

## Anorexia 'coaches' preying on teens

SUZAN DELIBASIC

YOUNG teens are being preyed upon by sexual predators known as "anacoaches" on social media platforms in a bid to exploit them under the guise of weight-loss coaching.

"Anacoaches" – short for anorexia coaches – are typically middle-aged, male sexual predators who go online to find young people to exploit by luring them with success stories of their coaching.

The Sunday Mail has found several examples of anacoaches openly operating on social media platforms, encouraging young teens to contact them for "quick weight loss advice" and "body weight checks to keep on track".

Swinburne University of Technology senior lecturer in information systems Dr Suku Sukunesan is examining social media content involving eating disorders, and said the new trend was disturbing.

"There aren't any official statistics but nine out of 10 anacoaches would be male with a perverted fetish or interest in sexually exploiting young kids," he said.

"Female anacoaches mostly display current anorexia symptoms," he added.

Dr Sukunesan said his initial analysis two years ago showed there were over 300 requests per day for anacoaches on Twitter.

Butterfly Foundation head of communications and engagement Melissa Wilton said any content that glorifies, promotes or encourages eating disorders is inherently dangerous and can prolong an individual's disorder.

"Butterfly is extremely disturbed by the concept of 'anacoaches', because we know that people living with eating disorders can be in a particularly vulnerable mindset," Ms Wilton said.

"We would welcome further legislation in online safety to make this practice illegal, particularly as research has indicated it is predominantly underage users who are being targeted." Contact the Butterfly National Helpline for support on 1800 334 673.

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# MP facing fresh street-row probe

Mundingburra MP Les Walker was banned from the Townsville Safe Night Precinct for three months following a fight earlier this year.

Former candidate calls cops over 'interaction' with Walker



SHAYLA BULLOCH

POLICE are investigating an altercation between a Townsville MP and a former political candidate outside a North Queensland pub on Friday night.

It comes just six months after the middle-aged politician made headlines for his involvement in a brawl at the Mad Cow Tavern.

Stephen Lane, a former independent candidate who ran for the seat of Thuringowa in the 2017 state election, made a complaint to police about 9pm Friday in regards to an "interaction" with Mundingburra MP Les Walker.

A police spokesman confirmed officers were investigating an incident between two men, which occurred at Palmer St, in South Townsville. Mr Lane posted on Facebook on Friday night.

He wrote that he was "deeply upset" by the incident and had reported it to police.

A police spokesman said the "interaction" was being investigated and was in the early stages.

Mr Walker strongly denied Mr Lane's claims.



"As a politician you have to grow a thick skin," Mr Walker said. "I utterly reject Mr Lane's claims."

Earlier this year Mr Walker was banned from the Townsville Safe Night Precinct for three months following a fight he was involved in at The Mad Cow Tavern.

CCTV footage from the incident at the Flinders St venue shows a man punch Mr Walker in the face, knocking him unconscious.

A tearful Mr Walker said at the time he still had no memory of the incident, which happened in January while he was out celebrating his birthday with his wife and four other friends.

The two men involved and Mr Walker were also fined for the incident.

**“As a politician you have to grow a thick skin ... I utterly reject Mr Lane's claims”**

Mundingburra MP Les Walker



## Bullying trauma just as harmful as substance abuse, according to new study

SUSIE O'BRIEN

TRAUMA from bullying is as harmful as substance abuse for bullies and their victims, a new study says.

Even the parents of bullies and their targets suffered widespread health and social impacts up to 40 years later, researchers from Deakin University have found.

In the first study of its kind, lead author Dr Long Le looked

at the impact of bullying in everyday life on all involved.

"The more continuously the children reported being a victim or perpetrator of bullying, the greater the loss of quality of life," Dr Le said.

"Children who reported being involved in bullying every year for three years had three times the quality of life impairment compared to those who reported involvement in bullying for only one year."

This was true for both bullies and perpetrators.

"Any reduction in bullying will have widespread benefits beyond just the child," Dr Le said. "Given the significance of the impact of bullying involvement on childhood quality of life, there is an urgent call for greater efforts to focus on prevention of bullying in early childhood."

One in five children between the ages of eight and 10

report they are either a victim or a bully at school.

The study was based on analysis of 8822 Australian children in grades 3 and 4 from 135 primary schools.

Eighteen per cent reported they were victims of bullying and fewer than 1 per cent reported being either a perpetrator or both a victim and perpetrator.

Dr Le and his team concluded that the reliance on self

reporting led to fewer bullies outing themselves.

Professor Cathy Mihopoulos, director of Deakin Health Economics, said parents with children who were involved in bullying were also less happy and had worse mental health and relationships.

"Parents together with schools, the community, and media are important partners in any interventions or initiatives to reduce the harm asso-

ciated with bullying," she said.

"Parents can teach children social skills and ways to deal with the bullying, and schools should be encouraged to provide evidence-based bullying reduction programs."

The total cost of bullying has been estimated at \$525m for one student cohort over 13 years of school.

The long-term costs are estimated at more than \$1.8bn over the next 20 years.