

Expressed Readiness of Australian Schoolchildren to Act as Bystanders in Support of Children who are Being Bullied

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Promoting interventive action on the part of student bystanders witnessing peer victimisation is currently seen as a promising way of reducing bullying in schools. A video depicting bullying in the presence of bystanders was viewed by late primary ($n = 200$) and early secondary school students ($n = 200$). Some 43% of the students indicated that they were likely to help the victim. Questionnaires were employed to assess student attitudes towards victims, beliefs about the expectations of parents, friends, and teachers, perceived self-efficacy, and social desirability response set. Multiple regression analysis identified as significant predictors of expressed intention to intervene: attending primary school, having rarely or never bullied others, having (reportedly) previously intervened, positive attitude to victims, and believing that parents and friends (but not teachers) expected them to act to support victims. Implications for action to reduce bullying in schools are discussed.

It is now recognised worldwide that bullying or peer victimisation is prevalent in schools (Smith et al., 1999) and has serious health consequences for a substantial proportion of repeatedly victimised children (Rigby, 2003b). In addressing this problem there has been in recent years a shift away from seeing bullying in schools as simply the outcome of individual differences in dyads, for example in physical strength and/or in personality, such as being prone to act either aggressively or submissively. The shift has been toward seeing bullying largely in relation to the social or group context in which it occurs (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Pepler & Craig, 1995). With it, there has been an emphasis upon the social roles that bystanders of school bullying commonly adopt (Andreou & Metallidou, 2004;

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Salmivalli, 1999; Sutton & Smith, 1999). This has led educational psychologists to address the question of how bullying in schools can be reduced through encouraging bystanders to engage in pro-social and interventive behaviour to assist victims of peer victimisation, as evident, for instance, in the recent work of Menesini, Codecasa, and Benelli (2003).

The extent to which bullying takes place in the presence of onlookers has been estimated among primary schoolchildren in Canadian schools using direct observational methods and employing video cameras and wireless microphones (Pepler & Craig, 1995). The researchers reported that peers (aged 5–12 years) were present in 85% of bullying episodes on the school playground.

How bystanders react to viewing bullying incidents has been investigated in a number of ways. An examination undertaken by O'Connell et al. (1999) of 53 videotape segments in which peers were present showed that only 25.4% of the time was spent in discouraging the aggression. The rest of the time was spent in either encouraging the bullying (20.7%) or passively reinforcing the bullying by watching without joining in (53.9%). According to Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig (2001) the majority of interventions (57%) to discourage bullying were in fact effective in stopping the bullying.

An alternative way of assessing the behaviour of bystanders in schools is to make use of peer-evaluation questionnaires in which students are asked to indicate how their peers respond when they observe bullying situations. Salmivalli, Huttunen, and Lagerspetz (1997) used this method in Finland with 459 schoolchildren, aged 11–12 years. They estimated that only 16.5% of children were identified as typically defending the victim. In contrast, some 25.5% of the children were classified by students as either assisting or reinforcing the bullying.

A final method of estimating the prevalence of different forms of bystander behaviour among children is to employ a self-report questionnaire. Estimates based on results from this method suggest that a larger proportion of students support victims of school bullying. In Australia, Rigby (1996a) estimated that 43% of primary school students "always or usually" tried to stop bullying. In England Boulton and Underwood (1992) reported that among late primary school students, some 49% indicated that they had tried to help. In New Zealand, Adair (1999) estimated that 54% of primary school students "stood up" for victims or got help for them. In Belgium, Vettenburg (1999) provided a figure of 62% of elementary school students supporting the victim. Henderson and Hymel (2002) reported that among Canadian primary school students, some 67.7% indicated that they "usually try to stop it". These estimates, which vary substantially between 43% and 67.7%, are based upon responses to unclearly defined situations.

Variations in results have been obtained according to the type of bullying witnessed. Lean (1999) conducted a study with 90 Australian primary school students, mean age 11 years, using different scenarios in which the bullying was described as physical, verbal, or indirect. Some 83% indicated that they would intervene when the bullying was physical, 74% when it was verbal, and 58% when it was indirect. The contrast between estimates based upon direct observational data and

estimates from self reports suggest that the latter may be inflated by students responding in a socially desirable manner. It may also be the case that some children are deterred from acting in accordance with their desire to support victims by factors of which they only become aware in the actual bullying situation.

It has been consistently reported that intervening to support victims becomes less common with age (Henderson & Hymel, 2002; Menesini et al., 2003; O'Connell et al., 1999; Salmivalli, 1999). There have been inconsistent reports on the relationship between intervening and gender. Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, and Lagerspetz (1998) reported that primary schoolchildren identified through peer reports as defenders of victims were much more likely to be female. In their study, 28.4% of girls were classified as defenders against 4.6% of males. However, using direct observational methods, O'Connell et al. (1999) reported that there were no significant differences between intervening by boys and girls, although younger and older girls were significantly more likely to support the victim than older boys.

Beyond gender and age, there has been little attempt to identify variables that may affect the way in which bystanders respond to bullying situations. Exceptions include an examination of personality factors that may be correlated with participant roles exercised in bullying situations (Tani, Greenman, & Schneider, 2003), which suggested that defenders of victims manifested a high level of friendliness, while supporters of bullies showed high levels of emotional instability and low levels of friendliness. More recently, Andreou and Metallidou (2004) have reported that a measure of social efficacy for assertion failed to predict a reported tendency for Greek primary school students to defend children who were being victimised.

In the present study we examined a number of social and personality factors that appeared likely to be related to the tendency to support victims in bullying situations. First, there was attitude towards victims. This variable had been shown to correlate negatively with bullying behaviour among Australian schoolchildren (Rigby & Slee, 1993) and positively with expressing approval of teachers and students who intervened to stop bullying. Given that students are likely to be motivated to help individuals for whom they feel some compassion or sympathy, it was expected that attitudes to victims would correlate positively with indicating a readiness of students as bystanders to help those who were being bullied.

Helping someone in a potentially difficult or dangerous situation requires a degree of confidence in one's ability to affect outcomes in a positive way. It was hypothesised that those helping victims would have a relatively high level of self-efficacy. As conceptualised within Bandura's (1995) social learning theory, self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to produce desired results by one's own actions. It is believed to contribute to pro-social functioning (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gebino, & Pasirelli, 2003). No direct test of whether high levels of self-efficacy in children are related to intervening in bystander situations has been reported, although it has been reported that teachers whose self-efficacy had been raised through a staff training program subsequently acted more effectively in reducing the rate of bullying incidents at school (Howard, Horne, & Joliff, 2003).

A further contributing factor may be a sense that others with whom one has a significant relationship have expectations regarding how one should behave as a bystander witnessing bullying. One would anticipate that the perceived expectations of parents, friends, and teachers could have some influence in motivating students to act in a helpful (or unhelpful) manner. Such normative pressure has been shown to be relatively independent of the attitude one may hold (Azjen & Fishbein, 1980). Which of the possible normative pressures would have the greatest influence was unclear, although the importance of the peer group in the context of behaviour at school suggests that expectations of friends, as distinct from teachers, may have a greater influence (Astill, Feather, & Keeves, 2002).

It is widely acknowledged that behaviour in a given situation may be predicted by relevant past behaviour (see Ajzen, 1988). Clearly this would include actual interventions performed by a student to help a victim. In addition, one might expect previous engagement in bullying, especially in the recent past, to influence a student's bystander behaviour. As Cairns and Cairns (1994) and Salmivalli (2001) among others have shown, children who bully tend to belong to networks of children who bully and can be expected to assist rather than discourage the bullying behaviour of their associates. Whether children who are victimised tend to help other victimised children is currently unclear.

Finally, as suggested earlier, there was a strong possibility that expressed intentions to act to assist victims may be influenced by considerations of social desirability. This construct contains two elements: self deception (a personality factor) and impression management (related to environmental contingencies; Sullivan & Scandell, 2003). The tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner is more likely to be present when reporting upon behaviour that may be considered somewhat reprehensible (Rigby, 1987), for example not helping others in distress. Controlling for this possibility can, at least in part, be effected by making use of a reliable measure of social desirability responding that is suitable for children (Eysenck, 1965).

The most commonly used method for discovering the intentions of students regarding assisting victims of bullying is to provide a brief verbal description of a bullying incident and ask students to indicate whether they would intervene. Unfortunately, this approach may fail to capture the atmosphere which bystanders experience when bullying takes place. A greater degree of verisimilitude can be provided by having students view a video graphically describing bullying episodes in the presence of bystanders who respond in different ways, that is, as supporters or opposers of the victim. In the present study, we made use of a series of cartoons in which the words used by bystanders were spoken by children. The video subsequently provided relevant stimuli to elicit reactions from respondents.

In summary, the study enabled us to estimate the extent to which different kinds of bullying behaviour in the presence of bystanders occurred in upper primary and lower secondary coeducational schools in Australia, and how children, as bystanders, believed they would respond in similar situations. Further, we examined the relationship between the expressed intentions of students as bystanders to assist fellow students who were being victimised by a peer at school and a number of

possibly related factors: demographic (sex and level of schooling); reported previous experience (involvement in bully/victim actions and having intervened to help victims); attitudinal (pro-attitude towards victims of bullying); perceived normative pressure to intervene (from parents, peers, and teachers); and personality (perceived self-efficacy and tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner).

Method

Respondents

Children in this study were from state coeducational schools in the Adelaide region of South Australia. There were 200 students (100 male and 100 female) attending primary school in Years 6 or 7 (mean age 11.5 years). They were recruited from four schools. In addition there were 200 students (100 male and 100 female) attending secondary school in Years 8 or 9 (mean age 13.5 years). These were also from four schools. In accordance with ethical requirements, parental permission was required for each child to participate.

Measures

The Victimisation Scale. This measure contains five items describing the following negative behaviours: hurtful teasing, unpleasant name calling, being deliberately excluded, lies being spread about you, and being threatened with harm. Respondents were asked to say how often during the current year they had been deliberately treated in each of these ways by a more powerful person or group seeking to hurt them. The response categories were: never, a few times, many times. The alpha coefficient reflecting internal consistency was .78.

The Bullying Others Scale. This measure contained items similar in content to the Victimisation Scale, slightly reworded, with instructions to students to indicate how often they had treated someone less powerful than themselves in each of the six ways during the current year. The same response categories were used. Coefficient alpha was .83.

Normative pressure to help victims. This was assessed by asking students first to view a picture in the questionnaire in which a child was being bullied physically in the presence of bystanders. They were then asked to indicate what the following people would expect them to do: mother, father, friends, and teacher. Students responded to each on a five-point scale, from “strongly support the bully” (1) to “strongly support the victim” (5).

Attitudes to victims. This was assessed using the Rigby and Slee (1993) Attitude to Victims Scale. This consists of 10 items, half positively and half negatively keyed.

“Kids should not complain about being bullied” was negatively keyed. High scores reflected a favourable attitude to victims. Coefficient alpha was .84.

The Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale. This measure was slightly adapted from the scale published by Schwarzer (1992). One item on his 10-item scale was excluded, namely, “Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations,” because the wording was considered inappropriate for pre-adolescent children. High scores reflect high degrees of perceived self-efficacy. Coefficient alpha was .82.

The Social Desirability Scale. For this a subscale of the EPI for Children (Eysenck, 1965) commonly known as the “Lie Scale” was used. It consists of 13 items to which a yes/no response can be given. An example is: “Are all your habits good and desirable ones?” (A “yes” answer is scored as a socially desirable response). In computing a social desirability score, results for one item were excluded. This was, “Do you always practice what you preach?” Substantial numbers of students did not know the word “preach”. Coefficient alpha was .74.

Procedure

Data were collected in classrooms from children who viewed a video in which pictorial representations of bullying incidents in the presence of bystanders were presented. Scenes depicted two forms of bullying, one verbal and the other physical. Visual information about what was being said by the bully, victim, and bystanders (provided in “balloons”) was accompanied by the words being spoken by children who assisted and advised in the production, for example in choosing wording that students were likely to use. While viewing the video, respondents were asked first how often they had seen “something like this” happening at their school. They responded on a questionnaire (completed anonymously) using these categories: every day, most days in the week, once or twice a week, and hardly ever. Subsequently, they viewed scenes in which bystanders reacted in different ways: supporting the victim, supporting the bully, or ignoring what was going on. Next, they were shown a picture of children objecting to what was going on and asked to record whether they would likewise object. The response categories were: I certainly would, I probably would, I’m really unsure, I probably would not, and I certainly would not. After viewing the video, respondents completed the questionnaire, answering questions from which a series of measures were derived (see above).

Results

The Prevalence of Bullying

How frequently bullying behaviour occurred in the presence of observers was estimated from judgements about how often respondents had personally seen verbal

and physical bullying, as depicted in the drawings, taking place during the school year. Some 92% of the primary school students ($n = 200$) and 97% of the secondary students ($n = 200$) indicated that they had observed verbal bullying taking place at least once. For physical bullying, the corresponding figures were 60% and 74%. A minority of students saw bullying happening frequently. Verbal bullying was seen as occurring every day or most days by 22% of primary students and 40% of secondary students; physical bullying was seen as occurring that often by 10% of primary students and 19% of secondary students. Clearly bullying in the presence of bystanders was a common feature in the lives of a high proportion of students, especially at the secondary level.

An alternative way of estimating the frequency of bullying utilised self reports of being victimised by others and bullying others. Of the five ways of being bullied or bullying others listed in the questionnaire, name-calling was the one most commonly reported: some 68% of primary school students and 81% of secondary students reported having been bullied in this way at least once during the year. Being hit or kicked was the least commonly reported. A substantial proportion reported having been subjected to such physical abuse at least once. These included 40% of primary school students and 46% of secondary students.

Given that "being bullied" commonly includes the criterion of being frequently subjected to abuse, the proportion of students in this category was estimated by computing the number reporting being bullied many times in at least one of the five stipulated ways. Among primary school students there were 26% of boys and 21% of girls in this category. At the secondary level, there were 30.6% of boys and 20% of girls. Finally, the proportion of bullies was estimated using the criterion of reporting having bullied others many times in at least one way. Thus, among primary school students 11% of boys and 10% of girls were identified as bullies, and at the secondary school level there were 24% of boys and 7% of girls. The sex difference here was significant ($\chi^2 = 5.85$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Thus the judgements of students as observers of bullying behaviour at school and self reports of being involved in bully/victim incidents concurred in supporting the conclusion that bullying behaviour was highly prevalent among primary school students and especially secondary school boys.

Reported Readiness to Object to Bullying

The tendency among students to intervene in support of victims of peer bullying was estimated first using responses to pictures depicting bullying behaviour. Results indicating that students would object to what was happening suggested that across different school levels and scenarios some 43% would probably or certainly intervene (see Table 1). Primary school students appeared somewhat more ready to do so. Generally, students were more prepared to intervene when the bullying was of a verbal rather than a physical kind.

Inspection of Table 1 shows a wide range of responses provided by students in each of the two bystander situations. Among primary students, girls tended to be more supportive of the victim in verbal bullying ($\chi^2 = 11.26$, $df = 4$, $p < .05$) and

Table 1. Percentages of students reporting likelihood that they would support the victim

	(1) Certainly would	(2)	(3) Unsure	(4)	(5) Certainly would not
Verbal bullying					
Primary boys	18	36	26	15	6
Primary girls	12	54	26	5	3
Secondary boys	3	27	36	23	11
Secondary girls	8	31	40	21	0
Physical bullying					
Primary boys	14	27	37	19	3
Primary girls	12	41	32	8	7
Secondary boys	2	29	31	22	6
Secondary girls	3	30	42	23	2

physical bullying ($\chi^2 = 13.85$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$). Among secondary students sex differences were not significant ($p > .05$).

Reported Frequencies of Past Interventions to Help Victims

Most students indicated that they had personally acted to stop a student being bullied by another student or group of students during the current school year. Results for boys and girls have been pooled as no significant gender differences were found ($p > .05$).

The most common response was to have done something to help a few times, with primary school students, on the whole, reporting more helping behaviour. These results suggest that at least 30% of primary students and 24% of secondary students have repeatedly sought to assist children who are being victimised. On the negative side, approximately one student in five has never attempted to provide assistance. Further details are included in Table 2.

Expectations of Others

After viewing a picture of a person being physically bullied by another child (with bystanders present) students were asked what each of these people would expect of them: mother, father, friend, and teacher. In the case of parents, students were

Table 2. Percentages of students reporting carrying out actions to support a victim

	Never	A few times	Fairly often	Often
Primary ($n = 197$)	14.2	54.3	17.8	13.7
Secondary ($n = 183$)	24.6	51.4	16.4	7.7

Table 3. Perceived expectations of others: percentages seen as supporting intervention

	Mother	Father	Friends	Teacher
Primary school				
Boys	81	71.4	48	88
Girls	90	86	74	85
Secondary school				
Boys	69	64.3	35	81
Girls	74	66.7	55	85

advised to omit the question if a designated parent was no longer alive. The results indicated that a large majority of students ranging from 64.3% to 90% (depending on the school/sex subgroup) believed that their fathers, mothers, and teachers expected them to support the victim. A smaller proportion ranging from 35% to 74% believed that their friends expected them to support the victim. Up to a maximum of 22% (secondary school boys) believed their friends expected them to support the bully. Table 3 shows the percentages of respondents in each subgroup believing that the designated persons expected them to support the victim.

There were some significant sex differences. In primary school, fewer boys than girls believed their fathers ($\chi^2 = 6.29$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) or their friends ($\chi^2 = 14.21$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$) expected them to support the victim. The greater tendency for girls to believe that their friends expected them to support victims extended into secondary school ($\chi^2 = 8.09$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). Significant differences between levels of schooling were found for girls: secondary school girls were more likely to believe their mothers ($\chi^2 = 8.67$, $p < .01$), fathers ($\chi^2 = 10.67$, $p < .001$), and friends ($\chi^2 = 7.88$, $p < .01$) expected them to support the victim. Neither sex nor school level differences were found in beliefs about teacher expectations ($p > .05$). Finally it may be noted that for all subgroupings, friends were seen as the least likely to expect support for the victim. This was especially true for boys.

Scale Measures

Five scales were constructed for use in subsequent analyses. As detailed earlier, each of the measures showed satisfactory reliability or internal consistency. Mean scores on these measures, together with *SD* and *n*, are given for primary and secondary school students of each sex in Table 4.

Two-way ANOVAs were conducted for scores on each of the scales, with sex and type of school as the factors. The following results were significant at the .05 level. On the Victimization Scale, boys scored higher than girls ($F = 12.84$, $p < .001$). On the Bullied Others Scale, boys scored higher than girls ($F = 28.29$, $p < .001$); secondary school students scored higher than primary school students ($F = 10.70$, $p < .001$); and there was a sex by school interaction effect ($F = 5.57$, $p < .05$). This latter result reflected a tendency for the increase in bullying others between primary

Table 4. Scale scores

Scale	Primary			Secondary		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Victimisation						
Male	10.00	2.47	100	10.39	3.04	98
Female	9.12	2.45	100	9.37	2.34	99
Bullied others						
Male	8.63	2.21	100	9.87	3.07	100
Female	7.87	1.08	100	8.19	2.10	100
Pro-victim						
Male	24.44	4.41	99	23.28	4.56	99
Female	26.10	3.82	100	25.52	4.47	100
Self-efficacy						
Male	26.36	3.82	99	25.91	3.79	99
Female	25.74	3.43	99	25.69	3.87	93
Social desirability						
Male	16.60	2.85	98	17.16	2.63	100
Female	17.50	3.26	100	17.38	2.79	95

and secondary school to be greater among boys. On the Pro-Victim Scale, girls scored higher than boys ($F = 23.04, p < .001$). No significant results were found for analyses of data for the Self-Efficacy Scale or the Social Desirability Scale.

Relationships with Support for Victims

Support for victims was assessed using answers indicating the likelihood of a student as a bystander objecting to bullying behaviour depicted in two scenarios, one showing verbal bullying and the other showing physical bullying. Scores on the two measures correlated .78 ($n = 400$) and justified the summing of the scores to constitute the dependent variable. This yielded a measure with scores approximately normally distributed, ranging from 2 to 10 with a mean of 6.49 and an *SD* of 1.82.

There was a moderate degree of skew for the distribution of scores on the measure of expectations of friends. This was corrected using a square root transformation. Where more severe skew was found (for scores on the Pro-Victim Scale, the Bullied Others Scale, the Victimisation Scale, and measures of the perceived expectations of mothers, fathers, and teachers) the skewness was reduced using a logarithmic transformation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983). Pearson correlation coefficients or point-biserial correlations (for dichotomous variables) were computed for subgroups of respondents according to sex and level of schooling. Due to some missing data, n varied between 90 and 100 for each computation (see Table 5).

Table 5. Correlations with expressed support for victim

	Primary		Secondary		All students		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M + F
Attitude							
Pro-Victim Scale	.38***	.19 (ns)	.28**	.42***	.36***	.30***	.35***
Expectations of							
Mother	.10	.21*	.17	.25*	.15*	.27***	.21**
Father	.06	.36***	.25*	.35***	.168	.39***	.28***
Friends	.47***	.19	.38***	.15	.46***	.23***	.38***
Teacher	-.10	.02	-.02	.15	-.01	.10	.04
Personality							
Self-Efficacy	.29**	.24**	.01	-.02	.17*	.11	.14**
Social Desirability	.00	.09	.23*	.13	.08	.11	.10*
Reported behaviour							
Victimised Scale	.10	.29**	.01	-.03	.04	.12	.05
Bullied Others Scale	-.05	-.08	-.18	-.23*	-.16*	-.17*	-.19***
Intervened	.28**	.26**	.25**	.19	.30***	.24***	.27***
Sex (M = 1; F = 2)	.10		.17*			.13**	
School level (Primary = 1; Secondary = 2)	.25***		-.22***			-.24***	

Note. M = male; F = female; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; figures given for the demographic variables are point bi-serial correlations.

There was a high degree of consistency in the results across the school/sex subgroups. This is evident in the positive correlations with the measure of expressed support for victim and Pro-Victim Scale, measures of expectations of mothers, fathers, and friends, reported previous interventive behaviour, and the negative correlation with bullying others. In each of these cases the correlations are consistent in direction and statistically significant ($p < .05$) for both boys and girls, after combining school levels. Also, for both boys and girls, expressed support for victims was higher in the primary school sample. In none of the subsamples were perceived expectations of teachers associated with support for victims. Higher levels of self-efficacy appear to be associated slightly with supporting victims for primary school students only ($p < .05$). Responding in a socially desirable manner showed a low and generally non-significant association, as did being victimised by others. Being female showed a small association with supporting victims; the relationship was limited to the sample of primary school girls.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Relationships with support for victims were examined further using a hierarchical multiple regression approach. At the first step, we entered the values for the given

Table 6. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis

	R^2	R^2 change	F	Multiple R
Step 1				
Sex				
School level	.069	.069	12.70***	.263
Step 2				
Being victimised				
Bullying others				
Reported intervening	.169	.100	13.65***	.412
Step 3				
Pro-Victim Attitude	.212	.042	18.10***	.416
Step 4				
Expectations of mother				
Expectations of father	.228	.017	3.66*	.478
Step 5				
Expectations of friends	.252	.023	10.50***	.502

demographic variables: sex and level of schooling. Second, we entered the variables that described reported respondent behaviours during the current year related to bullying: being victimised, bullying others, and intervening to assist victims of school bullying. At the third step we entered the Pro-Victim Attitude, a predisposition that might be expected to have components of both a genetic and a social origin. Then we entered measures of expectations of parents. At the fifth and final step came expectations of friends. It was found that the inclusion of further variables did not significantly increase the amount of variance in the dependent variable that could be explained. Results are given in Table 6.

It should be noted that within the steps, some variables contributed more than others. Significant beta coefficients ($p < .05$) were obtained for level of schooling (-.14), interventions to reduce bullying (.19), Pro-victim Attitude (.20), and expectations of friends (.18).

Discussion

The prevalence of bullying in the school samples in this study was confirmed through self-reports from students in primary and secondary schools. In fact a clear majority of students reported having been bullied at least once in some way during the current year. Between 20% and 31% of students indicated that they had been bullied frequently, with boys and secondary students being bullied most often. Over 90% of respondents indicated an awareness of peer victimisation occurring in the presence of bystanders.

There was considerable variability in the reported readiness of students to intervene to assist victims, with approximately 43% of students indicating that they certainly or probably would intervene and approximately 23% indicating that they certainly or probably would not. The remainder were unsure. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Salmivalli, 1999), primary school students appeared more likely to intervene, as also were girls. The estimate in the present study of 43% of students being prepared to intervene is notably higher than the estimate based upon the results from direct observations (Pepler & Craig, 1995), but identical to that reported by Rigby (1996a) in an earlier survey of Australian primary school students based upon self-reports. A significant but small correlation of .10 ($p < .05$) between the social desirability measure and reported intention to support the victim suggests only a minor influence on the tendency to report good intentions. It seems likely that in a real bully/victim situation in the presence of bystanders, unanticipated contingencies might dissuade children with good intentions from actually intervening. We emphasise that despite a generally positive attitude towards victims expressed by the respondents (for each subgroup the mean pro-victim score was well above the midpoint for the total scale), the majority of students in this study did not indicate that they would act to support the victim.

This study identified as correlates of intention to assist the victim a number of demographic, personality, and social factors. Results based upon zero-order correlates (Table 5) suggest that children who have intentions to intervene are more likely to be younger (primary school) female students who have rarely, if ever, bullied their peers at school, have pro-victim attitudes, believe that their mothers, fathers, and friends expect them to help victims, and have a relatively high degree of self-efficacy. Notably, teacher expectations and having been victimised by others were unrelated to any tendency to intervene on behalf of the victim.

The multiple regression analysis took into account intercorrelations between independent variables and the prioritising of variables according to their capacity to be modified. The order in which the independent variables were entered into the regression analysis began with arguably the least modifiable factors, namely sex and school level. It was evident that being a girl and attending primary school significantly increased the probability of intervention to help the victim ($p < .001$) and that a further significant increase could be attributed to reported past behaviour (i.e., after combining the negative effects of reportedly bullying others with the positive effects of reported past interventive action to support victims; $p < .001$). Adding the contribution of a basic orientation towards helping victims, arguably in part genetic and in part influenced by the past and present social environment, accounted for a further significant increment ($p < .001$). The social normative influence of beliefs about parental expectations accounted for a further significant contribution ($p < .01$). Beliefs about the expectations of friends added a final significant increment ($p < .001$). In total, these factors accounted for 25% of the variance in intended interventive action to assist victims.

There was a notable failure of two further factors to explain any additional variance in helping victims. In theory self-efficacy might have contributed significantly, given

that it is reasonable to expect children who are most sure of their capacity to influence events to take action. It seems possible, however, that the global measure of self-efficacy used in this study was too general in nature to have much impact on interventive behaviour. It is suggested that further studies should employ a more specific measure, that of perceived empathic self-efficacy, a construct that has recently been shown to contribute to psychosocial functioning (Bandura et al., 2003).

A second factor that failed to make a significant overall contribution was the perceived expectations of teachers. It is known that many young adolescents tend to be dismissive of the views of teachers, for example in seeking to resolve conflicts between students (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003). This may explain why correlations between the perceived expectations of teachers and student intentions to intervene were not significantly different from zero in the secondary school sample; somewhat surprisingly a similar, corresponding non-significant relationship was found with the younger students, suggesting that the influence of teachers in promoting positive bystander behaviour may be no more effective in upper primary school.

It appears from the above that teachers are unlikely to influence their students to become more positive bystanders by simply communicating their expectations that students should intervene. Their approach may need to be more indirect. For instance, emphasis may be placed upon the means of developing in students more sympathetic attitudes towards children who are repeatedly victimised at school. This may be achieved through classroom exercises designed to help students appreciate through role plays the plight of peers who are frequently excluded or subjected to verbal abuse (Rigby 2002, 2003a). Younger children, especially, can be helped to become more empathic (McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yakin, & Childrey, 2000). Given the importance of the expectations of peers in determining interventions by bystanders, teachers may seek to raise in the minds of students an appreciation of the substantial numbers of their peers in each class who do in fact dislike bullying behaviour and would like to see it stopped (Rigby, 2002). Normative pressure to intervene may be engendered in this way. The teacher may then focus upon helping students as bystanders to develop effective (and safe) means of expressing disapproval of bullying

Notwithstanding the similarities between primary and secondary school students in their apparent rejection of direct teacher influence in this area, our results show that the younger students are more likely to express a readiness to intervene. In part, this may be due to an increase in actual bullying behaviour when students enter secondary school, regardless of the age at which the transition is made (Rigby, 1996b, 2002) and a corresponding increase in the danger of becoming involved as a victim. In addition, it may be due to an increasing sense that students need to solve their own problems unaided by others. A third possibility is that compared with primary schools, secondary schools constitute less of a community in which people feel an obligation to support and assist each other when they need to do so. Perhaps the development of a more mutually supportive ethos in secondary schools, of a kind that is thought to characterise many primary schools, may contribute towards more positive bystander behaviour.

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