



MEDIA CONFERENCE UPDATE RELEASE

10th April 2010

**Event: National Centre Against Bullying Conference 2010:
Navigating the Maze**

When: Saturday April 10

Canadian Research Chair on Child Social Development at Laval University's School of Psychology Michel Boivin has told the National Centre Against Bullying Conference that children as young as three can be at risk of peer victimisation.

Professor Boivin's ground-breaking research has found that early childhood intervention is key to addressing peer victimisation, which affects 5-10 per cent of children and leads to social and health problems later in life.

An expert in peer relations, Professor Boivin has identified individual risk factors that may make a child, as young as 41 months, more likely to suffer peer victimisation.

These include physical aggression, harsh parenting such as a mother hitting the child, shaking the child or yelling at the child, and low income. But he stressed it was not inevitable.

"There is a link between peer difficulties and proposed risk factors which make a child more likely to be victimised or rejected, leading to loneliness or depression," Professor Boivin said.

"From 41 months we were able to identify at risk children," he said. "One can think of daycare as a preventative tool, we have data showing that."

"If a child at risk goes to family day care he is not at much of a risk as a child who is not attending day care. Kindergarten is a window of opportunity for prevention, as genetic processes unfold in school," Professor Boivin said.

He highlighted that genetics played a part in explaining aggression.

"For aggression, essentially genes are involved, but it is not clear how they are involved. Aggression is a very strong predictor of peer relation difficulties," he said.

Aggression, hyperactivity and externalising behaviors at school entry level can cause a person to be victimised by their peers, he said.

"But in later years aggressive kids will become the bullies, and are more likely to be protected from victimisation."

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation Chief Executive Officer, Judith Slocombe said Professor Boivin's research was a fascinating look at genetic and environmental factors.

"In terms of early childhood intervention, the research really highlighted how important it's going to be in this area," she said.

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