

Why we should care more about targeted interventions addressing bullying?

Christina Salmivalli
Professor of psychology
INVEST research flagship



**UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU**



Finnish institute for
health and welfare

Thank you

- My research group



Also thanks to

- All inspiring colleagues working in the field
- Undergraduate and graduate students throughout the years
- Schools, teachers, children and their families
- Department of psychology and speech-language pathology and the INVEST research flagship, University of Turku
- Research Council of Finland, European Research Council, Finnish Ministry of Education, numerous Finnish foundations
- Reviewer #2



Bullying has been studied for half a century

- Increasing understanding of the phenomenon, development of complex interventions, decreases in the proportion of students tormented by their peers in many countries
 - We have reasons to celebrate
- KIPPIS!**



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However,

- Effects of whole-school BPPs are modest overall
- "Remaining victims" are even worse off when victimization decreases (Healthy Context Paradox)
- Recognition of victimization is far from perfect
- Targeted interventions often fail in putting an end to bullying
- (Targeted) interventions are sometimes poorly implemented

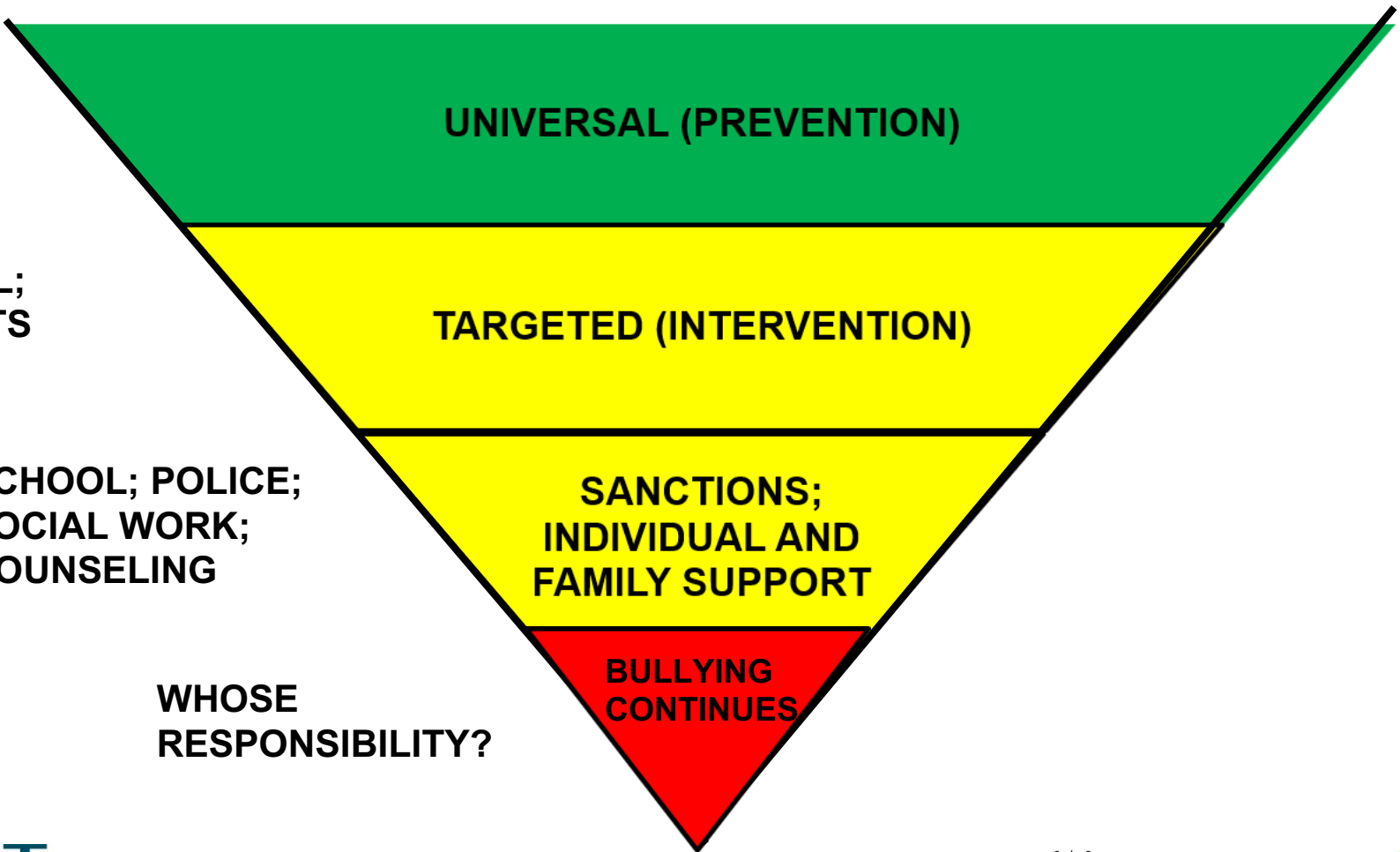


**SCHOOL;
(PARENTS)**

**SCHOOL;
PARENTS**

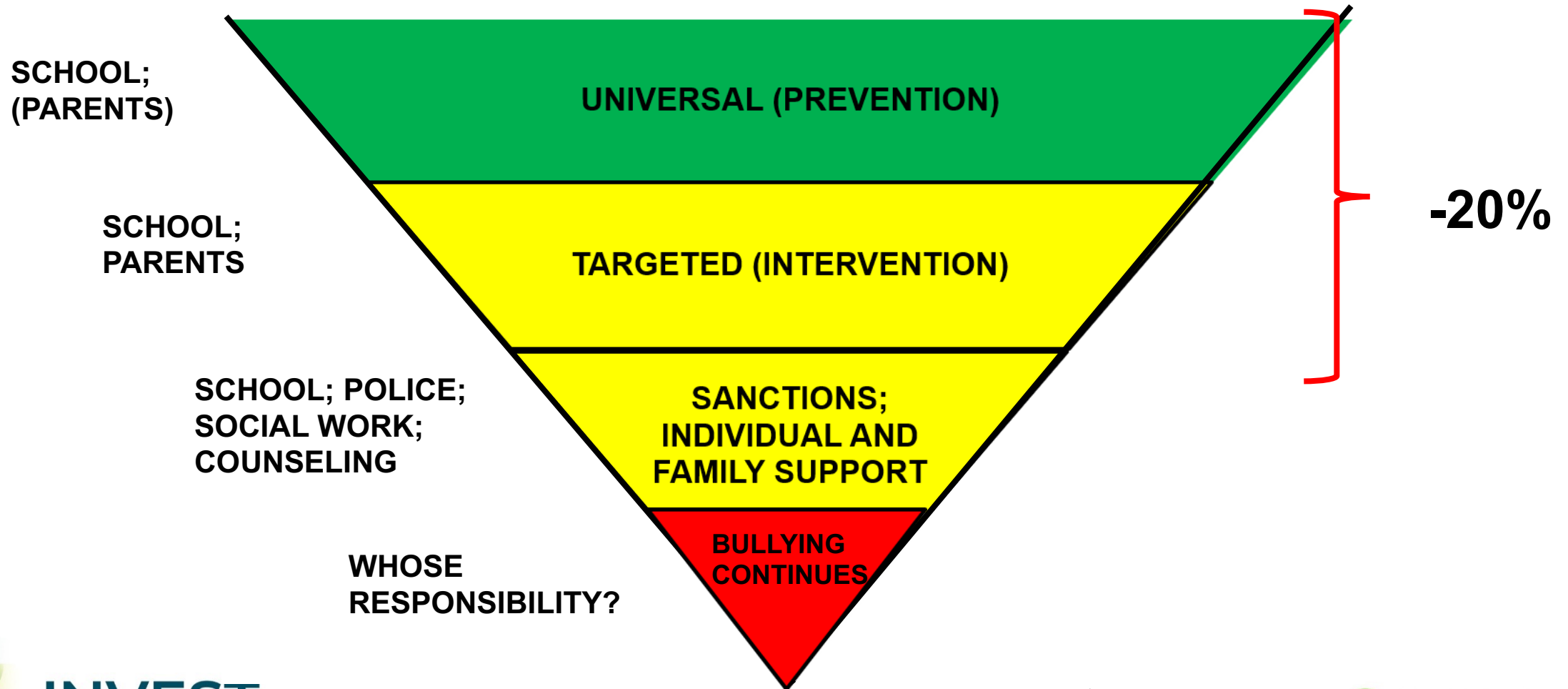
**SCHOOL; POLICE;
SOCIAL WORK;
COUNSELING**

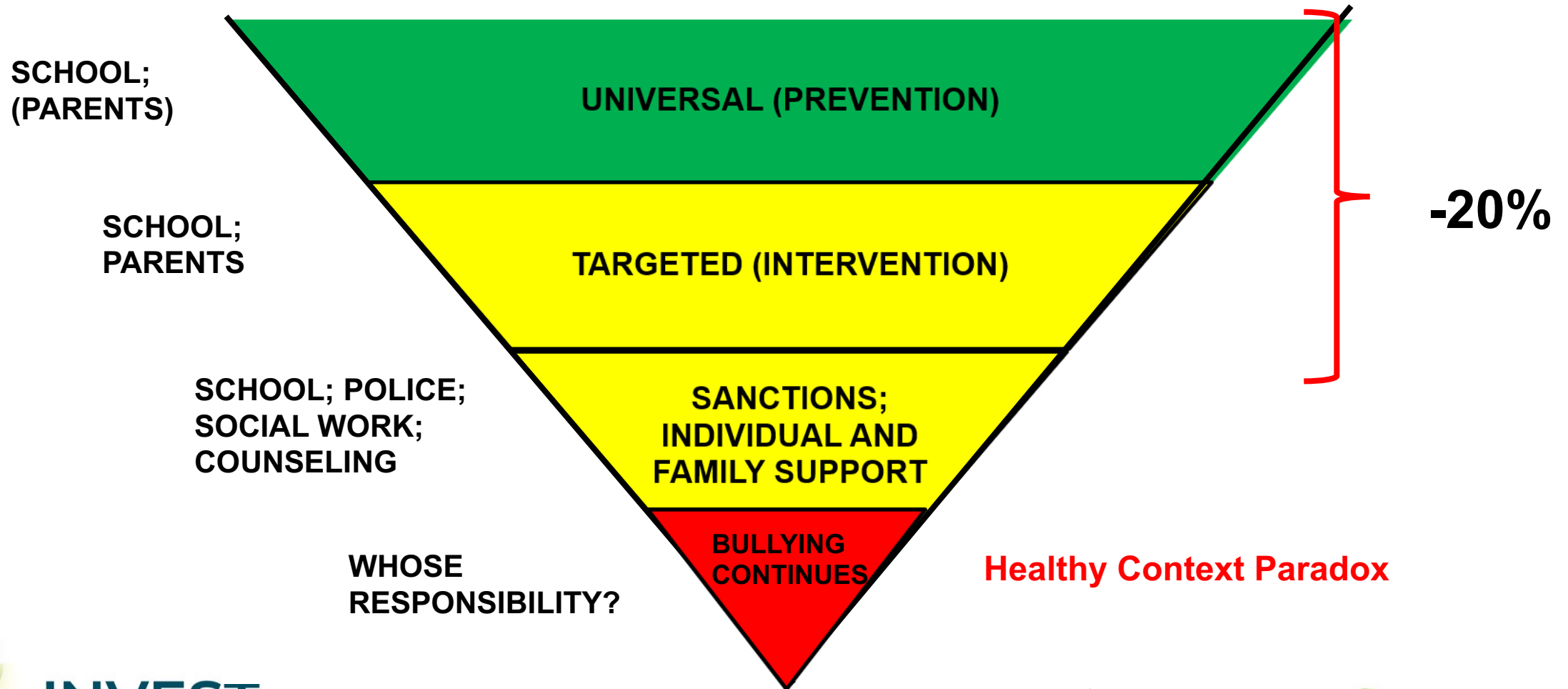
**WHOSE
RESPONSIBILITY?**



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- Prevention: Effects of whole-school BPPs are modest overall
- **”Remaining victims” are even worse off when victimization decreases (Healthy Context Paradox)**
- Recognition of victimization is far from perfect
- **Targeted interventions often fail in putting an end to bullying**
- **(Targeted) interventions are sometimes poorly implemented**





Healthy Context Paradox

- Even “success” is not success for all
 - Effect sizes of bullying prevention programs are small to modest
 - Too many young people still suffer from being bullied
 - Healthy Context Paradox: **when the overall level of victimization decreases, the “remaining victims” are even worse off** (Salmivalli, 2018; Garandeau & Salmivalli, 2019; Huitsing et al., 2019; Pan et al., 2021)

Healthy Context Paradox: Is it real?

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- Is HCP a real thing?

Healthy Context Paradox: Is it real?

- Laninga-Wijnen, Yanagida, Garandean, Malamut, Veenstra & Salmivalli (in press): Is there really a healthy context paradox for victims of bullying? Testing alternative directions and comparing within- and between person-effects. *Development and Psychopathology*.

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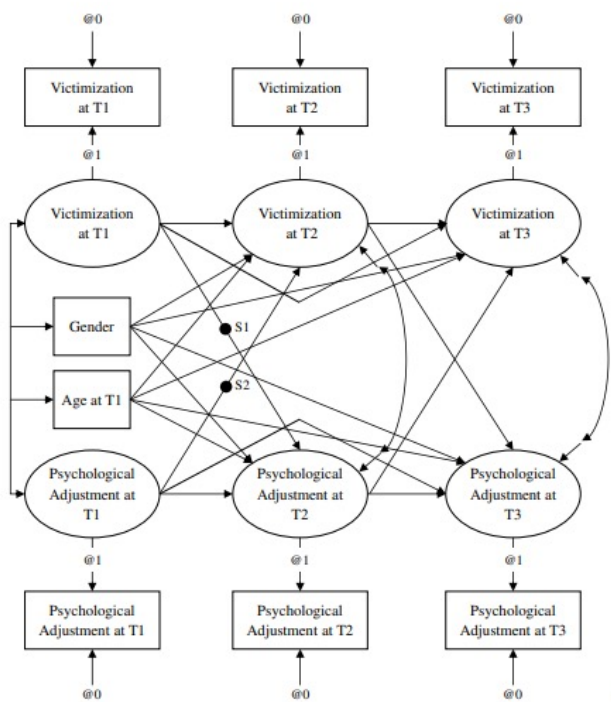
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- **Finding: Classroom-level victimization moderates the prospective effect of victimization on psychological problems, rather than the effect of psychological problems on victimization.**

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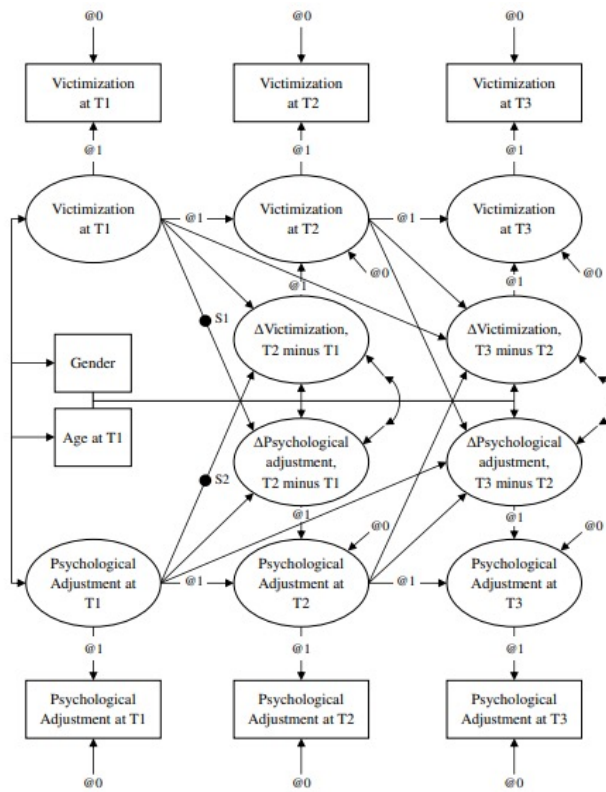
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Cross-lagged panel model



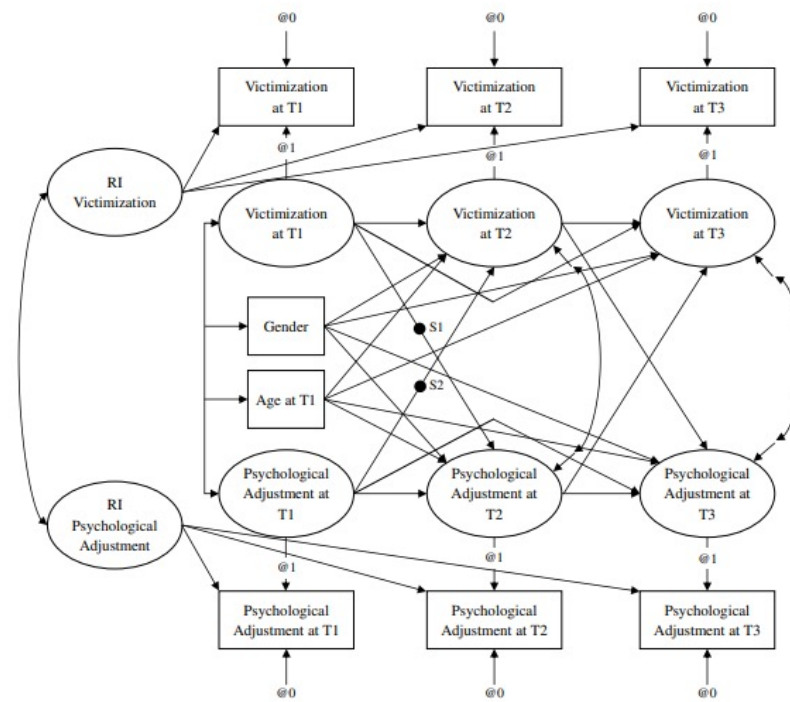
Student Level

Latent change score model



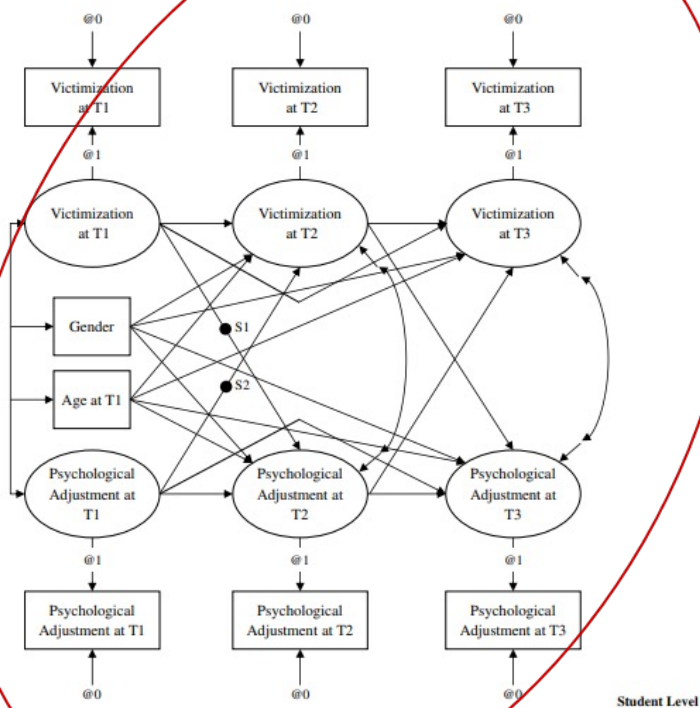
Student Level

RI cross-lagged panel model

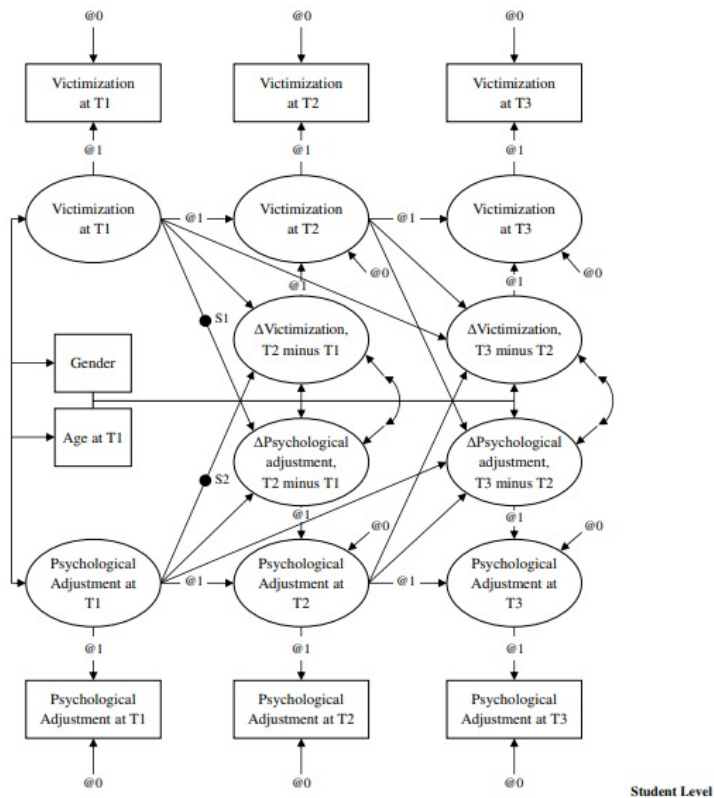


Student Level

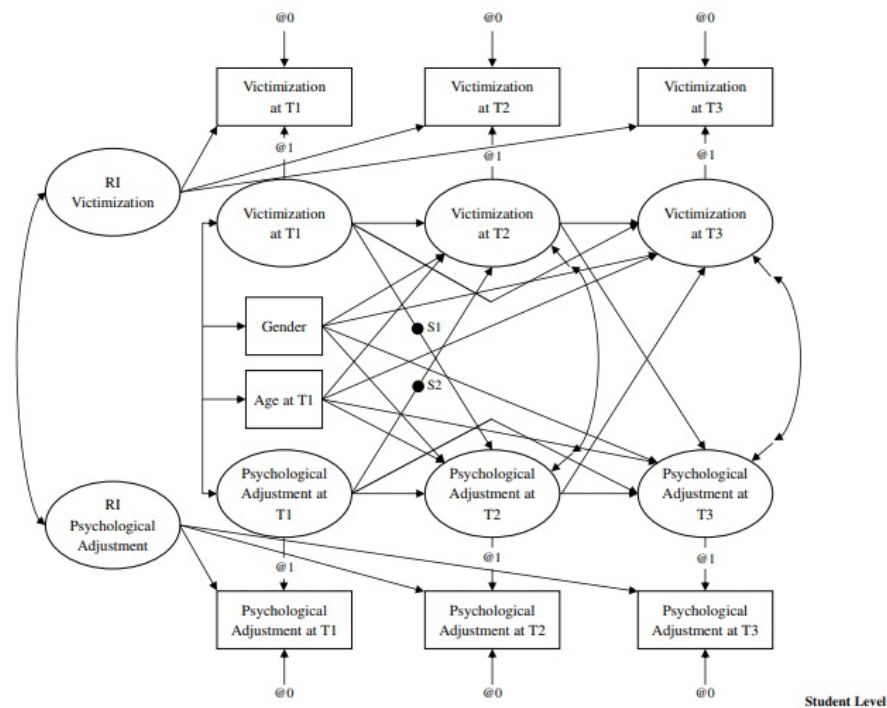
Cross-lagged panel model



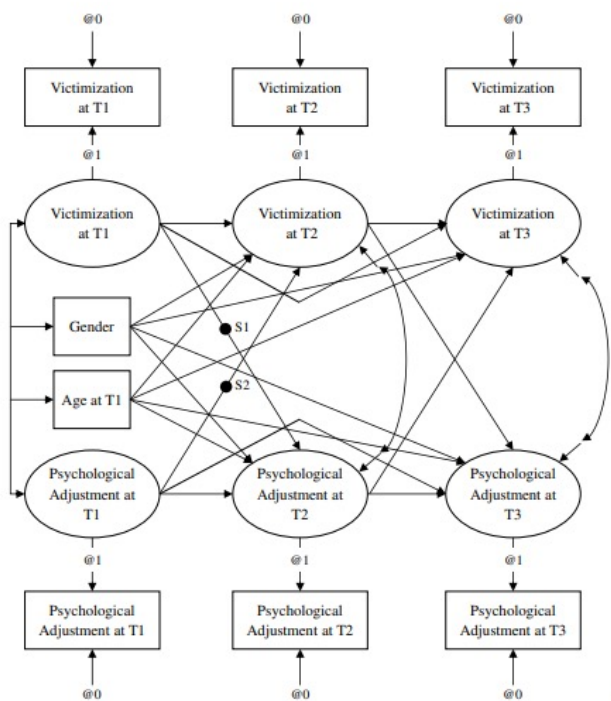
Latent change score model



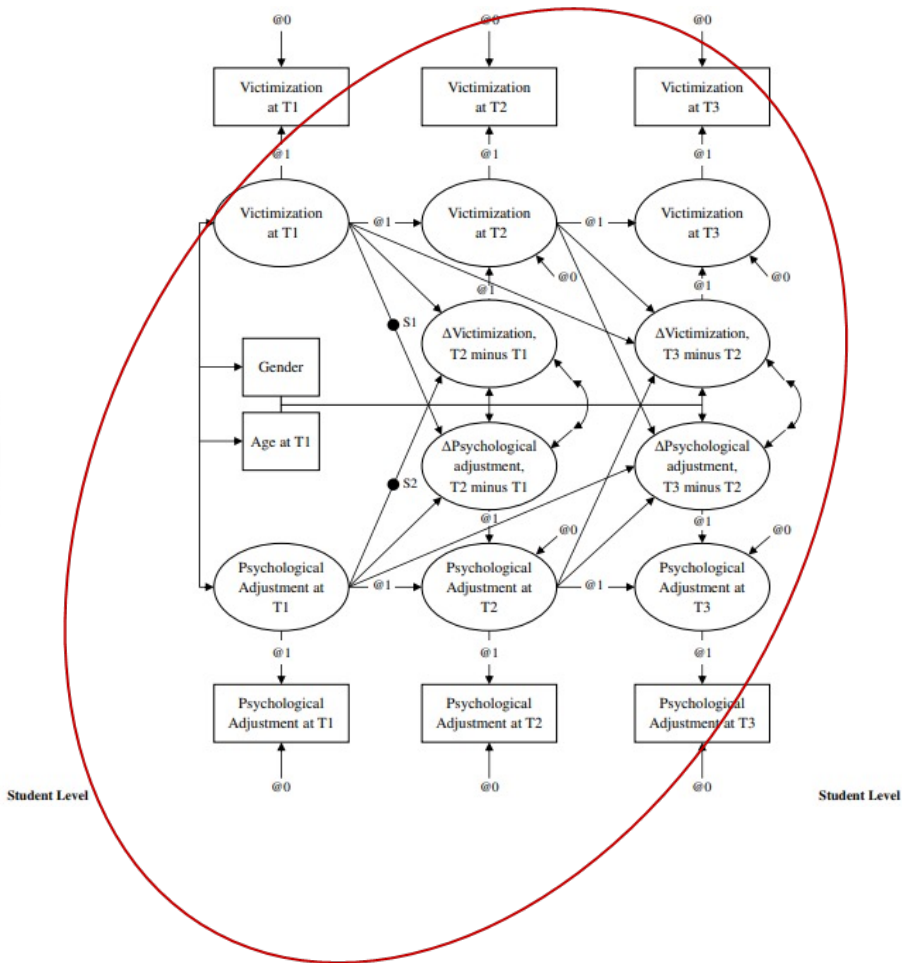
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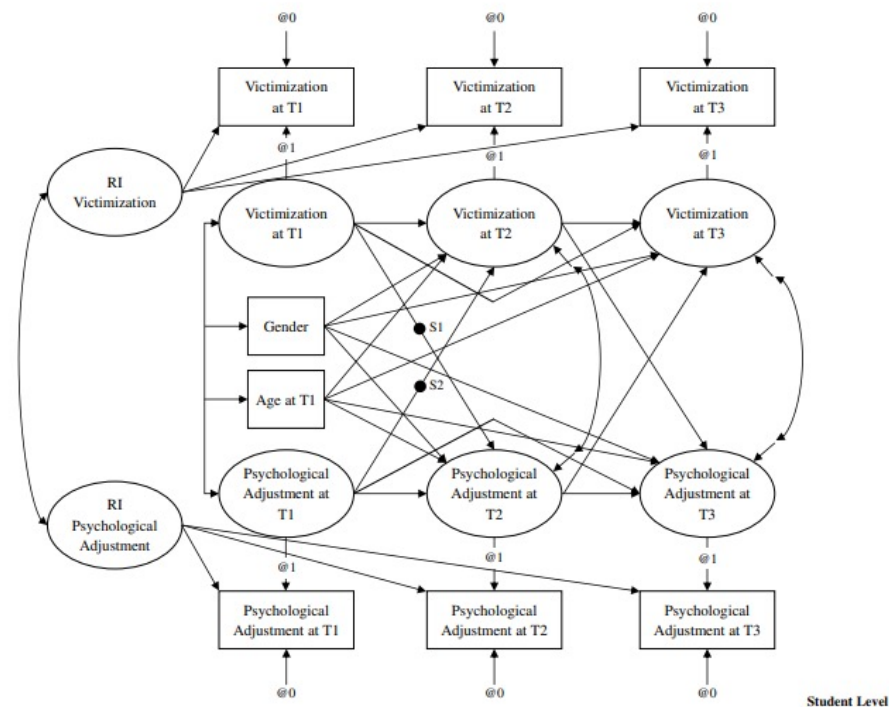
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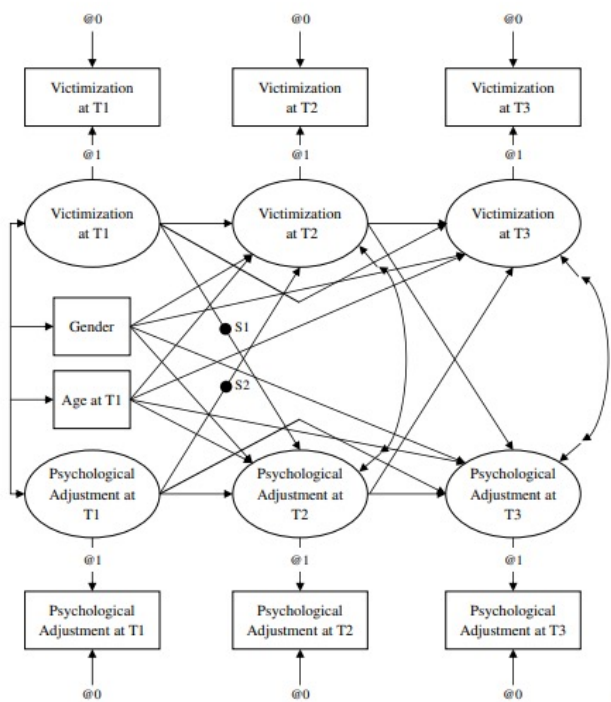
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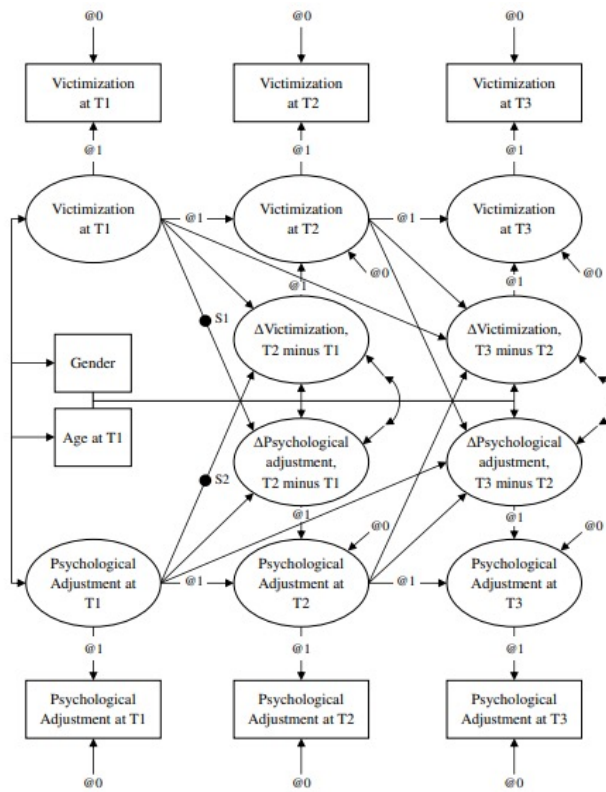


Cross-lagged panel model



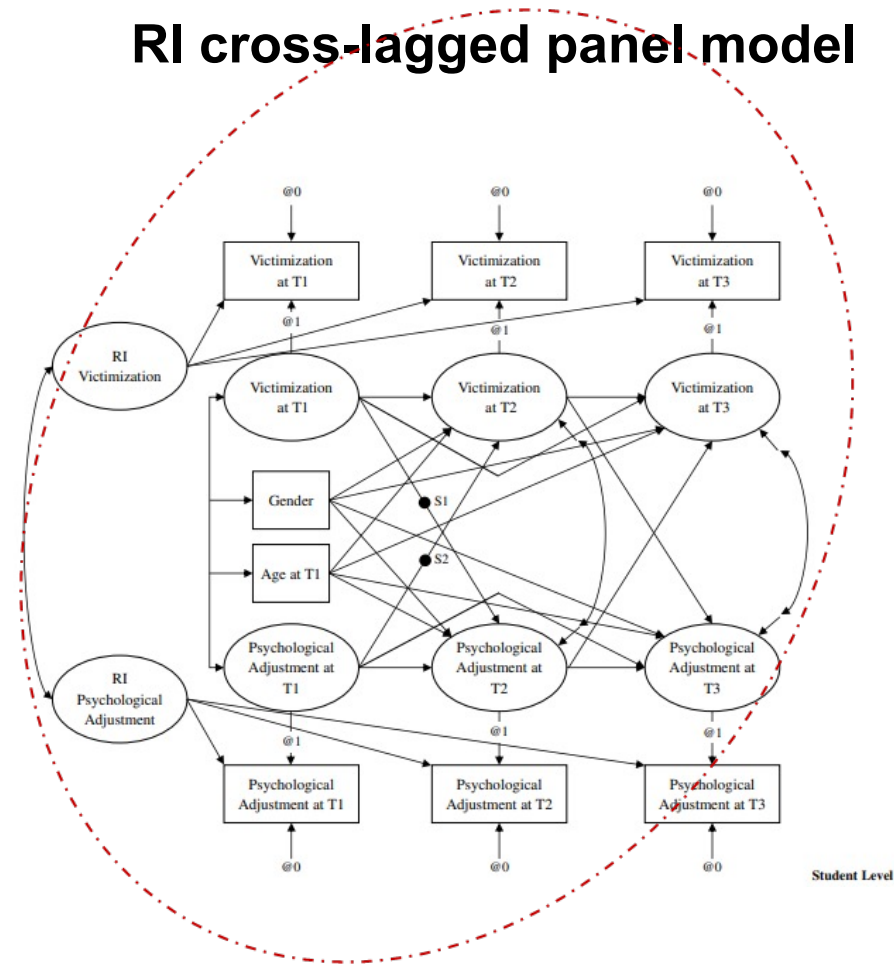
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Student Level

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Student Level

Healthy Context Paradox: Is it real?

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- **Finding: Victimized youth not only experience worse psychological maladjustment over time compared to others (between-person changes), but also higher maladjustment than before (absolute within-person changes) in “healthier” contexts**



Healthy Context Paradox: Defending norms

- What about another type of healthy context, high level of defending behavior in the classroom (high descriptive defending norms)?



Healthy Context Paradox: Defending norms

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Healthy Context Paradox: Defending norms

- What about another type of healthy context, high level of defending behavior in the classroom (high descriptive defending norms)?
- Laninga-Wijnen, Garandea, Malamut, & Salmivalli (2023): The longitudinal role of classroom defending norms in victims' psychological adjustment, causal attributions, and social comparisons. *Developmental Psychology*.
- **Finding: On average, students' well-being is higher in classrooms with high defending norms**



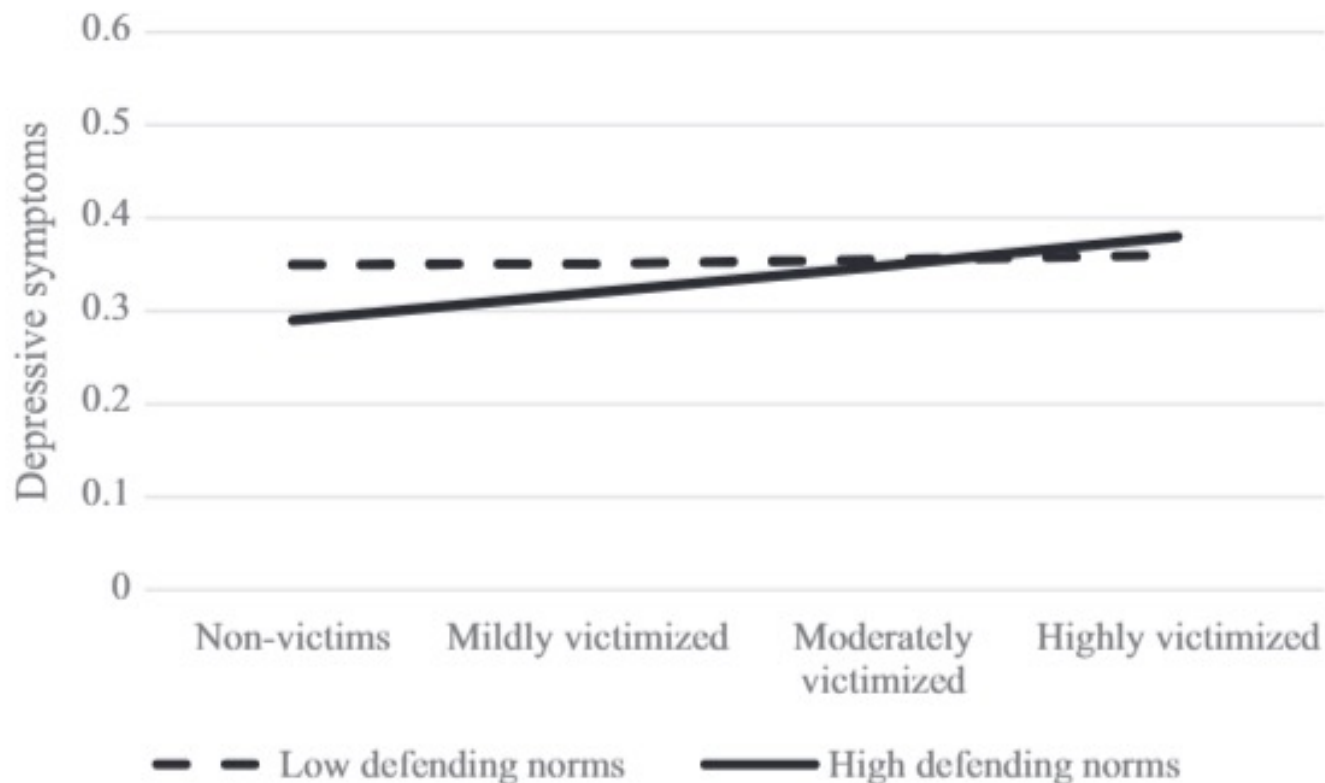
Healthy Context Paradox: Defending norms

- BUT:
- Do victimized youth fare better in classrooms with high levels of defending behaviors?

Healthy Context Paradox: Defending norms

Figure 1

The Role of Defending Norms in the Link Between Victimization and Depression



- **Finding: Even though the majority of students profit from defending norms, this might not be true for those who most urgently need help**
- Additional analysis: the unhelpfulness of defending norms was true of stable victims, who continued to be victimized despite high levels of defending in the classroom





Healthy Context Paradox: Defending norms

- Why some victims do not benefit from high levels of defending in the classroom ?
 - Defending is not targeted at them?
 - Even when targeted at them, defending is not helpful?
- In any case, it seems we are not very good at protecting the most vulnerable

Targeted interventions

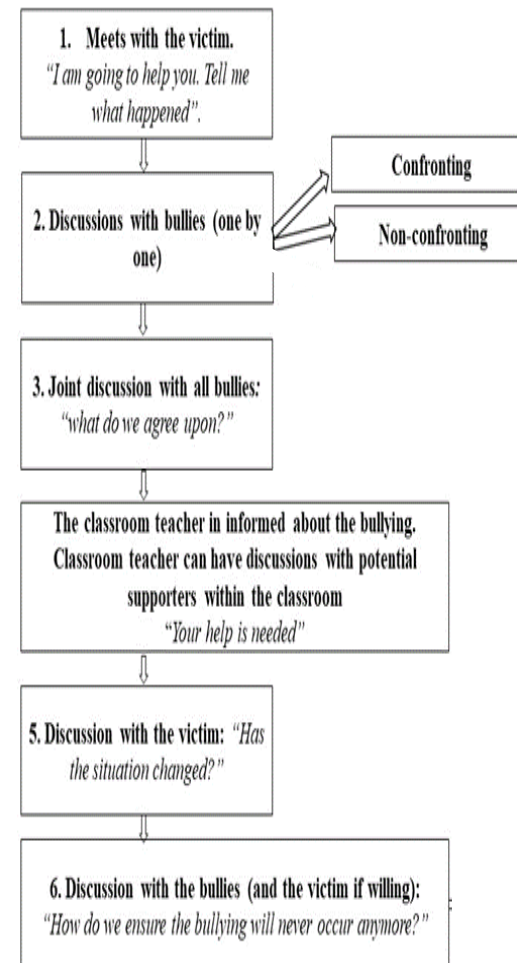
- Targeted interventions have been studied **far less** than prevention efforts or whole-school programs
 - We know very little about the (non-)effectiveness of different targeted approaches, how their effects vary across schools or across bullying cases, and what causes the variation
- Several studies suggest that targeted interventions **often fail** (when asked from students who were actually targeted by them)
- Current research on “what works” looks at the (universal and targeted) **components that were present in program manuals**, not the extent to which these components were actually **implemented**

Targeted interventions: two approaches

- Confronting vs. Non-confronting



- Which approach works best?



Targeted interventions: two approaches

- On average, the effects are equal



- victim-reported short-term outcome (Garandean et al., 2014); bully-reported immediate intention to change behavior (Garandean et al., 2016); outcome reported retrospectively by students who were victimized (Johander et al., 2021)

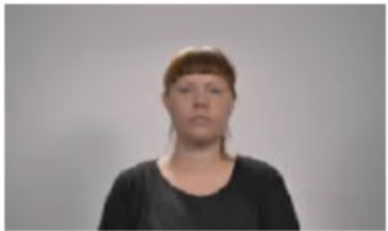
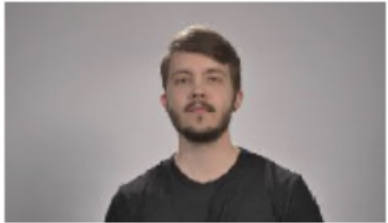
Targeted interventions: two approaches



- **The characteristics of the case** and the **characteristics of the students involved** have main effects on the outcome (Johander et al., 2023), but they also **moderate** the relative effects of the two approaches (Garandeanu et al., 2014)
- The combination of the two approaches (i.e., condemning the bullying behavior **and** raising empathy for the victimized peer) seems to be the “best bet” (Garandeanu et al., 2026)

Targeted interventions: Video vignette experiment

- In order to control exactly the content of teacher message, we designed an experiment with video vignettes



The participants imagine that they have been bullying a peer and invited to a meeting with the teacher. They are displayed a short video in which the teacher talks to them about the situation. In a between-subjects design, each child sees one of the three conditions (confronting, non-confronting, combined). Each message ends identically: "This situation needs to change now."

Targeted interventions: Video vignette experiment

- Confronting



- You have been bullying a peer
- This is not acceptable behavior
- It must stop immediately



Targeted interventions: Video vignette experiment

- Non-confronting



- Mean things have been done to a peer
- This must feel very bad, don't you think?
- This situation needs to change

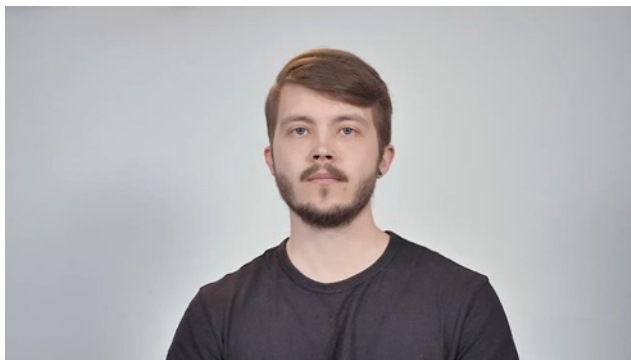


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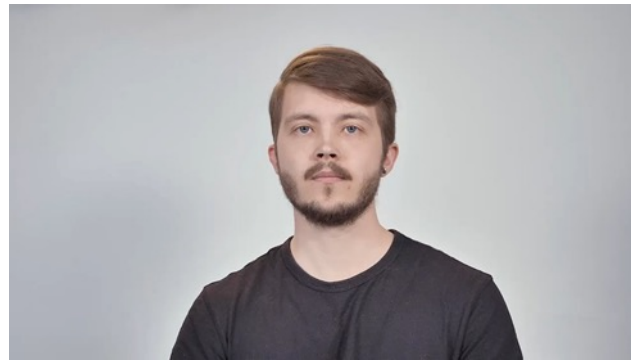
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Targeted interventions: Video vignette experiment

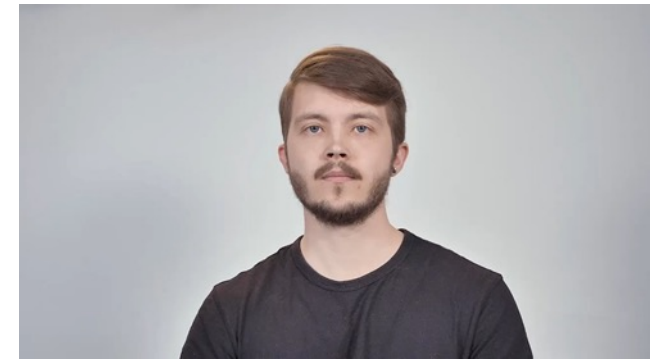
Confronting



Non-confronting



Combined



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Targeted interventions: Video vignette experiment

- Student questionnaires:
 - Before the video:
 - Gender; Cognitive empathy; Affective empathy; CU traits; Bullying behavior; Victimization experiences
 - After the video:
 - Perception of the message; Perception of the teacher; Emotions; Intention to change behavior (i.e., stop bullying)



Targeted interventions: Video vignette experiment


- **Findings:**
- After seeing the video, **70% of students said they would definitely stop bullying** the classmate after hearing the teacher message, about 90% said they would be quite likely to stop
- Among students who **had actually bullied a peer in real life**, only **40%** said they would definitely stop bullying the classmate





Targeted interventions: Video vignette experiment

- **Findings:**
- Those high on **psychological reactance** or **callous-unemotional (CU) traits** → less likely to stop bullying the peer
- Those who said they would **like the teacher less**, **trust the teacher less**, and feel **less guilt** after hearing the message → less likely to stop bullying the peer

- 
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Targeted interventions: implementation

- When teachers are instructed to use evidence-based methods in their targeted interventions, what do they actually do – and how that affects the outcome?



Different Approaches to Address Bullying in KiVa Schools: Adherence to Guidelines, Strategies Implemented, and Outcomes Obtained

Eerika Johander¹ · Tiina Turunen¹ · Claire F. Garandeau¹ · Christina Salmivalli^{1,2}

Accepted: 14 October 2020
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Abstract

We examined the extent to which school personnel implementing the KiVa® antibullying program in Finland during 2009–2015 systematically employed the program-recommended approaches (*confronting* or *non-confronting*), used one or the other depending on the bullying case (*case-specific* approach), or used their *own adaptation* when talking to perpetrators of bullying, and whether they organized follow-up meetings after such discussions. In addition to investigating adherence to program guidelines, we tested how effective these different approaches were in stopping bullying. Finally, we tested the contribution of follow-up meetings and the number of years KiVa had been implemented in a school to the effectiveness of the interventions, using reports from both school personnel and victimized students. The data were collected annually across 6 years via online questionnaires and included responses from 1221 primary and secondary schools. The school personnel were more likely to use the confronting approach than the non-confronting approach. Over time, rather than sticking to the two program-recommended approaches, they made adaptations (e.g., combining the two; using their own approach). Two-level regression analyses indicated that the discussions were equally effective, according to both personnel and victimized students, when the *confronting*, *non-confronting*, or a *case-specific* approach had been used. The discussions were less effective when the personnel used their *own adaptation* or could *not specify* the method used. Perceived effectiveness was higher in primary school and when follow-up meetings were organized systematically after each intervention, but unrelated to the number of years KiVa had been implemented.

Keywords KiVa antibullying program · Indicated actions · Bullying · Intervention · Long term · Implementation fidelity · Outcome · Confronting · Non-confronting · Follow-up

Over the past decades, growing awareness of the negative outcomes of school bullying (Reijntjes et al. 2010) has in many countries led to normative regulation, such as schools being required to have a policy, or an action plan against bullying (Salmivalli 2018). School personnel are thus faced with a demand to do *something* to address bullying. At the same time, numerous antibullying programs have been developed and evaluated in different parts of the world (Gaffney et al. 2019). Such programs often combine preventive actions (such as student lessons or improved supervision) with targeted interventions (i.e., procedures for intervening

in actual bullying cases, such as discussions with the students involved). Evaluation studies have, however, mainly estimated the effects of whole programs (without distinguishing prevention from intervention components), and the few studies that have compared the effectiveness of different approaches in targeted interventions only assessed short-term effectiveness on the basis of a single student informant (Garandeau et al. 2014, 2016). Consequently, we know little about the relative effectiveness of different approaches used when a case of bullying has already occurred, and even less about how school personnel implement guidelines provided to address such cases. The present study investigates the extent to which school personnel implementing the KiVa® antibullying program (Kärnä et al. 2011a) in Finland employ the program-recommended approaches (confronting vs. non-confronting) when discussing with bullying perpetrators, how this changes over a period of 6 years, and how effective the chosen approaches (whether program-recommended or something else) are

✉ Eerika Johander
eekrjo@utu.fi

¹ INVEST Research Flagship, Department of Psychology and Speech-Language Pathology, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

² Shandong Normal University, Jinan, China

Johander, E., Turunen, T., Garandeau, C., & Salmivalli, C. (2020). Different approaches to address bullying in KiVa Schools: adherence to guidelines, strategies implemented, and outcomes obtained. *Prevention Science*, 22, 299–310.

Data collected annually (2010-2015) from students and staff in Finnish KiVa schools

Among the 1101 participating schools, students from 1041 schools in grades 4-9 reported being summoned to the KiVa team because they had been bullied (N=38 931, 9.4% of the total sample of 416 323 respondents



Different Approaches to Address Bullying in KiVa Schools: Adherence to Guidelines, Strategies Implemented, and Outcomes Obtained

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eekrjo@utu.fi

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Adherence to program guidelines re: targeted interventions across the years

The **outcomes** of targeted interventions, as perceived by 1) students whose situation (victimization) had been intervened and 2) KiVa team members doing the intervention

Targeted interventions: Adherence

- Which approach did you use this past school year?



Confronting: Condemning the bullying behavior



Non-confronting: Raising empathy for the victimized peer



Either C or NC, depending on the situation



School's own approach: Doing it our own way



Unspecified: Not sure what we did

- Follow-up?
In all cases
Occasionally
Never

Targeted interventions: Adherence

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School's own approach: Doing it our own way



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Targeted interventions: Effectiveness

- **Students who had been victimized:** "When you had been bullied, did the adult intervention affect your situation?" (1= the situation did not change at all, I was still bullied, 2= since then I was bullied less or the bullying stopped completely, and 3= since then I was bullied more; dummy-coded as 0 = *did not change at all/increased*, 1 = *decreased/stopped*)
- **Adults responsible for targeted interventions:** "To what extent have the discussions led to a desired outcome – that is, ceasing of the bullying?" (0 = not at all or very poorly, ..., 4 = very well)

Targeted interventions: Effectiveness

- Students whose victimization adults had intervened said that..
 - bullying stopped, or decreased: 74%
 - situation did not change or it got worse: 26%
- Adults evaluated the effectiveness of their interventions at 3.17, on a scale from 0 to 4
- 12-17% of the variation in effectiveness was between schools; the rest was variation within schools across years

Targeted interventions: Effectiveness

- As years went by, schools were increasingly likely to move from evidence-based methods to other approaches...



- ... despite the fact that **in schools where this happened, interventions were more likely to fail**, according to both students' and school personnel's responses to annual surveys
- Failure was most likely in schools where **school personnel couldn't tell which method had been used**



Targeted interventions: Effectiveness

- In addition:
- The outcomes were **better** in schools where **follow-up meetings** were systematically implemented
- Whatever approach was used, organizing follow-ups systematically increased the likelihood of bullying stopping



Targeted interventions

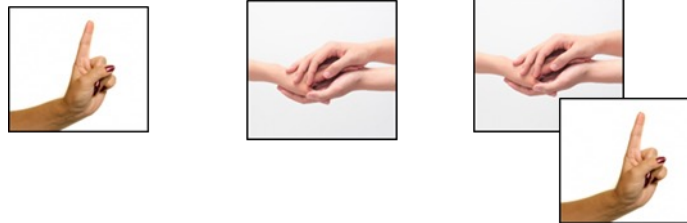
- Why some children do **not even intend** to change their behavior after hearing the teacher message?
- Why some children, despite their initial intention, do **not** change their behavior?
- Why among some, the behavior change is only **temporary**?

Tracking real-life targeted interventions

- 2-year longitudinal data collected in 16 elementary and 16 middle schools (students with 7-15 years of age) with online surveys
 - Students 6 waves; parents 2 waves
- Teachers intervening in bullying cases used a mobile app (KiVappi) guiding them through the series of discussions and enabling detailed documentation of each step



Again, the three conditions:



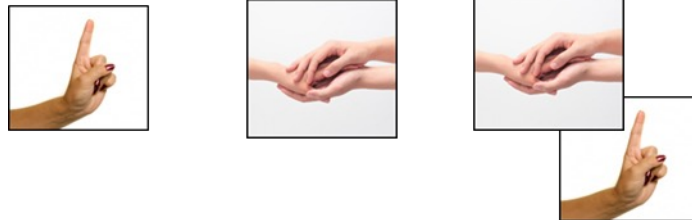
Tracking real-life targeted interventions

2020 Oct 2021 Jan May Oct 2022 Jan May
LONGITUDINAL STUDENT DATA, 6 WAVES DURING TWO SCHOOL YEARS
+ PARENT DATA, 2 WAVES

Students "natural selection"
to interventions

TARGETED INTERVENTION + FOLLOW-UP DATA

Bullying students'
perceptions of the
discussions, reported via
text-msg survey



Shortcomings of 'global retrospective reports' on targeted interventions

- Asking informants whether interventions they had implemented, witnessed, or been involved in as targets were successful in stopping bullying
- Reliance on such global retrospective reports limits our ability to accurately characterize, understand, and change behavior in real-world settings (Shiffman, Stone and Hufford, 2008)
- Memory bias; Socially desirable responding
- → We should instead investigate a **representative** sample of **specific** interventions **when they happen**





Tracking real-life targeted interventions

- **Strengths of our approach:**
- collecting data when things happen (ecological momentary assessment, EMA);
- possibility to combine rich individual-student-data, as well as parent data, with targeted intervention data
- possibility to identify control cases (both victimized students and students who bully) whose situation was not intervened in



Tracking real-life targeted interventions

- During two years, we collected data on 292 bullying cases, including **339 victimized students**, in which schools' KiVa teams intervened (in 22 cases, there was more than one victimized student)

Tracking real-life targeted interventions

Bullying had...	[victims]	[bullies]
• Stopped	69.2%	80.5%
• Decreased	20.5%	15.1%
• Stayed the same	9.2%	4.3%
• Increased	1.1%	0.0%

- the longitudinal questionnaire data: long-term effects; case controls

Tracking real-life targeted interventions

Table 1. Cross-tabulations Comparing Approaches on Victimization Outcomes ($N = 216$)

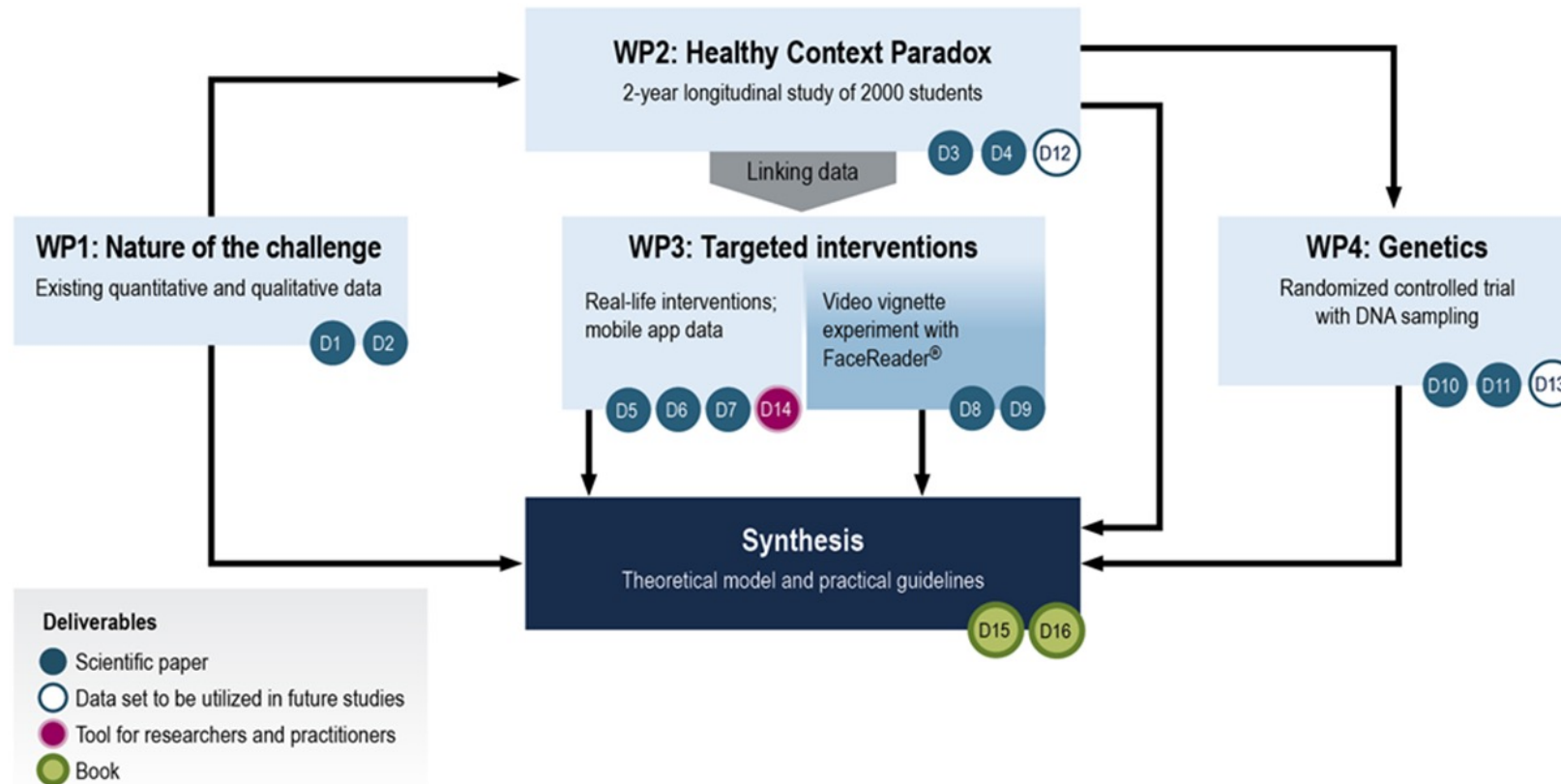
	Confronting	Non-Confronting	Combined
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Stopped	67 (75.3%)	52(57.8%)	27(75.0%)
Decreased	14(15.6%)	28(31.1%)	7 (19.4%)
Remained the same	8(8.9%)	9(10.0%)	2 (5.6%)
Increased	1(1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)

Tracking real-life targeted interventions

Table 1. Cross-tabulations Comparing Approaches on Victimization Outcomes ($N = 216$)

	Confronting	Non-Confronting	Combined
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Stopped	67 (75.3%)	52(57.8%)	27(75.0%)
Decreased	14(15.6%)	28(31.1%)	7 (19.4%)
Remained the same	8(8.9%)	9(10.0%)	2 (5.6%)
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CHALLENGE (Oct 2020–Sept 2025)



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So why should we care more about targeted interventions addressing bullying?

- Not all bullying can be prevented
- Those who remain victimized, despite prevention efforts, are especially maladjusted
- Prevention efforts bear fruit in long term
 - Those victimized need to be helped NOW
- Many targeted interventions fail to put an end to bullying, but we don't really understand why → more research needed