**The nature and prevalence of bullying at x School**

**Objectives:**

The researcher has been approached by x School to undertake a school based survey, with the overarching aim of examining the well-being of pupils currently attending the school. In particular the survey aims to:

* **Identify the nature and prevalence of bullying at x School**
* Assess the level of school enjoyment among pupils
* Examine the use of technology among pupils and identify the prevalence of risky online behaviours
* Provide the school with an indication of the levels of psychological well being among pupils
* **Identify whether bullying is related to school achievement**

**Please give a brief justification of your proposed research project:**

Well-being in adolescence has attracted much research attention in recent years, with a number of studies highlighting the poorer psychological well-being of UK youth compared to youth from other nations, (UNICEF, 2007). As well as being studied as a topic in its own right, psychological well-being has also been examined as a correlate of other behaviours including; experiences of bullying in school (Hawker & Boulton, 2000); use of the internet and social networking sites (Gross *et al,* 2002) and worries and problems in adolescence (Weems *et al* 2000). Bullying has for many years been acknowledged as a serious problem in schools, (Smith & Brian, 2002), defined as a systematic abuse of power with the intention to harm and repeatedly experienced over time (Nansel et al 2001). It has been suggested that approximately 10 – 20% of adolescents experience some form of bullying in the previous 3 to 6 months (Smith et al 2004) and has been found to have a serious and sometimes long term negative impact on psychological well-being (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Recently, research attention has moved towards incorporating cyberbullying; bullying perpetrated through media and communication devices (Campbell 2005; Patchin & Hinduja 2006), although to date research has focused predominantly on prevalence rates (i.e. Smith et al 2008) rather than the psychological impact of experiencing this form of bullying.

Technology has transformed the lives of many adolescents, with over 97% of adolescents aged 12 to 16 years owning a mobile phone (NCH 2005) and approximately that 98% of young people aged 5 to 18 have access to a computer (The Office for National Statistics 2002), technology has become an integral part of the lives of many teenagers. However, much media and research has tended to ignore the beneficial aspects of technology, focusing instead on the risks and dangers associated with the use of technology. The EUKids online project (Hasebrink et al 2007) categorise the risks associated with ICT use into four categories, commercial risks, aggressive risks, sexual risks and values risks. Due to the ethical and methodological difficulties associated with examining young people’s risky behaviours, in particular in relation to sexual risks, research into these risks is fairly limited. In terms of generic use, not focusing on risky use, research studies have highlighted rather inconsistent results, with some studies identifying how internet use is associated with depression and higher levels of social anxiety (Gross *et al,* 2002). Conversely other studies have identified many positive aspects to internet use, particularly in terms of the benefit to education (Valentine et al 2005).

In response to this research and recent government policy highlighting the need for schools to examine the experiences of their pupils, the head of x School has invited the researcher to undertake a survey of pupils with the principle aim of examining the psychological well-being of pupils.

**Please outline the proposed sample group, including any specific criteria:**

The head-teacher would like the project to be open to all pupils in the school from their first year (equivalent to year 7: ages 11 to 12) up to their Upper Sixth (equivalent to year 13; ages 17 to 18 years), a total school population of 700 pupils. Letters will be sent out to parents with the option to opt their child out of the project. Only pupils whose parents have not returned this letter will be invited to participate in the project.

**Describe how the proposed sample group will be formulated:**

As the head-teacher would like all pupils to complete the questionnaire, once permission from parents/ guardians has been gained all pupils in the school will be invited to participate in the project. Any pupil whose parent has refused permission will not be invited to participate in the study.

**Indicate clearly what the involvement of the sample group will be in the research process:**

The sample group will be requested to complete an online questionnaire consisting of approximately 100 questions which should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. The online questionnaire includes a number of sections/ scales addressing:

* Basic demographic information
* Enjoyment and engagement in school
* Prevalence of being a victim, perpetrator and bystander of bullying
* Use of the internet, including use of social networking sites and instant messenger programmes. This section of the questionnaire asks pupils about their experiences of cyberbullying and their perceptions of safety when using the internet.
* A battery of standardised scales including; The Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale; The Adolescent Well-Being Scale (Birleson, 1980); Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988) and the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A) (La Greca & Lopez; 1998).

The participants will be requested to complete the questionnaire online in class in exam conditions. Following completion of the questionnaire participants will be asked to complete a safe space exercise. Participants will be provided with a map of the school and school grounds and asked to identify the spaces in school where they feel the least safe. Finally the school will provide the research team with the academic achievement of each pupil participating in the study.

**Specify how the consent of subjects will be obtained. Please include within this a description of any information with which you intend to provide the subjects:**

Letters will be sent out to all parents/ guardians of pupils currently attending Pocklington School, requesting their permission for their child to participate in the study. The letter will outline the scope and broad aim of the project and will outline that should parents not want their child to participate in the project they should return the form at the bottom of the letter to the school by the given date.

**Indicate any potential risks to subjects and how you propose to minimise these:**

The questionnaire does ask participants a number of questions which could in some circumstances cause them some degree of distress, for example the questions related to experiences of bullying, due to the potential for distress a number of support mechanisms have been set in place to reduce the risk of distress:

* When the project team introduces the study to potential participants the right to withdraw at any point while completing the questionnaire will be stressed. In addition participants will be informed of their right to simply miss out questions they do not feel comfortable in answering.
* The questionnaire will be completed in test conditions so pupils are assured of their privacy when completing the survey, members of the research team will be present to answer any questions participants may have about the survey.
* At the end of the questionnaire participants will be given a small pack of information, including an advice leaflet on bullying from the bullying.co.uk charity; <http://shop.bullying.co.uk/leaflet/default.aspx>; an advice leaflet from Childnet with information on how to stay safe when using the internet and a mobile phone; <http://www.childnet.com/downloads/zcards01.pdf>; and finally a leaflet written by the research team. This leaflet includes details of useful websites providing advice and information on the topics covered in the questionnaire; details of named school staff whom pupils can talk to about the survey as well as a special unique identification code and details of how to withdraw from the study should they decide they want to do so.

There is also the potential risk that participants may disclose information which could be viewed as a child protection issue. For this reason before commencing the study the research team will be provided with full class registers of pupils in order to assign unique identification codes for each pupil. This information will be kept completely confidential and will be accessed by the research team only. The reasons for providing the identification codes are twofold; first the project involves the collection of three pieces of data; the questionnaire data, safe space mapping exercise and school attainment score, therefore the codes will be used to collate all this information and store the data collectively in one data base. Secondly, should a child protection issue be identified the research team are legally bound to identify the young person at risk and inform the school, therefore the unique codes will be used to ensure speedy identification of participants. Once all the data have been collected, all pieces of information have been pieced together and the data have been screened for child protection issues, the registers detailing pupils’ names and codes will be destroyed. Furthermore, in terms of child protection, all members of the research team have Enhanced CRB clearance.

**Describe the procedures you intend to follow in order to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the subjects:**

Data collection for this project involves pupils completing an online survey, a paper based school map exercise and lastly gathering data on each pupil’s academic performance. Codes will be assigned to each pupils name on class registered which will be kept secure by the lead researcher, at no point will the school have access to this information. The registers will details of pupils and their assigned codes will be destroyed once all of the pieces of data and been collated and once the data have been screened for child protection issues.

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