Clinical Psychology Master's student Joyce Li is concerned about kids. Joyce’s research interests lie in adolescent aggression, and sexual harassment in particular. She is especially interested in how persistent peer victimization affects young people’s mental health.

“Bullying and sexual harassment are often thought of as normal parts of growing up, but we know that these experiences can have a real and negative impact on an individual’s wellbeing. We also know that evidence-based prevention programs can work. Research on aggression informs the development of those programs.”

Joyce is currently working towards completion of her Master’s degree in Clinical Psychology at Queen’s this summer, and plans to continue in the PhD program in the fall of 2014.

Working in The Bully Lab with her supervisor Dr. Wendy Craig has given Joyce the opportunity to present and publish in both academic and community settings. For example, she recently completed work on a book manuscript for Pearson Canada, written for teachers-in-training on the topic of bullying and victimization.

Another project hit the airwaves earlier this summer. Since 2012, Joyce has also been working with Companies Committed to Kids (CCK; formerly Concerned Children’s Advertisers) assisting in the development of a national children’s mental wellness campaign. CCK is made up of a number of member companies such as Hasbro and Pepsi which, as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives, develop various awareness and educational programs to benefit children. CCK’s programs focus on healthy active living, media literacy, bullying prevention, and mental wellness.

The new mental wellness campaign includes a public service announcement airing on national television. Its aim is to start a conversation among parents about what they can do to promote children’s mental health. There is also a website referring parents to psychological resources, and a series of animated evidence-based infographics.

“This has been a really exciting opportunity because the potential audience is very large,” Joyce explains. “Just about any kid who grew up watching Canadian television has seen a CCK advertisement.”
Companies Committed to Kids takes an evidence-based approach to their ads, ensuring their campaign is consistent with the state-of-the-art research. Joyce’s role involved scanning the research literature and compiling a review on children’s mental health, selecting potential topics for the focus of the campaign. Over a series of teleconferences and in-person meetings in Toronto, Joyce presented to CCK staff and advisers, as well as the advertising agency tasked with developing the campaign. The agency then pitched ideas for a campaign, soliciting feedback at several stages throughout the process.

“It’s been interesting working with CCK and the ad agency because everyone has a different perspective and agenda. It was a fun challenge trying to clearly communicate an enormous body of research to a non-academic audience, and it was fascinating to watch them distill it all down to a 30-second commercial and short infographics. I think they did a great job at balancing the desire to be creative and a bit provocative, while still using good evidence-based information.”

Joyce has been involved with the Companies Committed to Kids project for the past 18 months. The project culminated with the launch of the campaign on June 18, 2014, at an event in Toronto.

“The main message of the campaign is that relationships matter,” Joyce says. “Adults have the ability to promote and nurture the mental wellbeing of the children in their lives by showing warmth and respect in their interactions with them, and by modelling positive behaviours. It’s a very positive and proactive message.”