

## **Fighting Bullying in UAE high schools in 2015**

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By

Serafina

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### **History of The United Arab Emirates**

A country that is rich in tradition and diversity, The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is comprised of seven emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain) occupying the southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. For a country that is still young, it has worked hard to establish a sound education system that caters to different groups of people. With many foreigners choosing to make the Emirates their new home, education plays a huge role in the deciding factor, especially for those with children.

Since the UAE is only 44 years old, there is no surprise that its education system is new. With only a few formal schools at its inception, a school building program ADEC (Abu Dhabi Education Council) was created that now caters to a variety of people. Together with the Ministry of Education (MOE), they work on formulating education plans.

The education in the UAE comprises four steps within 14 years.

1. 4 to 5 year-olds attend kindergarten
2. 6 to 11 year-olds attend primary schools
3. 12 to 14 year-olds attend preparatory schools
4. 15 to 17 year-olds attend secondary schools

The biggest concern is to ensure that the curricula followed by the schools not only meet the standards of MOE but also the standards that are followed internationally. The country is very proud thus far of its accomplishments in the education system. Even small villages and towns in the country have at least their own primary school and in many cases, a secondary school in surrounding cities that offer boarding facilities, thus ensuring high percentages of children attending schools. In 2015, many schools in the UAE are technologically equipped with most of the students having access to a computer.

The UAE government provides free education for citizens attending government schools. However, many people, including the nationals, prefer private schools as the level of education (especially in English) is of a much

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higher standard. Private schools provide foreign language education and also follow the [curricula](#) of the related countries thus being able to cater to various nationalities. Government schools' curriculum is designed to align with the country's traditions, customs and beliefs. The classes are taught in Arabic with English as a second language (Cultural Division).

From the beginning, the government realized the importance of education and it is continuously working on developing new systems and improving ways and facilities so as to maximize the potential growth of its manpower. Even though the UAE is able to work on improving their education system without the challenges of economic resources that many countries face, their schools still have one of the most persistent issues in schools worldwide- bullying.

*“Bullying is killing our kids. Being different is killing our kids and the kids who are bullying are dying inside. We have to save our kids whether they are bullied or they are bullying. They are all in pain.”* Cat Cora, American Iron Chef

For many years, bullying has been a constant issue in schools all over the world and has negative effects on the general school environment and on the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. Bullying can also have negative lifelong consequences--[both](#) for the bully and their victims. According to Keith Sullivan, Mark Clearly and Ginny Sullivan in their book, *Bullying in Secondary Schools: What it Looks Like and How to Manage it*, bullying is “a negative and often aggressive or manipulative act or series of acts by one or more people against another person or people over a period of time.” (Sullivan, Clearly and Sullivan, *Bullying in Secondary Schools: What it Looks Life and How to Manage it*) [for parenthetical documentation, including page number in print and the date.](#)

While bullying may be a well-known and easily defined phenomenon, studies show it is not as simple as its definition implies, but actually more complex (Taki). To understand it better, especially when looking at the issue in a specific country, society, or community, bullying should be analyzed and studied from a social perspective. In Mitsuru Taki's article, *A Comparative and Cross Cultural Research on School Bulling*, [studies](#) show that in different countries, “bullying is manifested in different ways.” [Q](#) While bullying is manifested differently in different social and cultural settings, there are still some similarities that have appeared due to the extensive research in that field.

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It occurs in all types of schools and race, gender, class or other types of natural differences do not restrict it. Another common factor is that it is at its worst during early adolescence (Sullivan, Clearly and Sullivan, Bullying in Secondary Schools: What it Looks Like and How to Manage it).

My research will show in detail how bullying manifests in high schools in the UAE in 2015 with the main focus being on high school Emirati students. I will first look at all the common factors in bullying and what has been produced in previous research and literature. By doing that, I will get a perspective on the psychological effects of bullying, and the different ways in which high schools deal with this issue. I will conduct surveys, focus groups and interviews to analyze how bullying manifests, progresses in the different types of high schools in the UAE, and its outcome in later years. The objective of my research is to find a more effective way to combat bullying by giving recommendations on how we can best address the issue in the cultural and social context of the UAE. Perhaps one day, bullies will be an endangered species.

### **The beginning of change**

*“Life is a fight, but not everyone’s a fighter. Otherwise, bullies would be an endangered species.” - Andrew Vachss Terminal*

After the above quote, you could define and discuss what it means to “fight.” Diversity is usually seen as a positive aspect in a country, bringing in different cultures, religions and ethnicities to name a few. Many of the nationals believe that these differences can also bring about conflict and criticism, not only amongst adults but especially among children. The UAE alone is made up of people of different cultures and even within UAE nationals. There is a sort of hierarchy in which tribes and families can be perceived to be of higher rank than others. Origins, families and culture are not the only reasons students bully other students—bullying is also based on social and economic statuses, and the students’ interests and hobbies.

There is such a great need among high school students all over the world to be accepted and to belong within a certain group or community. Students nowadays, spend hours in front of the mirror or try to starve themselves in order to fit the image that they think is required to belong.

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(Clack)

Bullying is an issue that has existed for a long time, and it is arguably getting worse with time. Schools that are supposedly safe havens for children and young adults are places where they are taunted and made to feel unsafe. For the bullied kids, the idea of going to school and facing their bullies is a terrifying thought that they must deal with every single day. Before discussing the causes of bullying, we must first acknowledge that bullied children are perceived to be weak. The reasons for the children to be bullied may vary because of different situations, schools and cultures. Bullied students may wear glasses, be less popular, be of a different race or religion, be over or underweight, be from different socioeconomic background, be gay or lesbian, or have a disability.

Bullies would usually challenge those who would not be able to stand up for themselves, and those who appear weak. Even though their actions portray them as self-assured it's usually the opposite. They bully others in order to feel better about themselves. To maintain this power, a bully has to maintain this behavior constantly. He / she may choose to focus this negative attention on one or more victims.

According to [bullying.com](http://bullying.com), there are different factors that bring about bullying, and what turns a child into a bully. Understanding the various causes of bullying may help us find a solution to this ever-growing cancer. According to [nobullying.com](http://nobullying.com), below are some of the traits that can further explain this dilemma.

1. In many cases we will find that bullies come from dysfunctional families. They often witness fights among family members: physical abuse and/or verbal abuse.
2. Unknowingly, bullies are rewarded for their behaviors and this only further reinforces their bullying nature. Every time they take away lunch money from their victims, cheered on by others for putting down another victim, they feel empowered and rewarded and just become worse.

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3. Most bullies need to maintain control. They are driven with the compulsion to maintain power and flourish.
4. Most bullies lack empathy and the idea of inflicting pain on others brings joy to them. As a matter of fact, they cannot relate to their victims' pain or feelings. Their lack of empathy only makes them relish the pain they are inflicting on their victims, which pushes them to hurt them even more.
5. Emotions can be very hard to control. Many people usually can prevent themselves from losing their temper when they are angry. For children, this control can only be achieved mostly after years of experience or even after watching their elders and learning from them. However, this control is very hard to maintain for most bullies. When a bully loses their temper, the outcome can be devastating. They unleash their anger on their victims in order to release their anger.

Understanding what causes bullying is one of the ways to help combat the problem. However, parents and teachers must come together and understand these causes of bullying and find ways to combat it. Bullying is a constant problem that needs to be addressed more seriously and everyone in the society will need to take a stand against it (bullying.com). In UAE High Schools, prejudices exist based on nationality, ethnicity, family dynamics and different sub-cultures both within UAE nationals, and non-national students. Each school forms its own set of prejudices based on the above factors. Some of the more common factors that contribute to bullying can be:

- a) The ability to speak English or Arabic. All schools (private and government) are required to provide both English and Arabic classes. Unfortunately, private schools concentrate heavily on English while the government schools concentrate heavily on Arabic. This leaves both sets of students at a disadvantage. The government school students taunt the private school kids about not being able to speak Arabic and that they are discarding their culture and are no longer true Emiratis. In return, the private school kids tease them about how backward they are for the fact that they may not speak English well or have a heavy accent.
- b) All government schools are segregated campuses gender wise. Even some private schools choose to have segregated classroom but there are a few who prefer to have not only co-education schools but also classrooms. Since many of the students are not used to dealing with the opposite sex, shy students when taunted by the opposite sex may become withdrawn and even shy. Since I work in a high school

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program that brings students from different schools together, I am always tasked with the responsibility of acting as a buffer between the students. Private school girls who are more experienced with talking to boys are usually teased about it by the government [schoolgirls](#) and made to feel like “bad girls”. The government school students are many times made to feel inferior by the lack of English proficiency. We noticed, however, that it was easier for the boys to become friends regardless of which school they came from. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the girls. Gossip can begin as early as day one of the program.

- c) Being a Muslim country, many families insist that their daughters wear headscarves (hijab) when leaving the house. [In 2015](#), however, you find more and more girls opting not to wear the hijab. The “hijabi” girls may not necessarily wear it for religious obligations but rather for family obligations. For girls who go to private schools, this could be considered as another sign of being backward and they are either ignored or teased to no end. From a very young age, many of the girls are encouraged by their families to wear the burqa. Since this is not a religious requirement, they do face situations where other students laugh at them. These students tend to shy away from other kids and prefer to sit alone. This might insight further prejudice and taunting.

### **Understanding Bullying in the UAE society**

*“May we all find ways to confront the bully in ourselves”* – Confronting School Bullying by Jeffrey Cohen & Robert A. Brooks

In order to understand the prejudice that is among the Emirati children, we will have to further understand the origins of this great nation and the tribes that built it up. Culture is very important to the Emiratis but they also hold their tribes in high regard. According to [3](#)documentation including the 2daydubai.com, Emiratis come from different tribes, which hold different social statuses. Bani Yas is the most prestigious and highly regarded tribe and has 20 subsections. Bani Yas had an extensive coalition network with many other tribes in the region from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Qatar. Some of its subsections are:

- Al Qaniz
- Al Falahi
- Al Hameli
- Al Humairi

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- Al Marar
- Al Mazroai
- Al Muhairi
- Al Muharbi
- Al Qeamzi
- Al Qubaesi
- Al Rumaithi
- Al Suwaidi
- Al Falasi

(2DAYDUBAI.COM)

Many expatriates like Louise Brighton, a British national who lived most of her life in the UAE, have been exposed to the ins and outs of what makes up the subsections of the Emirati families and how they are viewed on the hierarchy. According to Brighton's blog, Emiratis classify themselves in different groups. The [families](#), who migrated to the UAE before the discovery of oil, consider themselves to be "pure Emiratis" and consider anyone else who came after the discovery of oil and wealth not to be "pure Emiratis." The struggle between who is a real Emirati and who is not has always been there and nowadays it is mostly seen among their children. In the younger generation especially, it determines your social status among your friends; even wealth cannot be considered before the prestige of belonging to a higher tribe (Louise Brighton). Children who are born through interracial marriage are mostly bullied for no longer being pure. In the past, when an Emirati woman married a non-Emirati man, she would have to give up her nationality, which of course included her passport and all the benefits that came with it. It is worse for interracial children who attend public schools. They are bullied constantly and made fun of. Unfortunately, the bullies learn this kind of discrimination from their families. This is how they were all raised. Children of interracial marriages who attend private schools tend to fair better when it comes to tribal discrimination. However, in some cases, most of these students come from wealthy families and look down on children who come from a middle class family. How can we then expect children to understand what they are doing is wrong? Based on the above analysis, trying to combat bullying among Emirati students will be much harder, as we will have to look into the tribal aspect. These children have been raised with the mindset that some tribes are much higher in status than others. This is a case where parents' participation will play an important role [in helping to teach their children to discrimination on the basis of income, status, tribe, or race.](#)

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*Adab is the knowledge that saves one from doing wrong. Akhlaq involves right actions and right behavior. Together, they ensure the safety and comfort of everyone. These concepts are the foundation of Islam, and hold universal value for any society that wants to improve itself.* Good Character, by Musa Kazim Gulcur

While trying to think of solutions to help the UAE combat this growing problem, I am reminded of the five pillars of Islam that govern any Emirati household. They are the testimony of faith, prayer, giving zakat (support of the needy), fasting during the month of Ramadan and, the pilgrimage of Makkah once in a lifetime for those who are able (PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM). From these pillars we learn the many foundations of Islam. Many Muslim families use these foundations to teach their children to the best of their abilities. Two of these foundations that can be used in this research are *Adab* – the knowledge that saves one from doing wrong and *Akhlaq* – right actions and right behavior. Will including these two very important foundations help combat bullying?

In *Good Character* by Musa Kazim Gulcur, we read about how *Adab* and *Akhlaq* play an important role as foundations in Islam (Gulcur). *Adab* comes naturally. Children learn it from their parents and students from their teachers. It is up to the society to reflect good *Adab* to the children so they can develop it (Ummah.com). *Akhlaq* describes our manners or disposition--how some of us are patient and some of us are generous. It is very difficult to obtain *Akhlaq* and it requires consistency (C, Meryem). This may sound like part of an ideal solution but how will parents and school administrations introduce this into the topic of bullying? There is no literate translation for the word bullying in Arabic, however there are other words used to describe different acts of bullying such as harassment, backbiting, spreading vicious rumors and in some cases physical abuse. Even though fighting is considered to be shameful in many Arab cultures including that of Emiratis, many children have discovered bullying and now use it as an instrument of torture. Children not only learn bullying from each other. Maryam Ismail from The National states, “Schools are mirrors of society, where administrators and parents may bully each other and both may gang up on the teachers. The pupils see this and then learn the power of bullying (Ismail). Perhaps we may need to reiterate to the parents the concept of *Adab* and *Akhlaq* before trying to explain it to the students?”



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With the growing number of expatriates entering the UAE, the nationals are scrambling to maintain their identity and culture. They remind their children time and time again about the importance of culture and religion. Khalfan Musabih, cultural adviser at the Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Foundation, said: "We are not afraid of others but we are concerned about losing our identity, heritage and language. National identity is to feel you belong to your homeland and to feel zeal toward everything related to it," (Mohammed, Eman). Unfortunately, some of the parents teach their children how not to accept anyone who is not one of them. From their homes, children take this behavior to school and begin inflicting pain on anyone who is "not one of them." How then can we expect to eradicate bullying from schools when most of it is learnt from their homes? The answer lies within the society. We need to educate society, especially parents, on how harmful their teachings to their children have become. The UAE government is adamant on maintaining the culture and there are visible actions being taken to guarantee this. The danger of the country losing its identity may just be an exaggerated fear by its citizens.



(Mohammed, Eman)

Is it fair then to say bullying in UAE high schools is the result of outside influence? Even though expatriates bring in their culture and beliefs in the country, I believe that bullying among high school Emirati students has existed before the large herd of expatriates began their arrival. It existed in their strong comparison among tribes has always existed which always highlighted their differences.

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### **The UAE's fight against bullies**

*"Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life, but define yourself." – Tim Fields*

The UAE has worked tirelessly to achieve universal primary education in 25 years. Ninety percent of the students (both genders) are now completing primary school. The Ministry of Education has invested resources in the youth of the UAE as they view them as their future. They are working on putting in place strategies to develop students into confident and balanced members of society. It attempts to rear positive behavior in order to raise determined nationalist young adults who are well informed about the country's challenges and able to fathom its expectations (Ridge). Having no recorded history of bullying in the UAE makes it difficult to determine the percentage of students exposed to physical and mental abuse by their peers. However, now and again, parents of older generations would often speak of the days when children were friendly and fond of one another. None would deny the occasional argument and wrestling on the dirt, but most would say that bullying is somewhat a recent issue which my own personal experience would disagree with.

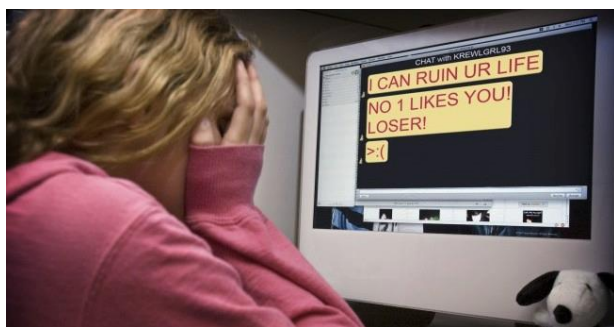
Having studied in a UAE high school myself, I can confirm that bullying did exist back then and it's just getting worse. Being a young country, the UAE has always welcomed people of different cultures while making sure that its tradition and culture were available for everyone to witness. Unfortunately, their children were never prepared for this new outcome. One has to understand that the majority of the Emirati Nationals' households have at least two housekeepers from either India, or the Philippines. While growing up in the UAE, I noticed that Emirati children would associate an Indian or a Filipino as a domestic help, and Arabs as people they could almost relate to culturally but could not completely accept. It was quite an adjustment for both the Emiratis and the expatriates to get used to one another.

After talking to several people who were born or grew up here in the 80s, none of them can ever recollect a report made regarding bullying to school officials or to parents. Also at that time, children were often taught not to complain if they were bullied, but to deal with it themselves. If a student were to complain to a teacher, they might be labeled weak or a tattletale, and so a new cycle of bullying would begin. Parents encouraged their children to deal

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with the issue themselves and to stop complaining about it. You would often hear comments from parents such as “it will toughen you up,” “boys will be boys,” etc. According to a survey conducted recently in the UAE, one in three teenagers is subject to bullying (James-Mullan). Part of my research will also be to prove that this percentage (if not slightly less) did exist back in the 80s.

Unfortunately, this number keeps rising. One of the main reasons for this increase is social media. Bullies have now progressed their taunts to online platforms. With every other teenager having access to a mobile phone there are even more chances for a bully to find a new victim every time they enter a social network website. With children spending more than half their day with other pupils on school grounds, conflicts are bound to rise between them. A few years ago, or even 10 years ago, students had limited access to the Internet, or any device that would connect them to the Internet. This limited the bullying to playgrounds and classrooms. Students turned to name calling, shoving, and what was an argument of “who is boss” turned into a fistfight.



(James-Mullan)

According to a news article on *The National* by Alison McMeans, The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education conducted the earliest recorded survey in 2005 over a period of three months in an attempt to understand the psychological and physical state of students. The survey included thousands of students from across all the schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. Of the students surveyed “more than half the boys and almost a third of the girls said they had been in a physical fight.” Not only have things escalated to injuring each other, but also the survey noted that more than 20 per cent of the students said they had skipped school because they felt it would be unsafe. (McMeans). This shows that the phenomenon that is bullying has been slowly rising in the UAE, pushing individuals and government entities to face the issue. Another survey also assessing the mental and physical state of

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teenage students, depicts the psychological aftermath of bullying, highlighting the cases of depression and sadness among students. Global School-based Student Health, a World Health Organization survey conducted in 2005, "indicated that 13 per cent of pupils had seriously considered suicide, and 9.8 per cent had made a plan about how they would do it." (Underwood)

#### **The abuse of technology**

*"Now, I've always known that there were bullies in the world. We've seen a lot of it in politics lately as well as in daily life. You see it where people who may be stronger, or bigger, or better with verbiage than other folks....show off. To me, that's what bullying is, showing off. It's saying, I'm better than you, I can take you down. Not just physically, but emotionally – Whoopi Goldberg*

Technology plays a very important part in our daily lives. We have come a long way from writing letters by hand and mailing them only then to wait for a response for weeks. We no longer depend on fax machines or pagers. We now communicate with each other more easily even over thousands of miles away. Technology has most definitely changed our lives. Unfortunately, just like any man made creation, we also face a lot of disadvantages with technology. The biggest disadvantage being that the more advanced we become, the more dependent we are on technology. If these machines were to breakdown and stop working, this technically means that ours stop functioning until the problem is resolved. The biggest problem of all is that we are now using technology to attack one another. Most of all it is the young generation that is suffering. An article on *Child Psychology and Psychiatry* states that in recent years bullying through electronic means, specifically, mobile phones or the Internet, has emerged, and often collectively labeled 'cyber bullying'. A corresponding definition of cyber bullying is: 'An aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group of individuals, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself' (Peter K. Smith). The bullies who used to hangout in school corridors or playgrounds to taunt their victims for the very few minutes available to them have now been given access to countless hours where not only can they continuously harass their victims but also increase the quantity of victims they can have at one time. Multi-tasking at its best.

This has now become a more different and dangerous form. Where once bullied children could run away from the playgrounds and leave their troubles behind even for a few hours, they now no longer have that reprieve. Their

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bullies have found ways to follow them even in the safety of their homes, at the malls and anywhere or any time they want to attack them. They no longer can separate their misery from school and their homes. The types of bullying that we were used to seeing in schools such as physical bullying (hitting, kicking, pinching), verbal bullying (name calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, racist remarks) and covert bullying (spreading rumors, negative facial or physical gestures, playing nasty jokes to embarrass someone mimicking unkindly) (National Centre Against Bullying) no longer seem to be enough for bullies and have now advanced themselves with technology.

In the last few years, we have seen a huge growth in the use of technology. A large percentage of households own electronic devices. Almost every child is connected to one form of social media if not all forms. With all the positive outcomes that come with such accessibility, giving us easy access to communicate with our friends and families, a form of assistance in education, it also opens doors to terrible outcomes when used inappropriately. Bullies have now made the website their mode of torture. Just like the cowards that they are, they hide behind a screen and take bullying to a whole new level. They are no longer limited to the playgrounds and classrooms. They can now reach not only one but also several victims at one time and also show how powerful they are to a larger group of people. The attacks can go on 24/7 with not only words but also pictures and videos. Circulating them to a larger network making it even worse for their victims. With easy access to Facebook, Myspace, chatrooms and, instant messages, bullies have made this platform their throne.

Growing up, many of us have heard our parents tell us the famous quote “sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can never hurt you”. How wrong were they? Bones do heal but cruel words stick with you for a lifetime and many kids grow up with mental health issues because of this. The danger of cyber bullying has escalated drastically. From hurt feelings and sadness, we are now faced with Anxiety, depression, Anger, Shame fear, frustration and, low self-esteem and trust issues. When these feelings are left unchecked for a period of time, victims of bullying tend to become withdrawn and exclude themselves from social relationships. Some of them even turn to bully others just so they can escape their situation. Worst of all is that most of those victims turn to harming themselves or others. There are many suicide reports or mass killings committed by teenagers due to bullying. The reason cyber bullying is considered to be more harmful than face-to-face bullying is because of the following various reasons:

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1. The insults, comments or images can be preserved by either the victim or others and can be viewed over and over again, thus reliving the pain every time they look at it.
2. The size of the spectators who are able to view the damaging materials increases the humiliation of the victim
3. The rate at which the rumors are spread circulates to a larger crowd
4. The different social networking sites allow bullies to employ in campaigns against a victim which involves many others
5. Most of the victims know their bullies through schools or family connection, thus increasing their contact with one another.

These reasons affect the victims emotionally, physically and, psychologically.

According to Jamil Ezzon, director of general of ICDL GCC foundation, even though the UAE does not have official statistics to assess the presence or extent of cyber bullying, the fact that the country has one of the world's highest internet and mobile penetration levels raises its potential risk (Bell). Due to the exposure that the young generation has to social media, cyber bullying causes irreparable psychological damage. This platform has become an extension of their 'offline' lives, which make them prone to online threats. Even though there is physical proof of cyber bullying, which a victim can use to report her/his tormentor/s, they still do not. Various reasons could be:

1. Shame
2. Fear of retaliation
3. Fear of being labeled as a snitch
4. Feel like they deserve it

In the UAE, a child especially in the case of boys, reporting bullying could be considered as a sign of weakness hence they keep quiet and suffer in silence. How then do we help parents fight against cyber bullying? A large network that has billions of users and different ways to access it?

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(Ph.D)

Parents have to become more involved in their children's lives. They have to control which websites their children visit and if privilege is given to the child, they must be told that the parent will be logging in to the child's account to review their activity. Parents can use various software available online to monitor their access and block websites. Family discussions are important. Parents must have honest dialogues about cyber bullying. They must emphasize to their children not only the importance of good behavior online but also to report any bullying that they are aware of. Even though cyber bullying may not happen on school grounds, it is very important for parents and schools to maintain communication. Children must feel safe both at home and in school. Schools must hold seminars and workshops on bullying, making clear their stance on this matter. Both the bullies and the bullied must know that such behavior is not acceptable and the repercussions are severe. It is also very important that parents are involved in any workshops or seminars held by the school regarding this matter. A united community will most definitely put a stop to such horrible behavior.

The notion of bullying does not exist in the Arab world like it does in the western world. There is still so much to be done in order to spread the concept. UAE can definitely learn from other countries on how to combat this infection through their anti-bullying campaign and awareness. However, Samineh Shaheem, an assistant professor of psychology at Middlesex University Dubai, who founded an anti-bullying campaign in the UAE, Bolt Down on Bullying, warns against imitating other countries' practices. She states "Cultural variables contribute significantly to the visage of bullying, therefore cut-and-paste solutions from other locations should not be used in the UAE. My research here has highlighted key cultural variables such as the UAE being a transient, highly diverse society and people have quite a different understanding of what bullying is and how it should be dealt with. We need to align our values in regard to this matter so that we can proceed with the same objectives - to eliminate acts of verbal, sexual, physical and cyber bullying completely" (Carswell).

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Perhaps while trying to find long term solutions for our students we can begin by addressing the problem with them rather than labeling them bullies and victims.

### **Friends and bullies**

*Sometimes bullies are your friends and very rarely do bullying prevention tips acknowledge this fact or what to do about it. -Rosalind Wiseman*

I was thirteen years old when I moved to the UAE to be with my family. A young Kenyan girl with a thick African accent. Everything about me was different. My hair was short; I hated dresses and could not speak Arabic like all other children around me. Whenever we were invited to house parties, I was always on my own. The other girls would ignore me and the boys would whisper in corners and point at me. I didn't know how to describe what was going on around me. For the first time in my life, I did not have any friends around me. I was on my own. I figured if I gave them time to get to know me then they will eventually like me. Unfortunately that went on for months. Have you ever had a dream where you are standing naked in a room full of people and everyone is pointing and laughing at you? That's exactly how my first week of school was. I can't even remember what was going through my head but what I remember thinking was no one should have to feel the way I was feeling.

I was so angry with my parents for pulling me out of my school in Kenya and moving me away from everyone I knew and loved. Even the kids from Africa looked at me differently. I was the only one who was not born in the UAE could not speak Arabic and my mannerisms were very different from theirs. No one in school wanted to eat lunch with me and when the teacher asked some of the kids to help me find my way around, I could see them making faces and grumbling about their bad luck. Lucky for me, I was raised by a very strong Grandmother and nanny and they taught me to look out for myself. A few weeks in school and I was tired of being treated like a pariah. First step was to stop the snickering and pointing.

One thing I found out was when you confront someone head on; they immediately change their tune. All that pointing and snickering was driving me out of my mind and made me feel like an exotic animal. When I was in Kenya, I was class president. I was not used to sitting on the sideline and being ignored



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or made fun of. I needed to reestablish my confidence so when I heard that the position of class president was up for grabs; I made a pitch for it. It was a risky move considering that I was the topic of everyone's jokes and had no friends but it didn't matter to me. It took time and a lot of effort from my end but I started with the unpopular kids in my class. Knowing how it felt to be looked down on, I needed to help them see how amazing they were. It did take some work but in the end the taste of confidence and belonging won them over. My next move was getting the teachers to notice my abilities. They all referred to me as the "Kenyan girl" and not by my name. It annoyed me immensely but I pushed my anger down and showed them who "Aisha" was. Helping around the classroom, cleaning after P.E. class, and volunteering my time. Soon, they started using my name. It was Aisha this and Aisha that.

Of course there was a risk that the popular girls would end up hating me but I had a plan and needed to stick to it. From a very young age, I hated feeling miserable and whenever this feeling would come around; I would do everything that I could to chase it away. The kids and teachers in school were causing me misery. I needed them to stop and the only person on my side was myself. My biggest challenge was the popular girls. How was I supposed to win a battle against a group of girls who have known each other from kindergarten? The day I decided to pull aside the ringleader and have a conversation with her was when I realized that bullies are simply afraid of confrontations. They can't face their victims on their own unless they have support. Cut the head of the snake and the body dies. I knew my parents would never send me back to Kenya so I needed to make Abu Dhabi my new home. I needed to be happy. I needed to survive. Needless to say, my troubles at school ended and I flourished.

Looking back at my experience, I can see how worse bullying has become but the difference now is that people are willing to talk about it and do something about it. Where in my case the bullying did not only come from the other children but also from teachers. They set a bad example to the other children and made them think it was ok to treat me differently.

Where in the past, not being able to speak in Arabic was a source of being teased and made fun of, nowadays not being able to speak fluent English has become a source of torture. Arabs have a very thick accent and are not able to pronounce certain words properly. This difficulty can be found in many students attending government schools. Unfortunately for them, the private school kids taunt and ridicule them. Change has arrived in the UAE but

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Unfortunately many of the Emiratis cannot accept it. They choose what they find appealing but cast aside what does not align with their traditions. While recently collecting data from high school students on their opinion regarding the changes that are happening within the UAE, their common concern was that these changes exposed them to how different their culture is to the rest of the world. Hence they feel as though they have to protect it by constantly mentioning how amazing it is to be an Emirati and all the benefits that come with it. Unfortunately, Just being an Emirati does not cut it. You have to fit a certain standard. You must have a maid, a driver and a nanny. Must travel away for a family vacation at least once a year, have designer merchandise, and host parties that are social media worthy. Most importantly, you must openly condemn anybody who does not fit into these standards.

How then can we expect to change a country's perception of how children should treat one another when they are constantly comparing themselves to whose family is better or richer? I believe this goes beyond a simple campaign held in schools and advertised over radios. Such a campaign will have to be brought to places where families frequent; malls, parks, etc. Parents must be provoked to think of questions such as; is my child a bully? Is my child being bullied? Does my child speak up when they see another child being bullied or simply keep quiet?

Looking at some videos (Youtube) on high school bullies, it is nerve racking to see the depths it has gone to. Obviously, there are more physical cases in a country like the U.S. compared to the UAE. However there is a case that did bring national attention to this matter. On 19 April 2012, an eleven-year-old girl was brought into an emergency room with a brain hemorrhage caused in a school fight (Nereim). Later on, it was discovered that the young girl was being bullied for a very long time before the final attack that sent her to the hospital. Both school administrators and parents have to come to an understanding that getting a hand on this situation that is about to get out of control is both their jobs and their responsibility. It should not be a case of; since it happened on school grounds then the school should deal with it or because it happened outside the school ground then it should be up to the parents.

UAE has very little research data on bullying simply because very few people want to talk about it or even acknowledge that it's actually happening. The other issue can also be that children can never really recognize when a friend is bullying them. They simply think it is harmless and will soon come to

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an end (Rizvi). While trying to collect data, I spent more time than I expected to explaining and giving examples of bullying and helping them understand how harmful a simple joke can become. My final verdict was many of my subjects were friends with their bullies or victims and found it very difficult to understand how the “harmless” taunting can be considered as bullying. I have had to take a different approach on doing my survey and break down my initial questions which will be presented in this paper.

### **Fighting bullying successfully**

*“Don’t turn your face away. Once you’ve seen, you can no longer act like you don’t know. Open your eyes to the truth. It’s all around you. Don’t deny what the eyes to your soul have revealed to you. Now that you know, you cannot feign ignorance. Now that you’re aware of the problem, you cannot pretend you don’t care. To be concerned is to be human. To act is to care.” - Vashti Quiroz-Vega*

Over the past couple of years, we have not only seen an increase in bullying but have seen how it has become much more aggressive and monstrous. Until the anti-bullying campaign was started, both the bullies and their victims did not have any guidance or a helping hand. These campaigns are thriving and bringing awareness to everyone. During the month of October schools around the world comes together and joins STOMP OUT Bullying in observing National Bullying prevention Month. People come together to encourage others to join the fight against bullying and cyber bullying by increasing awareness and showing the impact it has on our youth (STOMP OUT BULLYING). Children are encouraged to be part of this campaign by creating positive messages and handing them out to other children, videos talking about their experiences and protesting against anti bullying. The campaign teaches children how to identify bullying and even stand up for someone who is being bullied and even make friends with other kids that they don’t know. A powerful statement by the organization says “The more awareness that is created during the month of October and all year round is one step closer to putting an end to bullying.” To many, the statement of anti – bullying can simply be that one should always treat others, as he/she would like to be treated themselves. According to NoBullying.com, the anti-bullying movement was created in response to the steady increase in bullying across not only the United States [but also](#) the world. Countries all across the globe participate in anti-bullying activities, training sessions and legislation. What is anti-bullying? In a way, the anti-bullying movement gives a voice to the

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otherwise voiceless. It provides bullied kids (and young adults) with a sense of dignity and self-worth along with a plan of action. Let's take a deeper look at what the anti-bullying movement is all about (NoBullying.com). Even though these campaigns have been deemed successful and have brought about a lot of change, we also have to ask what negative aspects come along with it. Do anti-bullying campaigns do more harm than good?

According to an article by Helene Guldberg, these campaigns portray children as either little monsters or helpless victims. This further creates a hostile environment for children by adding suspicion. With different behaviors being labeled as acts of bullying more children are receiving the titles of either bullies or victims without the right course of investigation being done (Guldberg). Guldberg further explains how relationships among children are more complicated than the campaign implies. It is very important for everyone to understand what bullying is not. Keith Sullivan's handbook on anti-bullying explains how some incidents that at first appear to be bullying may be something else – criminal offending, sub-bullying or non-bullying behavior (Sullivan, The Anti-Bullying Handbook).

Bullying is antisocial and damaging but it is not a criminal behavior. Children often play buoyant physical and verbal games that may seem hostile and rowdy to adults. These can be considered as disciplinary behavior but they are not necessarily bullying. Teachers and parents must learn the difference between bullying, criminal acts, and sub-bullying and non-bullying behavior. Many schools are now developing the 'zero tolerance' approach to combat bullying. Unfortunately, this tactic can actually create a situation that did not exist. It promotes the illusion that whenever a child feels picked on or exploited in anyway, they should report it and their troubles will be taken care of by someone else. Children are not learning any lessons on the complexity of friendship and generally growing up. This is an illusion that everyone they meet is supposed to be kind, and pleasant and when this does not happen, a figure of authority with sweep in and wipe this threat out.

According to Anti-Bullying Alliance (Anti-Bullying Alliance) bullying is the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person by another, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. With this said, we must be careful in our analysis of the situation at hand before labeling it. Even though anti-bullying campaigns were started with the intention of protecting children who are truly victimized, it has now become an umbrella for anyone who feels hurt by a simple dispute. Anti-Bullying Alliance describes any act such as pushing,

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hitting, punching, kicking, or yelling abuse to another, name-calling, insulting someone, using verbal threats, spreading rumors, social exclusions as an act of bullying. With such claims, it should not be a surprise why we see an increase of bullying. Guldberg further explains that there is very little to back up the overblown claims by the anti-bullying industry about how widespread bullying is or about how far-reaching and devastating the effects of bullying are. The reality is that the evidence for a long-term effect of bullying is not there. That does not mean that it doesn't have a negative effect on some individuals. But equally it may have a positive effect on others. Without a doubt some children can do come out of difficult situations stronger and more resilient (Guldberg).

Perhaps anti-bullying campaigns should take the time to explain to children that it is perfectly [all right](#) to dislike someone and vice versa and not have to feel as though they are being bullied. As adults we find it acceptable not to like some people and like others. Melissa Witkow who is an assistant professor of psychology at Willamette University explains in her research that the effects of children's positive and negative relationships were a lot more complex than previously indicated. In fact their study found that having mutual antipathies was associated with fewer signs of maladjustment. In other words, it may be perfectly healthy to dislike, and show your dislike, of certain children, who in turn may reciprocate the feeling. "As adults, there are people we don't like, but we're not beating them up. We're not harassing them. A lot of adults think that kids should only have positive relationships, but that's not possible (Melissa R. Witkow).

As adults, we have a duty to the children around us. Helping them and guiding them through an already difficult path that lays ahead of them. The choices we make for them have to be sound and well thought through. Fighting there battles is not the answer but helping them understand the difference between a battle and a simple childhood misunderstanding can save them from years of turning themselves into either victims or perpetrators. Anti-bullying campaigns are useful to a certain extent but they are also hindering the growth

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### **Recognizing bullying for what it is and how to deal with it**

*“It is important for all adults to understand that bullying does not have to be a normal part of childhood. All forms of bullying are harmful to the bully, the victim, and to witnesses. The effects can last well into adulthood.”*

Growing up in a world where violence is increasing at an alarming rate, I do wonder if we can ever stop such a thing as bullying. How much awareness can we bring to it and how can we show our children that bullying is extremely harmful when they see it happening around them among adults? My fear is we may never end it and thus I fear for our children’s future. That being said, I do not believe we should remain silent. We must struggle by any mean possible to create a safe environment for our teacher. Perhaps they may learn enough to save this world from itself.

Think of a classroom environment where children are being taught the steps of solving a math equation. There is a beginning, middle and an end. There are explanations, understanding, a bit of confusion and then the final realization. We have to explain bullying to both parents and children the exact same way a math teacher would explain a problem in class. Telling parents and children that bullying is wrong simply will not do the job. We have to show them why it’s wrong and the effects of bullying. Victims are affected in many ways such as the develop anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, poor social self-competence, depression, psychosomatic symptoms, social withdrawal, physical health complaints, alcohol and drug use, suicide etc. Even though the victims may experience the worst of it many people do not believe that the bullies themselves suffer from these assaults. They are always in fights and get injured, drink alcohol and take drugs, drop out of school, carry weapons, become criminals and are convicted at an early age. Their lives are just as ruined as their victims. Throughout all this, we tend to concentrate more on the bullies and the victims but also tend to forget about the bystanders, witnesses, and assistants. In the case of children, they can easily be influenced. They are even made to feel that if they do not support a side, they can easily become a victim. Many assistants are there because they feel that this is the only way to protect them against bullying. We would like to think that bystanders could really help stop bullying when it happens but a person’s disposition can affect their decision in this matter. Perhaps they may have witnessed a bystander’s fate for interfering.

Previously, we talked about anti-bullying campaigns and their effects. We not only saw how these campaigns can help but also how they can create

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more harm. Perhaps not enough accurate data has been collected to exactly point out what bullying is and what it is not. Two children fighting each other on a playground does not necessarily mean bullying. It could simply mean a misunderstanding between two children. So how do we create a campaign that is effective and helpful to everyone? There are certain steps that we can take to stop any kind of bullying that is happening. According to the National Education Association (NEA), there are ten steps to stop and prevent bullying as listed below.

1. Pay attention. Unexplained injuries, destroyed personal items, changes in mannerism including eating habits, and avoidance of school and be warning signs to a bullying problem.
2. Don't ignore it. Even if you witness a simple teasing, you must not ignore it. The child being teased may not see it as something simple. You have to acknowledge it and let the child know that you are there to help them.
3. When you see something — do something. Run interference if you think there is a problem between students. Let them know that you are aware of their every move. You may be the only thing preventing a bullied child from spiraling in to depression or even worse circumstances. All questionable behavior should be addressed immediately to keep a situation from escalating. Summon other adults if you deem the situation may get out of hand. Be sure to always refer to your school's anti-bullying policy.
4. Remain calm. When you intervene, refuse to argue with either student. Model the respectful behavior you expect from the students. First make sure everyone is safe and that no one needs immediate medical attention. Reassure the students involved, as well as the bystanders. Explain to them what needs to happen next — bystanders go on to their expected destination while the students involved should be taken separately to a safe place.
5. Deal with students individually. Don't attempt to sort out the facts while everyone is present, don't allow the students involved to talk with one another, and don't ask bystanders to tell what they saw in front of others. Instead, talk with the individuals involved — including bystanders — on a one-on-one basis. This way, everyone will be able to tell their side of the story without worrying about what others may think or say.
6. Don't make the students involved apologize and/or shake hands on the spot. Label the behavior as bullying. Explain that you take this type of behavior very seriously and that you plan to get to the bottom of it before you determine what should be done next and any resulting consequences based on your

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school's anti-bullying policy. This empowers the bullied child — and the bystanders — to feel that someone will finally listen to their concerns and be fair about outcomes.

7. Hold bystanders accountable. Bystanders provide bullies an audience, and often actually encourage bullying. Explain that this type of behavior is wrong, will not be tolerated, and that they also have a right and a responsibility to stop bullying. Identify yourself as a caring adult that they can always approach if they are being bullied and/or see or suspect bullying.
8. Listen and don't pre-judge. It is very possible that the person you suspect to be the bully may actually be a bullied student retaliating or a "bully's" cry for help. It may also be the result of an undiagnosed medical, emotional or psychological issue. Rather than make any assumptions, listen to each child with an open mind.
9. Get appropriate professional help. Be careful not to give any advice beyond your level of expertise. Rather than make any assumptions, if you deem there are any underlying and/or unsolved issues, refer the student to a nurse, counselor, school psychologist, social worker, or other appropriate professional.
10. Become trained to handle bullying situations. If you work with students in any capacity, it is important to learn the proper ways to address bullying. Visit [www.nea.org/bullyfree](http://www.nea.org/bullyfree) for information and resources. You can also take the pledge to stop bullying, as well as learn how to create a Bully Free program in your school and/or community.

While doing my research I came across countless organizations that speak out against bullying. The one thing that almost all of them had in common was that "well-meaning" adults ran each one of them! Of course they did their own research and came up with ways to help them but there was very little involvement with the children themselves. One of the campaigns that I was quite intrigued by was "Teens against Bullying." It is a campaign that was created by teens for teens. A place for middle and high school students to find ways to address bullying, to take action, to be heard, and to own an important social cause (Teens Against bullying). No one can better relate to a teen like another teen. They know how mean they can be or how friendly then can be. They acknowledge the wish to be in with the "it group" verses being alone and eating lunch in a bathroom stall. As much as adults would like to create a safe world for their children, it is important that we involve the



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children themselves in this process. Here in the UAE, various anti-bullying campaigns are trying to help with this matter.

Bolt down on bullying (BDOB) is a program especially designed for the UAE by Dr. Samineh I. Shaheem - Assistant Professor of Cultural Psychology In collaboration with Suzanne Radford on Dubai Eye 103.8 FM. The BDOB campaign was featured in the ICPD conference of the year 2014. Since 2009, the Bolt Down on Bullying Campaign has continued to raise awareness regarding bullying in hopes of reducing incidents and sharing effective strategies on how to confront it. They are involving both the parents and school administrations in this campaign. However, their campaign may fall on deaf ears. A country that does not openly acknowledge bullying but views it simply as a disagreement among children may not wish to be involved in such a public protest. I have spoken to some of the expatriate parents whose children have been victims of bullying (by an Emirati child) and say that they would rather advice their child not to play with the bully and stay far away from them and avoid any contact as much as possible. They feel that involving the school administration will simply draw more attention to the matter than necessary. Keep in mind that this is a country where the nationals have power and they would rather not tangle with them and make the situation worse. Even the Emirati families would prefer to keep the administration out of this conversation so as to avoid embarrassment.

Fighting bullying in the UAE is still a work in progress that needs everyone to jump in and help contribute. A possible effective campaign could be that by Taaleem schools along with XRay Data, which is trying to introduce hi-tech software that can help parents monitor social media activities of their children. The software alerts parents about negative activity within their children's social media accounts, regardless of what device the child uses to log on. It ensures the child's privacy and is extremely simple to use. Alerts can be chosen from key criteria such as bullying, bullied, mood disorders and inappropriate intimacy. With this, the company claims, parents need not personally review their child's social networks. You get alerts only if a potential problem is identified. What more, you can also set your own preferences for alert warning levels (Kapur).

No matter how effective it may seem to be, we have to make them work by involving the children themselves. They have to add their opinion. Tell us what works and what will not work. Otherwise we will have dozens of anti-bullying campaigns that do not have any affect.

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### **Delving into the young minds to understand bullying**

*“One's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and cruelly mocked, but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered.” — Michael J. Fox*

A lack in studies and reports on bullying in the UAE makes it difficult to tackle the issue and produce ways on how to stop it. This lack might be caused by several reasons that can vary from students not having the opportunity to voice their opinions, to not finding the support that would allow them to report cases of bullying. Anonymous surveys and questionnaires are usually best suited for such issues that are considered to be sensitive topics to discuss by some individuals, especially children. Hence, I conducted an anonymous survey that included more than 50 participants who studied or are currently studying in high schools in the UAE. The survey was distributed to individuals with various backgrounds through social media and emails. I will discuss the results of my survey and attempt to compare it with the results of other surveys from the United States of America and the United Kingdom. To avoid confusion, I will refer to my survey as “primary survey,” and will refer to the others by the titles given to them.

The primary survey incorporated various questions that touched on types of bullying, effects of bullying, and reaction to bullying, ways to stop bullying, school environment, and advice for bullies and victims of bullying. The survey began with generic questions including nationality, gender and age to help understand whether these factors can be contributors to the issue. Another factor that was addressed in the survey and can be vital to understanding the issue in the UAE [is](#) knowing what kind of high school the individuals attended or are currently attending.

The survey showed that the kind of high school could contribute to the existence of bullying and the severity of bullying on school campuses. For instance, it showed that students in all-girls private high schools witness more bullying than students in all-girls government high schools, citing that it occurred occasionally throughout the school year. Results showed that 58% of students in the former school witnessed more bullying compared to 45% in the latter school. All-boys high schools, however, showed much higher cases of

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bullying, with 66% of students in government high schools stating that bullying occurred regularly on school grounds and 33% said that it was a daily occurrence. While 75% of male students in private high schools said that bullying was of an occasional occurrence in school.

72% of students in non-segregated private high schools said that bullying was witnessed occasionally throughout the school year. While 8% of students said that it was a regular occurrence, and 4% said that it was a daily occurrence. This shows that it does not matter what kind of high school children attend bullying is a countrywide phenomenon. The survey also opens up questions on whether the segregation of female and male students contributes to bullying. While female students in all-girls high schools have lower numbers of bullying incidents, the survey shows that female students suffer from bullying almost as much as male students do in non-segregated high schools.

Surprisingly and considering the numbers of bullying occurrences in UAE high schools, 44.6% of the participants consider themselves to be very safe on school grounds. Only 5.4% and 1.8% of the participants feel slightly safe and not safe at all respectively on school grounds. This suggests that even though students experience bullying in their schools, they still feel safe surrounded by other students and teachers. This can also mean that the students are offered support and help from their surroundings making them feel more at ease in their environment.

Following safety on school grounds, the participants were asked if they have been bullied, and were also asked to specify the type of bullying they had experienced. To make it clear to the participants, the survey explained that physical bullying encompassed; punching, kicking, slapping, pinching, pushing or shoving. Emotional bullying included; name-calling, teasing, mocking, insulting or racial slurs. Cyberbullying was linked to emotional bullying but of course done through the Internet.

54.4% of the participants said that they have been bullied at some point during their high school career, while 45.6% of the participants said that they have never been bullied in high school. Of the students who have been bullied, a staggering 87.9% of the participants cited that they have been emotionally bullied. Followed by 18.1% of the participants having been physically bullied and 15.1% said that they have experienced cyberbullying. Similarly, a 2008 survey conducted by Shari Schnieder, Lydia O'Donnell, Ann Stueve and

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Robert Coulter of the Education Development Center in Massachusetts, USA, showed that “a total of 15.8% of students reported cyberbullying and 25.9% reported school bullying in the past 12 months” of that year. The American survey continued to state that “a majority (59.7%) of cyberbullying victims were also school bullying victims; 36.3% of school bullying victims were also cyberbullying victims (Shari Kessel Schneider, Lydia O'Donnell, Ann Stueve, and Robert W. S. Coulter, BS).” This implies that students can experience more than one form of bullying, and also shows that bullying can follow children everywhere they go. This also makes it difficult to determine the best way to terminate the issue and allowing children to feel safe in schools and outside of schools.

A 2015 survey by Ditch the Label, a charity from the UK, reported, “43% of young people have been bullied, 44% of which are bullied at least once a week.” Ditch the Label continued to state, “74% of those who have been bullied, have, at some point been physically attacked. 17% have been sexually assaulted, and 62% have been cyber bullied.” The survey also reported “of those who were bullied, 98% were bullied by another student, 17% from a sibling, 13% from a teacher and 8% from their parents/guardians (Ditch The Label).” While another 2015 survey from NoBullying, which 61% of its participants were residents of USA, reported “61% said they were bullied at school and 20% said they were bullied by family members and 38% said they were cyber bullied (NoBullying.com).” This indicates that types of bullying vary from one country to another. Students in the UK experience more physical and cyber bullying than students that reside in USA and other countries. Also, reports of sexual bullying and bullying by family members are each found only in one country, or more in one country but less in the other. This implies that bullying has unfortunately continued to grow over the years in different environments and has taken on different forms and shapes.

The effects of any and all forms of bullying reported by all the surveys, including the primary survey, have been fairly similar. All the surveys have reported forms of insecurity, emotional distress, safety issues and health problems. The primary survey reported that 71.4% of its participants said that they were emotionally hurt after being bullied. 64.3% said that they felt insecure, 39.3% said that they were slightly annoyed with the experience, 32.1% said that they felt angry, 21.4% said that they felt unsafe at school, and 10.7% said they did not care about the incident. Some have also reported feeling unconfident, not belonging to their environment and vengeful towards their bullies. Ditch the Label reported that of those who were bullied “47% of

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young people want to change their appearance, 48% want teeth whitening, 17% breast implants, 6% liposuction and 5% Botox.” This indicates that students have been bullied because of their physical appearance and caused them to feel insecure and less confident about themselves. The UK survey also reported that of those who were cyber bullied “29% self-harmed, 27% skipped class, 14% developed an eating disorder and 12% ran away from home. (Ditch The Label)” Furthermore, the 2008 Massachusetts survey stated “victims of either form of bullying alone reported elevated levels of distress (Shari Kessel Schneider, Lydia O'Donnell, Ann Stueve, and Robert W. S. Coulter, BS).” This shows that the effects of bullying are not only emotional, but can also cross over to health issues, performance issues in school, and social issues.

The primary survey also attempted to understand the bullies and how they felt towards the bullying that they caused. Only 18.4% of the participants responded to this question and said that yes they have bullied another student. While 81.6% said they have never bullied another student. Of those who bullied other students, 77.8% resorted to emotional bullying, 11.1% used physical bullying and another 11.1% used cyber bullying. When asked about how they felt after bullying another student, 64.3% felt guilty or ashamed, and 28.6% felt slightly guilty or ashamed and 7.1% did not care at all or enjoyed it. Moreover, of all the surveys gathered, Ditch the Label was the only one that reported the number of bullies in UK schools. It reported, “50% of young people have bullied another person, 30% of which do it at least once a week (Ditch The Label).” These numbers and the lack of statistics reporting about bullies indicate heavily that it is crucial to have more knowledge of those who cause the bullying.

Bullying, however, can be stopped and this depends on how we react to it. Hence, the primary survey asked the participants about their reactions to their own bullying experiences, reaction to other students being bullied, and the reaction of their teachers in schools. Of those who were bullied, 57.1% attempted to defend themselves without the help of others, 26.2% ignored the situation all together, and 16.7% reported the incident to their teachers. Others have resorted to not talking about it so that they don't feel any more hatred from their peers, talking to the bullies themselves to understand the situation and come up with a solution, and some believed that they can stand up for themselves because their friends would support them while in the situation. The primary survey continued to report that 78.7% would try to help if they witnessed any bullying, 10.6% would report the situation to an administrator or teacher, and another 10.6% would ignore the situation if they witnessed a

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fellow student being bullied. Ditch the Label reported that of the 55% that reported bullying, 92% went to a teacher, 86% to a family member, and 69% to a friend. The UK survey also stated that “45% did not report bullying, 32% of which felt it would not be taken seriously, 32% were too embarrassed and 26% were scared of it getting worse (Ditch The Label).” The NoBullying survey reported “64% said they ignored it and another 40% said they confronted the sender/bully while 51% blocked the sender.” It also stated that “almost 92% said they would definitely stand up for bullies” if they witnessed another student being bullied (NoBullying.com). This implies that children can try in various ways to protect themselves and each other, but can also fear the bullies if they attempted to report the situation or stand up for themselves. With this, communities and schools must realize that they should make it clear that students will always find support and help in whatever environment they find themselves in so that they can work out their issues.

Furthermore, the primary survey reported that only 10% of students find teachers extremely helpful when a student is bullied. 38% find the teachers very helpful, 24% find them moderately helpful, 16% find them slightly helpful, and 12% do not find them helpful at all. The NoBullying survey reported that of those who were bullied, “84% said their parents weren’t even close to knowing enough about bullying and cyber bullying, 69% said they didn’t believe schools are even remotely close to helping out when cyber bullying happens, and 42% said they believed Facebook, Ask.fm, Twitter and Myspace are not even close to doing enough to prevent cyber bullies (NoBullying.com).” This heavily and boldly implies that the community as a whole needs to be educated about bullying and how to stop the phenomenon. Children might not be telling their parents or teachers about their issues, because they might think that they would not understand. So with this, we have [to](#) make sure that it is understood by everyone involved that bullying is an extremely dangerous and important issue.

The primary survey also asked the participants about their thoughts on the difference between conflicts and bullying, ways to stop bullying, and advice to help both sides. 75.5% of the participants said that they could tell the difference between bullying and a normal conflict, while 24.5% said that they couldn’t tell the difference. Most of the participants said that a conflict is between two parties arguing over a common topic, while bullying is a one-sided action that is meant to purposefully hurt another person regardless of the consequences. Moreover, one of the most popular suggestions by participants to stop bullying was to raise awareness and campaign the issue. Other popular

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suggestions included counseling both the bullies and the victims, making sure that the bullies receive appropriate punishment for their behavior, encourage the teachers and parents to be more attentive, and having open dialogues about the issue. Additionally the participant of the primary survey advised bullies that what goes around always comes around. Meaning that they should be aware of their actions because they will eventually catch up to them and make them feel bad about themselves. To the victims, the participants advised them to be the bigger people, to stand up for themselves, speak for themselves and for others and always know that it will get better.

The surveys discussed show a growing need to find various and innovative ways to end bullying and help both sides. The UAE high schools should also be encouraged to report more cases of bullying and conduct their own studies to track changes of the issue. This survey should be one of many survey conducted in the UAE and definitely should not be the last.

### **Finding a solution together**

*“I was once asked why I don't participate in anti-war demonstrations. I said that I will never do that, but as soon as you have a pro-peace rally, I'll be there.” – Mother Teresa*

It's a beautiful fall day in Dubai. The ground of the high school is lively with families coming to protest for a cause that they seem to believe in. Their attires match banners adorning the school corridors. The school children run around with smiles on their faces. Not one of them seems like a victim of bullying or even a bully but deep down imbedded in the school structure, we know that bullying has molded it and became part of the structure. Children can be masters of disguises. They learn how to hide their pain and struggles and show it only to those whom they can trust. The other day, while lounging on my couch and flipping thorough TV channels I came across an animation movie *Paranorman*. In the small town of Blithe Hollow, Massachusetts, Norman Babcock (Kodi Smit-McPhee) is an 11-year-old boy who speaks with the dead, including his late grandmother (Elaine Stritch) and various ghosts in town. Almost no one believes him and he is isolated emotionally from his family while being ridiculed by his peers. His friend, Neil Downe (Tucker Albrizzi), is an overweight boy who is bullied himself and finds in Norman a kindred spirit.

This may seem like just another animation until the first interaction between Norman and Neeil Downe, after both students face a bully. Neil

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follows Norman home after school trying to initiate friendship with Norman whom he feels he has a connection to. On seeing that Norman is still down from his bullying encounter, Neil tries to cheer him up but poor Norman does not understand why Neil is not as upset as he is. Instead, Neil seems quite ok with it. It's a daily occurrence and he has become quite comfortable with it. Norman is baffled and asks why it does not bother him. For a children's movie, Neil's response is quite shocking. "You can't stop bullying. It's part of human nature. If you were bigger and more stupid, you'd probably be a bully too. It's called survival of the thickest (Smit-McPhee)." Is this what we are teaching our children? Are we telling them that bullying is ok and they must endure it as part of their growing process? While school administrators and parents are trying to combat bullying in the UAE, they are fighting a battle against movies that say otherwise. From this movie alone, I was able to find ways to help create a better campaign that may help. Before we can proceed to the solution that we have been looking for, we have to understand the myths and misperceptions that cloud many peoples' judgment and possibly the reasons why bullying still continues to this day and also why it will be hard to eradicate it immediately.

When dealing with school bullying, we have to look at the myths and misperceptions of it. Many of us identify bullying as one thing while the rest of us identify it as another. According to [bullyonline.org](http://bullyonline.org) (School Bully OnLine), there are several myths and misperception about bullying that we all have to understand if we expect to eradicate this problem. Below are a few of these myths and misperception that you may find to be very interesting

1. There is no bullying here: Wherever there is a school or playground, there is bullying. The difference is that some schools put in the effort to deal with the problem immediately. However, there are schools that would rather ignore it or deal with it irrationally than accept the fact that it exists. To them, accepting that bullying is taking place in their school is like saying they are bad educators.
2. Ignore it: Surrendering to a bully may at the time seem like a good idea but all that it's doing is allowing them to continue the harassment and making it even worse.
3. Stand up for yourself: It's easier said than done especially with a serial bully.
4. Victims of bullying don't know how to defend themselves verbally or physically: Parents and schools do not teach children the skills of



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physical, psychological, emotional and verbal self-defense. This is because most adults don't know how to do this.

5. Bullying toughens you up: Bullying is in the same league as harassment, discrimination, racism, violence, assault, stalking, physical abuse, sexual abuse, molestation and rape. It causes trauma and psychiatric injury and can, if untreated, cause a psychiatric injury of sufficient seriousness to blight a person for life, resulting in a lower standard of educational achievement, causing a poorer standard of health, preventing them realizing their potential and thus being able to contribute less to society than would otherwise be the case - including paying less in taxes throughout their life. The symptoms of psychiatric injury caused by bullying are consistent PTSD.
6. Bullying is a rite of passage we all have to go through: Some people claim that harassment, discrimination, racism, violence, assault, stalking, physical abuse, sexual abuse, molestation, rape and domestic violence are rites of passage but these are all unacceptable.
7. Bullies are psychologically strong: Bullies are weak, disordered, dysfunctional and emotionally immature as evidenced by their need to bully. Bullies compensate for their weakness with aggression. What some people mistakenly see as "psychological strength" is really an aggressive determination to violate other people's boundaries with no respect, no consideration of others, no thought of consequence, and an endless fund of specious excuses and rationalizations for their aggression. A rationalization is an attempt to put a socially acceptable face on a socially unacceptable behavior. Many adults are taken in by this deception and manipulation.
8. Victims lack social skills: It is bullies who lack social skills and who are emotionally immature. Only emotionally retarded people who lack social skills need to bully; no one else needs to.
9. Everyone is capable of bullying: Bullies love to hear this justification as it minimizes their aggression and disingenuously makes their behavior appear on a par with normal behavior. The claim that "everyone is capable of bullying" is as accurate as saying "everyone is capable of rape" or "everyone is capable of pedophile behavior" and "everyone is capable of murder". The difference is that whilst anyone is theoretically capable of any crime, the vast majority chooses not to commit these crimes, whereas bullies choose to bully on a daily basis, and when held accountable, bullies choose

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to deny or justify or rationalize their bullying. A rationalization is an attempt to put a socially acceptable face on a socially unacceptable behavior.

10. Children who are bullied grow up to be tougher people: Bullying is a form of violence, which is designed to cause the maximum physical, psychological and emotional injury. If a leg or arm is shattered it does not become "tougher" but is likely to be damaged throughout life. It's the same with a psychiatric injury. *"I feel the people I bullied grew up tougher"* is a specious rationalization by which bullies justify and excuse their actions and convince themselves of the acceptability of their thuggery by abdicating personal responsibility for their violent behavior and the consequences of their actions on others.
11. Bullies are tough people: Bullies are weak, cowardly and inadequate people who cannot interact in a mature professional manner and have to resort to psychological violence (and, with child bullies, physical violence) to get their way. Only weak people need to bully.
12. You shouldn't sue for bullying because it prolongs victimhood: Bullying is in the same league as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape and pedophilia. Many child bullies go on to commit at least one of these offences as well as other antisocial acts. Scandinavian research shows that 60% of school bullies will have a criminal record by the age of 24. Prosecuting the perpetrators and holding accountable those who have failed in their duty of care is very different to "prolonging victimhood". Many people (especially those who are emotionally immature or failing in their duty of care) become defensive and aggressive when faced with the "A" word: accountability. Whilst there will always be a few people who abuse the law of tort for personal gain, it is disingenuous to confuse this small minority (who may themselves be bullies feigning victimhood) with the majority of genuine cases. "Victimhood" should never be used as a smokescreen for abdication and denial of responsibility and evasion of accountability.
13. You'll never get rid of bullying so let's concentrate on teaching victims how to assert themselves: It is sensible to teach everybody strategies of self defense, however, this must not be used as a smokescreen for encouraging bullies by failing to hold them accountable. Any anti-bullying scheme, which omits accountability for the bullies, is likely to have only limited success, and often no long-term success. It's likely we'll never completely get rid of

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harassment, discrimination, racism, abuse, molestation, pedophilia etc. but we must never give up trying. Problems like bullying are solved by identifying and dealing with the *cause*, not by trying to hide, suppress or reduce the *effects*. Unfortunately, many people - and especially the responsible adults who are abdicating and denying their legal obligations - like to focus exclusively on the targets of bullying, thus distracting attention away from the source of the problem.

When I first started my research on bullying, it was just that – research. Weeks have gone by now and I feel closer and connected to this topic than I ever thought I would be. While speaking to some of my students and their parents, I remembered the quote by Mother Teresa. Just like anti-war demonstrations, anti-bullying campaigns always begin with the intention of helping bullied victims. Over time however we forget what it was we were fighting for. Children are sensitive creatures. Any hurt that they feel is multiplied one hundred times so it's important that parents try to put things into perspective before going in with “guns blazing.” Parents will always over react when it comes to their children. It's their right to protect their child but unfortunately they don't always take the time to find out what the real problem is.

Adults' reactions can heavily influence the outcome of the situation. Children can either confide in their parents or worse put up walls and hide what's happening to them because that interference from adults can make the situation worse. Worse than overreacting adults, is the blatant denial that a child is either being bullied or is a bully. Many parents are ready to believe that despite the signs or what everyone else is saying, their child is an absolute angel who is not weak and does no harm to anyone. The few public campaigns that are available in the country are trying their best to help but they are too few to create an impact.

It's time for the children in the UAE to take a stand. Different cultures, religion and ethnicities have to be brought together. Their contribution plays a key role. Parents and schools have organized every campaign so far in the UAE schools. Where is the participation of children? While talking to some high school students here, I asked them how they think they can help spread around the country. Every child, victim or bully must be made aware that they have a right to feel safe at school, in the playground and even on social media. No one has the right to be hurt or hurt another. The campaigns should not be about shaming anybody.

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Even bullies are victims themselves. Once a year schools must come together in solidarity against bullying but anti-bullying campaigns must remain running and strong though out the years. Most important, the bullies must be shown that their behavior stems from somewhere and they should feel that they are able to ask for help as well. This is not only about a few children but all the children. There are schools that are taking initiative on this matter. A good example would be Al Mushrif private school in Abu Dhabi. Their anti-bullying council promotes inclusion and identifies any behaviors, which might be associated with bullying or being bullied. Another strategy is to keep students busy at break-times, says Emma Shanahan, the school's principal, "one of our key priorities this year is to have very active and positive playtimes for everyone. So we've invested a lot of money and time in organizing resources – there's more staff on duty to engage children in lots of different physical activities." She goes on to say, "We really care about one another here at Al Mushrif and that's very evident in what we say and what we do." The school's behavioral policy is centered on teaching the four Cs – courtesy, cooperation, common sense and consideration. It's quite easy for everyone to remember, and actually everyone is demonstrating that (Hoppe)." Many schools could learn a lot from the leadership of Ms. Shanaham. Away to not only bring all the children together but to also create a safe haven for them. Something that many children have not had in a long time.

By walking in the steps of the wonderful Mother Theresa, let us rally not only for anti-bullying but also for creating and maintaining a loving and supportive community. With this research, I hope that above all, our children and their children may never have to endure the pain of bullying ever again.

I would like to leave my readers with the below poem (4H). Words truly can hurt but with proper help, we can help our children rise above.

#### **WORDS CAN HURT**

Words can hurt, make me feel sad,  
When I haven't done anything bad,  
Sometimes words that hurts the most,  
Start as a joke or even a boast,

Words can hurt, drive me around the loop,  
I don't like you and your group!  
The words you say upset me,

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Why can't you just let me be?  
Words can hurt, ring in my ears,  
I wish that I could tell my peers,  
You bull me to look cool, don't you know that you are just a fool?

Words can hurt, makes me feel blue,  
To be off school I fake the flu,  
Even at break you gang hunts me down,  
Like a tiger, you make me frown,

Words can burn, hear my plight,  
Every day and every night  
In my bedroom my tears stream,  
Why can no one hear my scream?

Words can hurt, make me cry,  
Puts my heart in the sky.  
Find the courage, speak up and tell,  
Then may be things, may be things will turn out well.

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