

**An Investigation of the Relationship between Emotional Literacy and Bullying**

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.



Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Anne Harris

## Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between emotional literacy and bullying. Much time, money and resources have been invested in trying to combat the ongoing problem of bullying in our schools. However, research suggests that only fifty per cent of anti-bullying programs are effective in trying to stop the bullying that is being experienced by as many as one in six school children (Rigby, 1997). Many of the programs have focused on such approaches as making students aware of what bullying behaviours are and why they are not appropriate. Anti-bullying programs work with bullies to try and teach empathy, teach bystanders not to be part of the problem or focus on conflict resolution and peer mediation. Very little research has addressed the role that emotional literacy may play in helping a student avoid being the victim of bullying behaviours.

A mixed method approach was undertaken to investigate the relationship between emotional literacy and bullying with data gathered from two hundred and ninety five participants from Years 8 – 10. The students completed a questionnaire regarding peer relations and a checklist developed to measure emotional literacy. The initial data were then used to identify a small group of students that represented a range of emotional literacy levels and experience of bullying. These students participated in interviews using vignettes designed around social situations involving bullying. Parents and teachers of the interviewed students were also asked to complete checklists measuring the students' emotional literacy.

Analysis showed a moderately strong statistical relationship between students who have a lower than average level of emotional literacy and the likelihood they will be victims of bullying. Of the students rating themselves below average emotional literacy, nearly half

reported being bullied. On the other hand, of the students who rated themselves above average in emotional literacy, only one in ten reported being bullied. Further analyses of the types of bullying experienced by victims revealed a difference according to levels of emotional literacy.

The focus of our anti-bullying programs needs to remain on campaigning against bullying and changing such anti-social behaviours by working with bullies and bystanders. The findings from this research suggest that those students with low EL seem to be more prone to being bullied. If schools can work to identify weaknesses in EL even before there is any incidence of bullying for an individual, a preventative approach becomes available. It is hoped that the findings from this study will contribute to the approach schools can make in helping to prevent and address bullying toward students, in particular those students with low emotional literacy.

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