

SCHOOL BULLYING: BASIC FACTS, INTERVENTION, AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS

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GENERAL DEFINITION OF SCHOOL BULLYING

«A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, p. 9).

Negative action: when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another (aggressive behavior)

GENERAL DEFINITION OF SCHOOL BULLYING (continued)

Three key criteria:

- intentional harm-doing from perpetrator(s)
- some repetition
- an imbalance of actual or perceived power implied

Intentional, repeated negative (unpleasant or hurtful) behavior by one or more students directed against a student who has difficulty defending himself or herself (who feels vulnerable, more or less helpless)

Bullying is about relationships in which one individual is repeatedly abused by peers with more power

GENERAL DEFINITION OF SCHOOL BULLYING (continued)

The abuse perspective: There is a power difference in this relationship and the weaker part is more or less abused by the other individual or individuals.

The relationship perspective: Implies an activity that usually goes on over time, an activity that is unpleasant, hurtful and unwanted by the targeted individual and occurs in a context such as a classroom, a school, a sports club, a neighbourhood etc. The targeted individual typically has at least some superficial knowledge of the perpetrator(s).

UNIFORM DEFINITION of Bullying provided by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Department of Education, 2014.

Gladden, R. M., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Hamburger, M. E., & Lumpkin, C. D. (2014). *Bullying surveillance among youths: Uniform definitions for public health and recommended data elements, version 1.0*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Department of Education.

Not a new definition:

“The uniform definition of bullying presented below conceptually builds from the extensive work on bullying and is similar to the widely used definition of bullying developed by Olweus (Olweus, 1993; 1994)” (Gladden et.al., 2014, page 7).

“Bullying is any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners⁶ that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm”.

Important to use this definition because it defines the domain or construct to be explored and researched

Some researchers seek to avoid the term and concept of bullying and argue that they can do without it by just studying the behaviors they think constitute bullying such as hitting, kicking, saying negative and degrading things etc. The problem is that such research typically misses the relationship and the abuse perspectives. It is rather measuring generally aggressive behavior which is something partly different than bullying. To call such studies bullying research represents a misuse of the term and makes it more difficult to build up a coherent knowledge base which is important for understanding and effective intervention and prevention.

Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior but with special characteristics - an abusive relationship.

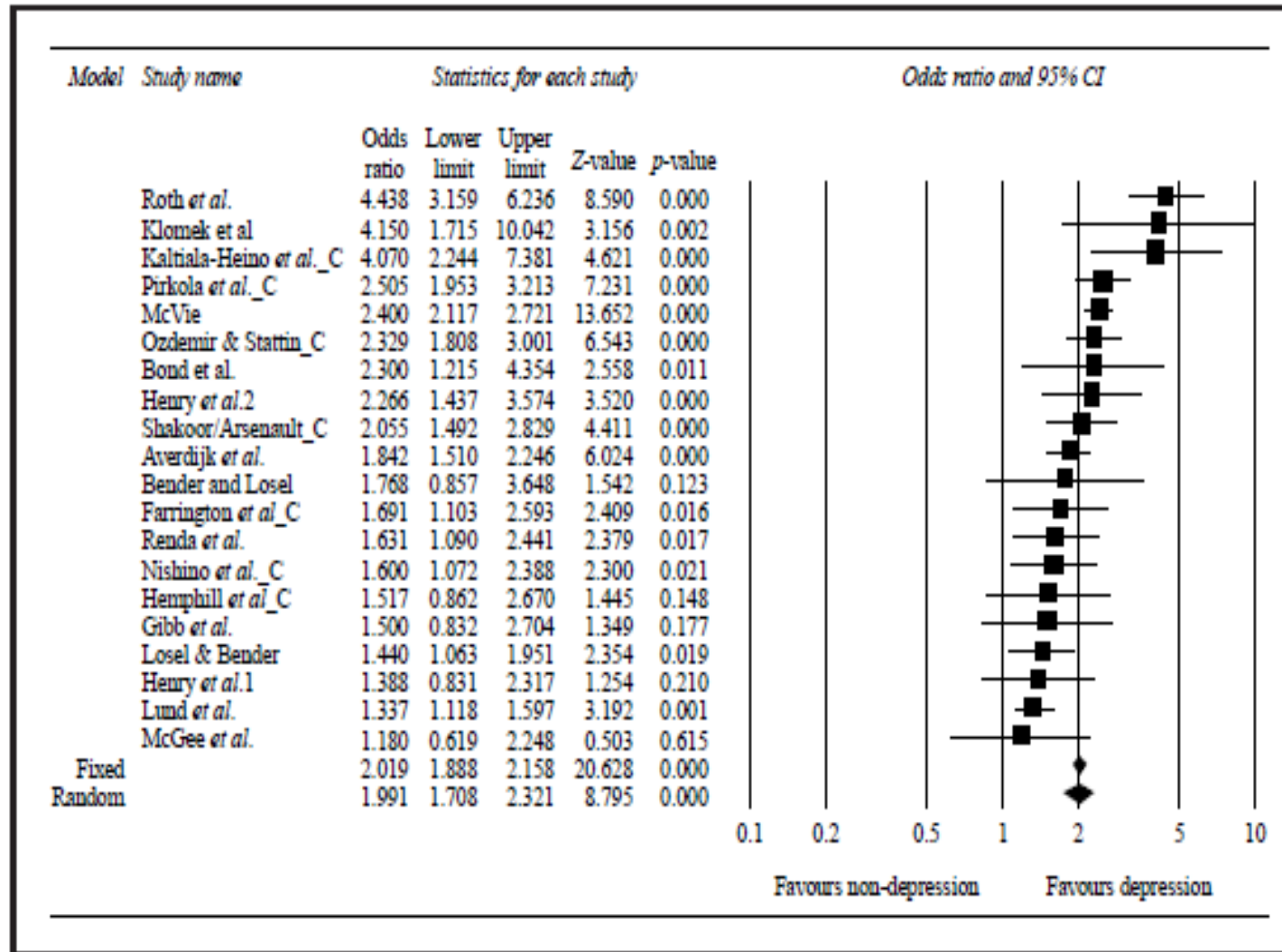
The fact that there is an abused child or youth ties bullying to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Protection from all forms of violence).

VICTIMS ONLY

USUALLY HAVE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:

- **are cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn and shy**
- **are anxious, insecure, unhappy, and have low self-esteem**
- **are depressed and engage in suicidal ideation much more often than their peers**
- **often do not have a single good friend and may relate better to adults than to peers**
- **if they are boys, they are often physically weaker than their peers**

Figure 1 Bullying victimization and later depression: unadjusted effect sizes



Average Odds Ratio (OR) Unadjusted=2.06 (CI: 1.79-2.38)

Adjusted= 1.74 (CI: 1.54-1.97)

BULLIES ONLY

USUALLY HAVE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:

- **strong needs to dominate and subdue other students and to get their own way**
- **are impulsive and easily angered**
- **show little empathy toward students who are victimised**
- **are often defiant and aggressive toward adults, including parents and teachers**
- **are often involved in other antisocial or rule-breaking activities such as vandalism, delinquency, and drug use**
- **if they are boys, they are often physically stronger than boys in general and their victims in particular**

In contrast to what is commonly believed, they do not have special problems with their self-esteem.

Ttofi et al (2011). The predictive efficiency of school bullying versus later offending: A systematic/meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental health*, 21, 80-89.

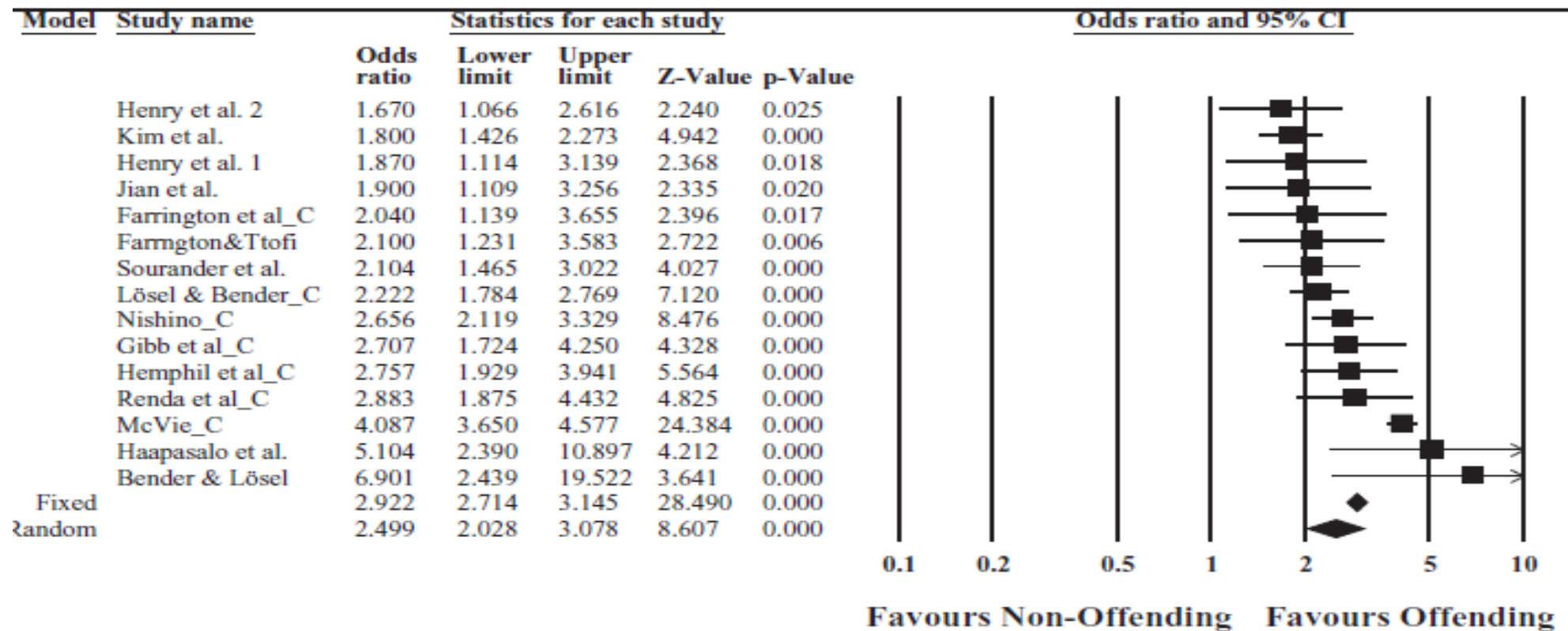


Figure 1: Bullying perpetration versus offending: unadjusted effect sizes

Average Odds Ratio (OR) Unadjusted= 2.50 (CI:2.03-3.08)

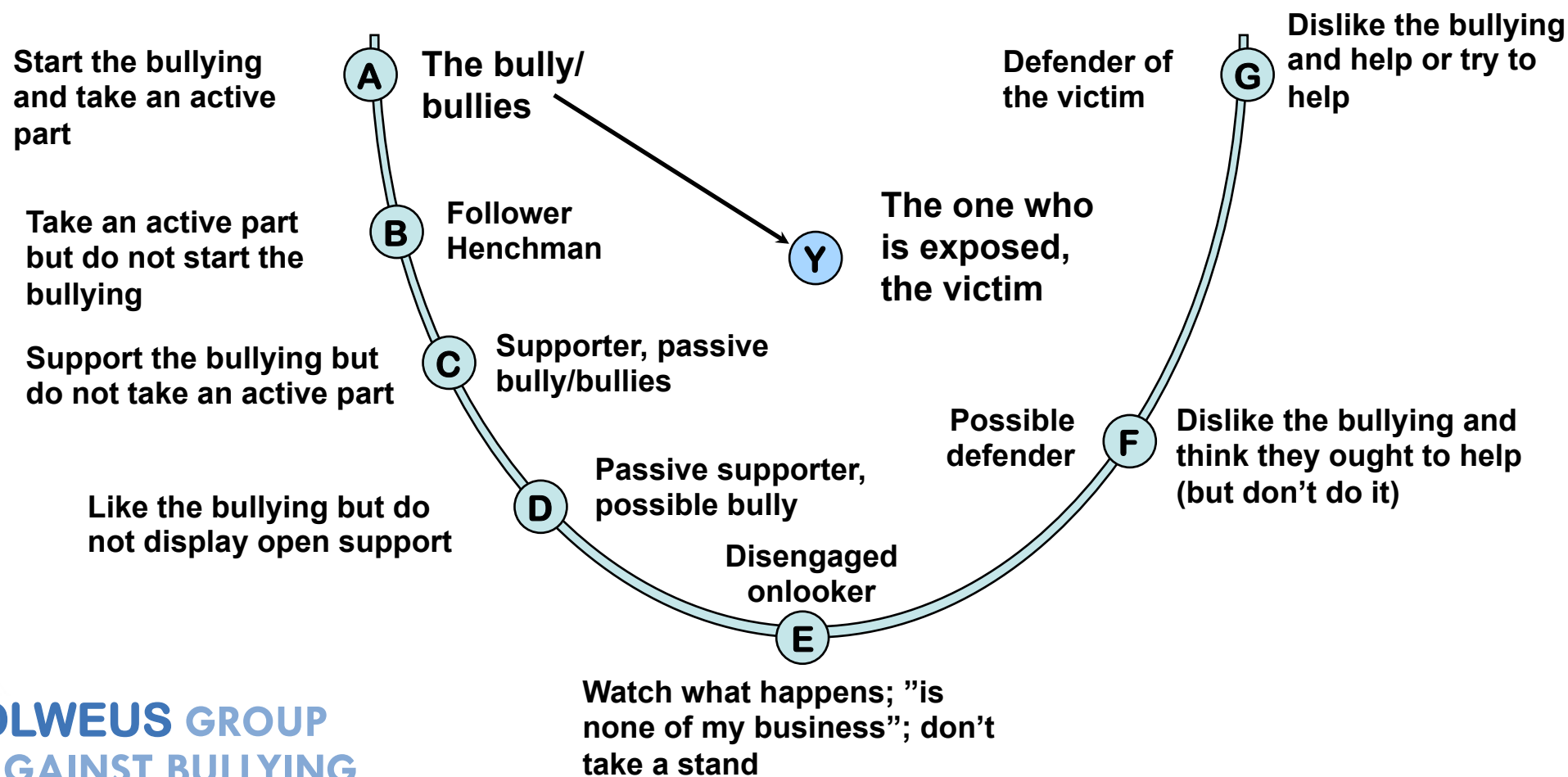
Adjusted: 1.82 (CI: 1.55-2.13)

BULLY-VICTIMS

HAVE CHARACTERISTICS OF BOTH VICTIMS ONLY AND BULLIES ONLY

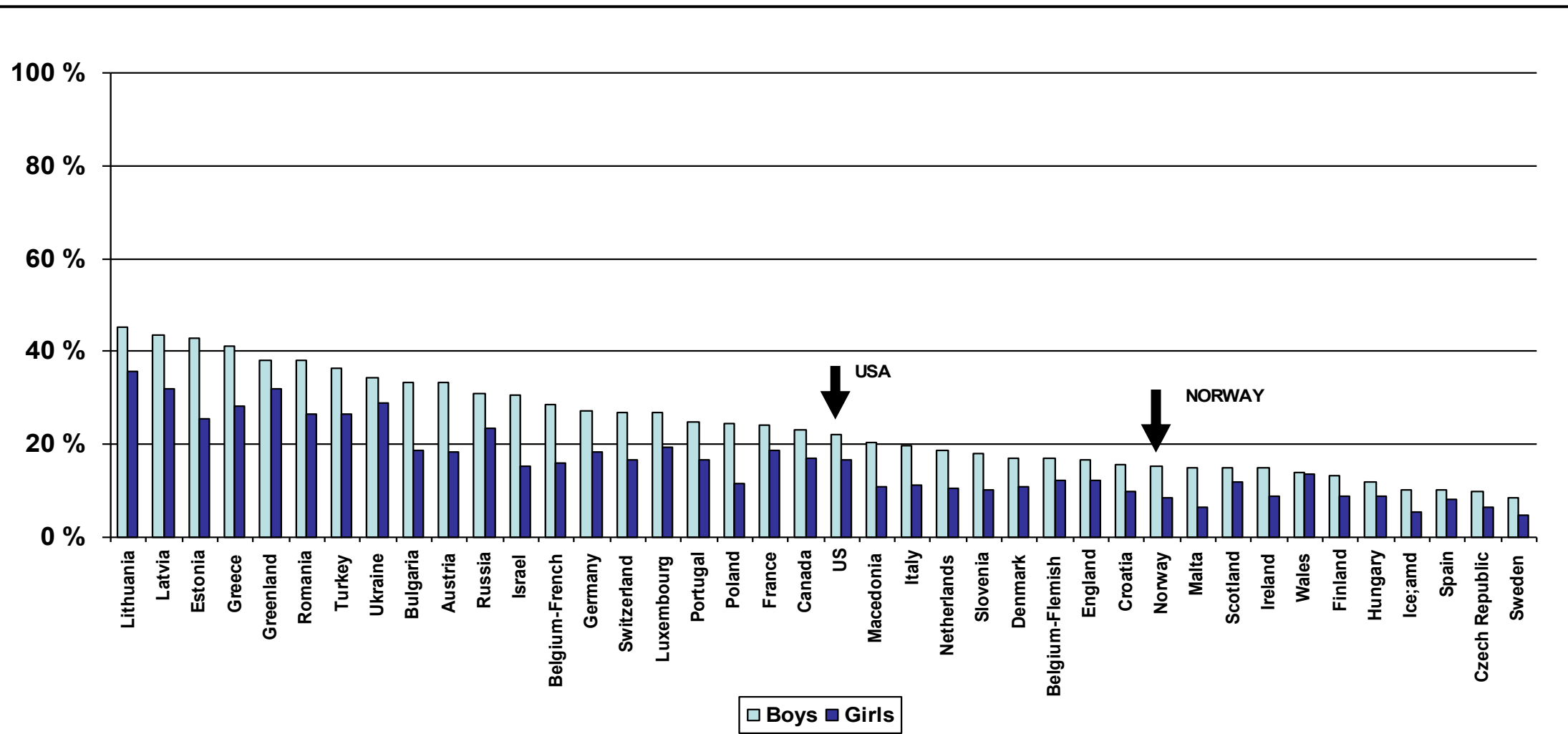
- are anxious, insecure, unhappy, depressed and have low self-esteem
- may be hot-headed and oppositional and try to aggress back but not very effectively
- are often involved in other antisocial and rulebreaking activities but to a somewhat lesser degree than bullies only
- may be hyperactive, restless, and have concentration problems (ADHD) and are perceived as generally tension-creating
- disliked by peers (and often teachers) and socially isolated

THE BULLYING CIRCLE: Students' modes of reaction/roles in an acute bullying situation



PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS BEING INVOLVED IN BULLYING AS VICTIMS ONLY, BULLIES ONLY OR BULLY-VICTIMS

40 Nation Study of 11, 13 & 15-Year-Old School Children



IMPORTANT SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS

- **SOCIAL CONTAGION**
- **WEAKENING OF NORMAL CONTROLS/INHIBITIONS AGAINST AGGRESSIVE TENDENCIES**
- **DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY**
- **GRADUAL COGNITIVE CHANGES**

FOUR MAIN FORMS OF BULLYING BEHAVIOR

- **DIRECT PHYSICAL BULLYING**
- **DIRECT VERBAL BULLYING**
- **INDIRECT/RELATIONAL BULLYING**
- **DIGITAL OR CYBER BULLYING**



THREE STATEMENTS/COMMON OPINIONS ABOUT CYBER BULLYING FOR WHICH THERE IS LITTLE OR NO RESEARCH SUPPORT

Based on four large samples of US students comprising 520 000 students surveyed in the period from 2007 to 2010.

1. Opinion: *That cyber bullying is very common, high-frequent form of bullying --*

Reality: Cyber bullying is a low-frequent form of bullying, only a third or a fourth of the level of “traditional” forms of bullying such as Verbal bullying. See Figure.

2. Opinion: *That cyber bullying has increased dramatically in recent years--*

Reality: There has been no systematic increase in cyber bullying in the period from 2007 to 2010. See Figure.

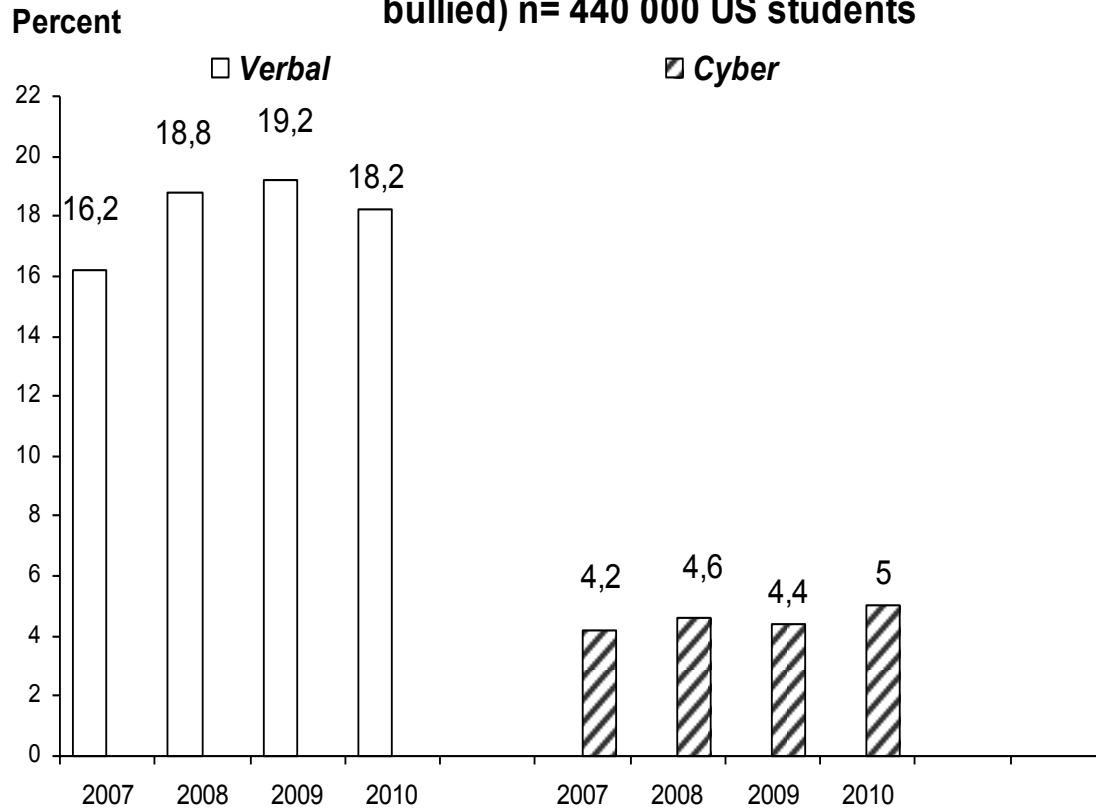
THREE STATEMENTS/COMMON OPINIONS ABOUT CYBER BULLYING FOR WHICH THERE IS LITTLE OR NO RESEARCH SUPPORT (Cont'd)

3. Opinion: *That the new media create many new victims and new bullies*

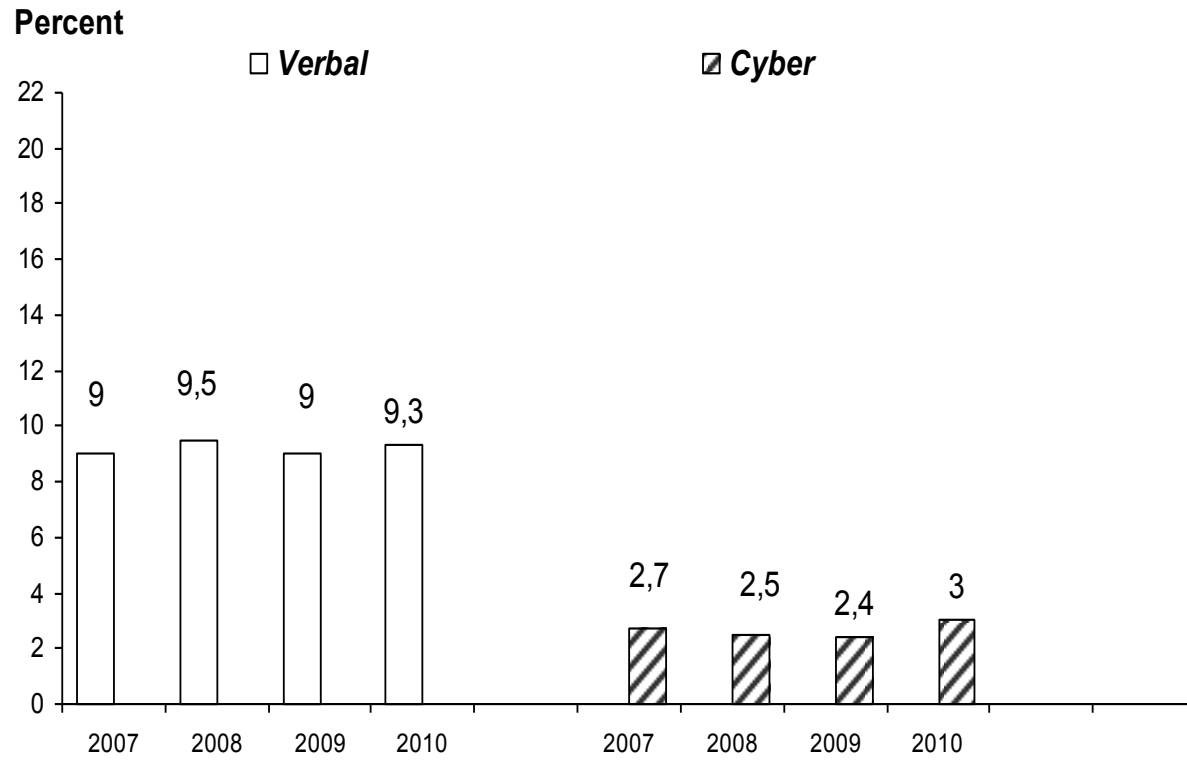
Reality: Most students – 85-90 percent – who are cyber bullied or cyber bully other students are bullied or bully others in “traditional” ways. There appears thus to be few new victims or bullies and most cases of cyber bullying appears to originate in the school setting.

Olweus (2012) *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9, 520-538.

Time series data for 2007-2010 for (direct)verbal bullying (being bullied) and cyber bullying (being bullied) n= 440 000 US students



Time series data for 2007-2010 for (direct) verbal bullying
(bullying others) and cyber bullying (bullying others)



POSSIBLE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF OVERRATING OF CYBERBULLYING?

- Unnecessary anxiety and tension
- Feelings of power-and helplessness among adults
- Most important, shift in focus of antibullying work and distribution of resources from traditional bullying to cyber bullying
- But, at the same time..... also cyber bullying must be taken seriously

THE MOST IMPORTANT MEASURE FOR A SCHOOL/COMMUNITY TO TAKE IN COUNTERACTING/PREVENTING CYBER BULLYING (OLWEUS)

Main focus on traditional bullying

Invest time and technical competence in disclosing thoroughly some cases of cyber bullying – and then communicate clearly (but anonymously) the results to the students

Goal: to increase the perceived risk of disclosure – this procedure will probably be able to reduce further the relatively low prevalence of cyber bullying

SOME TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

- Necessary to study cyber bullying in the context of traditional bullying
- If not, there are two likely problems: Bullying may be equated with a) general aggression or b) with cyber harassment which both are partly different phenomena
- All in all, my tentative conclusion is that there are a number of theoretical arguments and empirical facts that are consistent with a conceptualization of cyber bullying as a form of bullying along with direct physical, direct verbal and indirect (relational) forms.
- At the same time, a couple of possible qualifications.....

OVERVIEW OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM (i)

GENERAL PREREQUISITES

- **AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT ON THE PART OF ADULTS**

MEASURES AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

- **QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY**
- **SCHOOL CONFERENCE DAY**
- **EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION DURING RECESS AND LUNCH TIMES**
- **STAFF DISCUSSION GROUPS**
- **FORMATION OF COORDINATING GROUP**

OVERVIEW OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM (ii)

MEASURES AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL

- **CLASSROOM RULES AGAINST BULLYING**
- **CLASSROOM MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS**
- **MEETINGS WITH PARENTS OF THE CLASS**

MEASURES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- **SERIOUS TALKS WITH BULLIES AND VICTIMS**
- **SERIOUS TALKS WITH PARENTS OF INVOLVED STUDENTS**
- **DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTION PLANS**

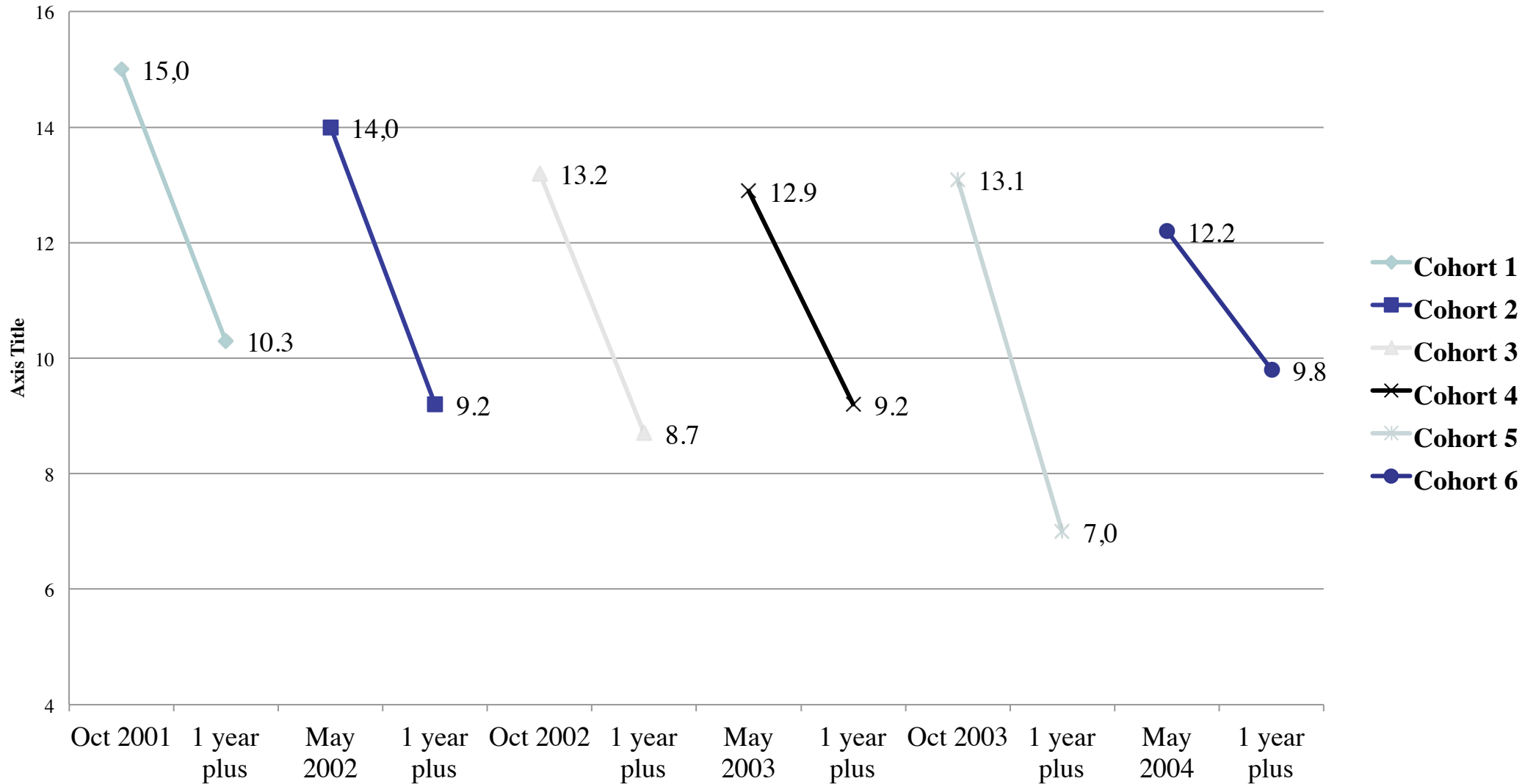
OBPP: “RESTRUCTURING OF THE EXISTING SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT”- CHANGING/REDUCING THE OPPORTUNITY AND REWARD STRUCTURES FOR BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Based on a limited set of principles. Important to create a social environment characterised by:

- warmth and positive involvement from adults**
- firm limits on unacceptable behavior**
- consistent application of non-punitive, non-physical sanctions on rule violations**
- adults act as authorities and positive role models**

Measures based on these principles applied at school, class, and individual levels, and ideally, at home.

PERCENTAGE STUDENTS BEING BULLIED BEFORE (UPPER FIGURES) AND 8 MONTHS AFTER (LOWER FIGURES) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PROGRAM (OBPP). SIX COHORTS OF SCHOOLS (n> 300), GRADES 4-7 WITH MODAL AGES 10-13



RECENT META-ANALYSIS OF ALL ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS IN THE WORLD

Ttofi, M.M., Farrington, D.P., & Baldry, A.C. (2008). Effectiveness of programmes to reduce school bullying: A systematic review. Report to the Swedish National Council on Crime prevention. Available from www.bra.se/publications.

Ttofi, M.M., & Farrington, D.P. What works in preventing bullying: effective elements of anti-bullying programmes. Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research, 1, 13-24.

- 59 reports/studies
- 30 programs (actually 24)
- one control and one intervention condition
- minimum 200 subjects

Main results:

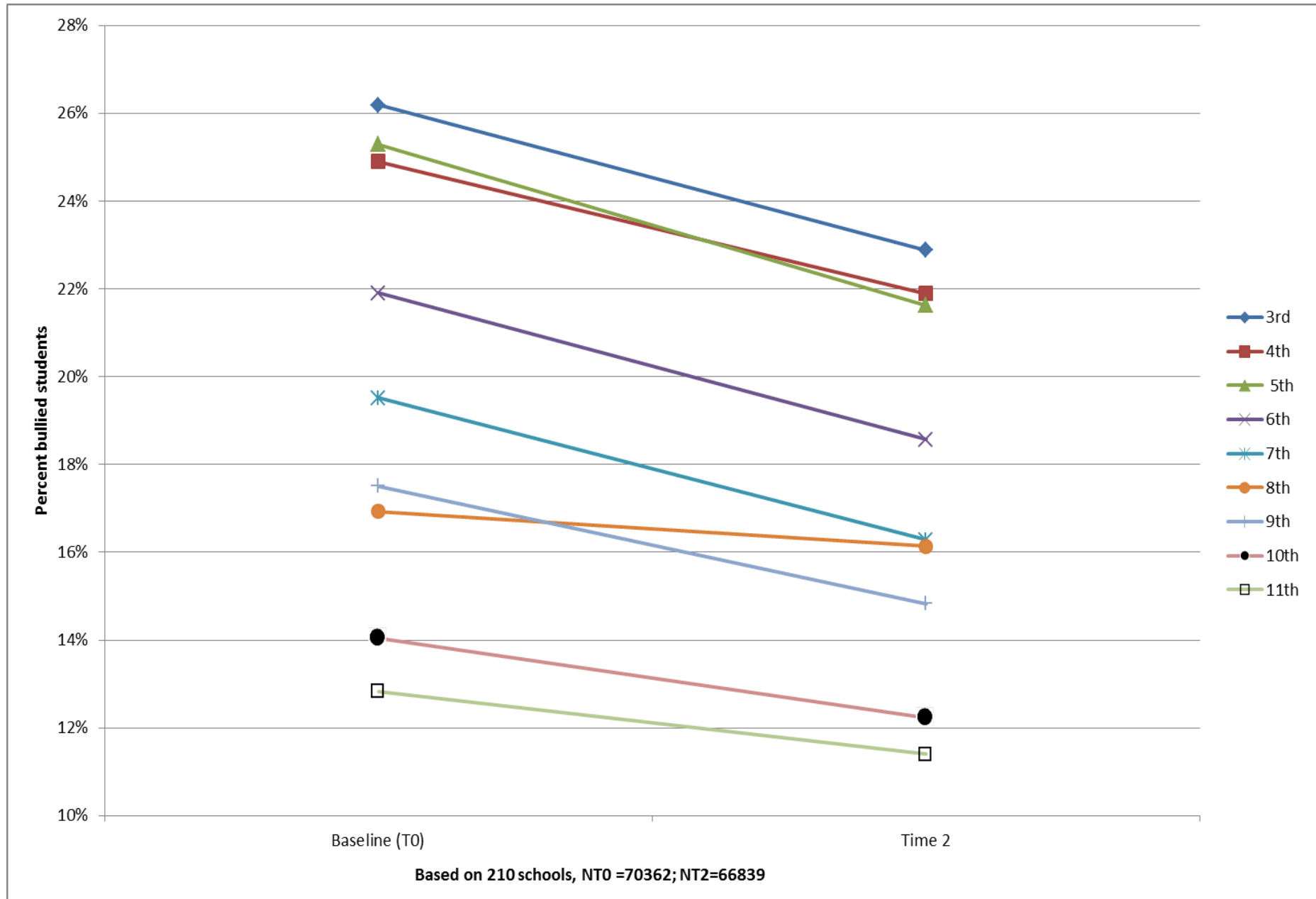
- positive overall effect but relatively small (OR 1.30-1.40) and very considerable heterogeneity (not a meaningful population of programs)
- 6-7 programs “clearly effective” according to T.& F.

Comment: Too general conclusion, “apples-and-oranges”. All evaluations of all programs except one were based on “efficacy” or “first-time, demonstration” projects; little evidence from “effectiveness” or large-scale dissemination projects; importance of replications - reproducibility

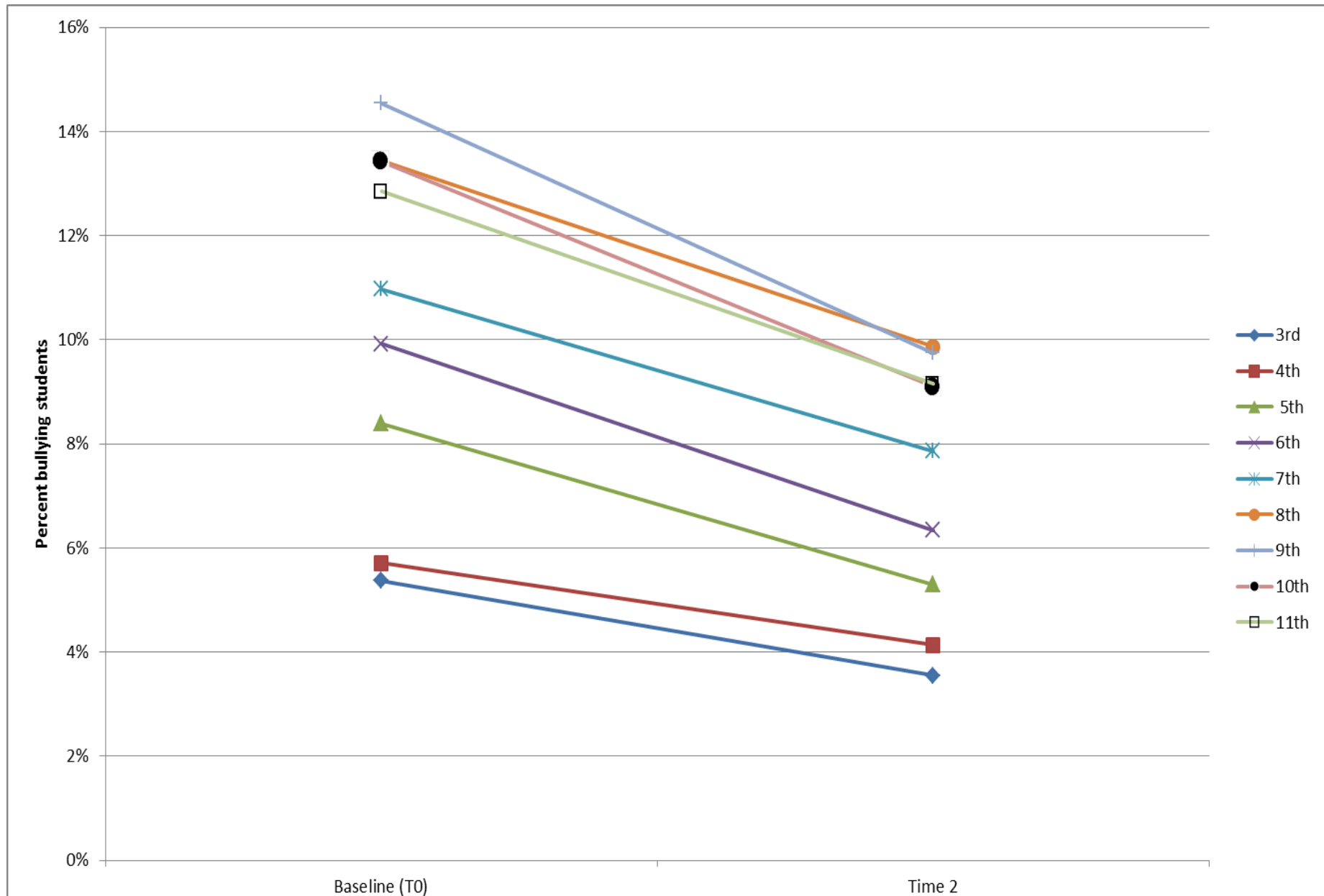
A NEW LARGE-SCALE STUDY OF THE OBPP IN THE U.S.

- Background: General concerns about the relative lack of success of antibullying programs and interventions in the U.S.
- New evaluation study of the OBPP in a total sample of 210 schools with more than 70 000 students and in sub-sample of 95 schools with more than 31 000 students (49 counties in a state in the northeastern U.S.)
- Schools in total sample followed over two years and in sub-sample over three years

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS BEING BULLIED BY GRADE. GLOBAL QUESTION, BEFORE AND AFTER OBPP.

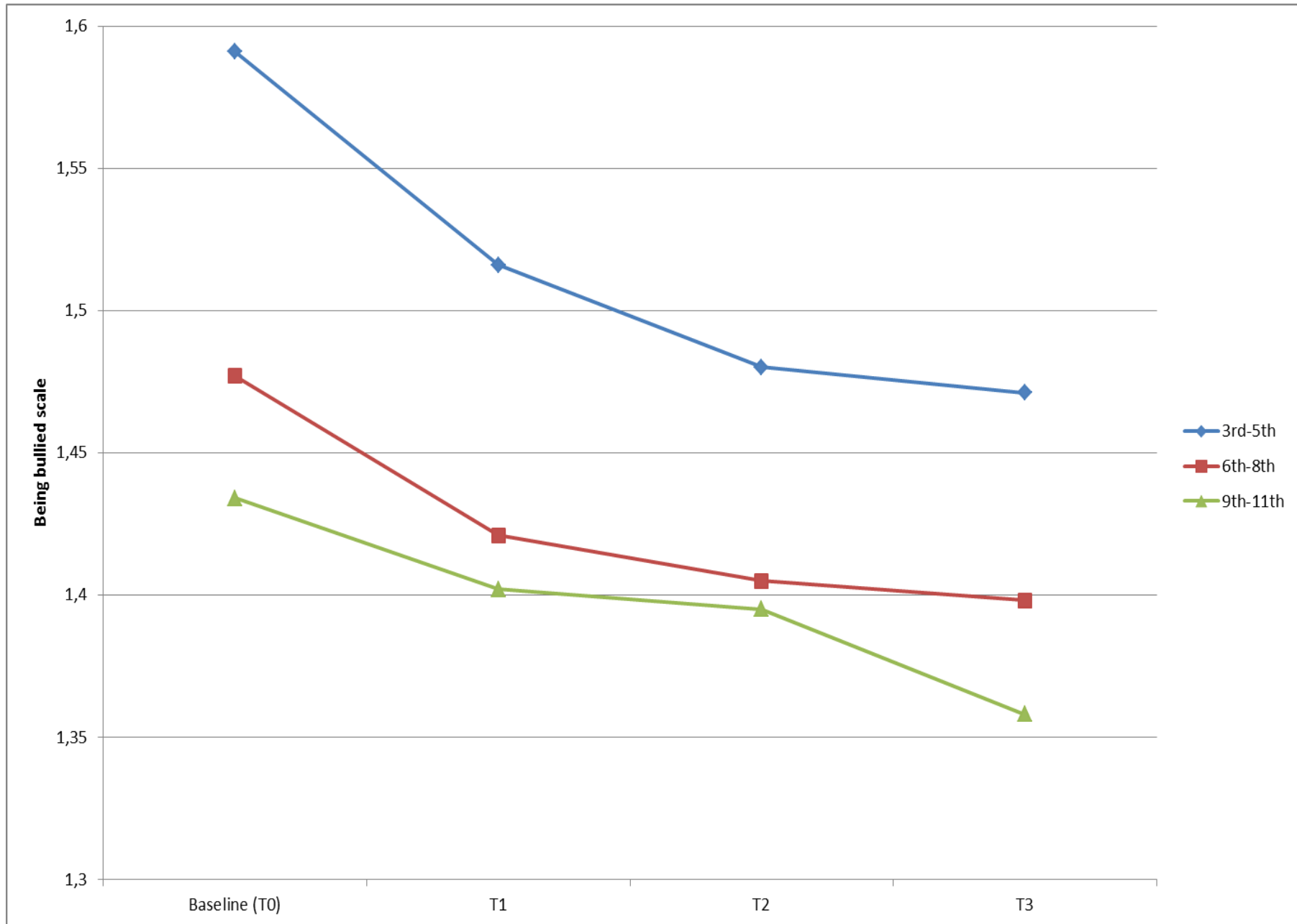


PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS BULLYING OTHER STUDENTS BY GRADE. GLOBAL QUESTION, BEFORE AND AFTER OBPP.

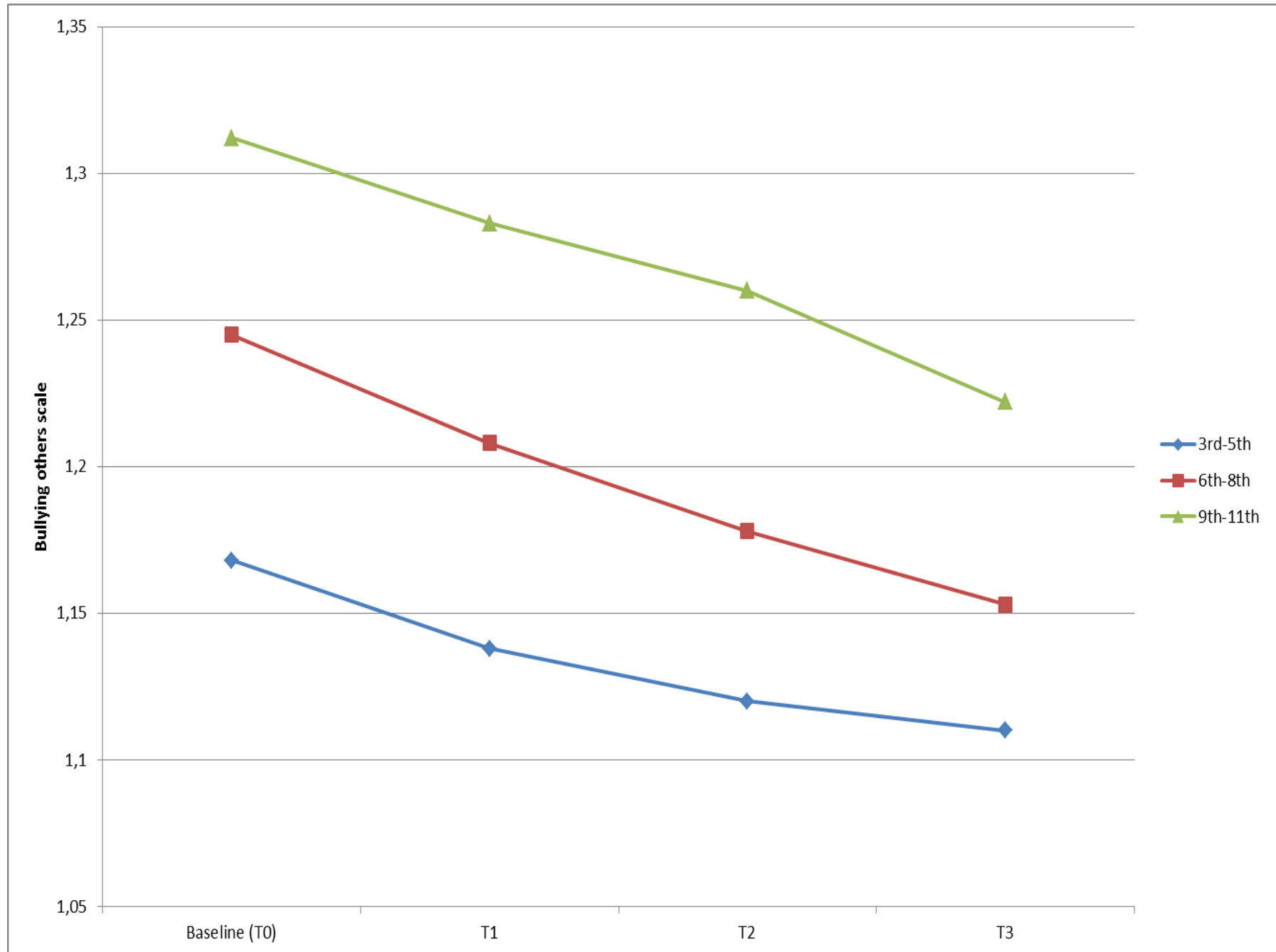


Based on 210 schools, NT0 =69933; NT2=66330

CHANGE IN BEING BULLIED OVER THREE YEARS BY GRADE GROUPINGS. SCALE SCORES.



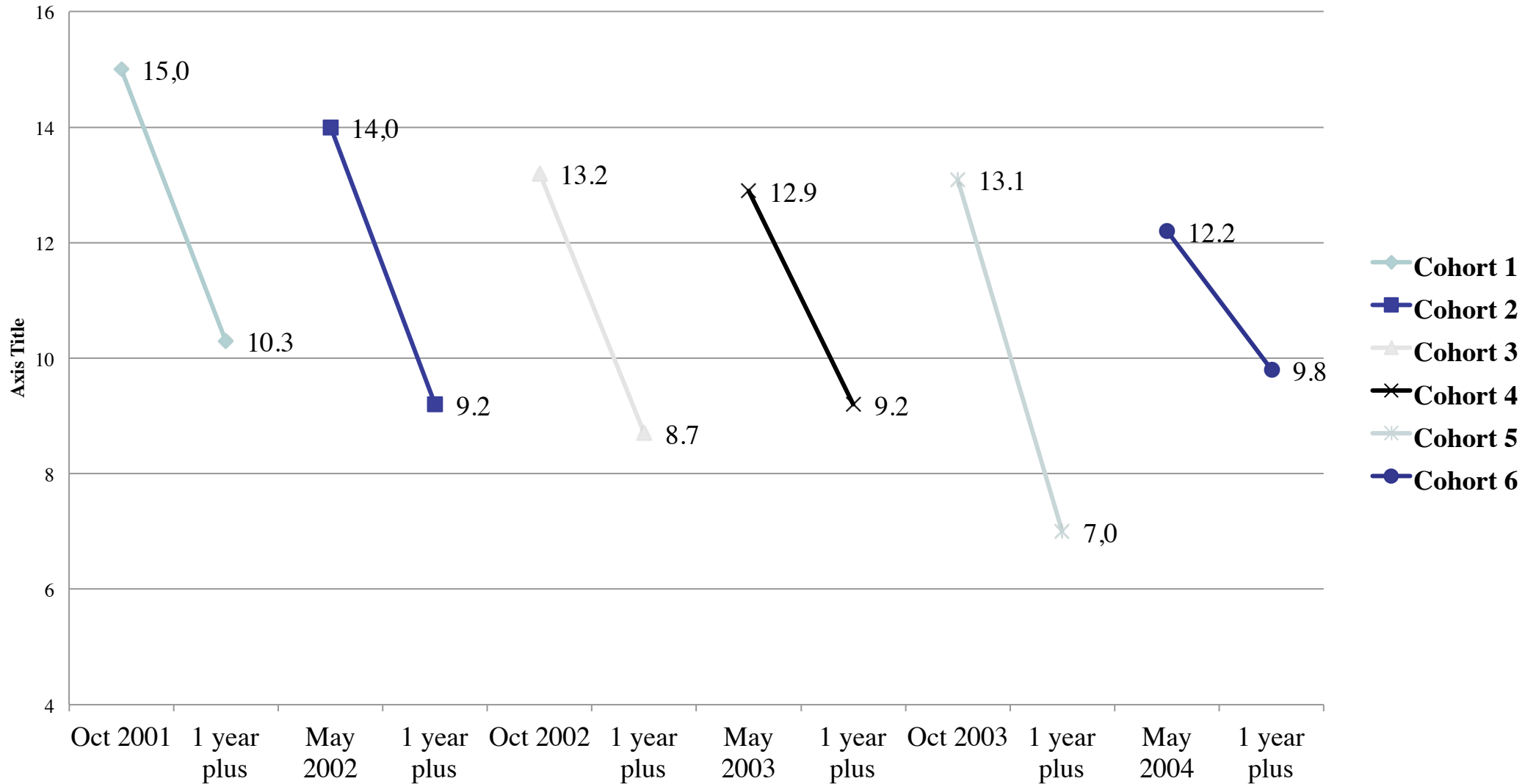
CHANGE IN BULLYING OTHER STUDENTS OVER THREE YEARS BY GRADE GROUPINGS. SCALE SCORES.



Selected additional effects:

- increased empathy with potential victims
- reduced willingness to join in bullying
- perceptions that peers, teachers and in particular, their own main teachers, had increased their efforts to counteract bullying
- program effects were generally somewhat larger the longer the program had been in place
- ***strong support for the overall effectiveness of the OBPP in U.S schools***

PERCENTAGE STUDENTS BEING BULLIED BEFORE (UPPER FIGURES) AND 8 MONTHS AFTER (LOWER FIGURES) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PROGRAM (OBPP). SIX COHORTS OF SCHOOLS (n> 300), GRADES 4-7 WITH MODAL AGES 10-13

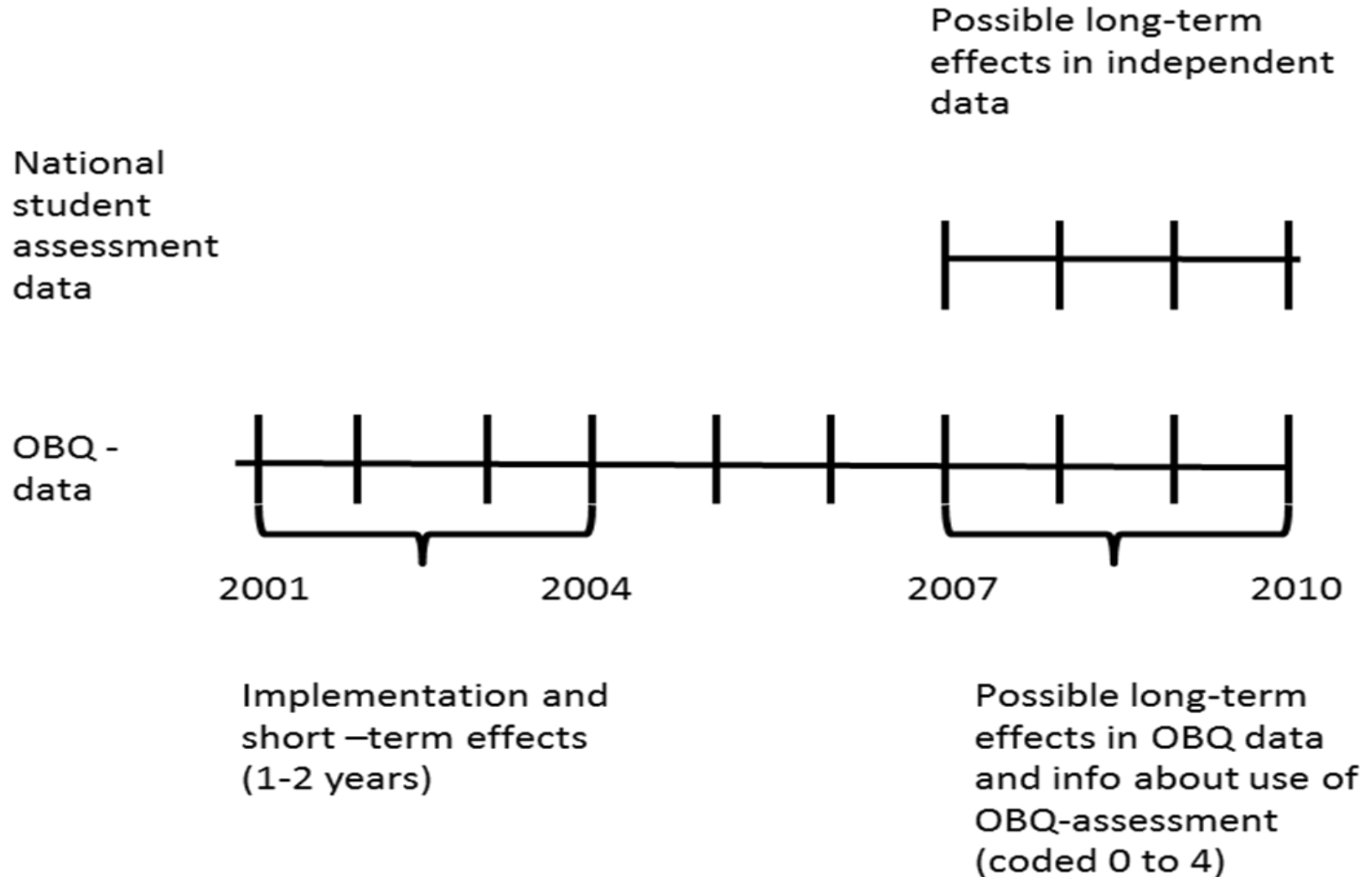


THE PRESENT STUDY

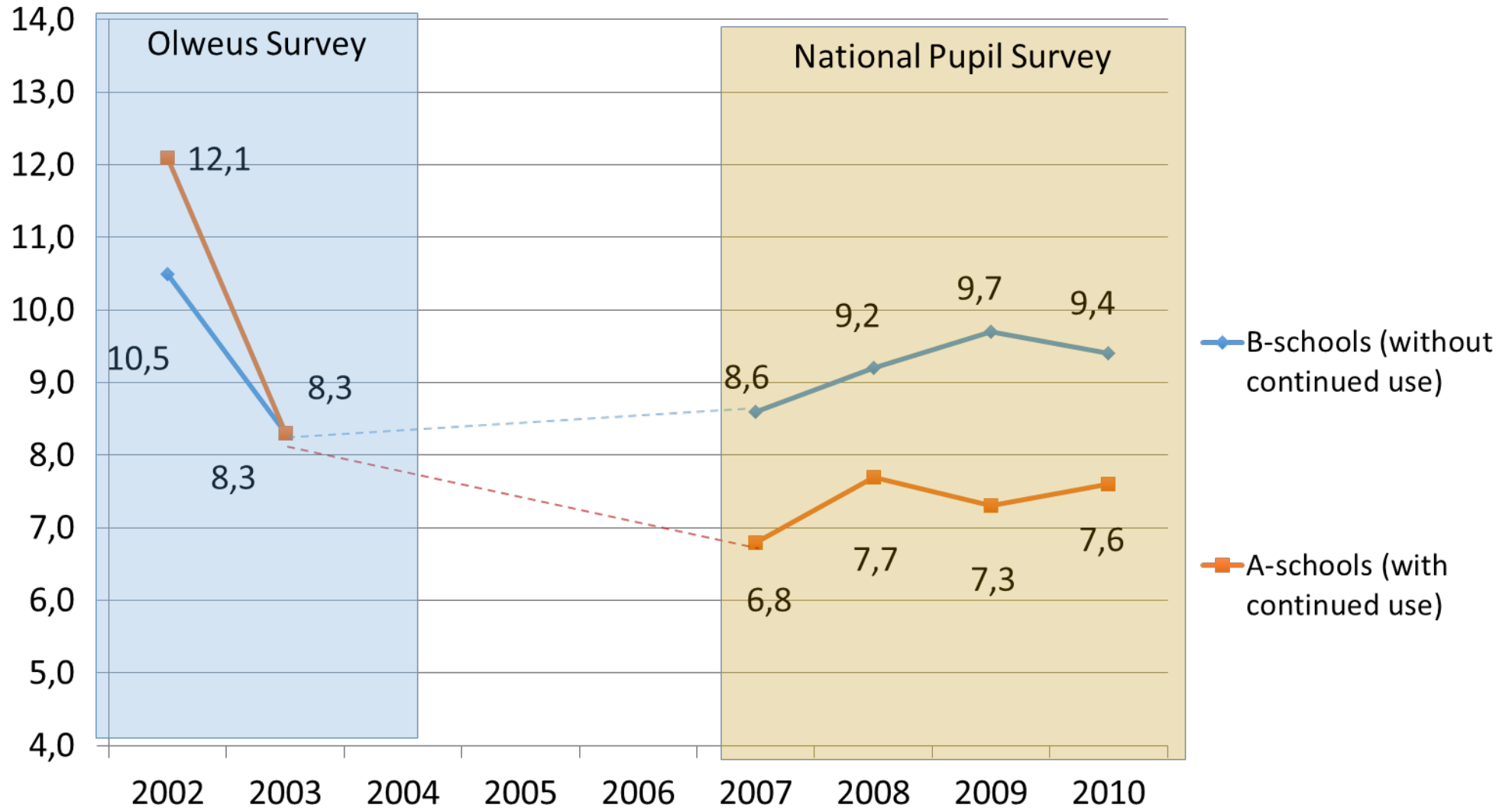
The present study compares the long-term development with regard to bullying (being bullied) for two main groups of schools: A -schools and B- schools.

- **A-schools** introduced the OBPP at some time in the period 2001-2005. Thereafter, mainly on their own initiative, they conducted three or four Olweus surveys in the follow-up period from 2007 to 2010. These 66 schools are called "A-schools with continued use" in this presentation. The number of students per year (averaged over four years) is 5 179.
- **B-schools** also introduced the program at some time in the period 2001-2005, but none of them took the Olweus survey in the follow-up period. These 95 schools are called "B-schools without continued use". The average number of students per year is 6 094.

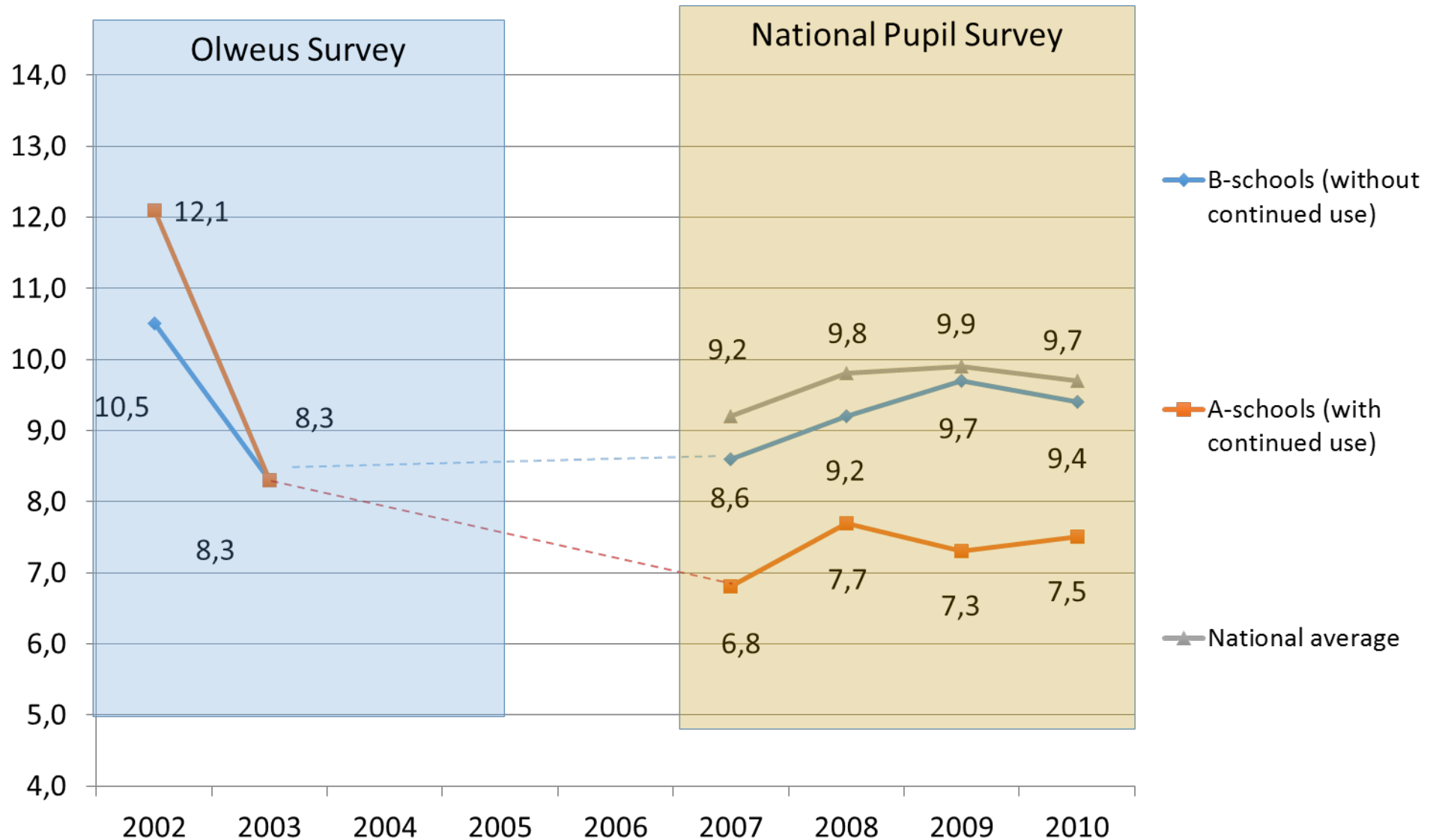
Overview of Research Design



BEING BULLIED: LONGTERM DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOLS THAT STARTED WITH OBPP IN 2002/2005 (HERE COMBINED) AND ALSO USED THE PROGRAM IN THE FOLLOW-UP PERIOD (2007-2010; 66 A-SCHOOLS WITH CONTINUED USE) COMPARED WITH OLIGINALLY VERY SIMILAR SCHOOLS THAT DID NOT CONTINUE USE OF THE PROGRAM IN THE SAME PERIOD (95 B-SCHOOLS WITHOUT CONTINUED USE)



BEING BULLIED: LONGTERM DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOLS THAT STARTED WITH OBPP IN 2002/2005(HERE COMBINED) AND CONTINUED TO USE/DID NOT CONTINUE TO USE THE PROGRAM IN THE FOLLOW-UP PERIOD (2007-2010) COMPARED TO THE NATIONAL AVERAGE



ARE THERE ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS?

- Did the Olweus schools have unusually low levels of being bullied in general (compared to an estimated national average) to start with?
- Did the A-schools have lower levels of being bullied than the B-schools already from the beginning?
- Did the A-schools have a more marked success than the B-schools with regard to original implementation of the program?
- Can the success of the A-schools be a consequence of possible use of other antibullying programs in addition to the OBPP?
- Can the success of the A-schools be an effect of repeated «testing» (more frequent student participation in surveys about bullying)?

SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Schools that continue to use the Olweus Survey and the OBPP, at least to some extent (A-schools with continued use), have a much better development with regard to being bullied 4 to 6 (up to 8) years after implementation than initially equally successful schools that discontinue taking the survey and, presumably, have not at all or to a clearly lesser extent continued to follow the program (B-schools without continued use)
- The levels of being bullied for students in A-schools are almost 25 percent lower than for students in B-schools. The odds of being bullied for pupils in schools without continued use are about 30 per cent higher than for pupils in schools with continued use (OR= 1.31).
- Based on the starting values in 2001-2005, pupils in Group A schools with continued use have an average absolute reduction in the follow-up period of five percentage points (12.5-7.1 per cent) and a relative reduction of 41 per cent.

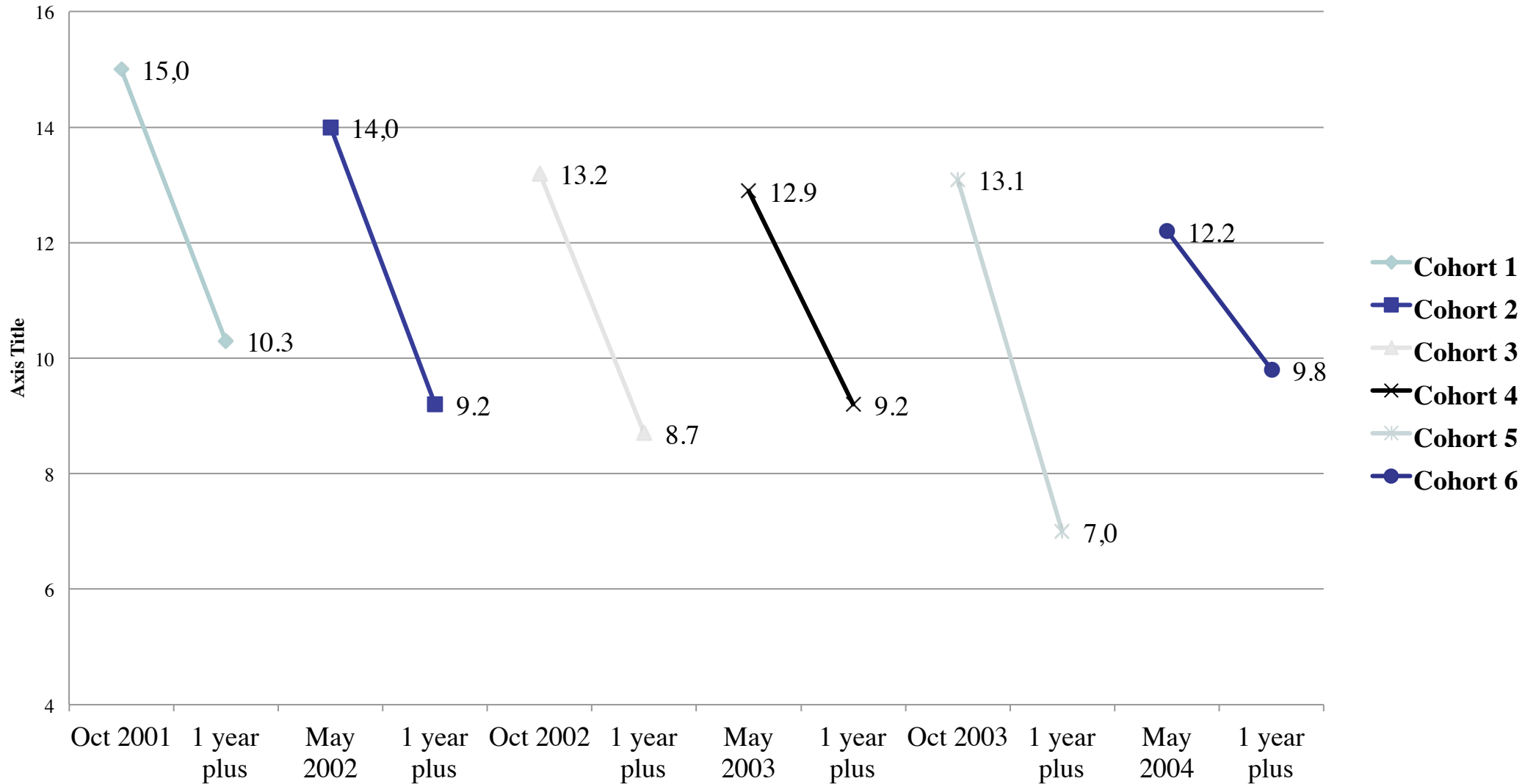


SOME CONCLUSIONS (CONT'D)

- At follow-up, B-schools without continued use have almost returned to their initial, higher levels of being bullied and are then relatively close to the national average
- Compared with the national average for elementary schools in the follow-up period, the levels of being bullied in A-schools are 30 percent lower. The odds of being bullied are almost 40 per cent higher (OR=1.39) for students in an elementary school that is not an Olweus school compared with students in an Olweus school (A –school) with continued use.
- The lower levels of being bullied in A-schools have been maintained over the whole four-year follow-up period, strongly suggesting that these schools have learned something important and will therefore offer new cohorts of students a more bullying-free school environment – a key long term school level effect



PERCENTAGE STUDENTS BEING BULLIED BEFORE (UPPER FIGURES) AND 8 MONTHS AFTER (LOWER FIGURES) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PROGRAM (OBPP). SIX COHORTS OF SCHOOLS (n> 300), GRADES 4-7 WITH MODAL AGES 10-13



SOME CONCLUSIONS (CONT'D)

- One take-home message: In addition to getting considerable short-term effects of the OBPP, schools can expect important long-term effects if they continue to use the program (presumably, if used with some regularity and fidelity).



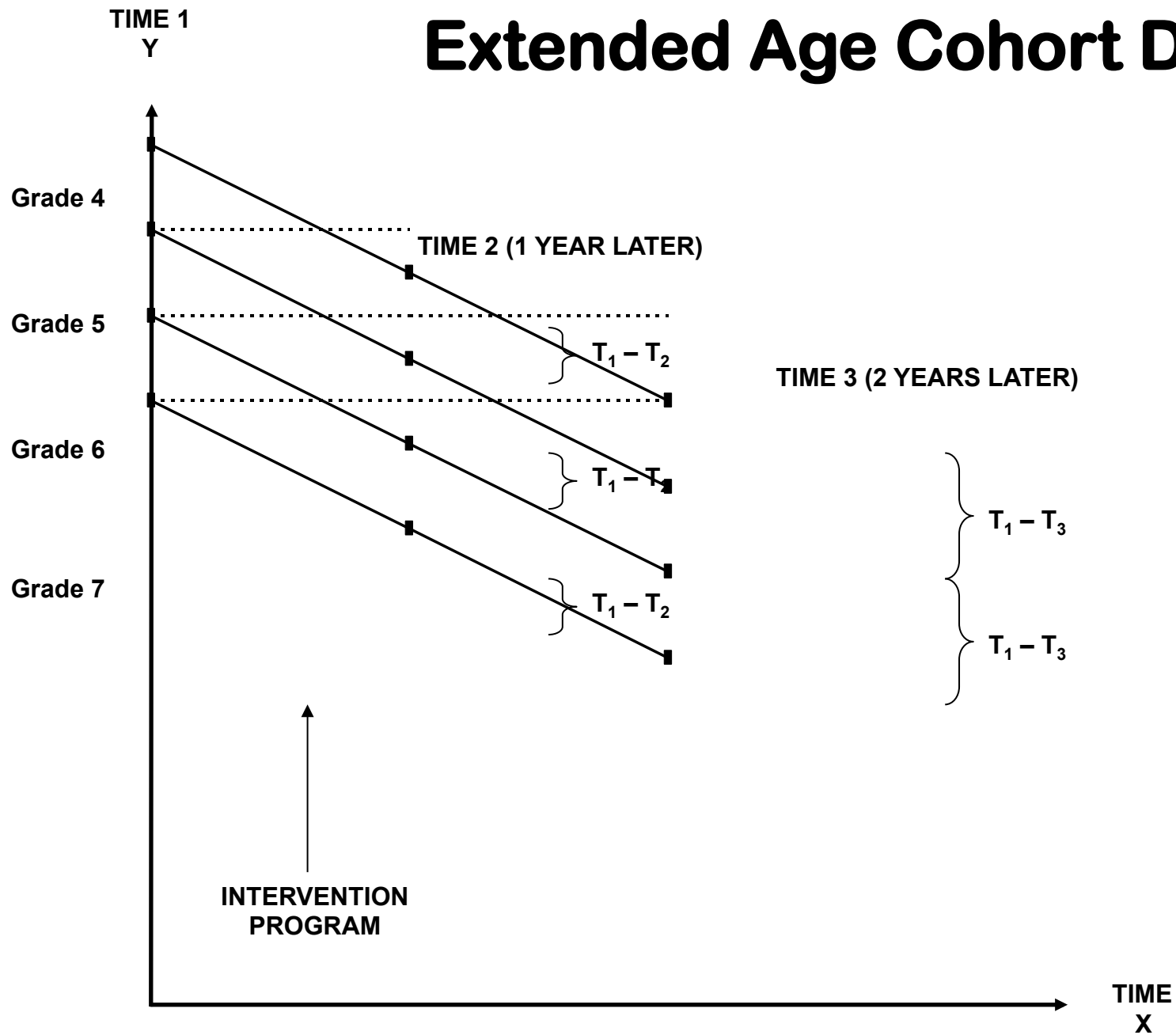
USEFUL GENERAL ANTIBULLYING MEASURES

Five key components from the OBPP (a whole-school, universal approach)

- Being clear about definition of bullying and using good, standardized measurement (survey) of the key bully/victim variables + user-friendly report
- Establish coordinating committee with clear responsibility for implementation and management of the antibullying work (some special training of selected participants in person/online)
- Provide effective adult supervision of places where bullying occurs (playground, hallways, lunch room, classroom, school bus etc)
- Establish and enforce good school/classroom rules about bullying and hold regular teacher-led classroom meetings with students about rules and related issues
- Learn appropriate ways of handling and following up individual cases (individual interventions)

- For more information about the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), as used in the USA: see www.hazelden.org/olweus

Extended Age Cohort Design





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Research on Bullying PsycINFO Database Citations

