The Ongoing Problem of Bullying in Canada: A Ten-Year Perspective

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The Ongoing Problem of Bullying in Canada: A Ten-Year Perspective

Faye Mishna, Debra Pepler, Charlene Cook, Wendy Craig, Judith Wiener

Bullying is a common experience for many children and youth (Craig and Harel, 2004; Craig and Pepler, 1996, 1997; O’Connell, Pepler and Craig, 1999; Nansel, et al., 2001; Olweus, 1994; Rigby, 2002). Bullying can significantly affect the academic, social, emotional and psychological functioning, as well as the physical health, of both children who are victimized and those who bully (Crick and Bigbee, 1998; Olweus, 1984; Rigby, 2002). In this paper, we report prevalence data for bullying and victimization collected in 1993 and again in 2003. In so doing, we seek to examine whether the prevalence of bullying has significantly changed over this ten-year period and to discuss the possible causes and implications of the patterns in the prevalence of bullying problems.
A strong agreement has emerged in the literature that an ecological systems theoretical framework is most suitable for understanding and addressing the complex phenomenon of bullying among children and youth (Atlas and Pepler, 1998). Bronfenbrenner (1979), widely acknowledged for formulating this framework, considered the qualities of an individual to be a joint function of the characteristics of the person and of the environment over the course of that person’s life up to that time. Thus, individuals are embedded in a number of social and environmental contexts and multiple factors invariably interact to influence social behavioural patterns (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Germain and Bloom, 1999).

When an ecological framework is applied to the understanding of bullying, the dynamics are seen to exist beyond the children who bully, or who are bullied. Rather, bullying is recognized as unfolding within the social context of the peer group, the classroom, the family, the school and the broader community and society. These system levels and their reciprocal interactions must be concurrently considered with individual characteristics and development and with interactions of the children who bully and who are victimized (Atlas and Pepler, 1998; Craig and Pepler, 1997; Olweus, 1984, 1994).

Research on the trends and patterns of bullying in Canada over the last ten years provides support for Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach. Evidence suggests bi-directional processes: the contexts of the family, school, community and society are affected by peer victimization and are also able to influence its course (Spriggs, et al., 2007; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost, 2002). The attitudes of adults, institutions and the larger community toward aggression, violence and victimization play crucial roles in the creation and maintenance of norms (Watson, et al., 2004), as well as in the development of preventive interventions.

The perspectives of adults are associated with children’s victimization, particularly in school settings where a lack of clear rules regarding aggression fosters victimization (Atlas and Pepler, 1998; Ziegler and Rosenstein-Manner, 1991). The adult-child relationship is pivotal to protection from abuse, which is a fundamental human right (Craig and Pepler, 2007; Finkelhor, 1995; United Nations, 1990). Although children look to adults to intervene to stop bullying (Bentley and Li, 1995; Charach, Pepler and Ziegler, 1995), youth grow sceptical of adults’ willingness and ability to effectively intervene (Charach, et al., 1995; Owens, Shute and Slee, 2000).
Moreover, it has been found that teachers do not intervene nearly to the extent they believe themselves to. A Canadian study found that one-quarter of elementary school students reported that teachers often or almost always intervene in cases of bullying, whereas three-quarters of their teachers reported that they usually intervened (Charach, et al., 1995). Students indicate that even when they do intervene, teachers are not always helpful. While Bentley and Li (1995) found that 68% of the children reported that telling a teacher they were being bullied helped, Rigby and Bagshaw (2003) found that almost 50% of children reported their teachers as unhelpful in resolving bullying. Further research suggests girls are more likely to find telling school staff to be effective in resolving bullying, whereas boys are more likely to identify physical and verbal aggression, humour, revenge and distracting or ignoring the student who is bullying to be more effective (Craig, Pepler and Blais, 2007).

Adult disinclination to intervene extends to the community and society. Several factors exacerbate the likelihood that children and youth will experience peer victimization. Bullying occurs in a context and is impacted by individual characteristics, social interactions, cultural sanctions, cultural conditions and the rate of violence within a society (Atlas and Pepler, 1998; Craig and Harel, 2004). Society’s overall perception of the inevitability of violence is reflected in the institutionalization of bullying (Atlas and Pepler, 1998; Charach, et al., 1995). The historical tolerance toward bullying and its perception as a normal part of childhood, may be fuelled by the pervasiveness of victimization (Astor, 1995; Smith and Brain, 2000). Structural factors such as socioeconomic conditions and attitudes toward violence along with societal attitudes inevitably contribute to the prevalence of bullying (Clarke and Kiselica, 1997; Smith, 1991).

In particular, research has identified the intersectionality between social location factors such as gender, racialization, sexuality, socioeconomic status and disability status in contributing to both the general prevalence and individual experience of bullying (Barboza, et al., 2009; Daley, et al., 2007; Giard, 2006; Gruber and Fineran, 2008; Mishna, 2003; Mishna, et al., 2007; Shute, Owens and Slee, 2008). Bias-based bullying both results from and reinforces discrimination toward minorities and marginalized groups within society, based on certain characteristics (Government of Canada, 2004; Greene, 2006; Rigby, 2002), thereby threatening appreciation of diversity, which is valued so highly by Canadians and Americans. Evidence suggests that the pervasiveness of bias-based bullying is high and that children and youth who belong to any number of marginalized groups or minorities are generally more vulnerable to experience victimization by their peers.
In recognition of the complexity of bullying, many jurisdictions have implemented systemic interventions (e.g., Craig and Pepler, 1997; Olweus, 1984; Pepler, et al., 1994) to challenge how systems tolerate and foster children’s victimization, and to alter staff and students’ perceptions (e.g., Clarke and Kiselica, 1997; Craig and Pepler, 1997; O’Connell, et al., 1999). Interventions have had mixed success (e.g., Craig and Pepler, 1996; King, Boyce and King, 1999; Pepler, et al., 1994), partly owing to such factors as variable commitment to these interventions by institutions and societies (Eslea and Smith, 1998; Pepler, et al., 1994); prohibitive time and personnel demands (Gini, 2004); inadequate adaptation of interventions to particular schools and students (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost, 2000); and teacher and school variables (Kallestad and Olweus, 2003; O’Moore, 2000). As such, examining the reasons that victimization persists and devising more consistently effective interventions require ongoing attention and resources.

METHOD
Two studies were conducted, one in 1993 and another in 2003, to examine the prevalence of bullying in Toronto schools. These studies utilized the same instrument to assess frequency of bullying and victimization behaviour. For the present study, we assessed changes in bullying and victimization behaviours during this ten-year period.

1993 Study

In 1993, prevalence data regarding bullying were collected as baseline data for a study examining the effectiveness of a bullying intervention program.

Data Collection and Analysis
Two schools were included in the 1993 data collection, both of which had students in Grades 1 to 6 (ages 5 to 11). The school board identified schools for inclusion in the program because of the principals’ and teachers’ willingness to participate, which was vital to ensure implementation of the bullying intervention program.

One school was located in a disadvantaged area of the inner city and had an enrolment of approximately 800 students. The school was culturally diverse, with about 70% of the students having a first language other than English. A large proportion of the students were from immigrant families, with approximately 30% of the children having immigrated within the past five years. The students were from primarily working-class families. The second school was located in the centre of the city and had approximately 500 students. For approximately 40% of the children, English was not their first language; 10% of the students had immigrated within the past five years. Students came from a range of working-class through to
professional families. Two classes from each of Grades 1 to 6 (12 classes in all) were selected from each school to participate in the evaluation research. Parental consent was obtained for participation in both the questionnaire and observational components of the evaluation. Approximately 80% of the children in the chosen classes had parental consent to participate in the evaluation. In the first year of data collection, this comprised 607 children in total.

The self-report questionnaire used in the original Toronto survey (Pepler, et al., 1993) and adapted from Olweus’s questionnaire (1989) was used to assess children’s experiences of bullying and victimization, which are reported in the present paper. On the questionnaire, students were provided with the Olweus definition of bullying and asked to report on their involvement in bullying others and being victimized in two time periods. “We say a student is bullied when another student or group of students say nasty and mean things to him/her or tease him/her a lot in a mean way. It is also bullying when a student is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room and things like that. These things may happen often and it is hard for the student being bullied to defend him/herself. But it is not bullying when two students of about the same strength argue or fight” (Pepler, et al., 1993).

The five-point scale for responses regarding involvement over the past five days was: 1 = not at all, 2 = once, 3 = twice, 4 = three or four times, 5 = five or more times. The five-point scale for responses regarding involvement over the past two months was: 1 = not at all, 2 = once or twice, 3 = now and then, 4 = about once a week, 5 = five or more times.

**2003 Study**

Prevalence data regarding bullying were collected in 2003 as a component of a study examining the experience of bullying through the perspectives of children who self-identified as having been bullied and of their parents and teachers.

**Data collection and analysis**

This study was conducted in four urban public schools located in neighbourhoods that differed in such factors as income, family composition and percentage of recent immigrants (Mishna, et al., 2005; Mishna, Pepler and Wiener, 2006). As a result of the diversity sought during sampling, participants were from a range of socioeconomic levels. One school was categorized as in the lowest of five levels of income range and one as in the second lowest. These schools had a high proportion of single parent families, a low percentage of parental
higher education, many families living in subsidized housing and high numbers of recent immigrants. The other two schools were categorized as in the highest and second highest income levels. These schools had a moderate to low proportion of single parent families and mixed to high parental education levels. Most of the families lived in single detached housing and there were low to moderate numbers of recent immigrants (Schools like Us Project Description, 2001-02).

In order to obtain students’ self-reports of bullying behaviour in school, the same “Safe School Questionnaire” utilized in 1993 (Pepler, et al., 1993, adapted from Olweus, 1989), was administered to 157 students (63 boys and 94 girls) in six grade four classes and eight grade five classes (69 grade four students and 88 grade five students). Each principal sent an introductory letter to parents of all grade four and five students, with an appended letter from the researchers. A research assistant reviewed the study with students during class time. To obtain parental approval for children to complete the questionnaire, a consent form was sent home. Of the 349 students invited to participate, 159 (46%) received consent.

Prior to the completion of the questionnaire in 2003, research assistants initiated classroom discussions on the survey to ensure clarity among respondents. To further facilitate common understanding, the definition of bullying used in the first study (presented earlier), adapted from Olweus (1989), was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. The reliability of the “Safe School Questionnaire,” measured by Cronbach alpha, was ($\alpha = 0.78$), indicating a good internal consistency for the scale. The children answered questions on a five-point scale. Children respond to bullying items with “it hasn’t happened in the current term,” “once or twice,” “more than once or twice,” “about once a week,” or “several times a week.”

**RESULTS**

In 1993, the sample (n = 229) was 51% boys and 49% girls. In 2003, the sample (n = 159) was 40% boys and 60% girls. In 1993, the sample was 57% grade 4 students and 43% grade 5 students. In 2003 the sample was composed of 40% grade 4 students and 60% grade 5 students.
Summary of Results—1993 Study
In 1993, data from the “Safe School Questionnaire” indicated that, during the current school term, 105 students (55%) reported that they were not bullied, 64 students (33%) reported that they had been bullied once or twice, 10 students (5%) reported that they had been bullied more than once or twice, 6 students (3%) reported that they had been bullied about once a week and 7 students (4%) said that they had been bullied several times a week. In response to how often the students were bullied during the last five days at school, 138 (71%) reported not being bullied, 43 (22%) reported that they had been bullied once, 15 (8%) reported that they had been bullied twice, 8 (4%) said that they had been bullied three or four times and 6 (3%) reported that they had been bullied five or more times.

Summary of Results—2003 Study
In 2003, data from the “Safe School Questionnaire” indicated that, during the current school term, 80 students (51%) reported that they had not been bullied, 45 students (29%) reported that they had been bullied once or twice, 14 students (9%) reported that they had been bullied three or four times and 18 students (11%) said that they had been bullied five or more times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you been bullied at school in the last term?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It hasn’t happened</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once or twice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a week</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you been bullied in the last five days?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three times or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Prevalence of Bullying Behaviours, 1993 and 2003
reported that they had been bullied once or twice, 14 students (9%) reported that they had been bullied more than once or twice, 8 students (5%) reported that they had been bullied about once a week and 10 students (6%) reported that they had been bullied several times a week. In response to the question regarding how often they had been bullied during the last five days at school, 101 students (64%) reported that they had not been bullied, 29 students (18%) reported that they had been bullied once, 9 students (6%) reported that they had been bullied twice, 12 students (8%) reported that they had been bullied three or four times and 6 students (4%) reported that they had been bullied five or more times.

**Comparisons across time**

In order to compare the results from the 1993 and 2003 studies, bivariate analyses involving Pearson’s chi-square were conducted to compare frequencies on individual questions to examine any significant changes over the ten-year period.

**RESULTS**

**Experiences of Victimization**

Differences in the number of children reporting victimization experiences were assessed with chi-square analyses on the following questions:

- How often have you spent recess alone because other students do not want to spend time with you?
- How often have you been bullied at school during the last semester?
- How often have you been bullied because of your race?
- How many times have you been bullied in the last five days at school?
- How often have you been teased?
- How often have you been hit/kicked?
- How often have you been bullied in other ways?

Chi-square analysis on these questions revealed no significant difference in the responses to any of these questions between 1993 and 2003.

**Frequency of Bullying**

Frequency of bullying others was obtained by assessing responses to the following questions:

- How often have you taken part in bullying other students in the last five days at school?
- How often have you taken part in bullying other students during the last semester?
Chi-square analysis identified significant differences in 1993 and 2003 responses to both questions: How often have you taken part in bullying other students in the last five days at school? ($\chi^2 = 4.11$, df = 1, $p = < 0.05$), and How often have you taken part in bullying other students during the last semester? ($\chi^2 = 4.65$, df = 1, $p = < 0.05$).

Chi-square analysis indicated that these questions were the only ones for which responses changed significantly from 1993 to 2003. However, these results are somewhat contradictory, as more students identified bullying in the last five days in 1993 than in 2003 (18% versus 10%), whereas more students identified bullying during the last semester in 2003 than 1993 (32% versus 22%).

**Frequency of Teacher and Peer Intervention**

The frequency of teacher and peer interventions as reported by the participants was explored using chi-square analysis on the following questions:

- How often do teachers try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?
- How often do other students try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?

Chi-square analysis showed no significant difference in the responses to any of these questions between 1993 and 2003.

**Table 2: Comparison of Bullying Prevalence, 1993 and 2003**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df$^a$</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ $^b$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How often have you spent recess alone?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it hasn’t happened</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once or twice</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than once or twice</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How often have you been bullied at school in the last term?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it hasn’t happened</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once or twice</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than once or twice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a week</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>several times a week</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Comparison of Bullying Prevalence, 1993 and 2003 (Cont)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you been bullied because of race?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>χ&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; &lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it hasn’t happened</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once or twice</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than once or twice</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you been bullied in the last five days?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>χ&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; &lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>none</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once or twice</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three times or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you bullied others this term?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>χ&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; &lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>it hasn’t happened</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at least once</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you bullied others in the last five days?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>χ&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; &lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>it hasn’t happened</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at least once</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you been teased?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>χ&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; &lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once or more</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you been hit/kicked?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>χ&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; &lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once or more</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you been bullied in other ways?</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>df&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>χ&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; &lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once or more</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

Overall, our findings reflect few significant differences between bullying rates in 1993 and those in 2003. Trends found to be statistically significant did not reflect meaningful differences, as bullying behaviour in 1993 and 2003 found to be significantly different still both fall within a typical range regarding this behaviour. Findings reflect a stable prevalence of bullying over time.

A limitation is the fact that the two sets of data collection took place in different schools. Nevertheless, the findings are consistent with other research in this area, including a report by the Canadian Council on Social Development highlighting fairly consistent rates of between 11-14% of being bullied “at least some of time” between 1996 and 2000 (Canadian Council on Social Development [CCSD], 2006). Our research contributes to knowledge in the field that highlights the continuing pervasiveness of bullying victimization and illuminates the need for more effort to significantly reduce bullying and protect children.

Our results may also be attributed to other trends in bullying in Canada, particularly increased education and knowledge regarding what constitutes bullying. Increased education regarding the importance of bullying, resulting from school-based programs targeting bullying, may be encouraging more children to identify their experiences as

Table 2: Comparison of Bullying Prevalence, 1993 and 2003 (Cont)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have students tried to intervene?</th>
<th>1993 n (%)</th>
<th>2003 n (%)</th>
<th>df*</th>
<th>χ² b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>almost never</td>
<td>42 (46)</td>
<td>46 (34)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>71 (77)</td>
<td>77 (58)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td>22 (11)</td>
<td>11 (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have teachers tried to intervene?</th>
<th>1993 n (%)</th>
<th>2003 n (%)</th>
<th>df*</th>
<th>χ² b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>almost never</td>
<td>34 (25)</td>
<td>21 (18)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>54 (40)</td>
<td>45 (39)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td>47 (35)</td>
<td>49 (43)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Degree of freedom.

b χ²: Chi-square statistic.

*p < 0.05
bullying such that the appearance of bullying remains steady despite the possibility of decreasing prevalence. Students’ reporting may be further influenced by the increasing recognition since 1993 of indirect bullying and the fact that the new sample included a higher percentage of girls. Even though boys are victimized more frequently than girls are (e.g., Atlas and Pepler, 1998; Baldry and Farrington, 1999; Craig and Pepler, 2007; Olweus, 1994), they tend to be victimized through direct aggression, while girls are apt to be victimized through indirect aggression (e.g., Craig and Pepler, 1997; O’Connell, et al., 1999; Owens, et al., 2000). The girls might therefore be more likely to identify indirect bullying and this may have impacted the numbers and contributed to holding the prevalence steady.

The lack of significant improvement regarding bullying prevalence has impacted Canada’s international reputation in this field. In the recent World Health Organization “Health Behaviour in School-aged Children” survey, Canada ranked a dismal 26th and 27th out of 35 countries on measures of bullying and victimization, respectively (Craig and Harel, 2004). Across all categories of bullying or victimization, Canada consistently ranked at, or below the middle of the international group. Our position on the international stage has slipped relative to other countries. In the 1993/1994 survey, Canada’s ranking on the prevalence of bullying and victimization was relatively higher than in the 2001/2002 survey (King, et al., 1996), however, the prevalence of bullying and victimization among Canadian students has remained relatively stable. The drop in Canada’s relative ranking, despite stable rates, suggests that other countries have been preventing bullying problems more effectively than Canada. Many of the countries that rank higher than Canada have had national campaigns to address bullying problems.

While bullying rates have not appreciably changed over the last ten years, various interventions have been implemented to address bullying during that period. In particular, both of these studies were conducted during a period of time in Canada when over 60 school-based anti-bullying programs were funded by Canada’s National Crime Prevention Strategy. Although there are many activities to prevent and reduce the risks of bullying and victimization, they tend to use diverse assessments and interventions, often without any evidence of effectiveness. Some interventions actually make the problem worse since they are not rigorously evaluated and operate in isolation without an evidence-based national platform for co-ordination and implementation. Academic publications concerning bullying similarly reflect this trend; while there has been a significant increase in publications from 1993–2003, insufficient
evidence-based knowledge has been generated in this field (Berger, 2007). This is particularly true of prevention and intervention oriented knowledge (Berger, 2007).

The high proportions of Canadian students who report bullying or being bullied confirm that this represents an important social problem. Further, the lack of national and evidence-based efforts in this area, coupled with Canada’s declining international standing in this field underline the need for a national strategy on bullying. Many cases of Canadian children who have died, or were seriously injured, due to bullying have elicited recognition of the seriousness of bullying problems. An ecological approach to victimization stresses the importance of preventive interventions in all spheres; therefore attention to this field must extend beyond the school system. This recognition needs to be reflected at a national research and policy level, in order to ensure a co-ordinated and systematic response necessary to alleviate this growing public health problem.

**CONCLUSION**

Bullying continues to be a significant issue in children’s lives, with well documented short- and long-term mental health, academic, physical and social problems. Indeed since these studies were conducted, technology such as the Internet, email, cell phones and web cams, has provided the opportunity for new forms of bullying to occur that are even more removed from adult view and supervision.

It is critical that policy and protocols that address bullying and violence must accompany anti-bullying initiatives and must model adaptive conflict resolution, as well as respect for diversity. For instance, school administrators must ensure that there is increased adult vigilance and supervision in the school and that all members of the school community know how to respond effectively. It must be clear to students and to their parents that teachers and school administrators will take seriously reports of bullying and that they are committed to solving bullying problems in a timely fashion (Cummings, et al., 2006; Smith, et al., 2005; Tutty, 2002) and that for example, they will make use of incidents that arise as “teachable” moments or moments of support (Mishna, et al., 2007).

It is clear that Canada both requires and is ready for national leadership regarding bullying. In particular, bullying education, prevention and intervention needs to move beyond the schools and reflect a national call to action. This national response should include establishing an independent body such as a Children’s Commissioner responsible for
children’s rights in Canada, as well as national educational campaigns and federal/provincial partnerships to prevent peer victimization. This work has been started by Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet), a new initiative of the Network Centres of Excellence. PREVNet is bringing together researchers from universities and national non-governmental organizations to promote safe and healthy relationships for Canadian children and youth (www.prevnet.ca). Additional national efforts must be called upon to join with PREVNet to generate and disseminate scientifically-based resources to build awareness, change attitudes, assess bullying, implement evidence-based strategies and develop policies that promote and support these activities within every community in Canada.

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