



High School Teacher Bullying and Student Risk Behavior

Jordan Kerere, M.Ed., Jennifer Maeng, Ph.D., & Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.
Youth Violence Project, University of Virginia



Introduction

An empirically supported relationship exists between bullying victimization and increased psychological distress and participation in risk-taking behaviors¹. Most research has concentrated on bullying by peers and neglected bullying by teachers. A previous study of middle school students found that 1,900 students were bullied by a teacher and reported significantly higher levels of distress than peers not bullied by teachers². In this statewide sample of 106,865 students from 270 high schools, we compared the prevalence of bullying by peers versus teachers using the Authoritative School Climate Survey.

Research Questions

- 1) How does the prevalence of teacher bullying compare to peer bullying in high schools?
- 2) What is the relationship between teacher bullying and student participation in risk behaviors (e.g., substance use, weapon carrying, fighting, depression, and suicidal behavior)?

Method

Participants:

- 106,865 high school boys (54%) and girls (46%)
- 52.3% White, 17% Hispanic, 13.2% Black, 17% Other race
- 32% received free/ reduced-price meals
- 270 schools (92% school participation rate)

Definitions:

- “Bullying is the repeated use of one’s strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another person on purpose. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social”
- “A teacher or other adult at school bullied a student by repeatedly punishing or criticizing a student unfairly. This goes beyond what is normal discipline in the school”

Measures:

- Reported bullying once per week or more classified as bullied (1 = yes; 0 = no) by peers, teachers, or both
- Four victim groups: 1) not bullied; 2) bullied by peers only; 3) bullied by teachers only; and 4) bullied by both peers and teachers
- Risk Behaviors:
 - Alcohol use, marijuana use, fighting, weapon carrying, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts (yes/no)
 - Depressive Experiences scale ($\alpha = .85$): 4 items (never, seldom, sometimes, often, always)

Analytic Strategy

- Logistic and linear regression models
- Covariates: gender, race/ethnicity, grade, and socioeconomic status
- Fixed effect model to account for nesting of students in schools³

Distribution of Bully Victimization Groups (N = 106,865)



■ Not bullied (N = 97,389; 91.1%) ■ Peer Only (N = 4,017; 3.8%) ■ Teacher Only (N = 3,879; 3.6%) ■ Peer and Teacher (N = 1,580; 1.5%)

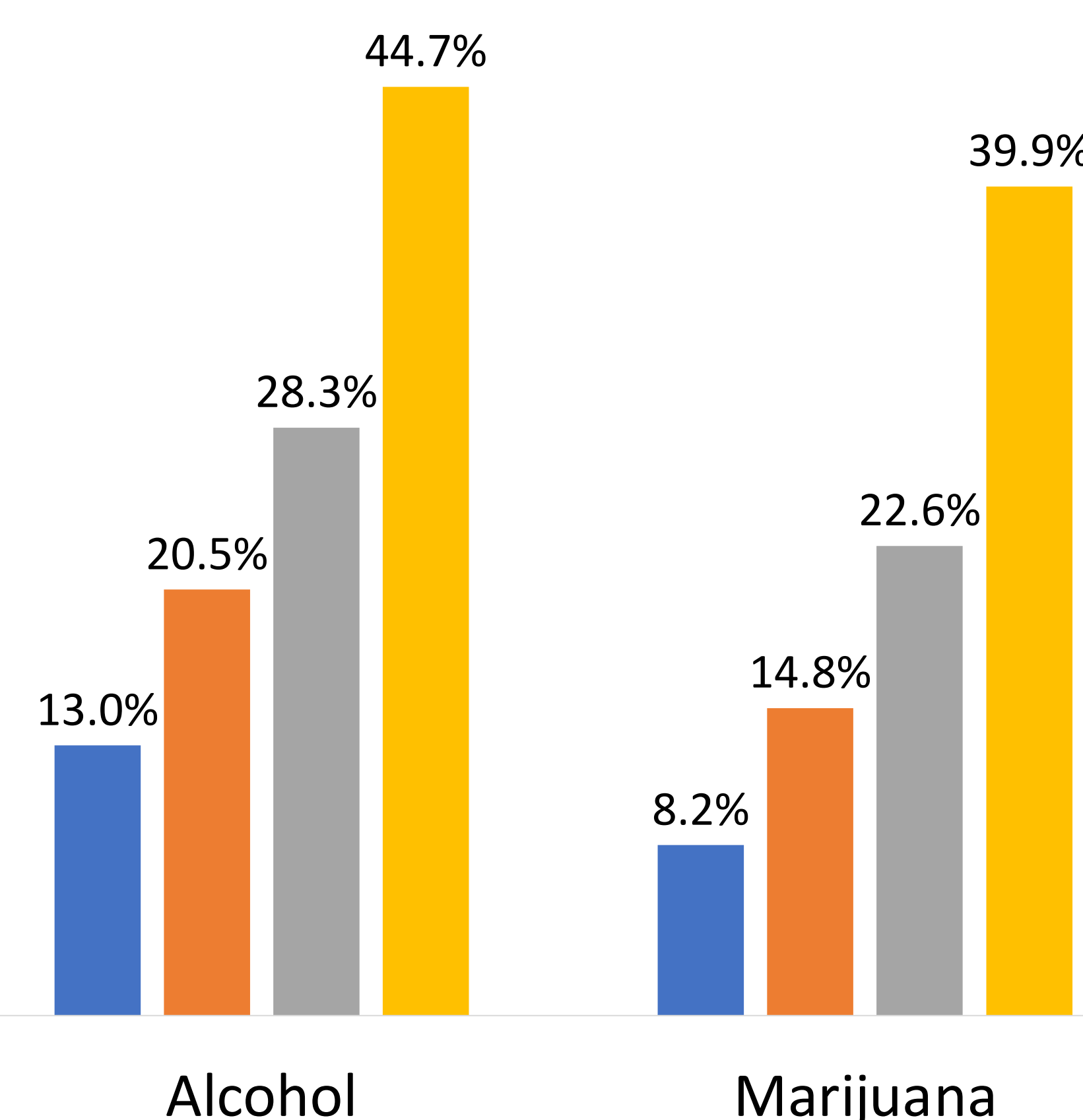
Results

Regression Model of Risk Behaviors

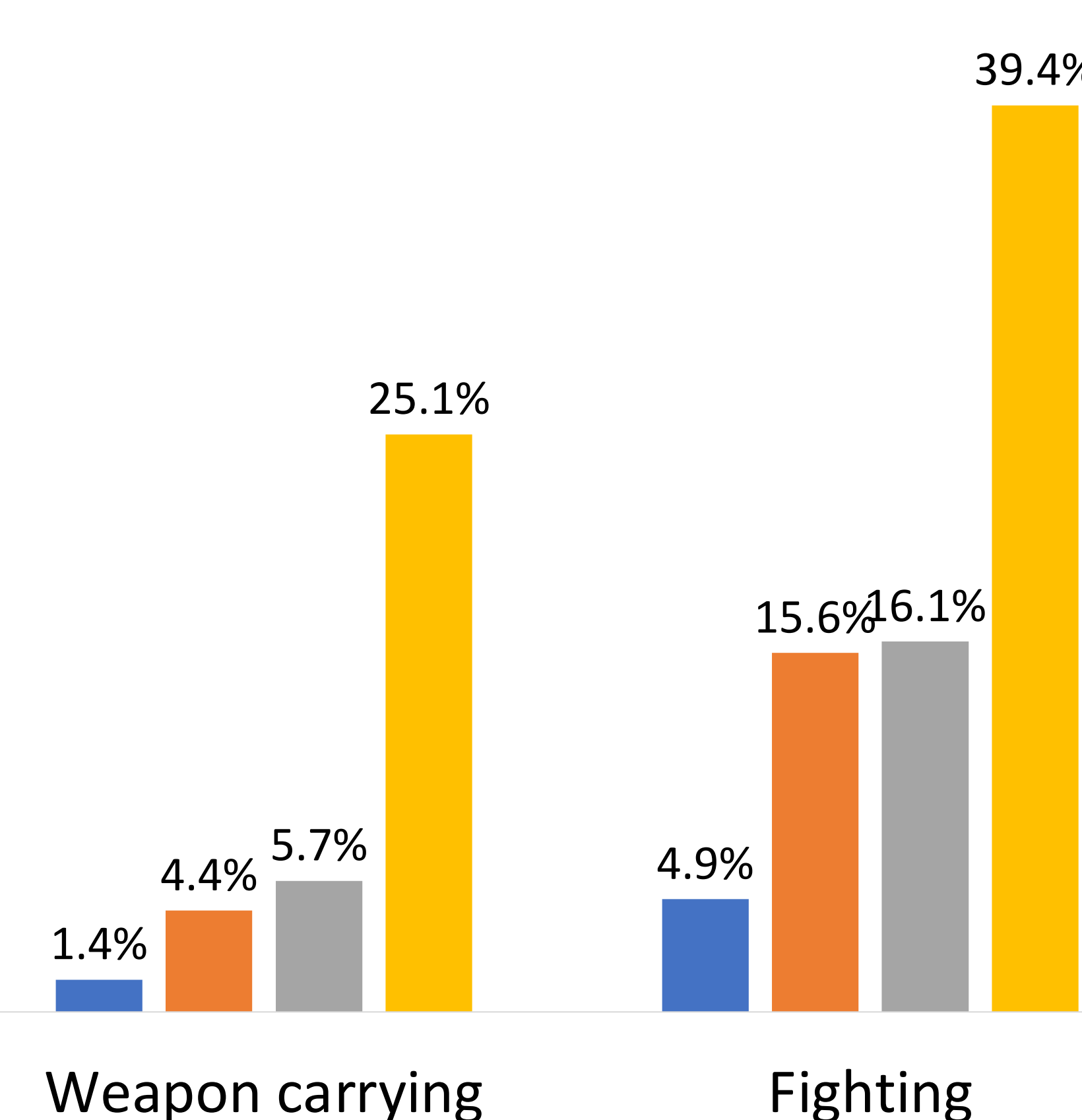
	Substance Use		Externalizing Behaviors		Internalizing Behaviors		
	Alcohol	Marijuana	Weapon Carrying	Fighting	Suicidal Ideation	Suicide Attempt	Depression Symptoms
	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR	B
Peer	1.78*	2.02*	3.18*	3.46*	4.08*	4.71*	0.78*
Teacher	2.58*	3.11*	3.91*	3.35*	2.70*	3.26*	0.62*
Both	4.10*	4.85*	13.69*	8.14*	6.07*	9.52*	0.92*

Note. Not bullied was the reference group. *p < .001. An odds ratio (OR) represents how much the odds of the outcome change for a one unit change in the predictor.

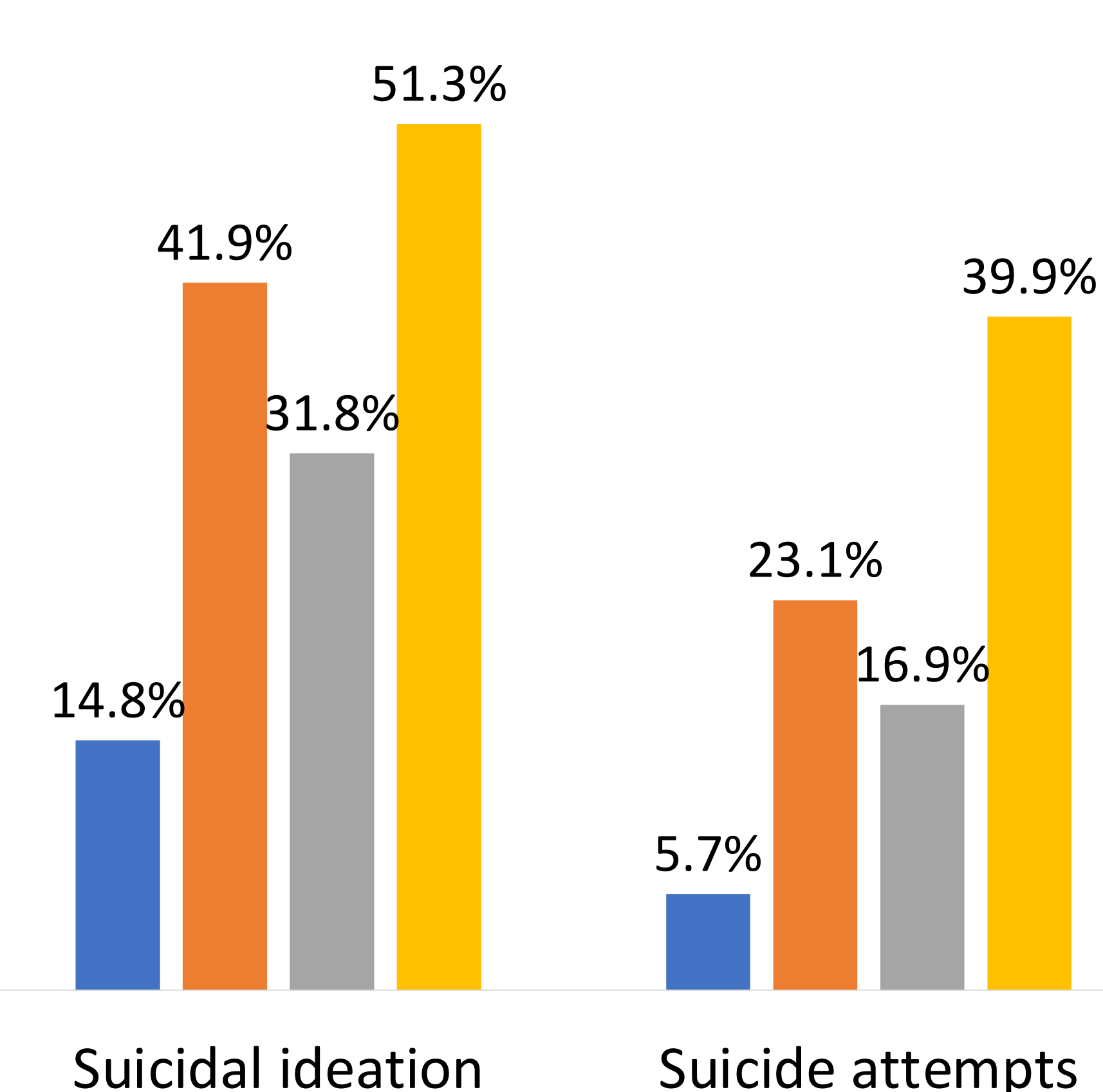
Substance Use by Victimization Group



Externalizing Behaviors by Victimization Group



Suicidal Ideation by Victimization Group



Discussion

Students bullied by both peers and teachers were at greatest risk of engaging in all risk behaviors. When students are bullied by only one perpetrator group, they can seek comfort and safety from other members of the school community, but students bullied by multiple perpetrators may be unable to do so. Victimization by multiple perpetrators may make students feel more condemned, develop a negative perception of school climate, or not feel safe or supported by anyone in the building. Further research is necessary on teacher bullying, whether teachers perceive themselves as bullies, and how this issue might be addressed through professional development or school climate initiatives. Teachers may not perceive themselves as bullying and students might not be accurate in their perceptions, so evidence-based clarification on this issue is crucial. Many U.S. public schools currently use empirically supported anti-bullying programs. Such programs, in addition to ameliorating peer bullying, may also help alleviate reports of teacher bullying. Positive school climate initiatives may also help reduce the prevalence of teacher bullying and provide other sources of support for students who feel victimized by their teachers.

References: ¹Arslan, 2021. School bullying and youth internalizing and externalizing behaviors. *Int. J of MH and Addiction*; ²Datta et al., 2017. The toxicity of bullying by teachers and other school staff. *School Psych Review*. ³Huang, F. (2016). Alternative to multilevel modeling. *J. of Exp. Ed.*

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