

Fists of fury

By MICHAEL CHEW and LAM FOO TSENG

FOR some people, nothing proves a bromance (brotherly romance) more than being there when the going gets tough.

And as puzzling as it might sound, 20-year-old Patrick holds the call of bromance close to his heart. The unfortunate part of this is that he sometimes shows it with his fists.

"When my friends ask for help, I cannot just back down and leave them in harm's way. I fight for my friends' sake. I want to help them," he said.

According to Patrick, these fights he gets called in to are often over girls. He's been called by friends in other colleges to help settle their love triangles, and we don't mean settling it the Oprah way.

"Once a friend called me up to help him beat up a guy who was flirting with his girlfriend. We tried to settle it through discussion, but things went ugly and we ended up bashing each other instead," he said.

Despite his "valiant" effort of helping friends by beating others, Patrick admits that he hates fighting.

"Personally, I think fights or brawls in college are ridiculous and should not occur. I always opt for talking things out and try to solve things without harming others," Patrick said.



Some youths would rather resolve their problems through violence rather than discussion.

Still, he adds, sometimes talking doesn't work and fights occur.

When we think of brawls and fights among students, we often associate it with petty stuff like girl problems and toothpaste tubes not rolled up – you know, the things that happen on TV. Most of the time, the two (or more) will be punished, then they make up and be best of friends.

Reality bites

In real life, however, the consequences are more serious.

Being caught and punished for fighting aside, there are sometimes more serious ramifications - people can get injured, sometimes permanently, and sometimes death is caused.

There is a reason why your parents often tell you that fighting does not solve anything.

What makes all this even less worth it is, of course, the fact that many fights and brawls are the result of petty arguments or just the result of manifestation of anger.

UCSI University College Student Wellness counselor Teow Ker Shin says that many fights are not even triggered by the intention to be violent.

"It always starts with unresolved conflicts within us, whether it is anger or dissatisfaction. Actions such as fighting or brawling are the result of keeping such conflicts within us for too long."

The best option is, like Patrick realises, to talk it out instead of keeping silent or keeping it to yourself.

Bad blood

Guy A finds out that Guy B is talking bad about Guy C behind his back, and Guy C happens to be Guy A's close friend.

That might sound like the storyline to some chick flick, but it is exactly the plot for 19-year-old Victor and his brawling action series.

"I found out about a guy who talked bad about one of my close friends. I approached the guy to talk things out, but he just ignored me. I walked away at first, but came back later and asked him again to have a discussion, but he ignored me again.

"I was frustrated at that point, and I slapped him on his face. A couple of my friends ganged up on him and we beat him up," Victor added.

As if the punches and kicks weren't enough, Victor and his friends continued the bashing with chairs and pool cues (they were at a poll centre), but were eventually pulled off by the workers and other bystanders. As horrible as it sounds, Victor takes it as a sweet victory over the guy.

"I have hated that guy for some time. I always thought he was snobbish and arrogant, so I used it as a perfect excuse to let my anger towards him," Victor said.

But as much as it gives Victor the pleasure to put him one up against his bitter rival, the violent incident gave him a bad reputation.

"People around me started to have a bad impression on me," Victor said.



Many fights that break out between young men often involves a girl in the picture.

"It's embarrassing that I chose violence to settle the dispute rather than to solve it in a non-violent manner. This incident even led me to losing some of my friends, too, which is regrettable."

Fight or flight?

It seems even lecturers and trainers aren't exempt when it comes to fights in schools.

Nizam, 19, got involved in a brawl with his flight training instructor, who left Nizam feeling embarrassed by a mistake during flight simulation training.

"I forgot where the emergency fuel pump was, and my instructor cancelled the training because of it. The instructor ignored me when I told him later that I remembered where the pump was but he told me that I wasn't ready yet and asked me to meet him at the academy.

"The instructor humiliated me in front of others over my mistake, and made fun of my error in the cockpit. I was furious but I controlled myself and left the class," Nizam continued.

The brawl erupted when the instructor confronted Nizam while he was hanging out with a friend at a nearby field.

"I told my instructor I wasn't in the mood to talk as I was still angry about the incident. I tried to leave but he shouldered me, and I threw my fist at him. That was how we started our fight," Nizam said.

Obviously, Nizam could not run away from the dire consequences of getting into a fight, especially with an instructor. He received a warning letter over his actions and lost the communication and trust of the instructor.

However, until today, Nizam believes he shouldn't be blamed for this incident.

"I still believe that it was not my fault, because my instructor provoked me.

"I will admit that it was my fault for not being able to locate the fuel pump, but that's about it. The line was crossed when he shouldered me on the field," Nizam added.

Holding back

Perhaps one of the most well-known cases of violence and aggression in Malaysian universities/colleges was the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) incident that involved a large group of students.

The story came to public knowledge when a video started circulating on the Internet showing some students crowding around members of an unofficial student organisation at a canteen and threatening them. Some clips of the incident have already clocked up 40,000 views on YouTube alone.

"They shoved me a few times, and tried to pull the chairs we were sitting on from under us," said Simon Ooi, one of the victims of the incident.

What impressed a lot of people was how Simon and his friends managed to stay completely calm even though the bullies were yelling aggressively in their faces, especially Simon's friend who was capturing it all on his digital camera.

"We just decided that we didn't want the situation to get any more violent. I reminded myself that though they were being aggressive, they hadn't done anything yet. If we had responded by fighting back, we would have been the ones at fault," Simon said.

In spite of that incident, Simon did not expect fights over things like love triangles and disagreements to still occur in colleges or universities.



Violence is not the answer! -- All pictures were posed by models

"Throughout my time of studying in UPM, I never saw any major arguments or fights, so I am surprised to hear that things like that can happen in colleges or universities nowadays. Our situation was a bit different from a normal fight. I believe the bullies were instructed to come and harass us.

"Personally, I think violence and aggression can never solve any problems. Students now should be matured and educated enough to talk about their differences instead," Simon added.

Seeking help

According to the counselor Teow Ker Shin, brawls and fights definitely still occur among tertiary level students.

She adds, however, that it is unfortunate that many college students do not seek help over their anger issues.

"Our role as counselors will be to provide support and encouragement for those who seek help."

She also advises people to embrace counseling and talking things out because it can help prevent untoward incidences like fighting.

"People tend to stay away from such counseling because they often feel that counseling are for 'weak' people and they prefer to solve things their own way," Ker Shin said.

In fact, she adds that the role of the counsellor is more to help students deal with their issues and anger before it manifests out of control.

"Counsellors usually do not deal with brawls, as it is out of our field. Fights and brawls where actual physical harm is caused will be dealt with the disciplinary board or the Security department. They will take it from there, and depending on the situation, the police might be roped in to help with the case.

"Counselling will help to identify the problems and provide a platform to pour up their thoughts, but it entirely depends on the individual to whether it could be the solution to their problems," Ker Shin said.

Some of the names have been changed to protect the identities of the interviewees.