

Engaging the Victimizer, Victim and Bystander with the Aim of Reducing Bullying among Young Children- "ECE Peace Ambassador Project"

This study is among the first to research how aggressive behaviour of young children can be reduced by interventions during the preschool year in Asia. The following example demonstrates that bullying happens in Asia among very young children. It is a true story reported by a parent in one of the seminars conducted by the principal investigator:

"My son is eight years old and is suffering from depression. We did not know that he had been bullied by a group of senior students since his first year at school. The senior students pretended to be gangsters and were pushing and threatening him during recess. Children in the playground just acted as outsiders and did not offer any help. My son did not tell me or the teachers about the bullying. He just hid in the toilets during recess if he could. We did not know about this until he had a nervous breakdown. My poor boy suffered the bullying for two years. I wish there was a programme teaching my son how to cope with bullying before he went to school."

With the emphases of harmony among peers in the Confucian philosophy, Chinese children are likely to bottle up their frustrations associated with bullying (Tam & Taki, 2007). Research shows that physical and verbal bullying are common in preschool years (Alsaker & Nägele, 2008; Repo & Sajaniemi 2015) and a growing problem in schools in Hong Kong (Wong, 2004). This project will investigate the efficacy of a unique intervention programme, the ECE Peace Ambassador Project (ECE-PAP), in reducing bullying in the early years. First, the study aims to explore the impact of ECE-PAP on children's a) understanding emotions of the self and others; b) coping strategies in managing emotions; c) motivation to reduce bullying behaviour; d) showing empathy towards others; and e) using social skills to maintain good relationships among peers. Second, the study aims to refine and further develop the intervention programme based on the findings of the study. Participants comprise 320 children aged five to six and teachers from 16 kindergartens from areas with a range of SES (socioeconomic status) families in Hong Kong.

This study will make new theoretical contributions to the research on anti-bullying programmes by testing the effects of emotional intelligence (EI) and coping strategies on young children's ability to deal with bullying, and to prevent or stop bullying among peers during the early years.