country's... the work-ers' rights are not valued as they should be. It is not surpris-ing that people who are vulnerable are "taking it out" on others more vulner-able than themselves.

Working on a three-month study of three country towns in three separate states, Professor Ron Kenway said that such re-ent-ment created a volatile situation. The effects were often worse for Aboriginal children and the children of recently arrived migrants and single mothers.

The study also revealed inter-generational stresses, with some litterers unable to cope with the idea that their sons were unlikely to follow in their footsteps at work (Sydney Morning Herald, 4/10/02, p.5).

Country yarning
An interactive web site for young people working in rural industries was launched in September at www.yarn.gov.au. It is intended to give young adults a way of networking, sharing information, promoting events and advertising their own events.

The site is supported by the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, but young people are able to create the content (including their own groups') web pages) using interactive facilities. (Casterton News, 4/9/02, p.12).

Services & welfare
Car workshops
Hand Brake Turn (HBT) is a voca-tional training and crime prevention program that is producing good results in Sydney's west. Aimed at young people between 15 and 19, HBT is a nationally accredited 10-week course set in an automotive repair workshop. It offers training in motor mechanics, spray painting and panel beating, detailing, workshop safety and driver education.

At HBT Parramatta, 24 young people are taken on at a time, usually from referrals by Job Network members or Centrelink. "The kids have to attend two inter-views and then we choose the ones to take part," says Ron Woods, the program’s manager. "They need to be interested in cars, have a positive attitude and be really keen. We are finding more girls want to join. We have four ready to start the next course. They are hearing about it by word of mouth and are very enthusiastic."

Next year HBT Parramatta will introduce another course, to be called "business skills". It will cover literacy, numeracy, banking and cooking (Sydney Morning Herald, 20/10/02, p.3).

Sexuality
'Morning after' pill
According to figures published in the Sunday Herald Sun, one in five teenage girls in Australia will become pregnant between the ages of 15 and 19, and one in 10 will give birth. The professor of sexual health at the University of Melbourne, Christopher Fairley, says that making the 'morning after' pill easier to obtain would help teenagers. It is legal in Australia, but only on prescrip-tion. In Britain the pill is sold in a leading retail chain store as part of a controversial government pro-gram there to reduce the number of pregnancies in girls under 16. "There is a moral misconception that if we make this pill easily available, teenagers will be having sex at an earlier age. Research indicates that it does not lead to earlier intercourse," says Professor Fairley.

While acknowledging that there is no quick fix to the problem of teenage pregnancies, he indicates some possible solu-tions that need to be discussed, such as encouraging parents to allow emergency contraception at home, making condom-vending machines more available, and allowing children to have their own Medicare cards from age 12 (Sunday Herald Sun, 15/9/02, p.12; Sunday Mail, 13/9/02, p.5; Sunday Telegraph, 22/9/02, p.34).

Updating sex education
New curriculum materials called Cosmos and Developing Healthy Relationships were released to government and private schools in Western Australia in September. Researchers from Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities and the University of Western Australia worked for over two years on the material. In association, the WA departments of health and education con-sulted teacher, parent and student focus groups.

The purpose of the new material is to outline what schools should teach students in relation to sex and healthy relationships. It also includes information about the dangers of Hepatitis C and needle-stick injuries, and about Western Australia's new abortion laws. It does not cover homosex-u-al law reforms in the state because of the timing of the pub-lication.

Implementation of the curric-u-lum material will depend on schools. State executive officer of the Christian School Association, Irish Faasmon, said her association's 14 schools were unlikely to use the material, and the Catholic education director, Therese Terrny, said "We would only talk about sex being within a Christian marriage."

The Health Department's sexual health coordinator Dr Sandy Thompson oversaw the material's preparation. Much of it would be used to prompt classroom discus-sion, she said, and teachers would have to be skilled in managing that discussion and careful about how it was handled (West Australian, 10/9/02, p.3).

'Australia lags behind'
Professor Roger Short, of the department of obstetrics and gynaecology at Melbourne University, says Australia lags a long way behind most of the developed world in teaching teenagers about sex and sexuality. He points to some troubling statistics: Australia has the second-highest teenage abortion rate in the developed world (behind the United States but ahead of Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and England and Wales). We also have a comparatively high number of teenage mothers. Professor Short believes that inadequate sex edu-ca-tion and high abortion and birth rates are interlinked exclusively.

In Victoria, sex education is not mandatory (unlike physical educa-tion, which is compulsory until year 10) because some parents do not want their children to undergo it.

The Victorian Catholic Education Office has a booklet called Directives for Christian Education in Sexuality that outlines what can and what cannot be taught in Catholic schools. The booklet's author, Monsignor Peter Elliott, says the approach is to teach about the whole person rather than about sex and he favours promoting chastity until marriage.

Family Planning Victoria reports that by the age of 18 one-third of teenagers have had sex, a propor-tion that rises to more than half by the age of 18. Professor George Patton, director of the Centre for Adolescent Health, is worried that young people are not well enough informed about sexual health, given the growing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia and herpes (Age, 3/8/02, p.3).

Socioeconomic status & youth aggression in Australia

It is perhaps surprising, given the widespread concern about youth violence, that there has been little or no research into the effect of socioeconomic status on youth aggression. In the process of addressing this gap in the research, this Australian quantita-tive study of students, parents and teachers from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds found associ-a-tions between socioeconomic status and aggressiveness in school students, which suggest directions for further research and for policy initiatives that may lead to a reduction in youth violence.

by Helene T. Demosthenous, Thierry Bouhours and Catherine M. Demosthenous

Technology
Music guide online
Young musicians interested in a career in music can now get advice from the industry's major players via the web. The Victorian state government has launched a site at wwwCREMENT/vic.gov.au which features tips from producers, band managers and agents, and has links to 6,000 resources, including music courses in the VET, TAFE and university sectors (Melbourne-tours Lester, 29/9/02, p.16).
addition, students with unrealistic and inflated views of their own academic performance had higher levels of general aggressiveness and were the most likely to bully others at school. Overall, our results show that socioeconomic disadvantage plays a major role in youth aggression. The implications of these results are discussed.

Poverty in Australia

In Australia, 12.5 per cent of children live in poverty, even though we are one of the world's wealthiest nations (Tanniru 2000). We need to understand that poverty brings with it a host of problems, including unhealthy living conditions, a lack of resources and inadequate schools (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag & Brooks-Gunn 1995). Poverty has been linked with low levels of stimulation and few opportunities for cognitive exploration and expression of emotion (Huston 1991). Cognitive developmental research suggests that young children overrate their own intelligence and social factors. Social explanations emphasise the ways in which one's socio-environment interacts with an individual's temperament to influence behaviour. Given that, we need to consider the influence of social factors, such as poverty, on aggressive behaviour.

How youths adjust to new experiences is also linked with how they perceive reality, which has led many researchers to examine the influence of perception on aggression. Of particular interest here is the research by Edna, Cavell and Hughes (1999), which (among other things) suggests that aggressive youth with over-inflated perceptions are at greater risk than other aggressive youth. Unfortunately, socioeconomic status was not explored in that study.

Despite the considerable evidence that suggests that poverty influences aggression, relatively few studies have examined the relationship between families' socioeconomic status and aggression. In socio-emotional adjustment, young people from families with low socioeconomic circumstances are more likely to experience delays in cognitive development and other aggressive youth. Unfortunately, socioeconomic status was not explored in that study.

The study made sense to conduct a survey to examine students' academic performance, general aggressiveness and bullying. The literature indicated that aggressive students have lower performance and bullying, revealed that the 17 per cent of students who did not participate in the study differed significantly from those who did on a number of characteristics (i.e., they were more likely to be boys; from grades 10; to come from families where parents did not participate in the study; to attend schools situated in low socioeconomic status suburbs; and they were rated by teachers as less popular, less well behaved, less academically competent and more likely to bully others). The literature suggested that these characteristics with aggression (e.g. Huston 1991), we wish to find that the frequency and seriousness of academic and behavioural problems in Brisbane schools have been underestimated rather than overestimated in the present study. The relationships between socioeconomic status and bullying may be, therefore, likely to be stronger than weaker among students in the targeted population.

Socioeconomic status and aggression

The results indicated that socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with students' poor academic performance and general aggressiveness (but not school bullying). These findings add to the literature. That is to say, they support Olweus' (1980) suggestion that an association between families' socioeconomic status and aggression may be found in countries with greater socioeconomic inequalities than those in Scandinavia, as is the case in Australia. Interestingly, however, this is so for temperament aggressiveness but not bullying. Indeed the fact that we did not find a relationship between socioeconomic status and bullying among youth in Australia supports international findings (e.g. Bosworth, Espelage & Simhon 1999). These results indicate that it is important to differentiate between emotional, social and social aspects of aggressive behaviour.

Although there is a link between general aggressiveness and school bullying, the evidence alone does not account for bullying. The findings also show that socioeconomic circumstances may have a strong effect on general aggressiveness but not on bullying. Student reports indicated that there was no significant relationship between students' socioeconomic status and bullying at school, as the literature suggested (e.g. Bosworth, Espelage & Simhon 1999). However, parent reports of their child's aggressiveness revealed a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and general aggressiveness. Given that the items forming the scale of aggressiveness tended to measure angry reactive aggression (e.g. "easily jealous," destroys his/her own things, throws and kicks things, hot temper) or so-called temperamental aspects of aggression, it is suggested that the distinction between temperament aggressiveness and social aspects of aggressive behaviour is important.

Complementary analyses, conduct with teacher ratings of student bullying, revealed that measures from students and parents were correlated, the strongest significant relationship occurred between parent reports of their child's aggressiveness and teacher ratings of the frequency of student bullying. Although this correlation suggests that aggressiveness plays a role in school bullying, the correlations oscillated between low and medium, which indicates that aggressiveness is far from being the only determinant of school bullying and that temperamental aspects of aggressive behaviour may not
addition, students with unrealistic and inflated views of their own academic performance had higher levels of general aggressiveness and were the most likely to bully others at school. Overall, our results show that socioeconomic disadvantage played a major role in youth aggression. The implications of these results are discussed.

Poverty in Australia

In Australia, 12.6 per cent of children live in poverty, even though we are one of the world's wealthiest nations (Tantrir 2000). We need to understand that poverty brings with it a host of problems, including unhealthy living conditions, a lack of resources and inadequate schools (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag & Brooks-Gunn 1995). Poverty has been linked with low levels of stimulation and few opportunities for cognitive exploration and expression of emotion (Huston 1991). Children from families with low economic disadvantage play a major role in youth aggression. The implications of these results are discussed.

Youth in Australia

The Brisbane study

We surveyed a representative sample of 22 socioeconomically diverse, state and non-state primary and secondary schools in Brisbane (for comprehensive details refer to Demontessori 2003). In each school, one class was randomly selected from grades 7, 8 and 10. All 33 class teachers, plus 717 students (83%) and 471 parents (54.5%) participated in the study. The results indicate that socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with low aggressive behaviour and bullying.

Also, we have not found any aggres-
sion research that has explored this relationship across multiple measures of aggression, including general aggressiveness and bullying, or that have compared self-and-other reports to examine young people’s ability to make realistic assessments of academic performance on aggression. The current study has overcome these problems.

Table 1. Measures used in the Brisbane Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>Employed the Bullying/Victimisation Scale by Ruby and Sles (1993), which asks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>students how often during the current year they had bullied others (for example, “in a group tease others” and “fight students you can easily beat”). Response categories are “never”, “once in a while”, “often” and “very often”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressiveness</td>
<td>Employed the aggression subscale of the Child Behaviour Checklist by Achenbach and Edelbrock (1991), which asks parents how true particular aggressive behaviours are for their child (for example, “easily jealous” and “temper tantrums or hot temper”). Response categories are “not true”, “sometimes true”, and “often true.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Employed the Bullying/Victimisation Scale by Ruby and Sles (1993), which asks students how often during the current year they had bullied others (for example, “in a group tease others” and “fight students you can easily beat”). Response categories are “never”, “once in a while”, “often” and “very often”.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparing ratings across informants also permitted a measure of discrepancy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate that socioeconomic status and bullying at school are, therefore, likely to be stronger rather than weaker among students in the targeted population.

Socioeconomic status and aggression

The results indicate that socioeconomic status is associated with students’ poor academic performance and general aggressiveness (but not school bullying). These findings add to the literature. That is to say, they support Edelbrock’s (1980) suggestion that a correlation exists between family’s socioeconomic status and bullying in school. The literature associates these characteristics with aggression (e.g. Huston 1991), we wish to make clear that the frequency and seriousness of academic and behaviour problems in Brisbane schools have been underestimated rather than overestimated in the present study. The relationships between socioeconomic status and aggression may be found in countries with greater socioeconomic inequalities than those in Scandinavia, as is the case in Australia. Interestingly, however, this is so for only a subset of aggressive behaviour but not bullying. Indeed the fact that we did not find a relationship between socioeconomic status and bullying among youth in Australia supports international findings (e.g. Bosworth, Espelage & Simón 1999). These results indicate that it is important to differentiate between bullying and other forms of aggressive behaviour.

Although there is a link between general aggressiveness and school bullying, aggression alone, does not account for bullying. The findings also show that socioeconomic circumstances may have a strong effect on general aggressiveness but not on bullying. Student reports indicated that there was no significant relationship between students, socioeconomic status and bullying at school, as the literature suggested (e.g. Bosworth, Espelage & Simón 1999). However, parent reports of their child’s aggressiveness revealed a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and general aggressiveness. Given that the items forming the scale of aggressiveness tended to measure angry reactive aggression (e.g. “easily jealous”, “destroys her/his own things”, “talks back to teachers” or “hot temper”) or so-called temperamental aspects of aggression, it is suggested that the distinction between temperament and sociocultural aspects of aggressive behaviour is important.

Complementary analyses, conducted with teacher ratings of student bullying, reveals that socioeconomic status measures from students and parents were correlated, the strongest significant relationship occurred between parent reports of their child’s aggressiveness and teacher ratings of the frequency of student bullying. Although this correlation suggests that aggressiveness plays a role in school bullying, the correlations are, oscillated between low and medium, which indicates that aggressiveness is far from being the only determinant of school bullying and that temperamental aspects of aggressive behaviour may not
Socioeconomic status and academic performance

It is also clear (from all reports) that socioeconomic disadvantage adversely affects academic performance. Students who underestimate their academic deficiencies are significantly more likely to come from poorer families. These results strongly support the body of research that associates socioeconomic disadvantage with the impairment of children's cognitive development (e.g. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov 1994). Hence, it is suggested that socioeconomic disadvantage hinders the development of academic performance and matures towards a more realistic assessment of one's own performance.

Academic performance and aggression

The results support Edens, Cavell and Hughes's findings (1999) that students with an inflated view of their academic performance are among the most aggressive. Of further interest, wall support was given by Pettit et al. (1999), more likely to aggress others as a function of social dominance and goal acquisition (i.e. bullying). Moreover, when comparing student-and-teacher reports of each student's academic performance, we find that significantly more students with inflated views of their academic performance came from low socioeconomic status families. These results suggest that low socioeconomic status may lead some students to overrate their academic performance.

Overall, although students with inflated perceptions form a small group, there seems to be a greater likelihood of discrepancy among socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Low socioeconomic status seems to adversely influence not only student levels of academic performance but also the likelihood that students would realistically assess their performance. As suggested earlier, structural factors such as low socioeconomic status can adversely affect normal cognitive process toward developing realistic perceptions. Given that young children (who tend to exaggerate their abilities) generally develop more realistic perceptions as they mature, and that low socioeconomic circumstances are associated with discrepancy, it appears that socioeconomic disadvantage hinders the development of realistic perceptions, that is, retards the development of self-awareness or some level of maturation.

Implications for prevention/intervention

Although our study is unable to clarify the direction of the causal pathways that may exist between perception of one's own academic performance and aggressive behaviour — that would require longitudinal and experimental research — it is likely that the relationship between one's perception and aggression is bi-directional, as diagrammatically depicted in Figure 1.

The bidirectional top arrows indicate that low academic performance may lead to aggressive behaviour, which in turn hinders academic performance. The student may be caught in a positive feedback loop, where a negative view of one's performance, discrepancy and aggression tend to increase. In conclusion, our findings support recommendations for early intervention as a preventative measure for aggression, with a particular focus on quality education programs for principals, teachers, students and parents. Also, we suggest that intervention aim to enhance young children's cognitive and socioemotional development (before they face adjustment problems). The overarching aim should be the promotion of a positive school environment and prosocial development for vulnerable youths in Australia.

References


Younger links and ideas: Youth issues — violence

This is the title of an American site with a range of resources on violence and youth, and on bullying. Web: http://www.youthwork.com/violent.html

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse: Bullying bibliography. 'Bibliographies in this Clearing House collection represent a selection of references from the Australian Family & Society Abstracts database over the past few years and are regularly updated'. Web: http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/bib/bully.htm

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and extend our sincere thanks to the policy and research staff at Education Queensland and Catholic Education for supporting this research, Paul DeLava and Brigitte Bouhours for their valuable assistance, and the many school principals, teachers, students and parents whose warm welcome made this study possible, and rewarding.

Helene Demoustasch teaches in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University, Queensland. She is also completing a PhD with the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice, and Governance on early intervention with disadvantaged families as part of the Pathways to Prevention project. Thierry Bouhours is completing a PhD in the School of Criminology at Griffith University on republican justice principles and practices on the prevention and management of antisocial behaviour in secondary schools. Catherine Demoustasch is currently completing an EdD in the School of Language, Cognition and Special Education at Griffith University.
Automatically translate into more social types of aggression such as school bullying. The finding that low socioeconomic status is not associated with bullying but positively associated with general aggressiveness suggests that the parent scale tends to measure reactive aggression and that it is this type of aggression that low socioeconomic status is influencing.

Socioeconomic status and academic performance

It is also clear (from all reports) that socioeconomic disadvantage adversely affects academic performance. Students who underestimate their academic deficiencies are significantly more likely to come from poorer families. These results strongly support the body of research that associates socioeconomic disadvantage with the impairment of children's cognitive development (e.g. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov 1994). Hence, it is suggested that socioeconomic disadvantage with the impairment of children's cognitive development (e.g. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov 1994) may exist between perception of one's performance and socioeconomic status can adversely affect young children's cognitive development (e.g. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov 1994). Hence, it is suggested that socioeconomic disadvantage adversely affects academic performance. Students who underestimate their academic deficiencies are significantly more likely to come from poorer families. These results strongly support the body of research that associates socioeconomic disadvantage with the impairment of children's cognitive development (e.g. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov 1994). Hence, it is suggested that socioeconomic disadvantage with the impairment of children's cognitive development (e.g. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov 1994) may exist between perception of one's performance and socioeconomic status can adversely affect young children's cognitive development (e.g. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov 1994).

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Hargreaves, P.E. 2000, Research methods in criminal justice and criminology, 5th edn, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.


Penn, 1993, Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do, Blackwell, Oxford.


• Recommended sites for information on bullying:

  - Bullying in schools and what to do about it - Ken Rigby - This web site provides information that will help people to understand more about bullying in schools and how it can be stopped. It is of special interest to educators, children and parents.
  - No bully - a New Zealand site sponsored by Telecom New Zealand and New Zealand Police
  - For more information on the Pathways to Prevention - Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches to Crime in Australia's program see the Australian Institute of Criminology web site: <http://www.aic.gov.au/ research/catalogue/registers/projects/sp-107.html>
  - World Health Organisation First world report on violence and health - This report is the first comprehensive review of the problem of violence at a global level. In addition to the issues of collective violence, such as war or conflict, the report examines equally significant yet frequently overlooked issues such as youth violence, child abuse, elderly abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and self-inflicted violence or suicides. Web: <http://www.who.int>

• Youthwork links and ideas: Youth issues – violence

  - This is the title of an American site with a range of resources on violence and youth, and on bullying. Web: <http://www.youthwork.com/ index.html>

• The National Child Protection Clearinghouse: Bullying bibliography. 'Bibliographies in this Clearing House collection represent a selection of references from the Australian Family & Society Abstracts database over the past few years and are regularly updated.' Web: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/bulby.html>

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