

Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence

La Promotion des Relations et l'Élimination de la Violence



PREVNet

# The Trauma Associated with Bullying Involvement

Wendy Craig, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology

Scientific Co-Director PREVNet

Queen's University

[www.prevnet.ca](http://www.prevnet.ca)

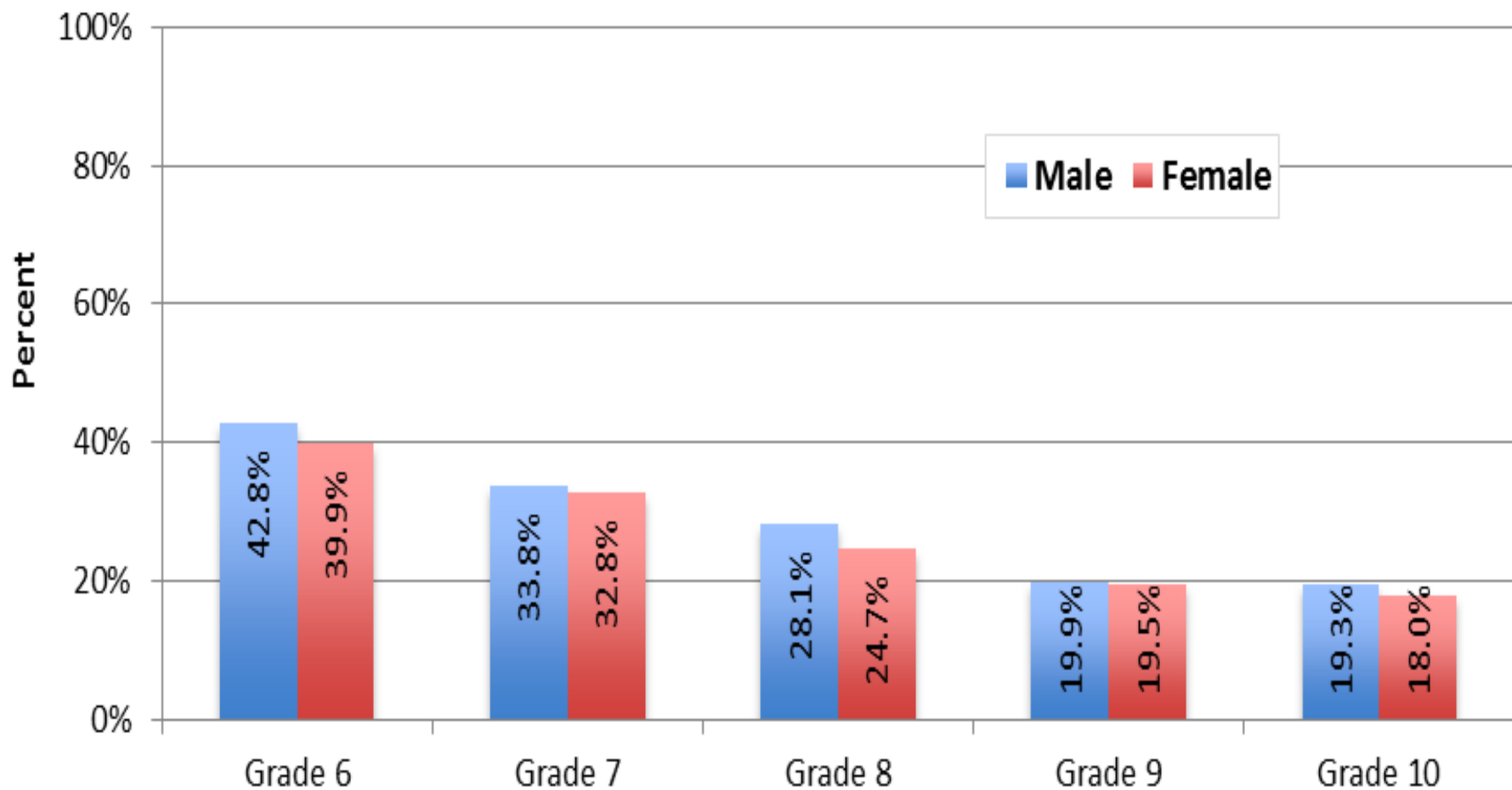
THE NETWORKS  
OF CENTRES OF  
EXCELLENCE  
NEW INITIATIVE



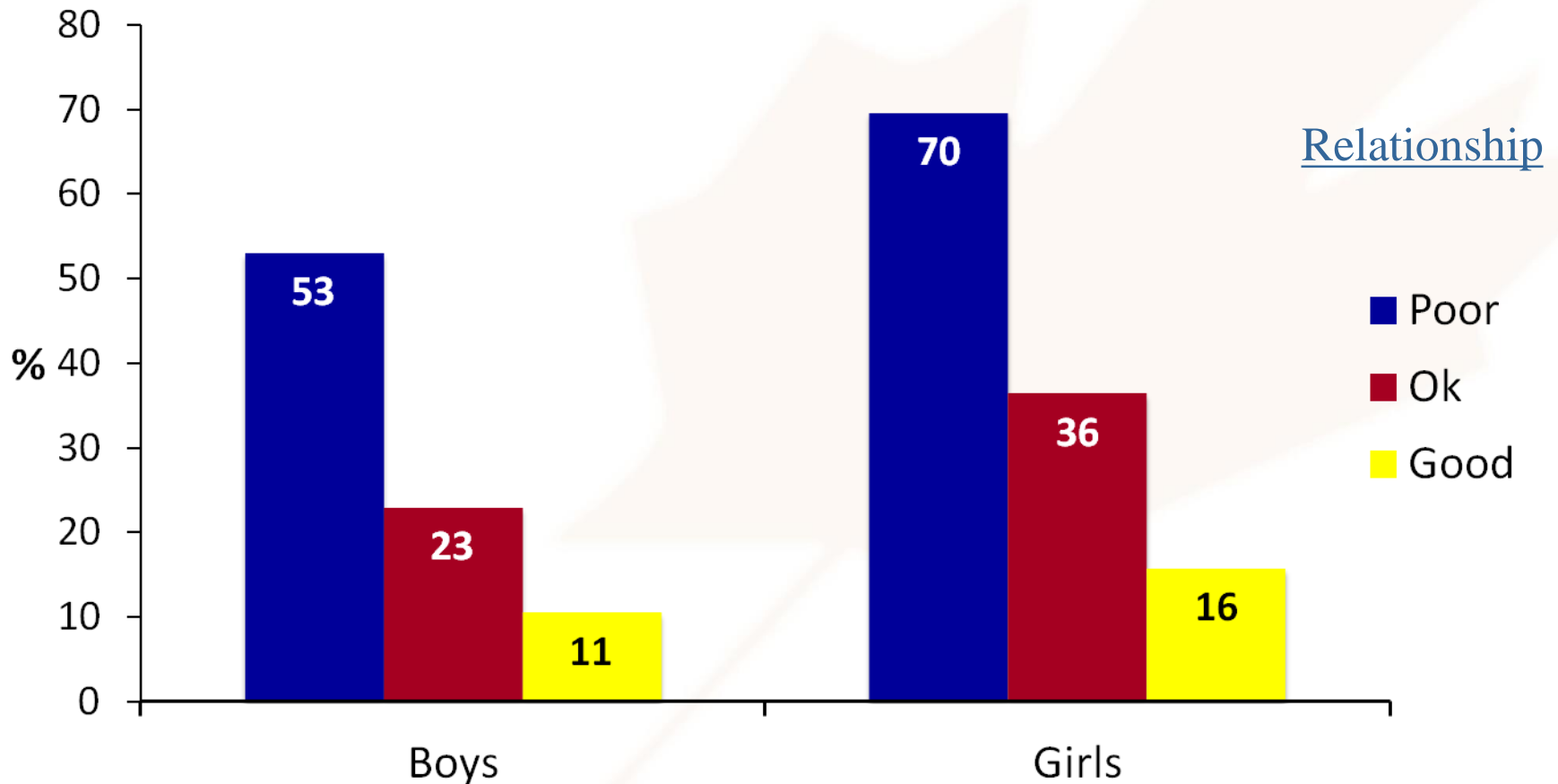


**Relationships matter!!**

## Percentage of students who reported having a high relationship with their parents, by their grades and gender



# Emotional Problems and Relationship With Parents

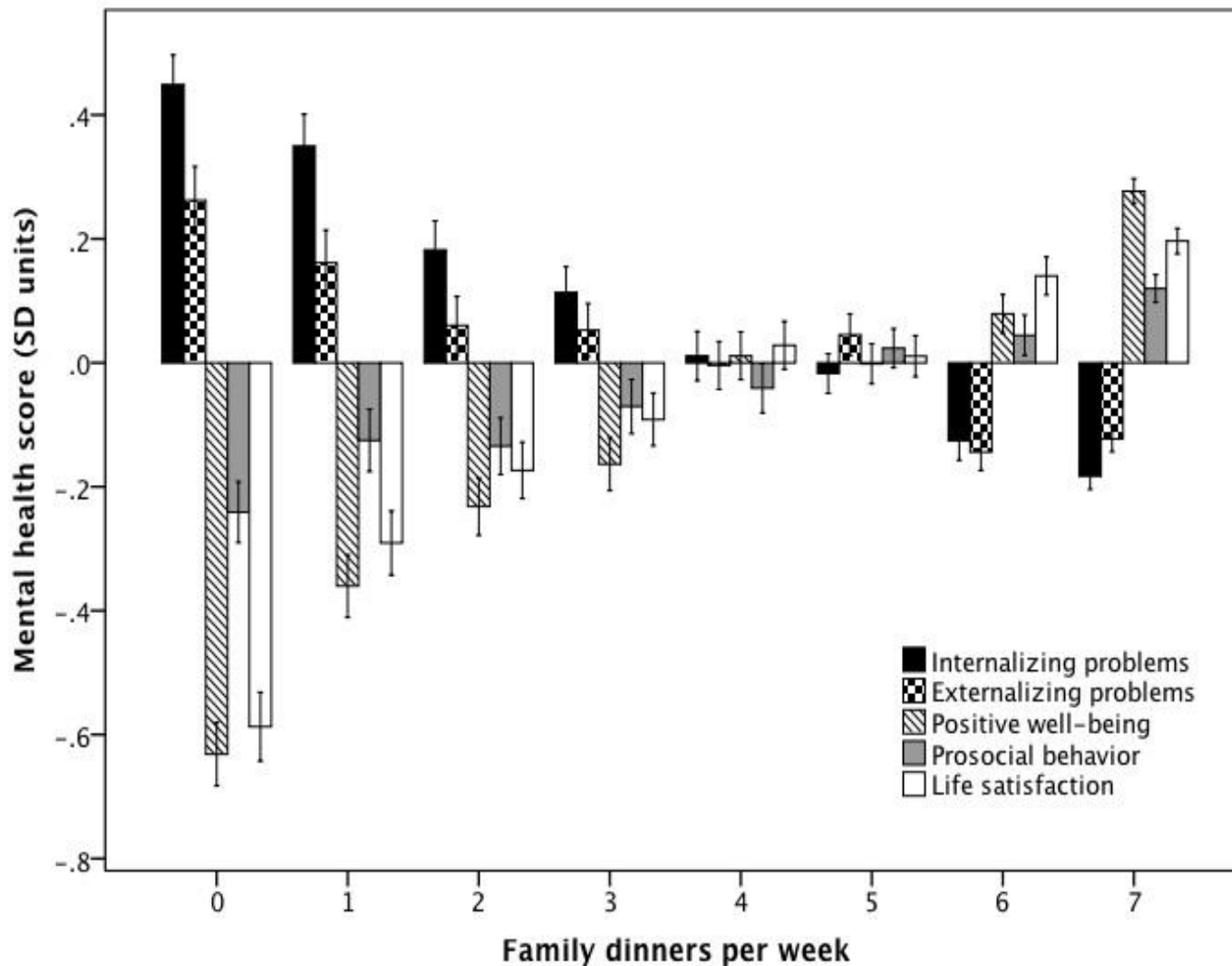


Data from the Canadian Health Behaviour Survey of School Aged Children.

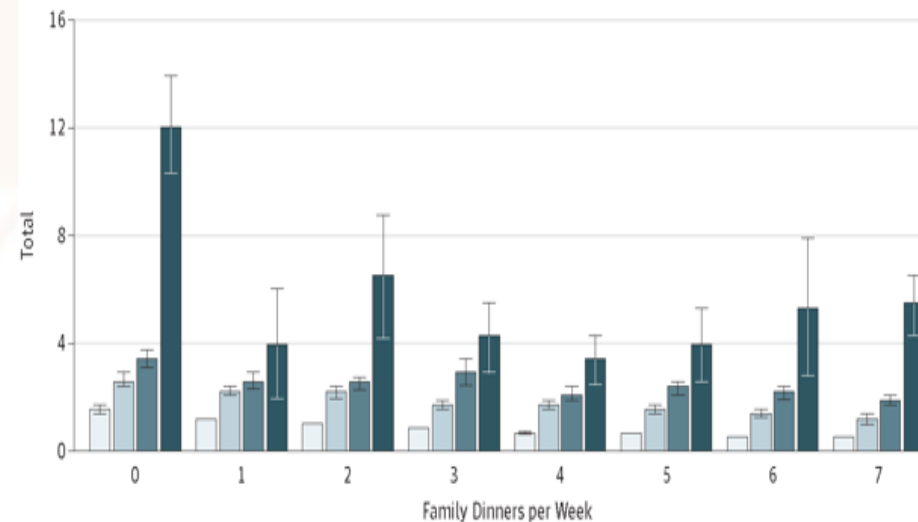
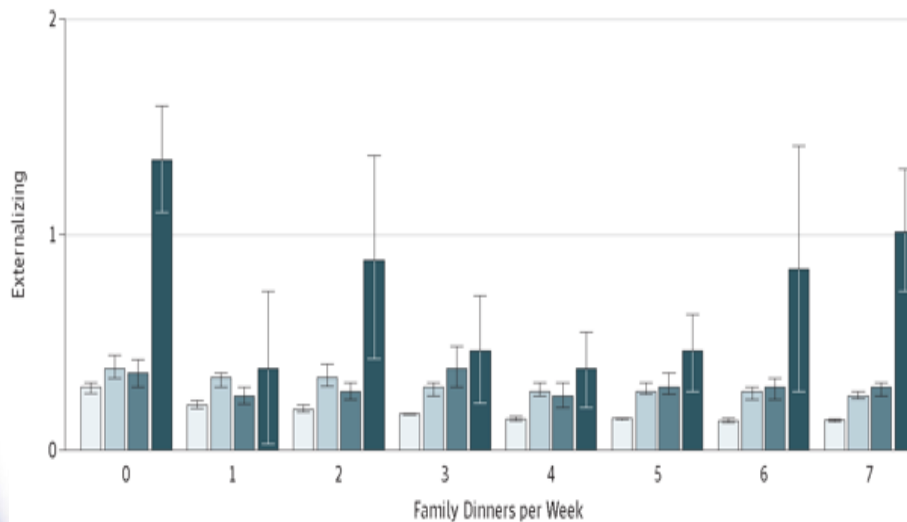
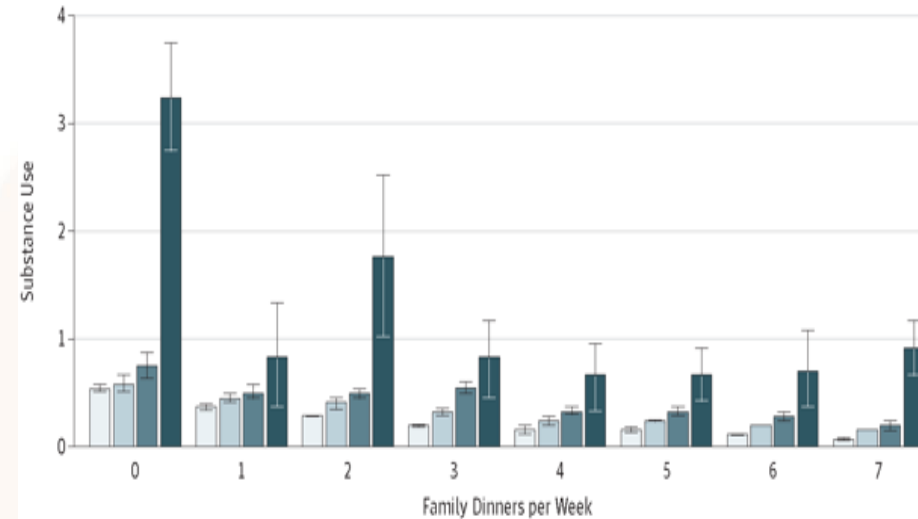
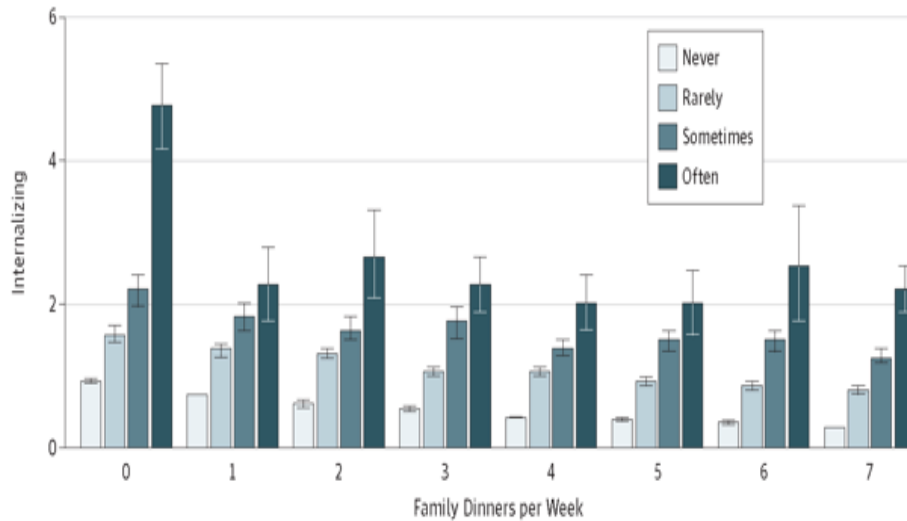




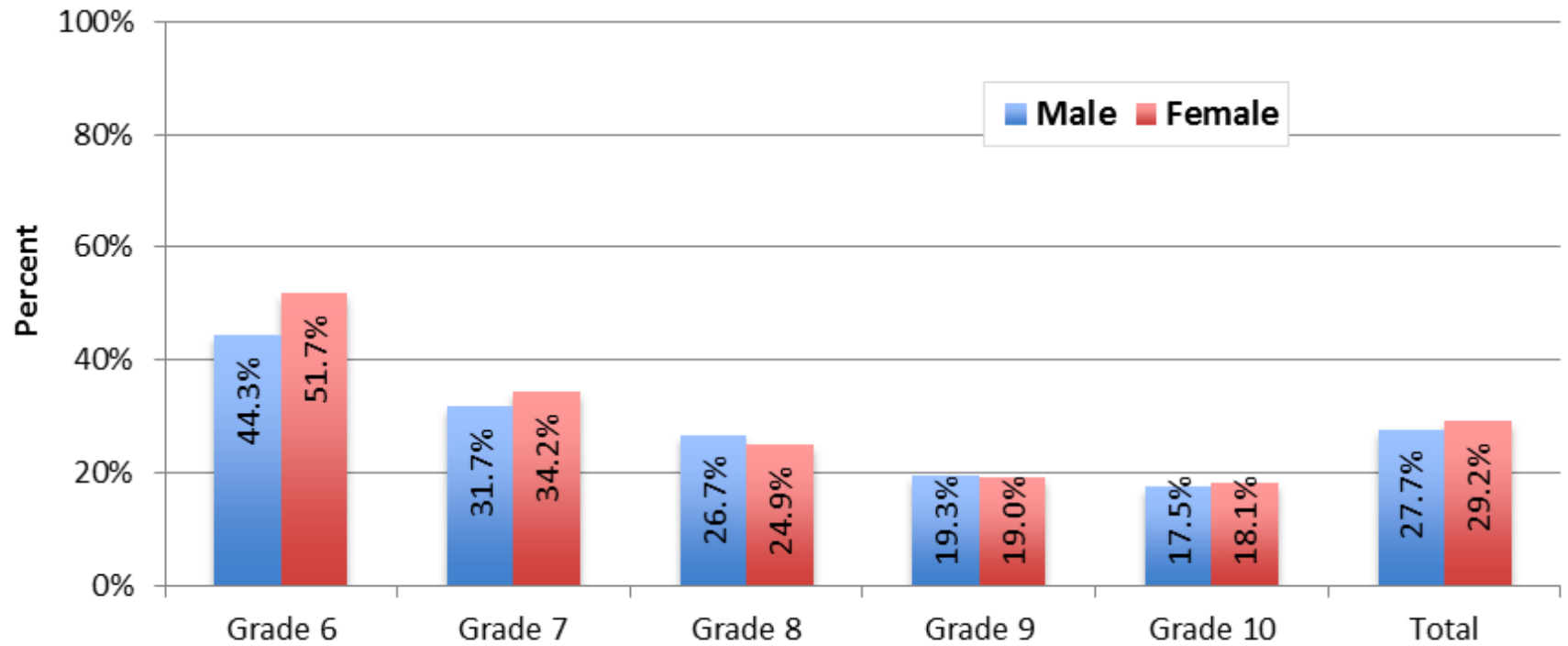
# Mental Health By Family Dinners



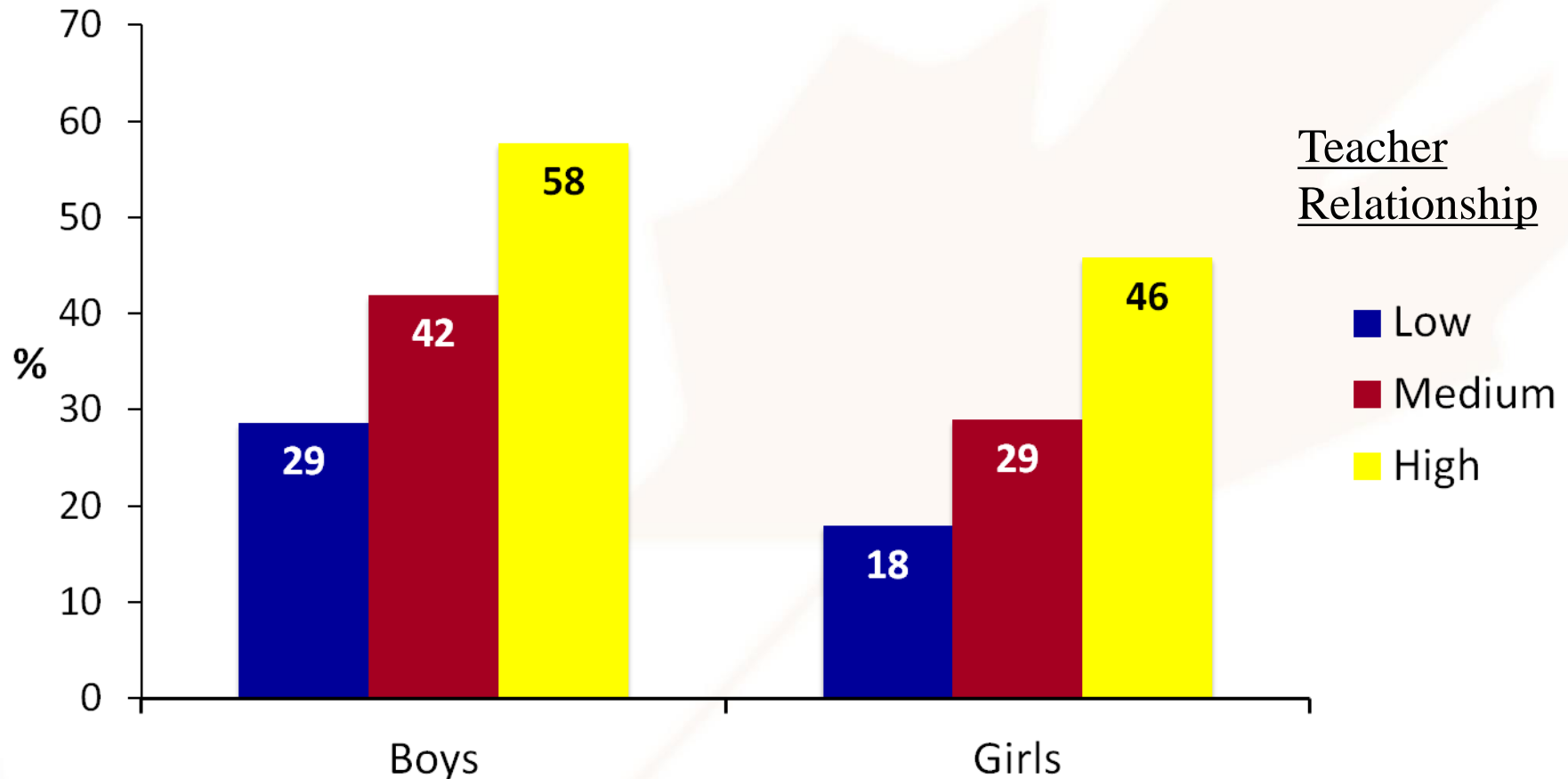
# Relationship Connection at Dinner



## Percentage of students who reported having a high relationship with their teachers, by their grades and gender



# Emotional Wellbeing and Teacher Relationships



Data from the Canadian Health Behaviour Survey of School Aged Children.





# The Central Role of Relationships

- Outcomes:
  - Physical Health, Healthy Lifestyle, Emotional Health, Positive Behaviours, Aggression, Substance Use, Risky Behaviours, Academic Achievement.
- Parent relationships mattered for 23/24 health outcomes.
- Teacher relationships were related to 8/24 outcomes.
- School relationships mattered for 13/24 outcomes.
- Peer relationships mattered for 14/24 outcomes
- Neighbourhood relationships mattered for 12/24 outcomes.
- Trends over time

Pepler, Debra, Craig, Wendy, & Haner, Dilys (2012). Healthy Development Depends on Healthy Relationships, Public Health Agency Canada.



# Bullying as a Traumatic Experience

- Bullying is a traumatic experience that occurs in the context of peer interaction.
- Impact of bullying is often underestimated and minimized
- Bullying has a traumatic impact on bystanders

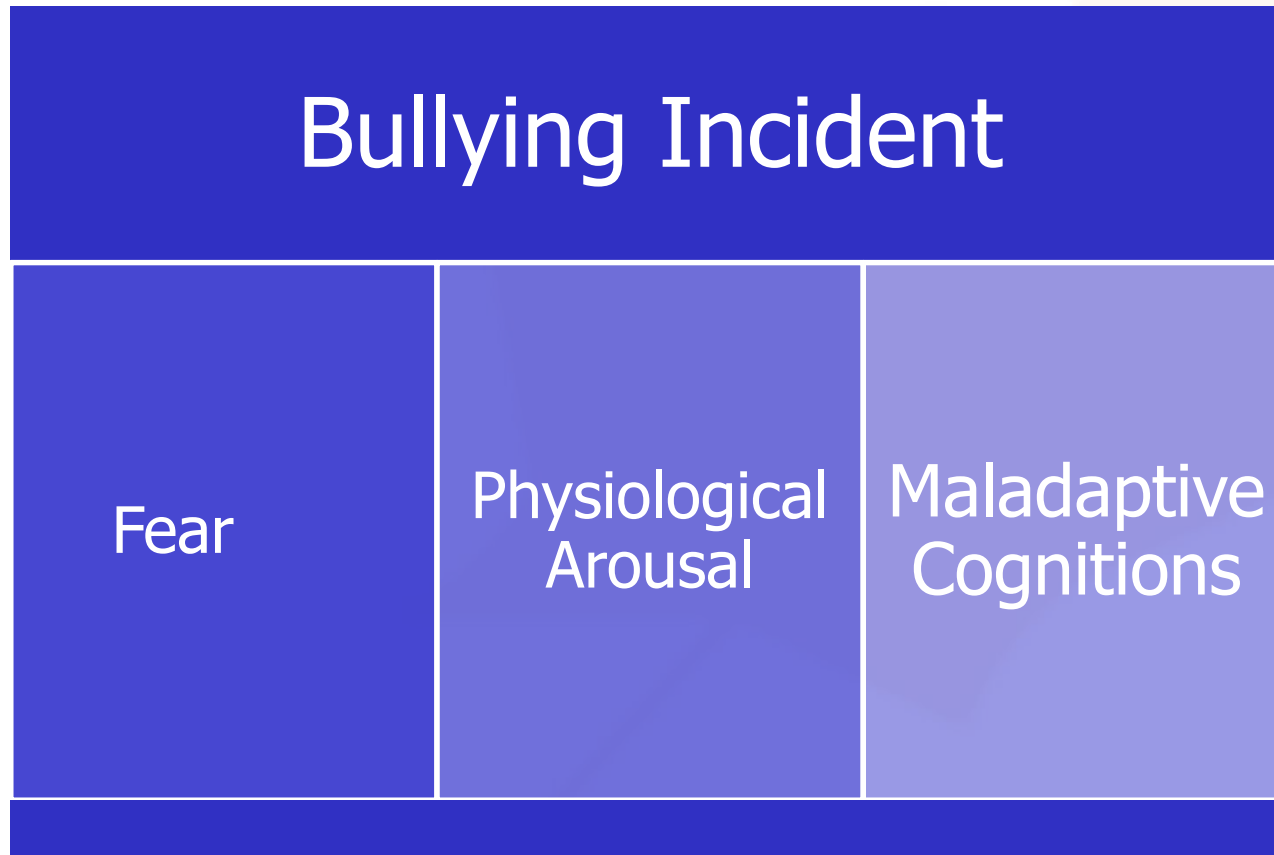


# Trauma is experienced by all

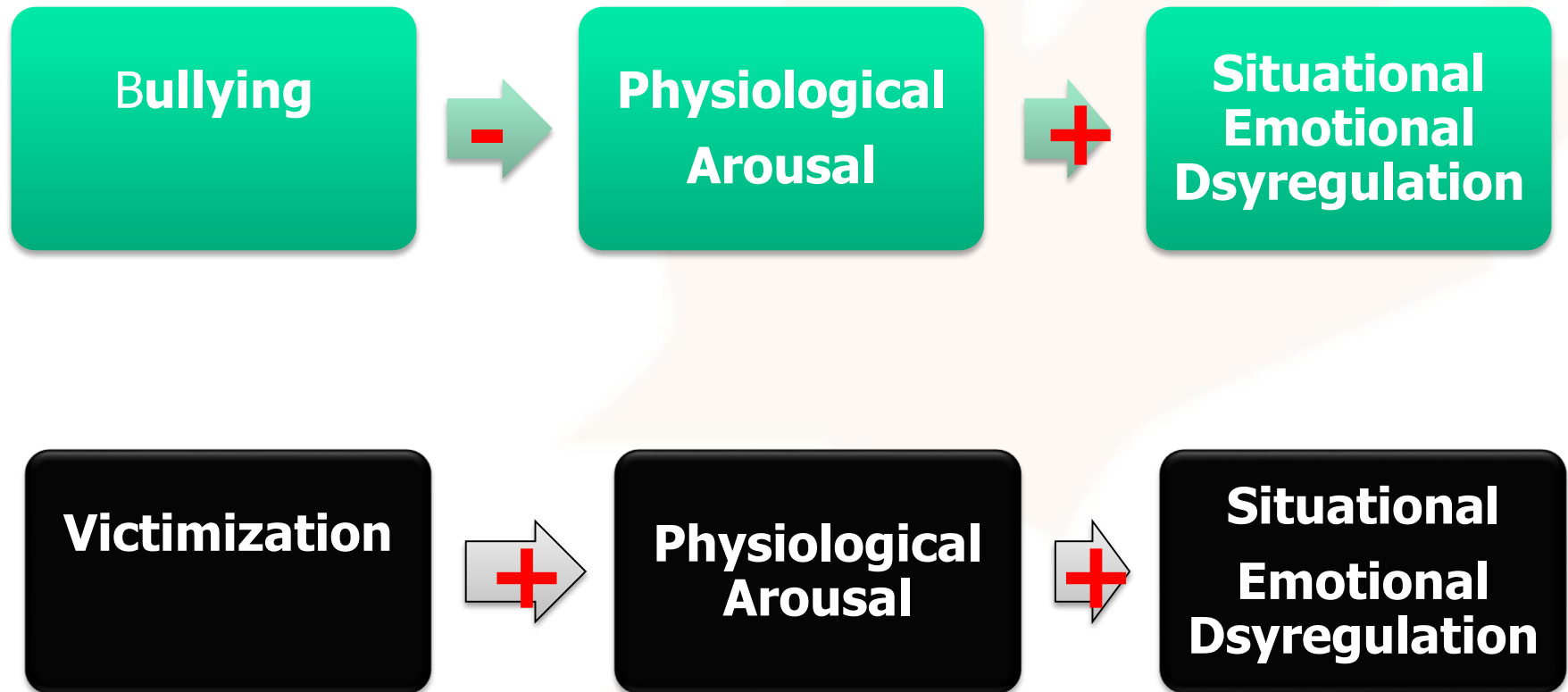
- A large proportion of those who bully have also been victimized by bullying and have experienced trauma within the family or the community
- Bullying is a shared interpersonal experience that may produce a shared experience of trauma through a shared social rejection interaction



# Shared Trauma Perspective

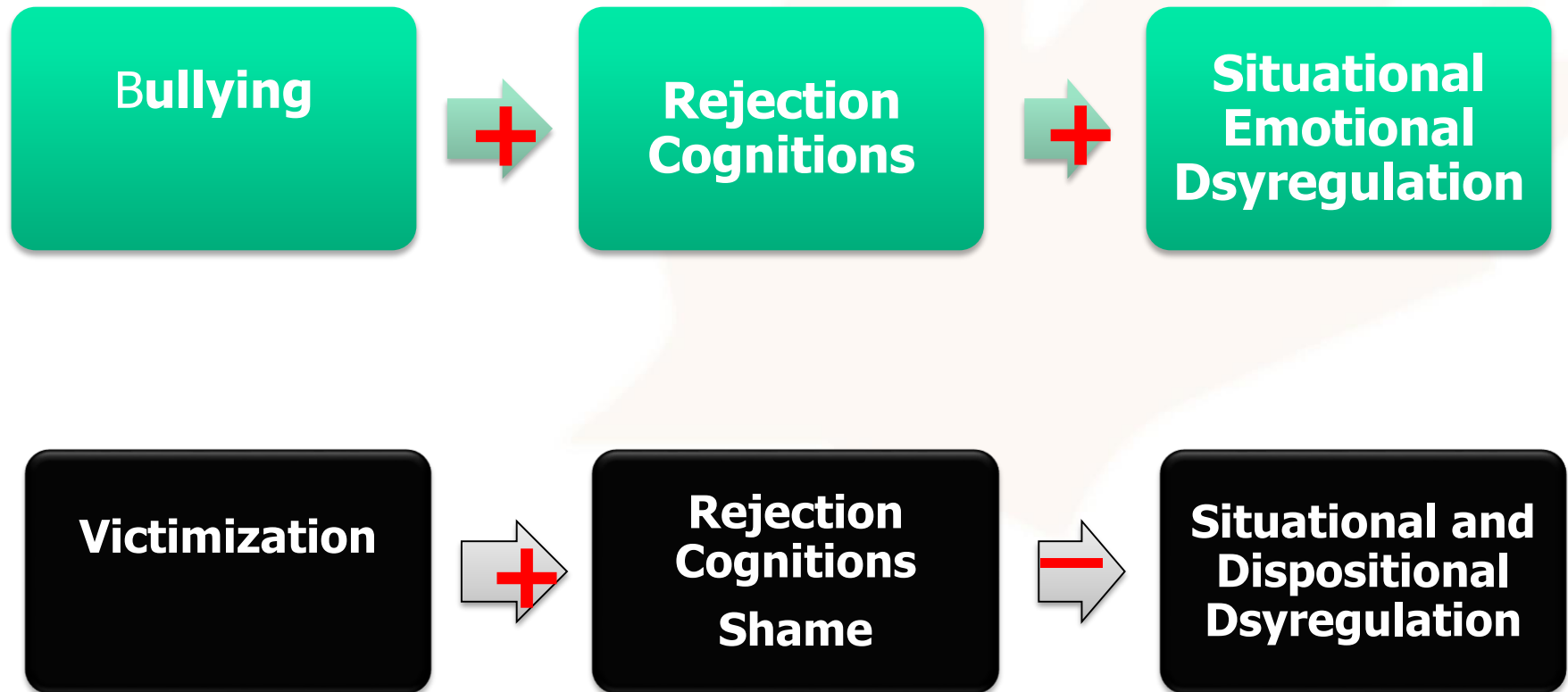


# Bullying and Physiological Arousal





# Bullying and Emotional Dysregulation in Adolescents

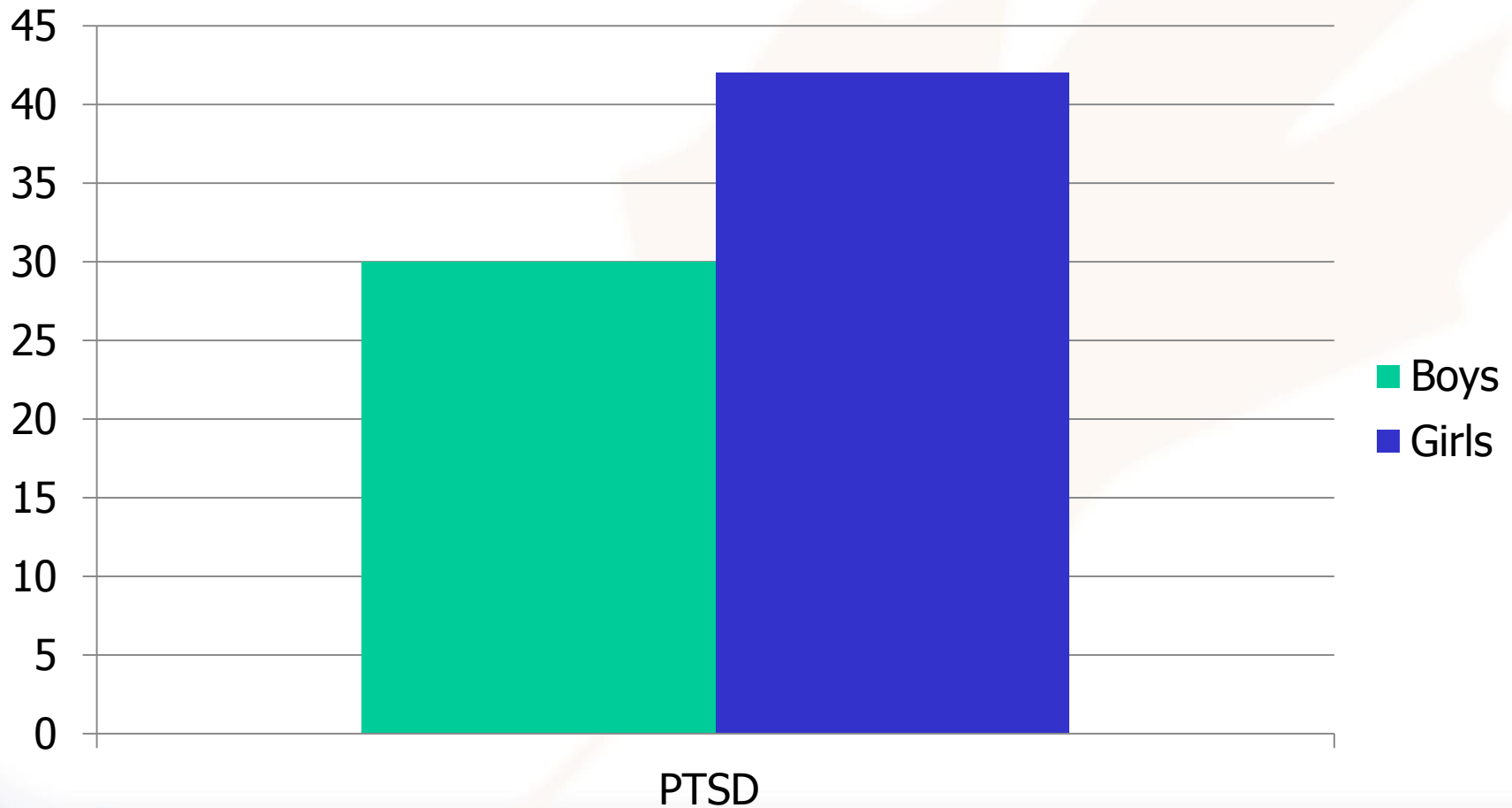


# Brain Activity of Victimized Youth Experiencing Social Exclusion

- Peer victimized group showed increased neural response in:
  - left amygdala (involved in fear and arousal processing)
  - left parahippocampal gyrus (involved in emotional memory)
  - left inferior frontal operculum (involved in emotional experience)
  - right fusiform gyrus (involved in processing of faces)
- Extent of the altered neural response in peer victimized individuals is proportional to the degree of bullying they experienced.



# Victimization and PTSD Symptoms



# Bullying as a Traumatic Experience

- Witnessing bullying associated with:
  - Somatic complaints
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Substance use

Jones & Barlow, 1990  
Rivers et al., 2009  
Zinzow et al., 2009



# Bullying and the Peer Group

- Bullying occurs in a group context
- Peers present for 85% of bullying incidences
- 19-25% defend → many positive associations
  - Reduced victimization
  - Higher self-esteem, peer acceptance, and popularity for defended youth

Hawkins et al., 2001  
Salmivalli et al; 2010 2011  
Sainio et al., 2011



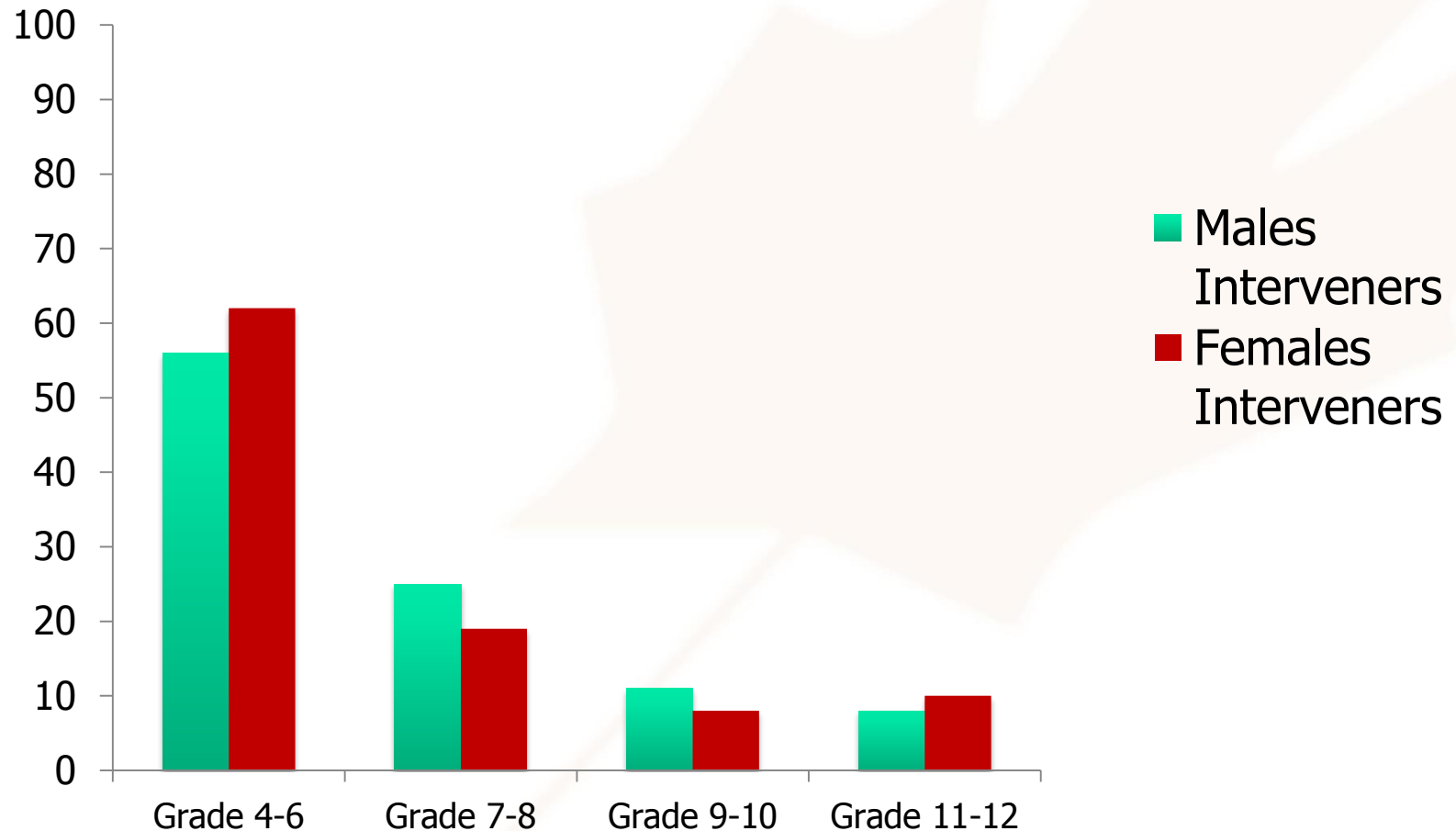


# Role of Peers in Bullying

- Most universal bullying prevention programs attempt to change bystander behavior (Bradshaw, 2015)
- A meta-analysis of 11 bullying prevention programs with a specific focus on bystander behavior found that they increased bystander intervention (Polanin, Espelage, Pigott, 2012)

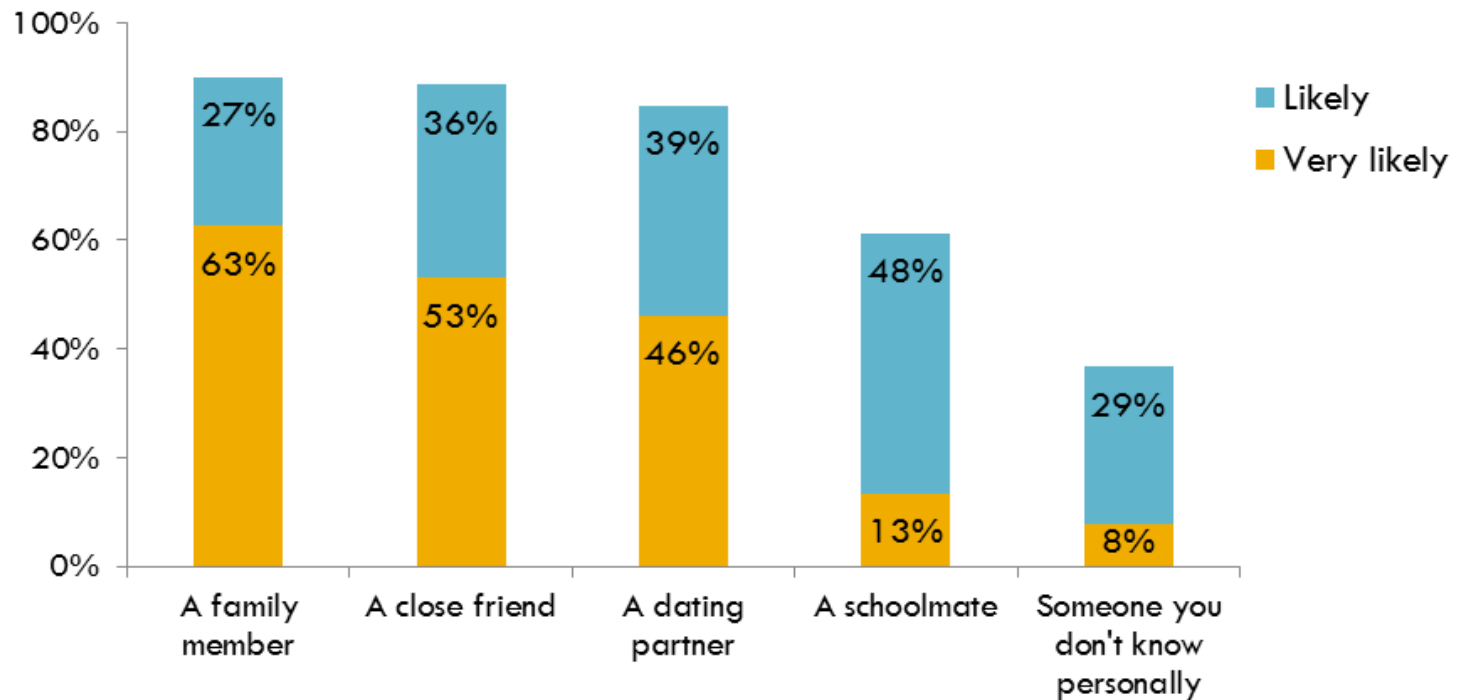


# Proportion of Youth who Intervene

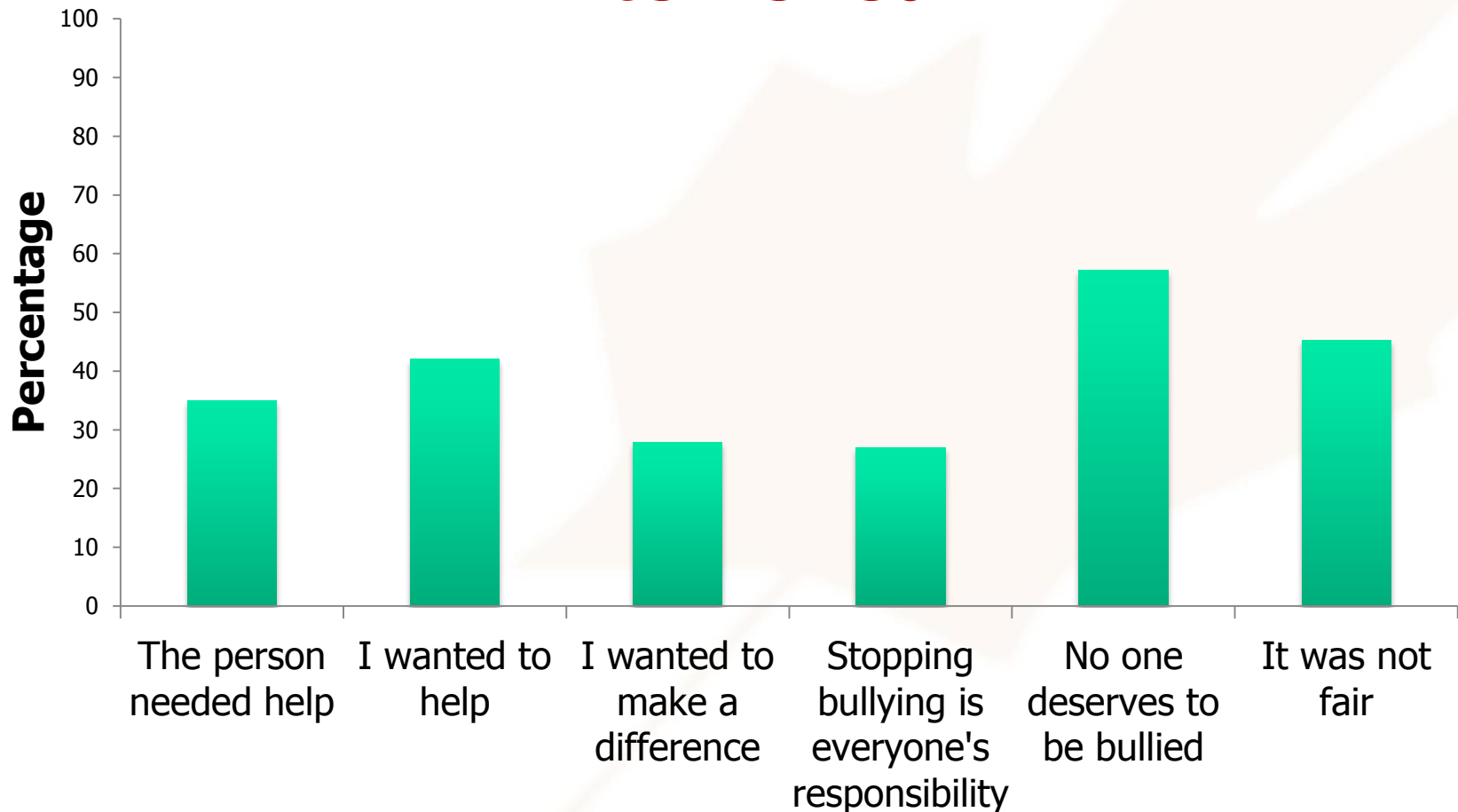


# Power of Relationships

Likelihood of intervening when the target is...



# Interveners: Why They Intervened



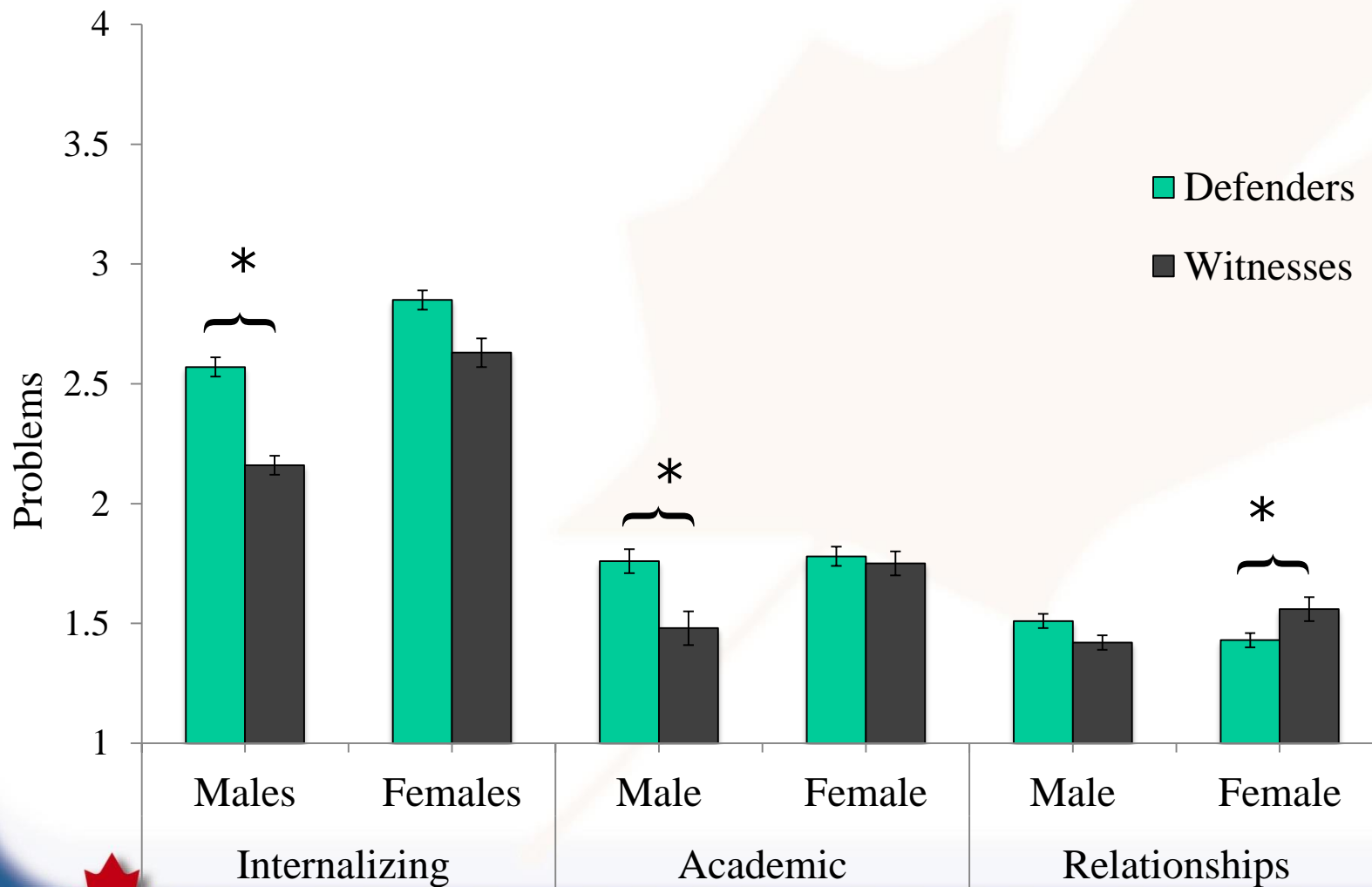
# Why don't Youth Intervene?

- Conflicts between self & friend's interest
  - Want to see fight
  - Want friend to fight a disliked third party
- Misguided help
  - Friend will fight better if angry
- Youth need more skills in calming friends
  - Can be addressed through intervention
- Need to see teachers and peers act effectively in these situations

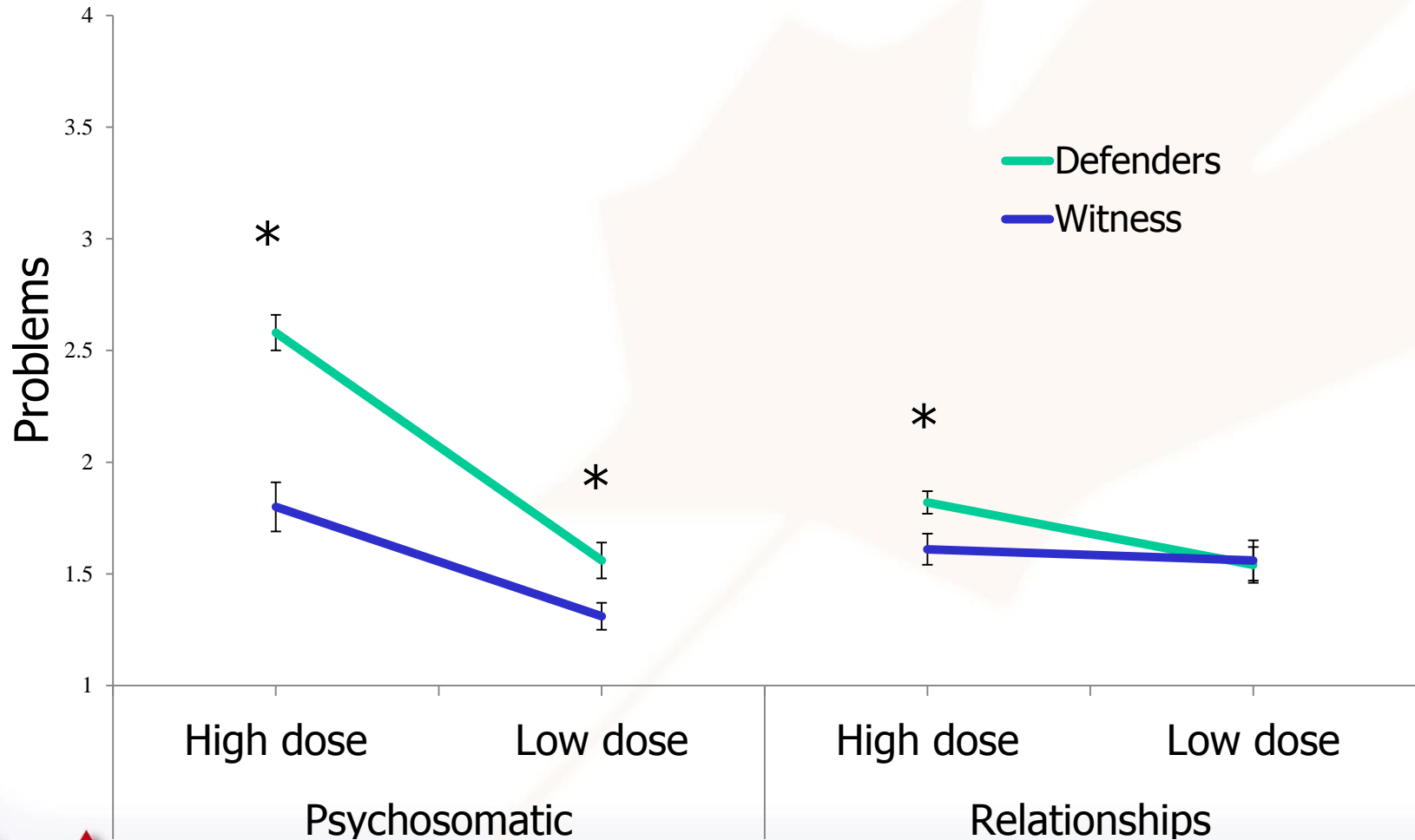




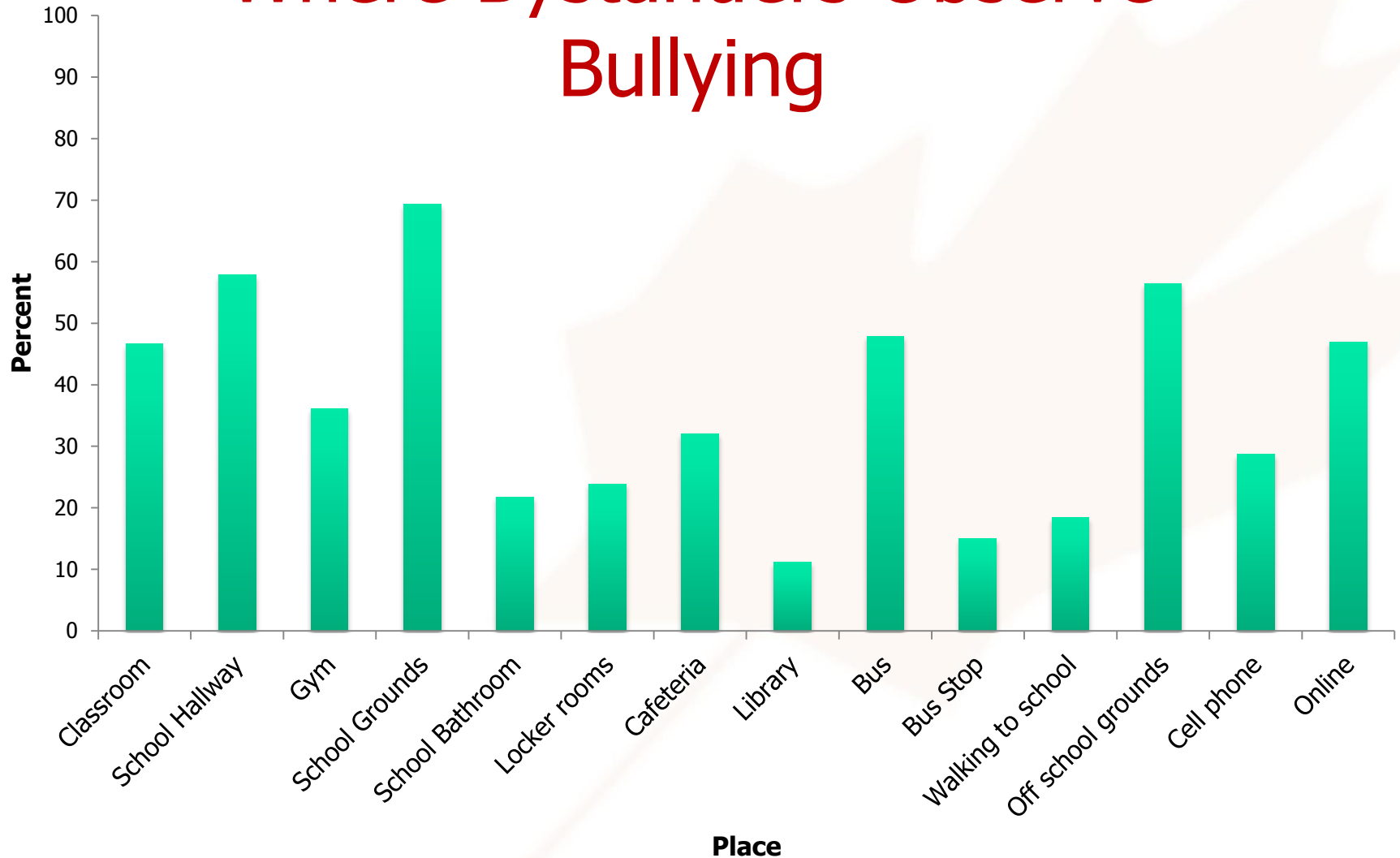
# Psychosocial Difficulties and Defending



# Effects of Intervening Relate to Pervasiveness



# Where Bystanders Observe Bullying



# Brain Scans of Defenders

- Defending behaviour is associated with brain activation in areas associated with emotional empathy and perspective taking.
- Displayed more activity in the supramarginal gyrus (SMG) and in the middle frontal gyrus (MFG).
- Emotional empathy is believed to be related to the mirror neuron system and facilitates the motor representation of other people's emotions accompanied by affective reactions to the emotion.



## Implications for Practice

- Empower and engage older youth
- Moral value and social justice motivations
- Empathy training may enhance defending behavior
- Attune to relationships and engage in social architecture
- Acknowledge that not all students benefit from defending-some experience trauma





"In the end,  
we will remember not  
the words of our  
enemies..  
but the silence of our  
friends"

© Martin Luther King

