

Volunteer group polling 4,000 students on bullying problem

Online survey involves those aged seven to 17; findings to be out in three months

By **MELODY ZACCHEUS**

A SURVEY of 4,000 students is under way to discover the prevalence of bullying in Singapore.

The online poll of students aged between seven and 17 – the largest of its kind to be carried out here – was set up by volunteer group Coalition Against Bullying for Children and Youth (Cabcy). Its founder and president Esther Ng said she hopes it will find out the extent and frequency of bullying incidents among students.

The findings will be released in about three months to help groups like Cabcy identify bullying trends and de-

velop intervention plans for victims.

Last month, the Protection from Harassment Bill was passed in Parliament. This provides civil remedies, criminal sanctions and self-help options for victims, such as applications for protection orders against harassment.

Cabcy's last such study, in 2006, found that one in eight primary and secondary school students were bullied at least once a week, and one in four experienced cyber bullying at least once in their lives.

Cabcy was set up in 2005 to help children, youth and adults recognise the different forms of bullying, its effects on victims and what can be done

to help reduce or prevent the problem.

The group currently handles between four and six cases every month – a 30 per cent increase from when it started.

Said Ms Ng: "There are many others who don't come forward. Many suffer from depression, some might self-harm and others may entertain suicidal thoughts. We want to prevent that."

To encourage victims and their friends to speak out against bullying, the group launched a social media campaign yesterday. It features a 90-second animated video of a bullying victim going through psychological and emotional torment.

The video on www.shareittoendit.com will get shorter the more shares it gets, as a symbol of ending the victim's suffering and misery.

The aim is to hit 100,000 shares on Facebook as soon as possible, with

“

STOP SUFFERING IN SILENCE

There are many others who don't come forward. Many suffer from depression, some might self-harm and others may entertain suicidal thoughts. We want to prevent that.

– Ms Esther Ng, founder and president of the Coalition Against Bullying for Children and Youth, on the victims of bullying and its effects

”

just the last video frame standing, said Ms Ng. The video was created by marketing communications company JWT Singapore and digital agency XM Asia as part of their annual community social responsibility effort. Links on the video site will also direct people to Cabcy's website, where victims, families and educators can tap resources such as e-counselling services.

Singapore Children's Society senior director of youth services Carol Balhetchet said the survey will build on existing literature and shed light on the growing incidence of cyber bullying as well as help explain why bystanders choose to keep silent.

She said: "Any form of education and awareness about bullying will encourage more bystanders to take action and show victims their support, thereby reducing the feelings of isolation victims often suffer."

✉ melodyz@sph.com.sg