

Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (2007-2008)

Aim

The Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS) aimed to redress the lack of reliable evidence about the nature and prevalence of covert bullying in the Australian context, and to identify possible policy and practice options for schools that are practicable, relevant, and acceptable to Australian education systems, sectors and schools. This study aimed to shed new light on covert bullying among school-age children, with the ultimate goal of identifying feasible, effective and sustainable policy and practice to address this phenomenon.

Methods

Triangulation of covert bullying behaviour data was collected using mixed methods across three separate studies from a total of 20 832 Australian students aged 8 to 14 years from over 200 schools and 456 school staff.

A series of qualitative and quantitative covert bullying sub-studies and desk research were conducted:

- Sub-study 1: Synthesis of published theoretical and empirical evidence;
- Sub-study 2: Qualitative data (2007) collected from 84 students aged 8 to 13 years;
- Sub-study 3: Quantitative CHPRC data (from existing data sources 2002-2006) collected from 13 330 students aged 8 to 14 years; and
- Sub-study 4: Cross-sectional quantitative national data (2007) collected from 7 418 students aged 8 to 14 years and 456 school staff.

Results/Findings

The major findings of the four ACBPS sub-studies provide evidence, which can guide teacher and student understandings of covert bullying and the development of strategies to effectively address this behaviour.

The results of the ACBPS show that 27% of students are bullied every few weeks or more often. The results also showed that covert bullying is a fairly common experience among Australian secondary school students, with one in six students (16%) reporting they were bullied covertly every few weeks or more often in the past term. Moreover, covert bullying in Australia is likely to follow international trends and become more prevalent and insidious among students largely due to young people's increasing use of and dependency on information and communications technology to connect with their peers. The ACBPS also found that covert bullying has the potential to result in more severe psychological, social and mental health harm than overt bullying, and also has the capacity to inflict social isolation on a much broader scale.

The ACBPS teacher survey revealed that teachers are more likely to intervene on overt bullying than covert bullying, usually because many schools have clear, standard policies and courses of action for staff to follow if they observe overt bullying.

As a result of these findings, a number of recommendations were produced for national policy and practice; education systems and sectors; and schools.

Who was involved?

Investigators: Donna Cross, Therese Shaw, Lydia Hearn, Melanie Epstein, Helen Monks, Leanne Lester, and Laura Thomas

Publications

Cross, D., Shaw, T., Hearn, L., Epstein, M., Monks, H., Lester, L., Thomas, L. 2009. Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS). Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth.

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