

Bullying in Middle-School Students: An Examination of School Social Climate

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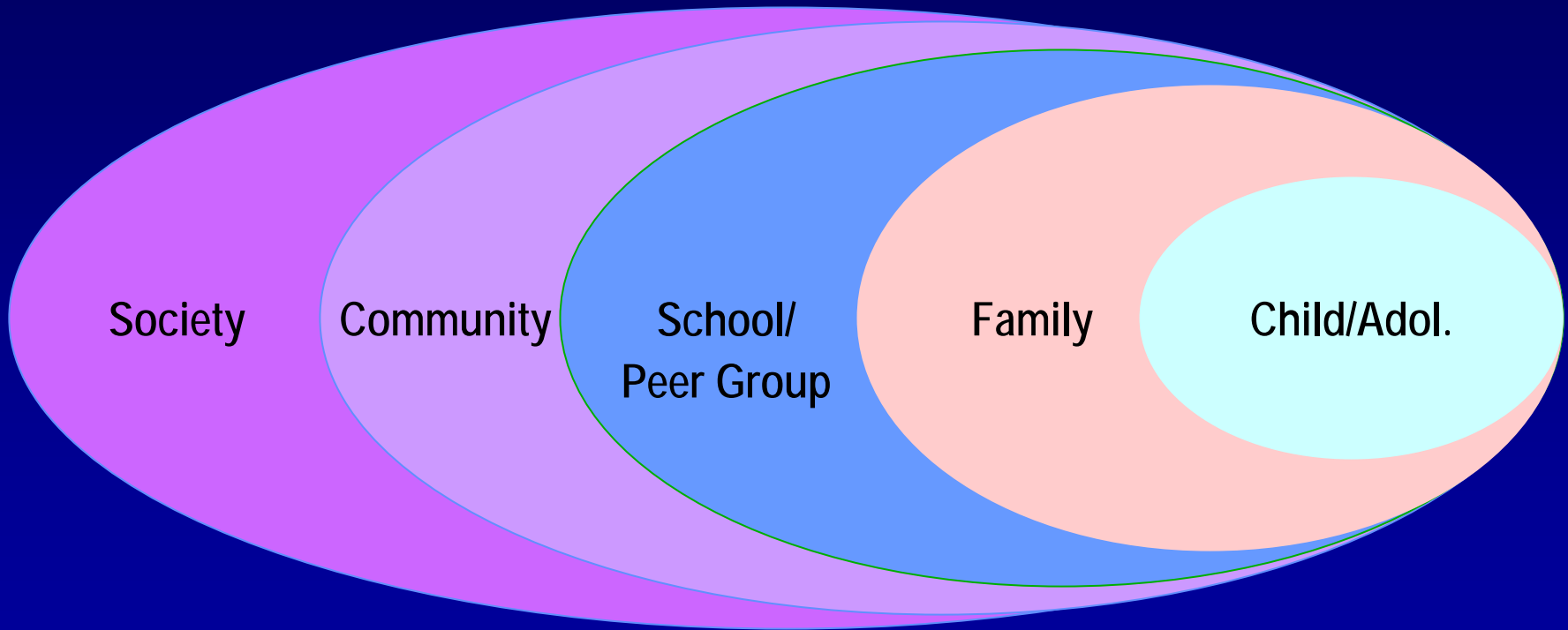
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How do Bullying Behaviors Develop?



What is School Climate?

- “...the quality and frequency of interactions among and between adults and students” (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997).
- “...the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children’s cognitive, social, and psychological development” (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997).

School Climate and Bullying

- **Students involved in bullying report less satisfaction with their school experiences (Nansel et al., 2001).**
- **Middle school boys who report negative perceptions of school climate exhibit externalizing behaviors (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997).**
- **High levels of conflict in school are associated with increased acting-out among students (Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990).**
- **Schools that have positive disciplinary actions, strong parental involvement, and high academic standards report fewer problems with bullying (Ma, 2002).**

School Climate and Bullying (cont')

- **Focus Group example: “We don’t bully at this school.”**
- **Bullying prevention and intervention programs must target all levels of the social ecology, including the school (Larson, Smith, & Furlong, 2002)**
- **The climate that is created in a school can either inhibit or encourage bullying behavior among students and staff.**

However,

- **School climate is a difficult construct to define and assess.**
- **Less attention has been given to perceptions of school climate related specifically to students along the bully/victim continuum.**
- **Less attention has been given to the association between bully/victim status and perceptions of school climate across schools.**

Purpose

- (1) To describe an assessment tool that examines school social climate.**
- (2) To examine the relationship between bully/victim status and perceived school social climate.**
- (3) To examine the differences in perceived school social climate across three middle schools.**

Participants

- All individual and school participants are part of a larger longitudinal study on bullying.
- $N = 469$ 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders from three Midwestern middle schools.
- Parental consent rates: School 1 – 28%; School 2 – 29% ; School 3 - 22%.
- School 1: 121 participants across 6th through 8th grades; ages 11-13; racial distribution: 72.5% Caucasian, 12.5% African-American, 5% Asian-American, 5% Latino(a), 3.3% Native-American, and 1.7% Middle-Eastern.

Participants (cont')

- **School 2: 154 participants across 7th through 9th grades; ages 11-14; racial distribution: 96.1% Caucasian, 1.3% African-American, 2.6% Asian-American.**
- **School 3: 194 participants across 7th through 9th grades; ages 11-14; racial distribution: 94.8% Caucasian, 3.1% African-American, .5% Asian-American, 1% Latino(a), .5% Native-American.**

Measures

- ***Bully Survey – Student Version*** (Swearer, 2001): Self-report survey used to determine bully/victim status (bully, bully-victim, victim, bystander, not involved)
- ***School Social Climate Measure:*** Originally a 32-item scale (Bullying Climate Scale, Song & Swearer, 1999).

School Social Climate Measure (SSCM)

- Based on Kasen, Johnson & Cohen's school emotional climate scale (1990).
- A 33-item scale on a 4-point Likert scale ("totally false to totally true").
- Principal axis factor analysis, varimax rotation.
- Factor loadings $\geq .4$ were included; 20 items rejected.
- No items loaded on more than one factor.

School Social Climate Measure (SSCM)

- Extraction of four factors accounted for 41% of the item variance.
- Four factors: Positive student and teacher interactions; negative student and teacher interactions; bullying support; vandalism.
- Internal consistency: .74

F1: Positive Student and Teacher Interactions

- School assignments are interesting for students (.58).
- Students talk with teachers about their personal problems (.57).
- Teachers ask students for their thoughts about assignments and projects (.46).
- Students often talk about school grades, assignments, projects, and subjects in their free time (.45).
- Students are friends with teachers or other school staff (.61).

F2: Negative Student and Teacher Interactions

- **Teachers and other school staff bully students (.60).**
- **Teachers argue and shout at other teachers or school staff (.48).**
- **Teachers and students argue and shout at each other (.58).**
- **Teachers and other school staff do not try to stop bullying (.49).**

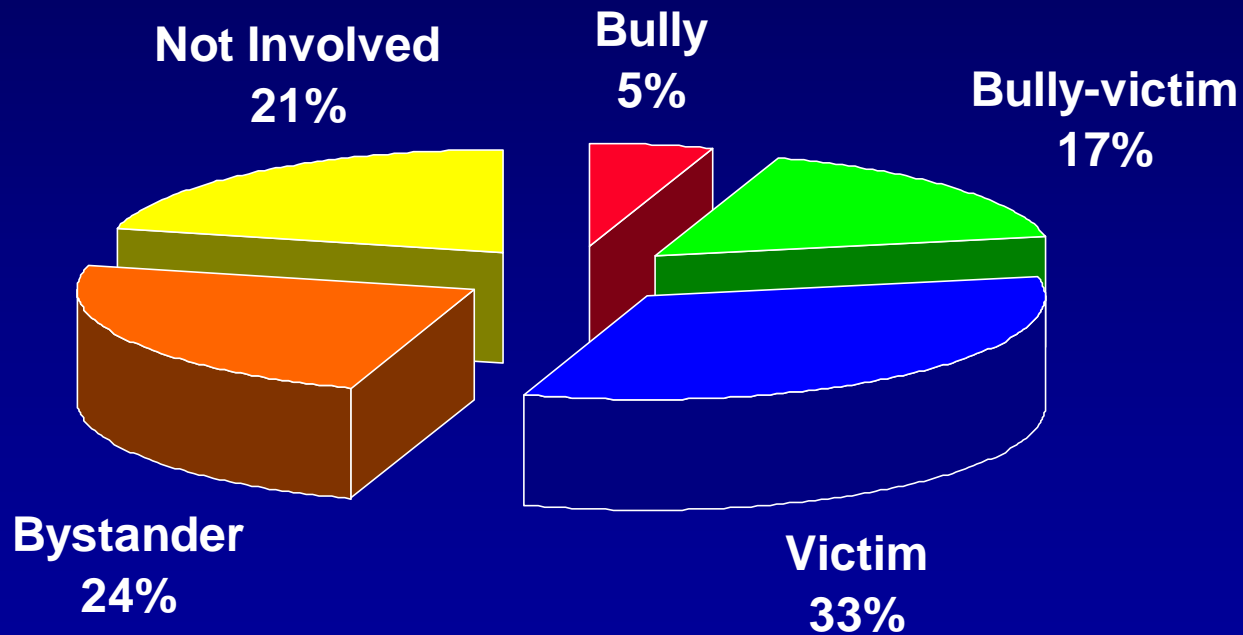
F3: Bullying Support

- Many students get bullied (.67).
- Bullying is a problem at my school (.80).

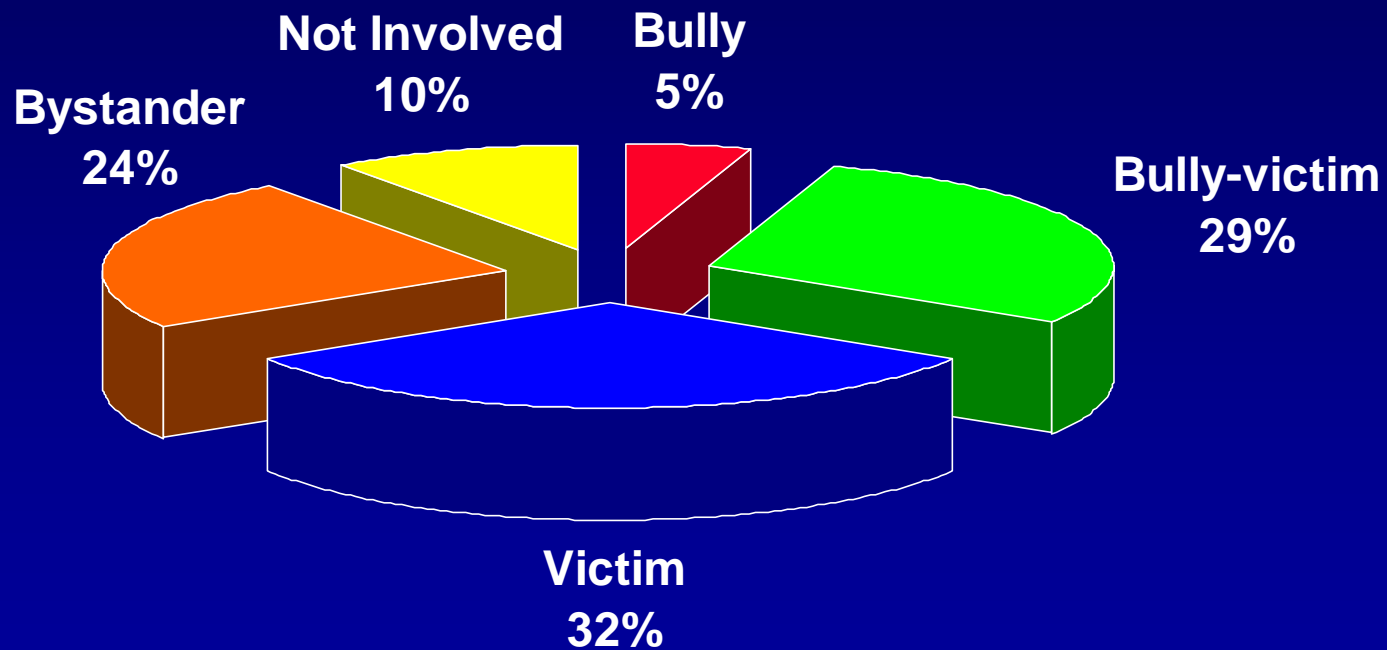
F4: Vandalism

- **There is a lot of graffiti written on school property (e.g., bathroom, outside walls) (.67).**
- **Students vandalize or damage school property (.67).**

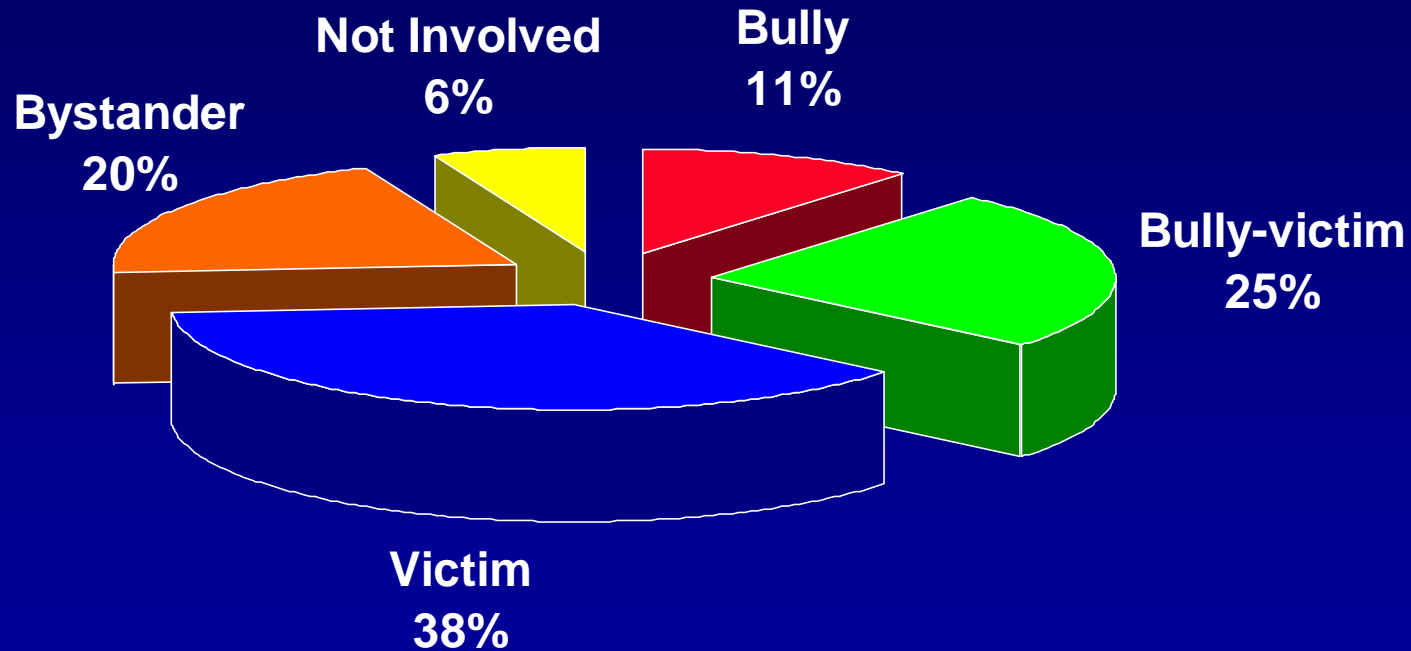
Bully/Victim Status: School 1



Bully/Victim Status: School 2



Bully/Victim Status: School 3



Relationship between Bully/Victim Status and Perceived School Social Climate

- One-way ANOVA conducted
- Significant relationship between bully/victim status and perceived school social climate
- $F(4, 464) = 12.19, p < .00$

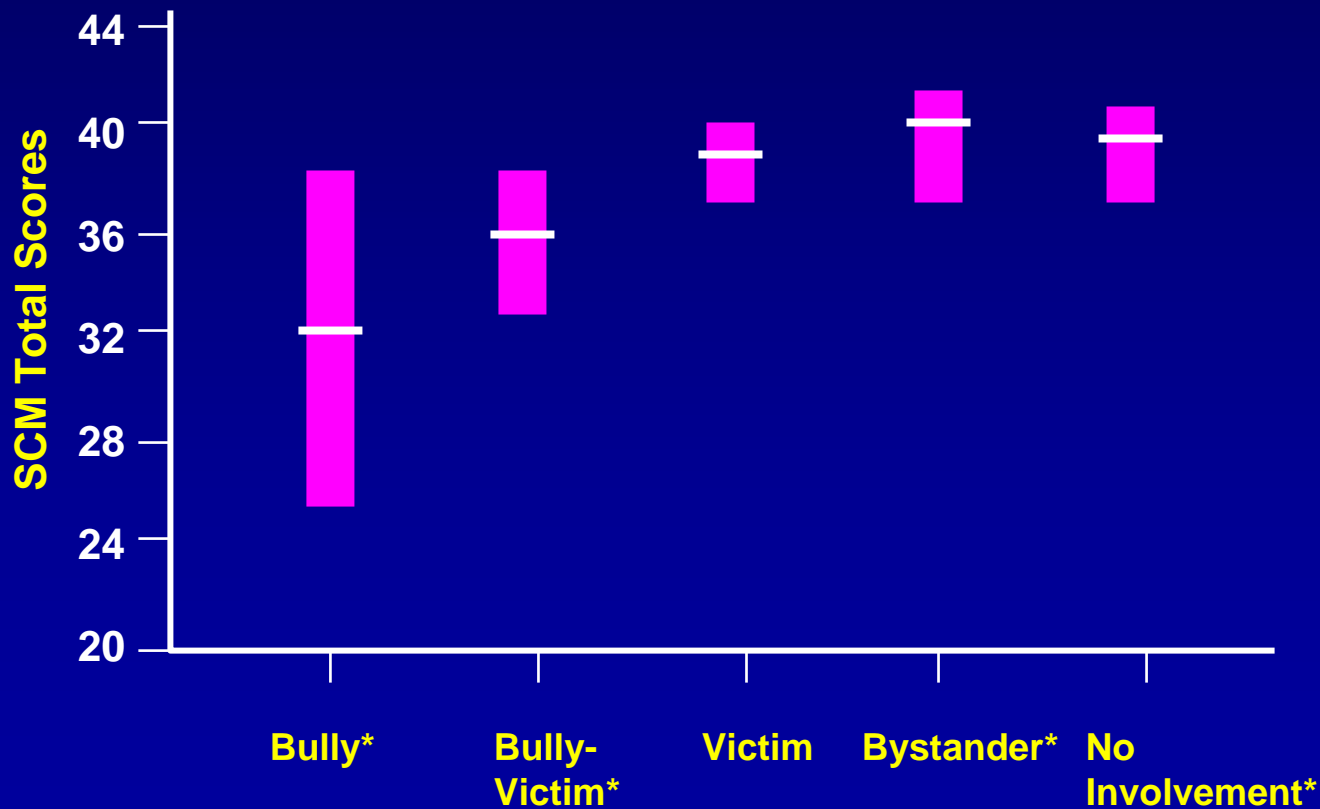
Differences Across Bully/Victim Status and SSCM Total Scores

Bully/Victim Status	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Bully	Bully-Victim	Victim	Bystander
Bully	35	34.37	5.87	--	NS	NS	NS
Bully-Victim	113	33.01	5.29	NS	--	*	*
Victim	162	35.09	5.69	NS	*	--	NS
Bystander	105	36.99	6.15	NS	*	NS	--
Not Involved	54	38.61	4.36	*	*	*	NS

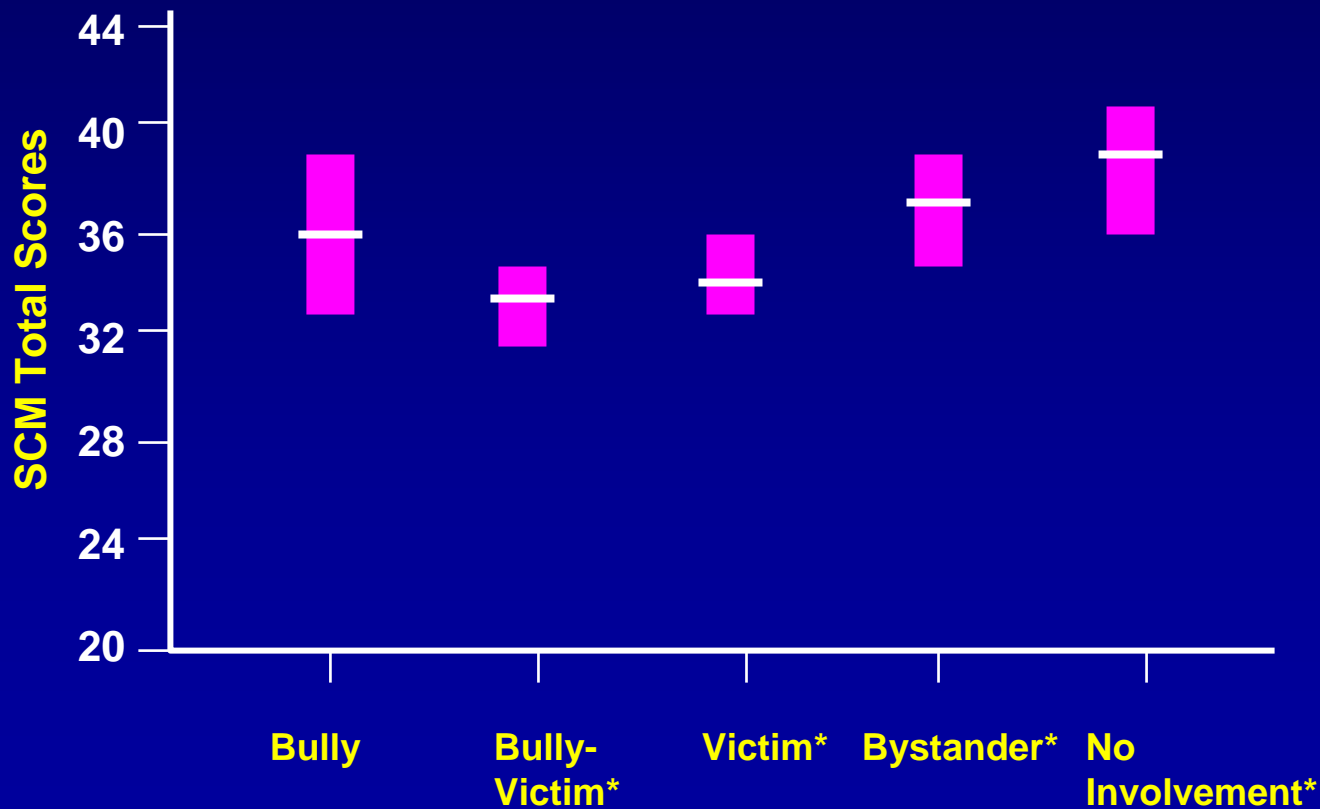
Note. SSCM Total equals total scores on School Social Climate Measure

NS = non-significant differences between means, while asterisk (*) = significant differences using Tukey's HSD procedure

Confidence Intervals for SSCM Total Scores by Bully/Victim Status: School 1



Confidence Intervals for SSCM Total Scores by Bully/Victim Status: School 2



Confidence Intervals for SSCM Total Scores by Bully/Victim Status: School 3



Perceptions of School Social Climate

- Significant differences across bully/victim status.
- Different schools had different patterns.
- School 1: Bullies & bully-victims had the most negative views of school social climate ($p < .05$).
- School 2: Bully-victims & victims had the most negative views of school social climate ($p < .05$).
- School 3: Bully-victims had the most negative views of school social climate ($p < .05$).
- Students not involved in bullying had the most positive perceptions of school social climate.

Relationship between Schools and Perceived School Social Climate

- One-way ANOVA conducted
- Significant relationship between schools and perceived school social climate
- $F(2, 467) = 17.08, p < .00$

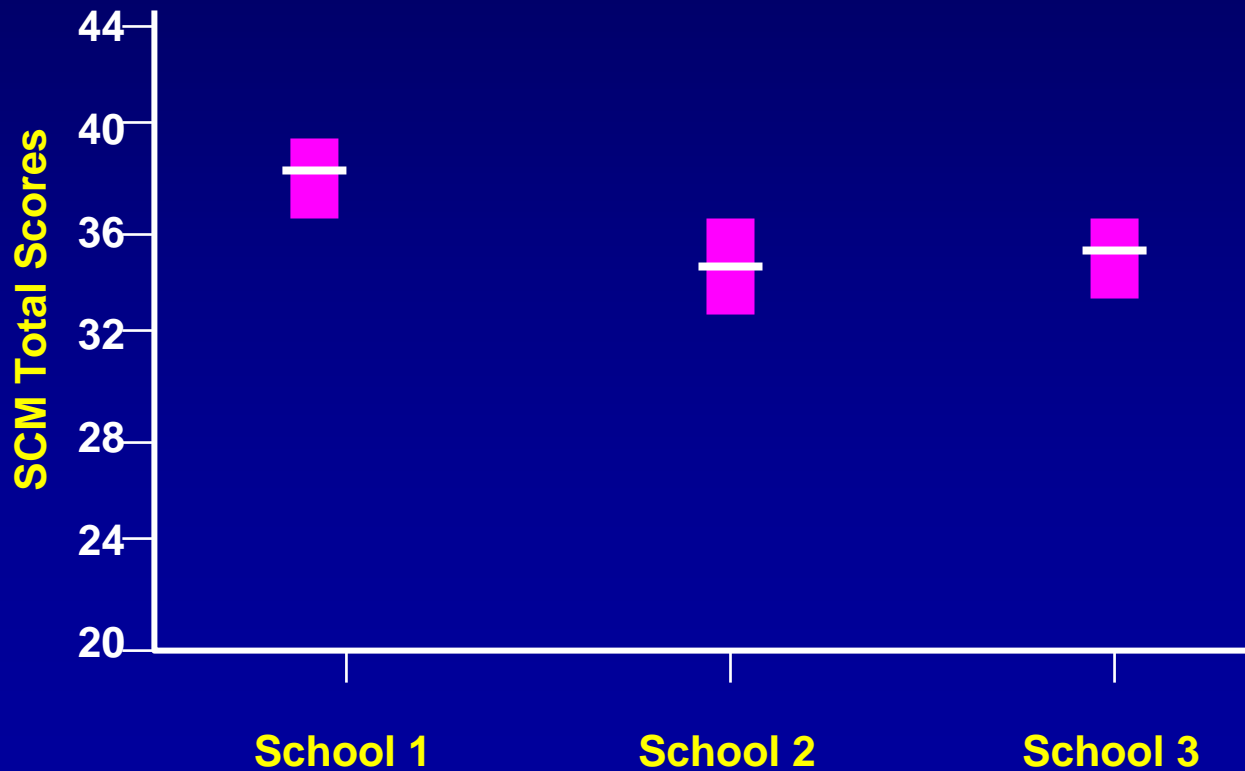
Differences Between Schools and Perceived School Social Climate

Middle School	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	School 2	School 3
School 1	121	37.95	5.93	*	*
School 2	154	34.39	5.45	--	NS
School 3	194	34.52	5.63	NS	--

Note. SSCM Total Scores equal total scores on the School Social Climate Measure

NS = non-significant differences between means, while asterisk (*) = significant differences using Tukey's HSD procedure

Confidence Intervals for SCM Total Scores by School



Conclusions

- **Students involved in bullying as a bully, bully-victim, or victim report more negative perceptions of school social climate than bystanders or students not involved in bullying.**
- **Students in School 1 had higher perceptions of perceived school social climate than students in Schools 2 and 3.**
- **School 1 had just completed the 4th year of data collection in a longitudinal study on bullying.**

Conclusions (cont')

- **School 1 has engaged in data-based decision-making regarding bullying and victimization interventions.**
- **School social climate appears to be an idiosyncratic construct specific to an individual school.**
- **Bullying prevention and intervention programs need to be tailored to a school's unique ecology.**

Limitations and Future Directions

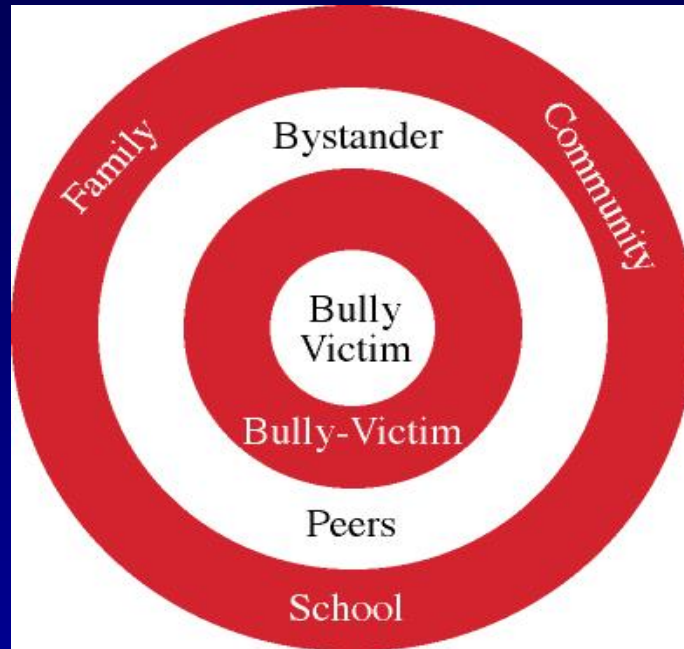
- Unequal cell sizes across bully/victim status.
- Bully/victim status determined via self-report only (i.e., did not use multiple informants).
- Too few schools to draw meaningful conclusions.
- SSCM needs further psychometric investigations.
- Need to validate the SSCM with another school climate measure (e.g., the SCS; Haynes, Emmons, & Comer, 1994).
- Need to determine the elements of school social climate involved in bullying and that can be a target for intervention.

Changing the Climate will Change the Bully.

Draw A Bully



Target Bullying: Ecologically-Based Prevention and Intervention for Schools



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