

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the bullying strategies that primary school principals reported using throughout the Mid West Education District (Yamaji Region) of Western Australia. This paper addresses the Conference theme of ‘advocacy policy-making and systems strengthening in mental health promotion and prevention activity’ and focuses on the determinant of ‘freedom from discrimination’.

Introduction

In addition to the serious mental health consequences of bullying, repeated exposure to bullying and racism in the school environment is a major contributor to poor academic performance and poor retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Howard, 2002). **If schools fail to provide culturally secure responses to bullying they can further alienate Aboriginal students and perpetuate perceptions of systemic racism towards Aboriginal people** (Howard, 2002; Lawrence, 1994).

Study Design

This mixed method study is being conducted as part of the *Solid Kids, Solid Schools – Aboriginal Bullying Prevention* project in the Yamaji Region of Western Australia. Principals from every primary and district high school in the Yamaji Region were invited to complete a survey to learn about their bullying prevention and management strategies and what, if any, protocols were used to respond to the strengths and needs of their Aboriginal students. Thirty three principals (55% response rate) completed the survey by either telephone interview or self administration.

Findings

Findings varied according to community and school demographics. Principals shared the following:

- Most schools believed their bullying prevention and management strategies treated **all** students the same;
- Aboriginal students involved in bullying are more withdrawn than non-Aboriginal students involved in bullying at a school yard, class and school level;

- Restorative justice strategies provided a greater sense of ‘fairness’ in the administration of consequences for unacceptable behaviour, ‘fairness’ was an important issue to some Aboriginal children;
- Concerns about the impact of intergenerational poverty, family violence and community violence (i.e. family feuding) on some of their Aboriginal students; and
- One school acknowledged the importance of kinship relationships in formulating a culturally secure response to managing unacceptable behaviour at school.

These findings will contribute, at a systemic level, to the development of a bullying prevention and management program to be piloted through the *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* project.

Charter recommendation

To help Aboriginal students who are bullied or who bully others education systems must provide culturally secure responses that protects the unique strengths and meets the unique needs of these students and their communities.

REFERENCES

Howard, D. (2002). Family, Friends and Teachers: Why Indigenous Students Stay at or Leave School. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 30(2), 8-12.

Lawrence, H. (1994). Aboriginal children in urban schools. *Issues in Educational Research*, 4(1).