

# '50% kids feel bullied in school'

## Schools To Be Roped In To Tackle Aggressive Behaviour

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**New Delhi:** Growing up was never easy. It is harder still for Gen Y, faced with aggression of various kinds — temper tantrums, bullying, and sometimes, the very worst — someone taking out a gun and shooting. But the seeds of aggressive behaviour are planted early in life and experts say it could often take the simplest form, such as a young child refusing to go to school or stealing money from parents.

Now, a new survey aims to identify and tackle the problem as early as possible. In order to gauge levels of aggression among Delhi's school children, the Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, Max Hospital, conducted a survey of 541 boys and 459 girls aged between 14 and 17 in public schools in New Delhi and the NCR region. The survey, conducted between July and September, was supervised by Dr Samir Parikh, Max Healthcare's chief psychiatrist. He says the study was meant to "identify the triggers leading to aggression later in life. It isn't just about a physical act of violence. It could be about challenging authority or breaking rules which could become a serious pattern later."

The results were startling. More than half the boys and nearly half the girls said aggression was a clear and present danger for them. Nearly half the children said someone had tried to steal or deliberately damage their property (clothing/books) in school. Some 31% boys and 20% girls said they felt safer when part of a gang in school. A smaller percentage said it didn't feel like going to school for reasons of safety and 33% of boys and 29% of girls thought it alright to miss school once in a while.

Parikh said missing school is a case of rule-breaking because "school is not



Kids learn to be aggressive early in life

an option. A child should miss school only if he's sick, not because he slept late, etc. This study is relevant to other cities too."

The survey's results will be the trigger for new intervention programmes to help school kids tackle violence and aggression. Max Healthcare says it is soon to start a Pro Social Peer Moderator Programme, which will train students to be role models at school. The programme will have four phases a year and cover four topics: aggression management, study and exam skills, relationships and substance use. Each phase will have a two-day workshop — the one on aggression management starts on October 16 and will train three students (two from Class IX and one from XI) and a teacher-coordinator. Workshops will be held every six weeks, in an indication of the seriousness of the problem.

Parikh says the trained students "will become a sub-community, and take short sessions with junior classes. They will conduct awareness campaigns with posters, debates, etc, under the supervision of the teacher. The results will become evident within 3-4 years and I hope, reduce and prevent the occurrence of adolescent behavioural problems."

Disturbingly, more than half the chil-

### US grapples with crime

Aggression and violence in schools is high elsewhere too. The National Centre for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, found that between 2005-06, 78% schools experienced one or more violent incidents of crime, 46%, one or more thefts, and 68%, another type of crime. This amounts to an estimated 2.2 million crimes, translating into a rate of 46 crimes per 1,000 students in 2005-06.

dren said they thought it fun to tease a classmate or spread gossip about someone in order to make them angry. Encouragingly, however, the Delhi students still appeared to fight shy of outright deviant behaviour such as taking money from parents without their knowledge (only 13% boys and 4% girls said they did this); damaging others' property for fun (12% boys, 4% girls); shoplifting for thrills (4% boys, 7% girls).

But the students admitted it was important to be part of a peer group, even if it meant breaking some rules. More than a quarter of the boys and 16% of the girls said a show of force was crucial to friends liking them. Some 28% boys and 29% girls said they said and did things when provoked by others. And 36% boys and 22% admitted they did things with friends despite the fear of being caught out. But the survey offered more cheering indicators too. Twenty-two percent boys and 13% girls said they stopped people breaking rules if they could. They admitted to lying to keep friends out of trouble with parents and the authorities. This finding could indicate a moral vacuum in 27% boys and 38% girls.

But, as Parikh says, the new workshops mean a beginning has been made.