

# Teens behave badly with eye on online audience

Many of them are bright, but often leave their parents feeling helpless

By JANICE TAI and PRISCILLA GOY

THERE was a time when teenagers who behaved badly hoped that no one found out.

Now, some of them flaunt their outrageous behaviour online – and wait for the world to get shocked.

“They bad-mouth their teachers and spread malicious gossip

about people they don't like and this online behaviour often translates to real life when they throw or kick cupboards or doors at home and hurt their parents by scratching or punching them,” said Dr Carol Balhetchet, senior director for youth services at Singapore Children's Society.

And some teenagers even get on the wrong side of the law.

On Tuesday, Amos Yee Pang

Sang, 16, was convicted for posting an obscene image on his blog and for uploading content online that contained remarks against Christianity.

Counsellors say such bad behaviour usually leave parents feeling helpless.

Yee himself posted about his father being “violent and abusive”, while his parents did not post bail for him.

The tension between parents and children who refuse to listen to them also appears to be rising.

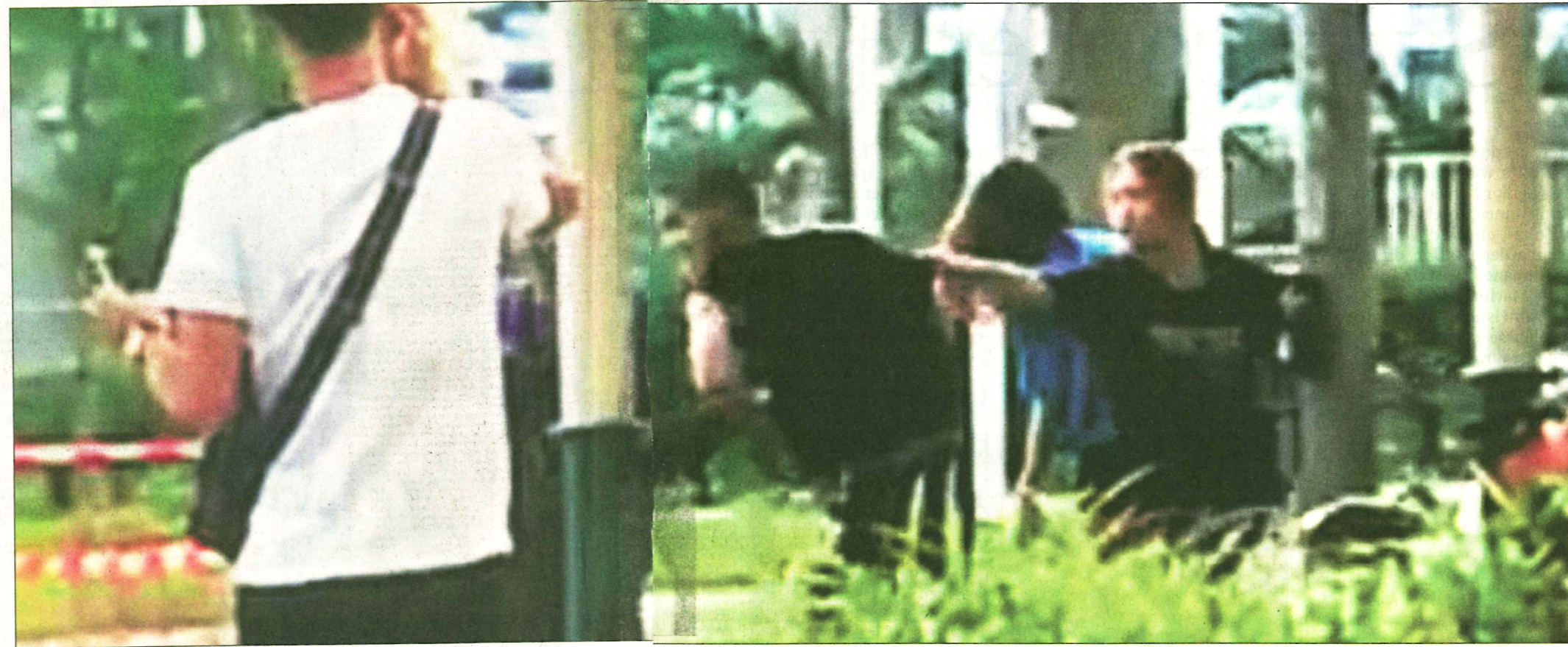
Singapore Children's Society has been screening more com-

plaints from parents wanting to pursue a Beyond Parental Control (BPC) order.

Parents apply to the court for this order to get help in managing children who display behavioural problems in school or at home. The society handled 113 such requests in the first three months of this year, up from a three-month average of 93 last year.

Eventually, the court issued 66

**Nationally, more youth crimes involve violence. The number of youngsters arrested for rioting last year rose 13.8 per cent to 322.** PHOTO: LIANHE WANBAO READER



BPC orders last year. In 2013, there were 83 orders.

Other youth workers and psychiatrists are also seeing more teenagers who display aggressive and anti-social behaviour that could veer out of control.

At youth education consultancy Kingmaker, about a third of the cyber-wellness classes it conducts in schools now tackle the topic of online aggression. In the past, the hot topics were on Inter-

net or gaming addiction.

Youth leadership training company Agape Group Holdings helped 640 young people who struggled with anti-social behaviour, such as violent outbursts in class, last year. This number has doubled over the last three years.

Nationally, more youth crimes involve violence. The number of youngsters arrested for rioting last year rose 13.8 per cent to 322.

Social media appears to fuel such behaviour and take it to a wider audience.

“With Facebook, youth can view offensive remarks and photos or videos of fights posted by people they ‘follow’, even if these are not friends they know personally,” said Mr Dominic Lim, who runs Splat!, a non-profit volunteer group for youth at risk.

“Their curiosity is piqued, they try behaving in the same

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## NEED FOR CONTROL

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– Agape's chief executive Delane Lim

way,” he added. This could become a habit.

He cited the example of a 15-year-old who saw a photo of a gang fight posted online and took to emulating the violent behaviour. He spewed vulgarities, threatened people and ended up getting caught with a knife in school.

Youth workers said teenagers have also become more eager to draw attention to themselves – sometimes venting their frustrations online to grab eyeballs.

“These attention-seekers challenge authority and their aim is to take control of the conversation as they do not get that sense of control elsewhere,” said Agape's chief executive Delane Lim.

For example, after a teen punched his classmate in the face two months ago, Mr Delane Lim wanted to counsel him outside of class time to minimise disruption.

But the youth insisted on arguing with Mr Lim for an hour in front of the whole class.

“A number of them are bright, confident and eloquent kids who debunk the stupid delinquent ster-

eotype,” said Mr Lim.

This only worsens the parents' frustrations.

Dr Balhetchet said: “Some young people think that negative attention is better than no attention.

“They can be quite egocentric, possibly due to parents who indulged them with material gifts to make up for the lack of time.”

Madam S. K. Wong, 40, a mother of two teenagers, said parents need to be mindful about their own behaviour because children mimic them.

She herself used to hurl chairs at her 14-year-old son and cane him if she heard he had gone to the arcade after school.

The wake-up call came a few years ago when she learnt that her son was using vulgarities and bullying others in school.

She went to a counsellor and learnt other ways to connect with her son.

“Now, I am even his ‘friend’ on Facebook,” said the office assistant in Mandarin.

Not all parents are so lucky.

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