

BULLYING

# CAN WE END IT?

Statistics from the Education Ministry show that bullying cases in schools have gone down over the years, but the heinous actions are becoming more brutal and sadistic, resulting in more deaths. Experts and observers fear things will only get worse, as mental health problems are predicted to be the second largest health issue in the country by 2020. **AUDREY VIJANDREN** writes

**J**UST two weeks after the death of National Defence University of Malaysia naval cadet Zulfarhan Osman Zulkarnain, 21, from physical injuries believed to have been inflicted by his university mates, another victim of bullying breathed his last on Thursday.

T. Nhaveen was believed to have been physically and sexually assaulted by his former schoolmates in Penang while buying food. He was only 18.

Statistics from the Education Ministry revealed that there were more than 14,000 cases of bullying in schools between 2012 and 2015, with most of them involving physical bullying.

Although the number of reported cases has dropped over the years, there is an increase in cases in secondary schools, from 0.06 per cent of cases in 2015 to 0.11 per cent cases last year.

In 2015, 2,968 cases were reported compared with 2,825 cases in 2014 and 4,120 in 2013.

The figures paint a dark scenario — cases are becoming more brutal, with many youths showing aggressive tendencies online, often resulting in cyberbullying.

Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation senior vice-chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye says social

media makes it easier for youths to get involved in bad behaviour, such as physical bullying and cyberbullying.

“Based on CyberSecurity Malaysia’s statistics, cyberbullying among students occurs almost every day, with 338 cases reported last year compared with 291 cases in 2014.

“The number was equally high in 2012 and 2013, with 250 cases and 389 cases respectively.

“To make things worse, more youngsters are now suffering from mental health

problems,” he says, referring to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2015.

The survey revealed that about 4.2 million Malaysians aged 16 and above suffered from mental problems. The number is alarming because it shows an increase of 11.2 percent compared with 2006.

He says approximately 84 per cent of children in Malaysia suffer from some form of bullying, with 33 per cent having been bullied online.

“Another 45 per cent of kids say they’ve bullied others offline and 15 per cent admit that they have committed cyberbullying acts,” he says, referring to nobullying.com, an online forum aimed at stopping bullying.



Dr Gerard Louis



Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye



An expert believes the media and Internet play a part in desensitising youth to violence.



Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim (left) and William Doraisamy



He warns that with mental health problems predicted to be the second largest health problem in the country after heart disease by 2020, parents and teachers must ensure that children are getting the help they need.

Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim believes that schools should have a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying.

“Any form of juvenile behaviour must be dealt with promptly and in a serious manner.

“Students must be made to understand what constitutes bullying.

“There must be a safe channel for bullying to be reported. Establish standard operating procedures and enforce them.

“Parents undoubtedly play an important role to ensure and pro-

vide a healthy environment where peer groups and sibling interactions occur,” she says, adding that bullying traits can start at home.

“Kids pick up on what their parents say at home, such as using derogatory terms like *cacat* (retarded), *fatty*, *pondan* (sissy) and cursing while driving.

“Schools should break this cycle by teaching students that this is wrong. In turn, students should be brave enough to tell off their parents. I think parents will appreciate it.”

She says PAGE has consistently advocated a non-corporal punishment approach in schools to stop the cycle of bullying from recurring.

Counselling psychologist and former principal of HELP International School Dr Gerard Louis says social media contributes to a significant number of bullying cases.

“If social media is put under the broader category of media in general, such as movies, television, video games and the Internet, then many studies point to the role that media plays.

“This is especially so in influencing and forming attitudes of young people in using violence as a means to resolve conflict and becoming increasingly





**CASES OF BULLYING DEATHS**

2017 — 2004

**2017** T. Nhaveen, 18, was heading to a burger stall in Gelugor, Penang, with his friend before he was attacked by his former school bullies with helmets and sticks. He was sodomised with an object and burn marks were found on his back. Five boys aged 16 to 18 were remanded. Nhaveen was declared brain dead and died on June 15.

**2017** On June 1, naval cadet Zulfarhan Osman Zulkarnain, 21, was pronounced dead at Serdang Hospital after an assault over allegations of laptop theft. The post-mortem found swelling on the eyelid, scalding on the body, including private parts, and burn marks on almost 80 per cent of the body. The pathologist also found swelling on the scalp and broken ribs.

**2016** A 17-year-old boy was fatally beaten at a rehabilitation centre in Pokok Sena, Kedah, following a fight over fried chicken with a group of inmates on Nov 18. The victim, Mohamad Shukri Kassim, from Langkawi, was found dead by the warden after he did not show up for morning prayers the next day. It is believed that the victim had died for at least three hours before his body was discovered.

**2004** In March, Mohamad Faris Ibrahim, 16, was beaten to death by schoolmates at their hostel. It was believed the seniors attacked him because they were jealous of him being a top student and popular with teachers despite being a newcomer to SMA Datuk Klana Putra Ma'amor. A warden found Faris in a pool of blood on his bed at 7pm after the boy failed to turn up at the dining hall for dinner.

**2013** Muhammad Suhaimi Norhamidi, 18, was hammered by fellow trainees for jumping the queue at breakfast at the Pinggiran Pelangi camp in Pahang and suffered internal head injuries. Half an hour after the alleged assault, he was found sprawled on the bathroom floor of the hostel. The camp commandant rushed him to Muadzam Shah Hospital, where he died.

**2014** On Feb 7, a 13-year-old student died at a clinic in Semenyih, Selangor. His mother alleged that it could be related to bullying. The deceased, T. Kavinraj, had often complained of being bullied and was taunted about his deceased father. He was physically abused, and even had his shorts pulled down in front of other students. He came out of the toilet after a meal with his family and told his mother that he had drunk pesticide. He was rushed to a clinic, but the doctor confirmed that he died.

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"These anti-social traits are usually displayed by the perpetrators, who often come from broken homes or from homes where guardians have lost control of their children or are completely ignorant of what their children do outside the home."

He believes that the absence of spirituality and religion worsens negative behaviour in youth.

"Peer pressure and herd mentality also influence kids into committing such heinous acts."

"The media should highlight this catastrophic situation among

teens and young adults to prevent society from being reduced to garbage humans bereft of dignity or direction."

Kuala Lumpur Criminal Investigation Department chief Assistant Commissioner Mohd Rusdi Isa says the number of bullying cases in Kuala Lumpur remains the same compared with previous years.

"The number of cases involving death also remains the same," he said, adding that the department does not have exact figures on cases.

**EXPERTS**

'Bullies are violent, weak'

"**BULLYING** is never acceptable. It's hurtful and part of a cycle of aggressive behaviour. Bullies are not strong — they're violent and weak."

"Bullying often starts in childhood. It was indicated that what happened to T. Nhaveen was the result of years of provocation."

"Bullying others because they appear different is wrong. Children perceived to have a gender identity different from what is seen as the norm are especially at risk and need to be protected."

"Bullying kills. It shatters lives and tears apart the social fabric. It goes against Malaysian values of tolerance and understanding."

"Do not turn a blind eye to bullying. It can and should be stopped. If you witness a bullying incident, do not keep quiet. Report it immediately. Speak out before it's too late."

**MARIANNE CLARK-HATTINGH**  
United Nations Children's Fund representative in Malaysia

"**A STRONG** support system is important, especially peer-to-peer support, because most victims won't go to counsellors, friends or parents. It's good when kids start talking about bullying so that they don't feel alone."

"They need to know there's somebody to help them. These days, both parents work, so it's more challenging for children. Those days, there was a 'whole village' system."

"As a society, we should ask why there is so much anger? Where are bullies learning all these methods of bullying from?"

**DATIN P.H. WONG**  
Childline Malaysia honorary project director



"**RESEARCH** has shown that our capacity to empathise with someone diminishes if we consider them different from us. We're more likely to identify with people who we can relate to."

"Educators and parents must teach children how to accept others and embrace diversity. This is even more important in the Malaysian social landscape with various cultures and subcultures."

"Schools should adopt an anti-bullying stance with clear processes on how bullying will be dealt with. There should also be grievance channels, open communication and counselling sessions for all parties involved, as well as mechanisms to curb bullying."

"Bullying is a learned behaviour, something seen at home from a parent, an older sibling, a relative or other older role models, such as teachers, guardians or coaches."

**PUVESHINI RAO**  
Clinical psychologist



"**I BELIEVE** social media can encourage bullying. Lack of supervision and education on the use of social media may contribute to bullying."

"As a society, we need to work towards creating a culture of openness, respect and empathy. Parents aren't the only role models for children. We are all role models for the younger generation."

"If we use foul language, are aggressive and quick to disrespect another person, children will grow up thinking it is acceptable. We need to demonstrate values that are crucial in today's world — inclusiveness, tolerance and acceptance."

**JEAN-MARIE SELVAM**  
Rekindle Therapy clinical psychologist



emotionally desensitised to violence."

Many people, he says, find it enjoyable to watch acts of violence committed online.

"These individuals have no sense of anxiety, as one normally will when watching such acts."

He says those inclined to act that way could have come from an abusive family, an unhealthy school environment, have low self-esteem, are impulsive, have poor social skills or lack of positive role models.

"Such individuals are more likely to imitate what they see."

Retired headmaster William Doraisamy, 74, who has 30 years of teaching experience, says many youth today are desensitised to violence in media.

"Violent movies and news about terror attacks and crime have diminished the value of life and the feelings of concern for others."



## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

# APATHY OF BULLIES, BYSTANDERS A FACTOR

Criminologist Dr Geshina Ayu Mat Saat of Universiti Sains Malaysia says bullies are often repeat offenders, but they can be rehabilitated. **AUDREY VIJANDREN** writes

**Question: Is bullying a crime? Please elaborate.**

**Answer:** Yes, it combines threat or actual violence, verbal abuse and psychological harm. The harm sustained may be short- or long-term, which may lead to changes in the victim's behaviour and outlook on life.

**Q: What are factors that cause bullying to escalate to the levels today?**

**A:** There's a lot of research evidence that shows the psychosocial and criminogenic factors underlying bullying behaviour, such as apathy, decay of moral values, reduction of community lifestyles, or an increase in individualistic lifestyles, influence from violent content that are easily accessible online and offline, pro-criminal attitudes, lack of empathy, bystanders or witnesses who are unwilling or afraid of getting involved and becoming victims, high levels of hostility, superiority complex and the in-

ability to tolerate differences.

**Q: Is there a trigger that turns a person into a bully?**

**A:** It's not really a "switch" as anti-social and aggressive tendencies are often already there. As such, the trigger can be anything perceived by the bully to be provoking.

**Q: Should bullies who are minors be tried and charged as an adult if the crimes are severe, such as resulting in fatality?**

**A:** This is mentioned in the Child Act 2001, where it specifies that a child may be tried as an adult if the action committed is violent and severe in accordance with the age of

criminal responsibility.

The age of criminal responsibility for murder is 10 in the Penal Code.

However, we need to wait until the proposed changes to the Child Act are gazetted.

**Q: In cases of bullying, should**

**the punishment equal the crime?**

**A:** Yes, within the provisions of prevailing laws.

**Q: Should there be leniency if the teen bully confesses and apologises?**

**A:** It depends on the teen's history of violence and involvement in pro-criminal behaviour, and whether the punishment is in the best interest of public safety, future deterrence and victim justice.

Having said that, some crimes committed by youth are so heinous and pose a very real danger to others that a confession and apology is not enough.

The violent crime has occurred, and the victim has suffered grievous harm that will last for life or has died. A plea for leniency or mercy for such crimes should not be granted as the young offender was not merciful to his victim.

There are other considerations as well, for example, deliberateness of the crime, purpose of harm, forethought and actions after the crime.

**Q: Are bullies repeat offenders? Is there a chance for rehabilitation?**

**A:** Yes, to both. I've never come across a bully who bullied only once. The bully's behaviour and attitude escalate over time, especially if that person is surrounded by like-minded people or joins a gang where



## STATISTICS ON BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

<b>84%</b> suffered from some form of bullying	<b>33%</b> have been bullied online	<b>45%</b> have bullied others offline	<b>15%</b> have committed cyberbullying acts
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(Source: nobullying.com)

## REPORTED CASES OF CYBERBULLYING AMONG STUDENTS

Year	Cases
2012	250
2013	389
2014	291
2015	256
2016	338

(Source: CyberSecurity Malaysia)

## NUMBER OF REPORTED BULLYING CASES

Year	Cases
2012	4,159
2013	4,120
2014	2,825
2015	2,968

• Total of more than 14,000 cases (2012-2015)

• Secondary schools saw an increase of 0.05 per cent in reported bullying cases (2015 to 2016)

(Source: Education Ministry)

To report bullying, call the anti-bullying hotline Talian Aduan Disiplin at 1800-88-4774 or email to [adudisiplin@moe.gov.my](mailto:adudisiplin@moe.gov.my). Alternatively, you can call Childline Malaysia at 15999.

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## ANTI-BULLYING TRAINING

# Ministry open to enhancing teachers' problem-solving skills

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Education Ministry is open to introducing anti-bully training modules for disciplinary teachers following the fatal cases recently.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk P. Kamalanathan said though the current syllabus had elements to combat such issues, the ministry welcomed efforts to improve teachers' ability to resolve student-related problems.

"If a proposal to improve the process is brought forward, the

ministry is open to studying its effectiveness and implementation.

"A collective effort between parents, teachers and students is needed to create awareness of the bullying phenomenon, and to make sure students understand bullying is not okay.

"Students should report bullying incidents and teachers must take them seriously and follow procedures," he told the *New Sunday Times*.

National Union of Teaching

Profession secretary-general Harry Tan, who agreed that such a module should be proposed, suggested that it should address three aspects.

He said besides training, caning as a method to enforce discipline should be reinstated.

Tan said disciplinary teachers were only allowed to mete out corporal punishment with written consent from the principal, but many teachers chose not to cane for fear of backlash from

parents and the public.

"Disciplinary teachers are facing a predicament of not being able to use corporal punishment though they are allowed to.

"Most of them are fierce and tough, so they may overdo (the punishment). They must have training and know when to draw the line between instilling discipline and abusing students.

"They must also be trained in psychology so that they can handle different kinds of students

based on psychological theories and deal with bullies and victims."

The final aspect should centre on intervention skills. Teachers should be trained to de-escalate physical aggression, such as brawls, without getting injured or causing injuries.

He recommended that these training modules be given only to certain teachers, especially those under the purview of the senior assistant in charge of student affairs.

