from CRI-VIFF, 1999). Groups could come back together and share learning afterwards. One study (Education Wife Assault, from Winkel & De Kleuver, 1997) found that attitude backlash in young men was greatest in response to messages addressing consequences to the perpetrator. More favourable results are related to messages that focus on experiences of victims.

3.3.6   Youth Leadership and Peer Education

As discussed above, youth development efforts focus on helping adolescents to become engaged, competent and responsible adults. Adolescents who participate in programs that build relationships, engage youth and provide organized, structured activities, tend to have lower rates of social problems and higher rates of civic engagement and school achievement (Moore & Zaff, 2002). Youth leadership can be a means of promoting the positive development of students, including those who may be at-risk. Engaging youth leaders, with appropriate adult support, to dedicate their energies and creativity to issues such as prevention of bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence, benefits the school community, the school culture, and the youth leaders themselves.

Based on the assumption that adolescents are more open to education from peers, some violence prevention programs use a peer leadership approach. While research in the area of peer leadership in violence prevention is somewhat limited, initial studies indicate that a peer helping approach can be a successful treatment for antisocial (including violent) youth (Gibbs, Potter & Goldstein, 1995). There are various potential youth leadership models for developing and implementing a school-based bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence prevention program, but at this stage, there is a paucity of good evaluative data on what works under what circumstances. Of some help might be findings with respect to youth crime prevention from the University of Maryland's Office of Justice Programs' Research Report (1997) which indicates that:

- Mentoring programs are a promising approach to preventing crime risk factors;
- School-based mentoring programs appear promising for reducing nonattendance, but have not been studied sufficiently to determine their effectiveness for reducing delinquency or substance abuse
- Peer mediation programs are not promising, particularly when implemented as stand-alone programs as opposed to broad attempts to improve disciplinary practices; and

- Peer counselling interventions to reduce delinquency can increase delinquency, so are contraindicated.

Specifically with regard to bullying prevention and intervention, Sharp (1996) concurs, at least in part, with the last point above. She points out that while peer counselling programs may be an effective way of enabling students to support their peers, there is "the potential for disaster" (p. 21). This form of support has serious ethical and organizational implications, particularly in relation to confidentiality, responsibility, training and supervision.

While not specifically violence related, evaluative research summarized by the Minnesota Institute of Public Health (2003) on the effectiveness of school-based substance abuse education, concludes that the use of peers as the primary source of instruction is indeed more effective than the use of adults in terms of influencing both knowledge and attitudes. In addition, youth-led programs that are interactive as opposed to didactic prove superior.

A youth leadership approach has been used in a dating violence prevention program in New Brunswick (Byers-Heinlein, Hart, Harrison, Matchett & Byers, 2004). Young university students prepared and delivered interactive presentations to over fifty classrooms of middle and high school students. Although it was not possible to conduct a formal evaluation of the presentations, consistent qualitative feedback from participants, presenters, teachers and guidance counsellors was very positive and clearly supported the value of utilizing young people as presenters.

It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that trained youth leaders have significant potential to influence their peers to understand issues related to bullying and victimization, and the need for empathy and intervention on behalf of students who are being victimized. The current study will explore this question.

Several findings from the literature may be instructive for the development and delivery of youth-led bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence prevention efforts:

- Institutional support, e.g., from the school community, influences the success of students' formal interventions. Support includes "the willingness on the part of the school community to allocate resources of time, space and materials, and to support students' efforts by recognizing students who make a commitment to be leaders" (Partners Against Hate, 2002, p.19).
- Youth require training and adult support if they are to have the potential to succeed as peer leaders. Tobler (1992) found that although peers were more effective leaders than teachers, leaders may or may not be able to facilitate the necessary interaction (Minnesota Institute of Public Health, 2003).
- Contextual characteristics may influence the effectiveness of training sessions. For example, teacher enthusiasm seems to positively affect student receptiveness; the teacher's presence, i.e., at the back of the classroom, does not seem to affect the class reaction to the presentation; teacher's absence may contribute to

problems in classes that are difficult to control; active participation by the teacher can be detrimental, taking away from the authority of presenters and making it seem like a "class" versus a workshop (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2004).

- A male and female presentation team can work well, with each partner providing support and backup for the other. Both can respond to challenges from the group with the same message, demonstrating that young people of both genders agree that, for example, dating violence is unacceptable (Byers-Heinlein, 2004).
- Particularly in regard to discussions re. dating violence, it is important to find presentation strategies and styles of interacting that ensure that girls can participate actively (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2004).

Opportunities for meaningful involvement, including leadership experiences that may help to shape the culture of the school, are important strategies to support healthy outcomes for students. In addition, those students involved in presenting bullying and dating violence prevention material to their peers, are likely to significantly broaden their own understanding of the facts and issues involved, as well as learn new attitudes and skills that they can apply beyond the experience (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2004).

Leadership opportunities, with appropriate adult support, may be particularly valuable for those youth who are otherwise not involved in the school community, feel that they don't belong, and are considered "at risk" in the school environment. For youth involved as leaders in substance abuse education, decreases in drug use were observed for those who volunteered to participate. With respect to bullying, sexually harassment and dating violence, the same could prove true, i.e., those having personal experience with these problems could experience change. As discussed above, with regard to the benefits of youth involvement, "Engagement feeds engagement" (Barnard et al., 2003). Leadership opportunities for diverse youth may be extremely valuable, and "There is evidence that when at-risk kids are given equal access with no stigmatization, they do come out in large numbers" (Violence and Youth, 1994). The leadership experience provides students with opportunities to develop a broad range of skills that can effect positive change in themselves and in the school environment.

One of the most important considerations in planning prevention efforts with a youth leadership focus is the potential for ongoing or sustainable school and community development. Involving youth in a leadership capacity, "passes the torch" by involving a new generation in prevention efforts (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2004).

3.3.7   Collaboration with Community Resources

Given the complex and systemic nature of bullying and victimization, prevention efforts need to include not only those students who are directly and indirectly involved, the family, and the school, but also the community.

Beyond prevention and intervention efforts at school, there is a need in some cases for therapeutic approaches for young people who have been involved in bullying or other forms of victimization, and/or their families. Needs might include enhancement of self-

esteem for young people who have been victimized, and assisting those who have been involved in bullying to develop empathy and prosocial skills (Mishna, 2003). This might require greater or different resources than the school is able to offer. Schools can liaise with community groups, organizations and services to support students and families to connect with informal and formal community resources (Swearer et al., 2001).

Schools can work collaboratively with community agencies to develop, implement and evaluate whole school prevention policies and programs. As well, however, there is the potential for development of a reciprocal relationship with community partners. Student leaders have valuable insight and experience with respect to bullying and other forms of violence. Peer leaders can extend their knowledge, developing skills and interests beyond the walls of the school, and become anti-violence champions in the larger community.

3.3.8 Supervision

Essential to a whole school bullying prevention policy is the provision of increased supervision, monitoring and follow-up to reports. Particular attention must be paid to bullying "hot spots", i.e., areas where bullying tends to happen (Pepler & Craig, 2000).

Research has shown that the social context and the level of supervision play a major role in both the frequency and severity of bullying incidents (Prevention of Bullying among Children and Youth in Hamilton, 2002). Given the limited awareness that teachers and other adults have regarding the extent of bullying at school, staff need to be open to concerns expressed by students and responsive in following through when bullying is identified by students (Craig et al., 2000). As well, it is critical that students feel able to tell an adult when they or someone else is not safe (Pepler & Craig, 2000).

Youth who have been victimized need monitoring to ensure that they are safe, that they feel safe, and that they can experience all that a positive school environment can provide.

3.3.9 The Need for Sustained Intervention

Bullying behaviour is developed over a long period of time, and in various contexts, so change will be slow to occur. It is also important to note that bullying can appear to increase with the raising of awareness within a school (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Pepler & Craig, 2000). Similarly, with regard to dating violence, often significant attitude changes happen slowly, e.g., not until the second year of an intervention program for young women and the third year for young men (School-based Violence Prevention Programs, 2002). Efforts to change attitudes and patterns of behaviour require reinforcement over a long period of time in order to produce long-term changes (Pepler & Craig, 2000; School-based Violence Prevention Programs, 2002; Education Wife Assault, 2004). A leadership program that builds capacity within schools, i.e., enables students to engage with the development process, grow in experience and commitment, and support the involvement of younger students, can contribute to the sustainability of the program over the longer term.

3.4   Conclusion

Current best practices research indicates that a whole school bullying, sexual harassment and dating violence prevention program needs to engage students, staff, parents and the community in an integrated and sustained approach. In addition, the engagement of students as active participants and leaders has the potential to contribute significantly to the ultimate goal of developing healthy individuals and healthy, violence-free relationships.

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