

# The Effectiveness of a Nationwide Intervention Programme to Prevent and Counter School Bullying in Ireland

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to set out what is known about (large-scale empirical research) and what has been done about (large-scale whole-school intervention programmes) bullying behaviour in Irish schools, with a view to indicating likely future developments in Irish anti-bullying action. Results from a 1993 nationwide representative survey of bullying behaviour in schools (O'Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997) are compared with those of a hitherto unpublished survey from 2004-2005 (the 'ABC' survey). Essentially, whilst the proportion of primary students involved in bully/victim problems was lower in the 'ABC' survey (35.3%) than it was in the 1993 nationwide survey (43.5%), the opposite was true for post-primary students (36.4% and 26.5% respectively). The background and methodology to two whole-school anti-bullying programmes in Ireland -one regional, the 1998-2000 Donegal Primary Schools Anti-Bullying Programme (O' Moore & Minton, 2005), and one attempted nationwide initiative (the 2004-2006 ABC programme (Minton, 2007)- is presented, along with the programmes' principal evaluation findings. Whilst the regional programme was evaluated as having produced statistically significant reductions in reports of having been bullied (19.6%), frequently bullied (50%), having bullied others (17.1%) and having frequently bullied others (69.2%) within the last three months (O' Moore & Minton, 2005), the same levels of success were not obtained in the ABC programme initiative. A comparison of the implementation of the two programmes and a reflection on both contemporary and overall developments in the field of anti-bullying research and action in Ireland is undertaken, as indications for future directions are mapped out.

*Keywords:* school violence, school bullying behaviour, Irish schools, intervention programs.

## RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es precisar qué se sabe (investigación empírica amplia) y qué se ha hecho (programas a gran escala de intervención en colegios enteros) sobre el bullying en las escuelas irlandesas, con objeto de indicar probables progresos futuros en la actual-

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ción anti-bullying en Irlanda. Se comparan los resultados de un estudio representativo a nivel nacional de 1993 sobre bullying (O' Moore, Kirkham y Smith, 1997) con el estudio hasta ahora inédito de 2004-2005 (el estudio ABC). Esencialmente, aunque la proporción de estudiantes de primaria implicados en acosos/victimización fue más baja en el estudio ABC (35.3%) que en el de 1993 (43.5%), ocurre lo contrario para los estudiantes de secundaria (36.4% y 26.5% respectivamente). Se presenta el objetivo y la metodología de los dos programas anti-bullying en Irlanda -uno regional, el programa anti-bullying de las Escuelas de Primaria de Donegal 1998-2000 (O'Moore y Minton, 2005), y una iniciativa a nivel nacional, el programa ABC 2004-2006 (Minton, 2007), junto con los resultados principales de la evaluación de los programas. Mientras que el programa regional mostró reducciones estadísticas significativas en los informes de ser acosado (19,6%), frecuentemente acosado (50%), acosar a otros (17,1%), y acosar con frecuencia otros (69,2%) en los últimos tres meses (O'Moore y Minton, 2005), los mismos niveles de éxito no fueron obtenidos en la iniciativa del programa ABC. Se lleva a cabo una comparación de la puesta en práctica de los dos programas, una reflexión sobre los progresos actuales en el campo de la investigación anti-bullying en Irlanda y se dan indicaciones para las direcciones futuras.

*Palabras clave:* violencia escolar, conducta de acoso escolar, escuelas irlandesas, programas de intervención.

### SCHOOL BULLYING BEHAVIOUR IN IRELAND: FINDINGS

*The 1993 Nationwide Survey in Ireland:* A nationwide survey of bullying behaviour in Irish schools was undertaken in 1993 by Professor Mona O'Moore at the Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Trinity College Dublin (O' Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997). A nationally representative sample of 20,422 pupils -9,599 primary (aged 8-12 years; 4,485 girls, 5,114 boys) and 10,843 second-level (aged 11-18 years; 6,633 girls, 4,210 boys)- took part. These pupils were drawn from 531 schools (320 primary schools, 211 post-primary schools), constituting a 10 percent of primary and post-primary schools in each of the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland. The extent to which the pupils were involved in bullying behaviour, either as perpetrators or victims, the typology of the bullying behaviour in schools, and the pupils' beliefs, feelings and reactions concerning bullying, were established by the administration of a modified version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1989; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Pupils read the following definitional passage (similar to that used by Olweus, and by Whitney & Smith) before they answered the questionnaire items:

“We say that a pupil is being bullied, or picked on, when another pupil, or group of pupils, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a pupil is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no-one ever talks to them, or things like that. These things can happen frequently, and it is difficult for the pupil being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a pupil is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two pupils of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel.”

The modified Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaires were administered in class by the class teachers in the autumn term of 1993. The teachers received standardised instructions; essentially, pupils were to be seated in such a way that conferring or copying should be avoided, the questions were to be answered anonymously, and no time limit for the completion of the questionnaires was to be set. Additionally, pupils were to be informed that the questionnaire was about life in school, and how much bullying there was in school, and the importance of answering the questions truthfully was to be communicated to the pupils.

Of the primary school pupils, 31.2% reported having been bullied: 18.6% indicated that they had been bullied 'once or twice'; 8.4% 'sometimes'; 1.9% once a week; and 2.4% several times a week. Of the post-primary school pupils, 15.6% (n= 1, 695) reported having been bullied: 10.8% 'once or twice'; 2.9% 'sometimes'; 0.7% once a week; and 1.2% several times a week. Some pupils were involved in bullying behaviour purely as perpetrators; others, purely as victims; still others, as both a bully and a victim. O'Moore (2000) thus estimated that 'of the school-going population in Ireland, which consists of 870,000 pupils, that there may be 215,000 primary school children and 96,200 post primary pupils who are at risk of suffering the ill effects of bullying and victimisation.'

*The 2004-2005 'ABC' survey:* In the autumn/winter terms of the academic year 2003-2004, a modified version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire was distributed to 2,312 third- to sixth- class students (eight to twelve year-olds -925 male, 1,327 female) at 33 primary schools, and 3,257 first- to third-year students (twelve to sixteen year-olds -1,568 male, 1,689 female) at 12 post-primary schools, which were spread over the geographical area of the Republic of Ireland, in the autumn/winter terms of the academic year 2004-2005. These constituted all of the pupils in the specified year groups at the participating schools who were present when the survey was undertaken. Questionnaires had been sent out to 68 primary schools and 38 post-primary schools; hence, the return rates were 48.5% and 31.6% for primary and post-primary schools respectively. All administration procedures, and definition of bullying behaviour, were identical to those used in the 1993 nationwide survey.

Of the primary school pupils involved in the 'ABC' survey, 29.2% reported having been bullied: 22.7% indicated that they had been bullied 'once or twice' or 'sometimes'; 3.4% once a week; and 3.1% several times a week. Of the post-primary school pupils, 22.9% reported having been bullied: 18.0% 'once or twice' or 'sometimes'; 2.8% once a week; and 2.1% several times a week. Again, some pupils were involved in bullying behaviour purely as perpetrators; others, purely as victims; still others, as both a bully and a victim. The findings of the two surveys with respect to these categories are documented below:

Table 1 shows that there was a lower incidence of primary pupils' general involvement in bullying behaviour in the 'ABC' survey than there was in the 1993 nationwide survey (35.3% versus 43.5% respectively;  $\chi^2 = 51.59$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ). There were particular lowered instances in the 'involvement as a bully only' (6.8% in the 'ABC' survey, versus 12.3% in the 1993 nationwide survey;  $\chi^2 = 56.79$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ) and 'involvement as both a bully and a victim' category (7.3% in the 'ABC' survey,

Table 1. Comparison of percentages of pupils reporting involvement in bully/victim problems during the last three months in the 2004-2005 'ABC' survey and in the 1993-1994 nationwide survey.

<i>Involvement</i>	Primary pupils		Post-primary pupils	
	Nationwide study (1993-1994)	'ABC' survey (2004-2005)	Nationwide study (1993-1994)	'ABC' survey (2004-2005)
As a victim only	17.1	21.2	11.5	15.2
As a bully only	12.3	6.8	10.8	13.5
As both a bully and a victim	14.1	7.3	4.1	7.7
Total Involvement	43.5	35.3	26.5	36.4

versus 14.1% in 1993 nationwide survey;  $\chi^2 = 77.0$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ). Conversely, there was a higher incidence of involvement as a 'victim only' (21.2%) in the 'ABC' survey than there was in the 1993 nationwide survey (17.1%);  $\chi^2 = 21.30$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ).

There was a higher incidence of post-primary pupils' general involvement in bullying behaviour in the 'ABC' survey than there was in the 1993 nationwide survey (36.4% versus 26.4% respectively;  $\chi^2 = 118.71$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ). 13.5% of the 'ABC' survey sample reported having bullied others, but not having been bullied, compared with 10.8% in the 1993 nationwide survey ( $\chi^2 = 17.97$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ). In the 'involvement as both a bully and a victim' category, the incidence rates were 7.7% in the 'ABC' survey, versus 4.1% in the 1993 nationwide survey ( $\chi^2 = 68.56$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ). Finally, 'involvement as a victim only' category, the incidence rates were 15.2% in the 'ABC' survey, compared with 11.5% in the 1993 nationwide survey ( $\chi^2 = 31.21$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ).

In short, compared with data accrued from the 1993 nationwide survey, the primary school pupils in the 'ABC' survey were significantly less likely to report having been involved in bully-victim problems overall, less likely to report having bullied others, but significantly more likely to report having been involved as a 'pure' victim. Conversely, the post-primary school pupils in the 'ABC' survey were significantly more likely to report having been involved in bully/victim problems overall, and in the 'pure bully', 'pure victim' and the 'bully-victim' categories than their counterparts in the 1993 nationwide survey had been.

A further point of comparison between the 'ABC' survey and that of the 1993 nationwide study is of interest. In the 1993 nationwide survey, the post-primary pupils had a lower overall rate of involvement in bully/victim problems than did the primary pupils (26.4% versus 43.5 per cent respectively); this was strongly statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 659.47$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ). However, there was no such general lowered incidence of involvement amongst post-primary pupils in bully/victim problems in the 'ABC' survey, where post-primary pupils had a very similar overall rate of involvement in bully/victim problems to the primary pupils (36.4% versus 35.3% respectively). Hence, the general finding of an age-related decline in involvement in bully/victim problems (O' Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997; Smith, Madsen & Moody, 1999) was not borne out by the findings of the 'ABC' survey.

## BACKGROUND TO ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMMES IN IRELAND

Following in the tradition of counterparts in Norway (Olweus, 1993; Roland, 2000; Roland & Munthe, 1997), the United Kingdom (Smith, 1997) and alongside those in Spain (Ortega & Lera, 2000) and many other countries worldwide (see Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004), large-scale anti-bullying programmes that have been implemented in Ireland have followed the 'whole school' model of simultaneous strategic intervention with the different groups within the school community—school management staff, teaching staff, parents and students (Byrne, 1996; O'Moore & Minton, 2004). The basic structures of the regionally-based anti-bullying programme of 1998-2000—the Donegal primary schools anti-bullying programme (O'Moore & Minton, 2005) and the attempted nationwide anti-bullying initiative of 2004-2006 (Minton, 2007) utilised the framework model of the second nationwide intervention programme in Norway (Roland & Munthe, 1997). This framework involves four key components (Minton, 2007; O'Moore & Minton, 2005; Roland & Munthe, 1997):

- (I) the training of a network of professionals, who implement the anti-bullying programme in the participating schools;
- (II) the production of a teachers' resource pack, and in-service staff training by the professional network;
- (III) the production of a parents' information pack, and the holding of parents'/community members' information evenings, again undertaken by the professional network members; and,
- (IV) a consultancy role for professional network members throughout the duration of the programme in the participating schools.

Whilst the framework for the anti-bullying programmes implemented in Ireland was first applied in Norway (Roland & Munthe, 1997), the specific content of the training materials used in the Donegal primary schools anti-bullying programme and the 'ABC' programme were of course specific to the Irish context, and reflective of some twenty-five years of research and experience concerning anti-bullying action in Ireland (e.g. Byrne, 1996; O'Donnell, 1993; O'Moore & Minton, 2004). Training of professional network members included definitions of bullying; profiles of children who bully, and children who are bullied; 'tell-tale signs' of victimisation and bullying; adverse effects of bullying; whole school approaches to bullying; classroom and individual intervention strategies; dealing with parents of children who bully, and those of children who are bullied; and presentation skills. Within the confines of a journal article, space does not permit for a further consideration of the training materials; however, the interested reader will find these, as applied to the 'ABC' programme, reproduced in O'Moore & Minton's (2004) *Dealing with Bullying in Schools: A Training Manual for Teachers, Parents and Other Professionals*.

## METHODS

### *The Donegal Primary Schools Anti-bullying Programme (1998-2000)*

One hundred national (primary) schools, comprising all of the primary schools within one of the two administrative districts of Co. Donegal, which is situated in the north-west extremity of the Republic of Ireland, were invited by Professor O'Moore to participate in the programme. In total, forty-two schools consented to participate. The structural framework of the anti-bullying programme was outlined above. Essentially, during the first two terms of the school year 1998-1999, eleven teachers were trained, through a week-by-week programme (of twelve full days' duration) of workshops and seminars at their local (Donegal) Centre of Education, to implement the anti-bullying programme in three to five schools each.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme was made via the pupils' completion of pre-programme/post-programme modified Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaires (Olweus, 1989; Whitney & Smith, 1993). The sampling was so designed that those pupils who had answered as third-class pupils in the pre-test questionnaire should answer the post-programme questionnaire as fourth-class pupils the following year and those who appeared as fourth-class pupils in the pre-test sample should answer the post-programme questionnaire as fifth-class pupils. However, although all forty-two schools were invited to participate in both the pre- and post-programme phases of the evaluation, due to differential responses to the pre- and post- programme questionnaires by the schools, and anomalies in the administration of the questionnaires by the schools to the correct class groupings, it was possible to match data from only twenty-two schools, in terms of pupils who had responded to both the pre- and post-programme questionnaire according to this design.

As had been the case in the 1993 nationwide survey, class teachers administered these questionnaires in normal school time, and with the same procedures in place. Prior to the implementation of the programme, in the first two terms of the academic year 1998-1999, the extent of the pupils' involvement in bullying behaviour was determined. Final data were obtained from 527 third and fourth class pupils in twenty-two schools. One year after the implementation of the programme, in summer 2000, the extent of the pupils' involvement in bullying behaviour was determined: data were obtained from 520 fourth and fifth class pupils in the same twenty-two schools. The overall effectiveness of the programme was ascertained by a comparison of the pre-programme and post-programme questionnaire responses; this was undertaken via a series of chi-squared analyses. In other words, same-age cohorts, rather than adjacent-age cohorts -as used by Roland (Roland & Munthe, 1997), and Smith (1997)- were employed in the evaluation of the programme. The advantage of this repeated measures sampling design is that, if using whole classes, one can be reasonably sure that most of the pupils appear in both the pre- and post- test measures without compromising anonymity. However, the fact that age-related declines in reports of involvement of bullying behaviour are generally observed (O'Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997; Smith, Madsen & Moody, 1999) means that this sampling method could be compromised. In

this case, it was necessary to administer post-hoc statistical procedures in order to rule out this potentially confounding variable (see O'Moore & Minton, 2005).

### *The 'ABC' anti-bullying programme (2004-2006)*

Through the support of some of the twenty local Education Centre Directors in Ireland and the primary teachers' trade union, teachers in Ireland were informed, in January 2004, of an upcoming nationwide intervention programme. Applications from forty-four teachers and principals to join the professional network were obtained and after a consideration of details and interview thirty-eight members were appointed to the professional network in June, 2004. It was decided that the schools in which the professional network members were to implement the programme should be of their own choosing. This was due to the feeling that as voluntarism and good will are strong components in effecting the take up of such programmes in schools, professional network members could make use of whatever local connections they might have.

In August 2004, thirty-two of the professional network members (six had withdrawn) attended an intensive, residential summer school, the principal focus of which was to equip them with a full and applicable working knowledge of skills and strategies to implement the anti-bullying programme in up to four schools each. A follow-up meeting for the network was held in October 2004, immediately prior to the scheduled implementation of the programme in the schools. Essentially, the members were to run whole staff in-service training and hold parents' evenings between November 2004-February 2005), and to maintain a consultancy role to the schools throughout the school year (October 2004-June 2005). Only eighteen professional network members implemented the programme fully in 68 schools.

In terms of evaluation, questionnaires were filled out by all third-, fourth-, fifth- and sixth-class students at the primary level, and all first-, second-, and third-year students at the post-primary level in the participating schools in the winter term of the academic year 2005-2006, and following the implementation of the anti-bullying programme in the winter term of the academic year of 2006-2007. The problem of the phenomenon of age-related declines in reports of involvement in bullying behaviour (O' Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997; Smith, Madsen & Moody, 1999) was this time avoided by the use control group measures (see Minton, 2007). The same administrative procedures that had been implemented in the 1993 nationwide survey and the Donegal primary schools anti-bullying programme (see above) were followed in both phases of the evaluation.

Despite the fact that each of the schools that had returned completed questionnaires from the first phase were sent out the requisite number of post-programme survey questionnaires, between (I) drop-out from the professional network; (II) drop-out of schools from the programme; (III) discrepancies in the schools administration and return of the pupil questionnaires; and, significantly, (IV) low participation rates in the survey aspects of the programme, it was possible to match data from just three primary schools and one post-primary schools that had participated in both phases of the questionnaire and fully implemented the programme. However, it was possible to evaluate

the effectiveness of the 'ABC' programme -at least in as far as it was implemented in these four schools- by making a comparison of students' responses to the two phases of questionnaires via chi-squared analyses.

## RESULTS

The principal findings of the two anti-bullying programmes are documented below.

Table 2 shows that out of the six categories of pupil involvement in bully/victim problems, statistically significant reductions were obtained in five of them following the implementation of the Donegal Programme -of 19.6% in reports of having been bullied within the last three months ( $\chi^2 = 5.77$  (1 df),  $p < 0.02$ ), of 50.0% in reports of having been frequently bullied (that is to say, once a week or more often) within the last three months ( $\chi^2 = 6.43$  (1 df),  $p < 0.02$ ), of 43.8 per cent in reports of having been bullied within the last five school days ( $\chi^2 = 16.99$  (1 df),  $p < 0.001$ ), of 69.2% in reports of having been frequently involved in bullying others within the last three months ( $\chi^2 = 7.93$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ), and of 51.8% in reports of having been involved in bullying others within the last five school days ( $\chi^2 = 14.13$  (1 df),  $p < 0.001$ ).

The 'ABC' programme resulted in reductions in four of the six categories at both the primary and post-primary levels, but only on two instances did these reductions reach statistical significance -in primary pupils' reports of having been bullied within the last three months (56.8%;  $\chi^2 = 6.603$  (1 df),  $p < 0.02$ ), and in post-primary pupils' reports of having been bullied within the last five school days (59.3%;  $\chi^2 = 7.47$  (1 df),  $p < 0.01$ ).

*Table 2.* Principal results of whole-school anti-bullying intervention programmes in Ireland: Percentage reductions in pre- and post-programme proportions of students reporting involvement in various categories of bully-victim behaviour.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Primary schools</i>		<i>Post-primary schools</i>
	Donegal primary schools anti-bullying programme (1998-2000)	'ABC' programme (2004-2006)	'ABC' programme (2004-2006)
<i>Having been bullied</i>	Within the last three months	19.6*	30.7
	Frequently within the last three months	50.0*	Unavailable
	Within the last five school days	43.8*	59.3*
<i>Having taken part in bullying others</i>	Within the last three months	17.1	26.2
	Frequently within the last three months	69.2*	Unavailable
	Within the last five school days	51.8*	22.4

\*Statistically significant reduction.

## DISCUSSION

### *Comparing the results of the programmes. lessons learnt*

A critical point to understand at this point in time was why the 'ABC' programme did not deliver the evaluated nationwide intervention programme that was hoped for. Predictably, a number of factors were influential, and if we are to learn from these experiences, these factors must be given due consideration. Essentially, the success of the Donegal primary schools anti-bullying programme led the 'ABC' programme management team to expect that success for its programme was simply a matter of 'rolling out' similar content on a nationwide basis. As we have seen, this was not the case. To return to basics, the process of implementation -defined as '...the process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to people attempting or expected to change' (Fullan 2001, p.69)- is a complex one, because it requires making changes in individual and organisational behaviour and beliefs (Fullan, 1992). For example, although leadership at the school management level (Midthassel, Bru & Idsøe, 2000) and the active involvement of teachers (Midthassel & Bru, 2001) have been identified as key factors in ensuring the success of a programme, it should also be recalled that programmes with broader aims (such as 'whole school' programmes) necessarily need involvement beyond the staff level (Fullan, 1992, 2001). Having developed good resources does not guarantee programme success: ensuring strong, evidence-based and user-friendly content (which was achieved in the 'ABC' programme) and giving full attention to the securing of effective implementation strategies (which was not) are equally important in determining the likely success of an intervention programme.

Furthermore, the training of the professional networks involved in the two programmes differed. In the Donegal primary schools anti-bullying programme, the professional network was trained over a series of weekends, thus permitting participants to mentally 'process' information that they have been provided with between training sessions and an increased contact time between the training institution and the participants, with a net result that there was a more 'nurturing', or 'hands-on' approach. Conversely, in the 'ABC' programme, the professional network was brought together for initial training at a summer school (August 2004) and training day (October 2004), but thereafter contact between the programme team at Trinity and the professional network (which was dispersed all over the country) was via e-mail or telephone only. Hence, although the planning of a school intervention programme is undoubtedly important, planning alone cannot, and in the case of the 'ABC' programme did not, guarantee success.

Hence, there are some important lessons that may be learnt regarding the subsequent design of anti-bullying initiatives in Ireland:

- (I) Prior to the launch of programmes with nationwide ambitions, a system of national and local support needs to be set in place. This includes the necessary engagement and development of positive working relationships of all relevant personnel, particularly 'gate-keeping' personnel, in relevant government departments, education administration divisions, teachers' and parents' representatives, and the schools themselves.
- (II) As regards pre-programme training, the extended training period strategy adopted in

the Donegal primary schools anti-bullying programme would appear to have been more successful than the intensive immersion strategy adopted in the 'ABC' programme. The former strategy should be retained in future.

- (III) The gap between regional and national implementation has been bridged in the newer Norwegian anti-bullying programmes via the formation of structures within the participating schools that assist in 'steering' the school through the implementation of the programme (Midthassel & Bru, 2001). This is a tactic that appeared in neither the 'ABC' programme, nor the second nationwide anti-bullying programme in Norway (1996), both of which ran into similar problems (higher professional network drop-out, and lower implementation and evaluation rates) (Midthassel, 2005; Minton, 2007). Hence, this 'steering' strategy or something similar should be considered in future.
- (IV) 'Voluntarism and good will' are features that can enhance a programme with an already sound implementation strategy, but should not be relied upon to underpin, or worse yet constitute the implementation strategy. Whereas the training content and evaluation materials used within the 'ABC' programme were generally seen as positive points, far greater attention should have been given to the employment of sound implementation procedures. In future intervention efforts, it is important to recognise that both evidence-based programme content and well thought-out implementation procedures are necessary to give the programme its best chance of success.

### *Reflecting back, and looking towards the future*

When one looks towards future intervention efforts in Ireland, there is cause for optimism. In the first place, we have a picture of the nationwide incidence of bullying behaviour in Irish schools (O'Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997) that, whilst having been conducted some time ago (1993), continues to be informative. The full results of 2004-2005 'ABC' survey that is briefly referred to in this paper, although not based on nationally representative data, will assist in pin-pointing certain patterns of similarity and change since the time of the 1993 nationwide survey.

Secondly, in Ireland we have a successfully implemented whole-school anti-bullying programme that has been evaluated as being effective at a regional level – the Donegal schools anti-bullying programme (see O'Moore & Minton, 2005). Whilst clearly failing as a nationwide initiative, the 2004-2005 'ABC' anti-bullying programme enjoyed some success in the small number of schools in which it was both fully implemented and evaluated. In terms of the future development of anti-bullying programmes in Ireland, the 'ABC' programme it did produce a nationwide network of professionals which is trained, resourced and experienced in delivering anti-bullying programmes to school communities; a set of up-to-date and comprehensive training resources (see O'Moore & Minton, 2004); and a set of updated and effective evaluation materials (see Minton, 2007).

Finally, in recent times, we have been able to launch an Irish-produced DVD for use in anti-bullying work in post-primary schools. In a joint venture between Trinity College Dublin's Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre and Animo Communications, a DVD/educational package called 'Silent Witnesses' was launched on October 11th, 2006. Entirely Irish-produced, the package was aimed at post-primary schools (and sent, free of charge, to every post-primary school in the country), and

designed to help raise awareness regarding peer aggression, bullying and violence.

In summary, the last fifteen years of anti-bullying research and practise efforts in Ireland has resulted in groundwork of some importance being made. If the requisite lessons, particularly regarding the need for much stronger attention being paid to implementation strategies and procedures, can be learnt from the experiences of the 'ABC' programme, and governmental support could be secured (as has been the case in Norway -see Roland, 2000) for a nationwide anti-bullying programme for Irish schools, then there exists a very good opportunity in which substantial in-roads into preventing and countering bullying behaviour could be made. That would be good news indeed for the many children, and their families, whose lives are blighted by this unacceptable form of interpersonal aggressive behaviour.

#### NOTES

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