

Victimization Experiences among Transgender and Gender Expansive Adolescents: An Examination of Prevalence, Impact, and Protective Factors

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About Me

Associate Professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work

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- My research aims to prevent violence by promoting gender, racial, and social equity, and supporting adolescent development within their schools, families, and communities. I am passionate about teaching statistics and how social workers can utilize statistics to inform practice and policy.
- Principal Investigator: Violence Prevention Plan for the State of Illinois (2020-2029) <https://vpp.icjia.cloud/>



Overview

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth, plus youth who identify with other sexual or gender minority identities (LGBTQ+), are at a disproportionate risk for experiencing violence and mental health concerns.

Less research has focused on **transgender and gender expansive** adolescents.

This presentation will highlight findings from four research studies that aimed to address this gap in the literature.



Objectives

- 1) Learn about the **prevalence and impact** of victimization experiences among transgender and gender expansive adolescents.
- 2) Examine the **protective role that school climate can play** among gender minority adolescents who experience bullying.
- 3) Consider the ways in which this research can be integrated into **prevention science**, including violence prevention programs and policies.
- 4) Reflect on the ways in which **schools can be more inclusive** of gender diverse students, promoting safe, caring, and protective contexts for transgender and gender expansive youth across middle and high school.

Victimization as a Public Health Concern



In the past 12 months:

About 1 in 3 students had been **bullied** at school (29.5%)



About 1 in 5 students had experienced **electronic bullying** (19.2%)



Among students who are dating, 14.3% experienced **dating violence**.

Youth who experienced victimization are at a significantly higher risk for depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and substance misuse.

Victimization among LGBTQ+ Youth

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth, plus youth who identify with other sexual or gender minority identities (LGBTQ+) report **higher levels of bullying, discrimination, and other forms of victimization** compared to non-LGBTQ+ youth

Adverse health, psychological, social, and educational outcomes due to stigma, stress, and discrimination associated with victimization & LGBTQ+ based victimization (Minority Stress Model)

Undermines sense of safety

Key Terminology

Sexual identity: sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction towards other individuals

- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, etc.

Gender identity: an individuals' psychological, internal sense of gender; may or may not express their gender identity through physical appearance and behaviors

- **Cisgender:** individuals whose gender identity is congruent with the gender typically associated with the sex assigned at birth
- **Transgender:** individuals whose gender identity or expression is not congruent with traits culturally associated with the sex assigned at birth
- **Gender expansive:** individuals who do not identify as male, female, or transgender; individuals whose gender identity or expression is beyond the purported male-female gender binary, or those who do not identify with one specific gender (“Gender non-binary” “gender non-conforming” or “genderqueer”)

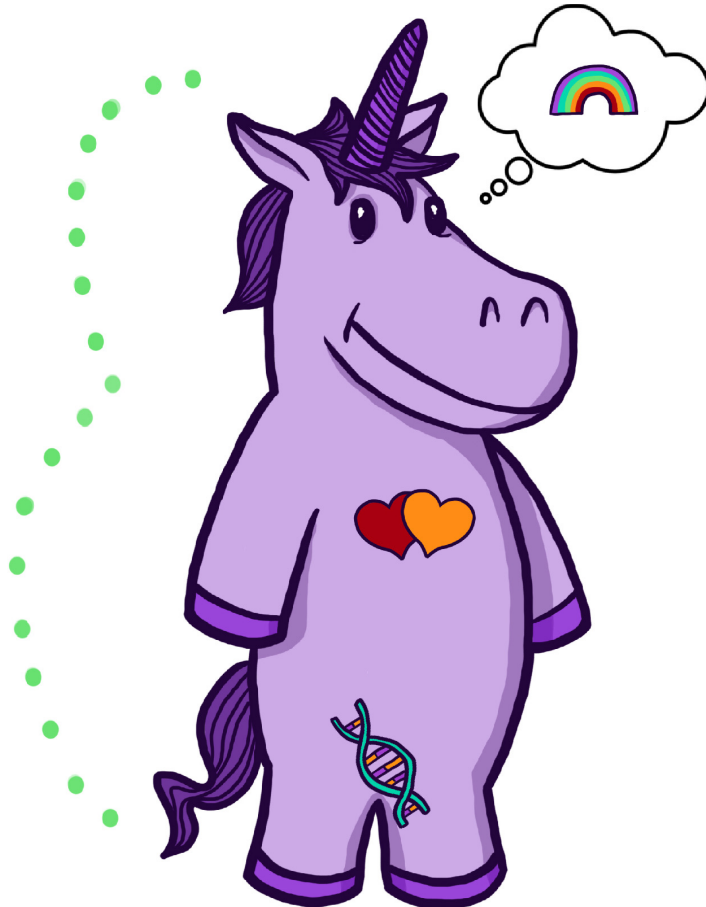
For glossary of more terminology:

<https://pflag.org/glossary>




<https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



Gender Identity

-  Female/Woman/Girl
-  Male/Man/Boy
-  Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression

-  Feminine
-  Masculine
-  Other

Sex Assigned at Birth

-  Female
-  Male
-  Other/Intersex

Physically Attracted to

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Bullying

Experiencing bullying includes repeated, unwanted aggressive behaviors (i.e., physical, verbal/emotional, relational) from peers with a perceived or observed power imbalance

The power imbalance may be greater for LGBTQ+ youth, increasing their risk for experiencing bullying:

- Face increased risks for threats, taunts, and physical/cyber/sexual attacks
- Face bullying targeting their sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, etc.
- Face bullying where youth threaten to “out” LGBTQ+ youth to other students, school staff, family

Victimization among LGBTQ+ Youth: Limitations

Majority of studies:

- Grouped LGBTQ+ youth together, with usually a small number of transgender youth (~1% of the sample)
- Focused on sexual minority youth (“LGB”)
- Gender expansive youth are only included in small handful of studies



The Prevalence & Impact of Victimization among Transgender and Gender Expansive Adolescents

Garthe, R.C., Kaur, A., Rieger, A., Blackburn, A. M., Kim, S., & Goffnett, J. (2021). Dating Violence and Peer Victimization Among Male, Female, Transgender, and Gender-Expansive Youth. *Pediatrics*, 147(4): e2020004317

Garthe, R. C., Rieger, A., Goffnett, J., Kaur, A., Sarol Jr., J. N., Blackburn, A. M., Kim, S., Hereth, J. & Kennedy, A. C. (2022): Grade-level differences of peer and dating victimization among transgender, gender expansive, female, and male adolescents, *Journal of LGBT Youth*, DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2022.2132443

Garthe, R. C., Blackburn, A. M., Kaur, A., Sarol, J. N., Goffnett, J., Rieger, A., Reinhart, C., & Smith, D. C. (2022). Suicidal Ideation Among Transgender and Gender Expansive Youth: Mechanisms of Risk. *Transgender Health*, 7(5), 416-422. <https://doi.org/10.1089/trgh.2021.0055>

Prevalence of Victimization by Gender Identity

Addressed significant gaps in the literature:

- **Prevalence across forms of dating violence and peer victimization**
- **Balanced groups** of youth: male, female, transgender, gender expansive
 - Allow for comparisons through matching analysis
 - Large numbers of transgender and gender expansive youth (1,116 per group)
- Included youth who have been largely left out of research studies: **gender expansive youth**

Experiences with Victimization across Middle and High School

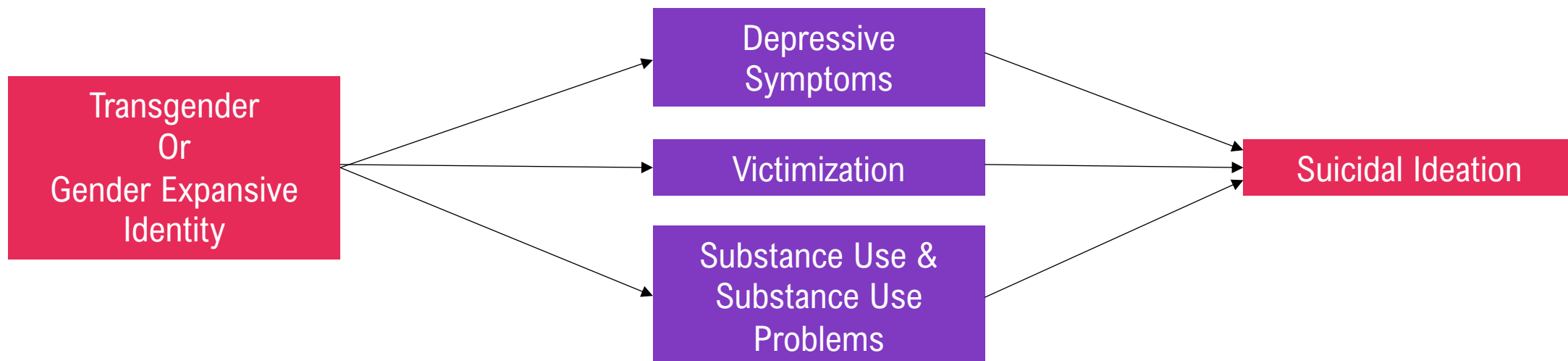
Addressed significant gaps in the literature:

- Examined rates of victimization from 8th grade to 12th grade by gender identity
- Does bullying victimization decline across grade level or does it remain high for transgender and gender expansive youth?

Mechanisms of Risk

Addressed significant gaps in the literature:

- Beyond just examining the link between gender and suicidal ideation
- HOW transgender and gender expansive youth are at a heightened risk for suicidal ideation





Methods

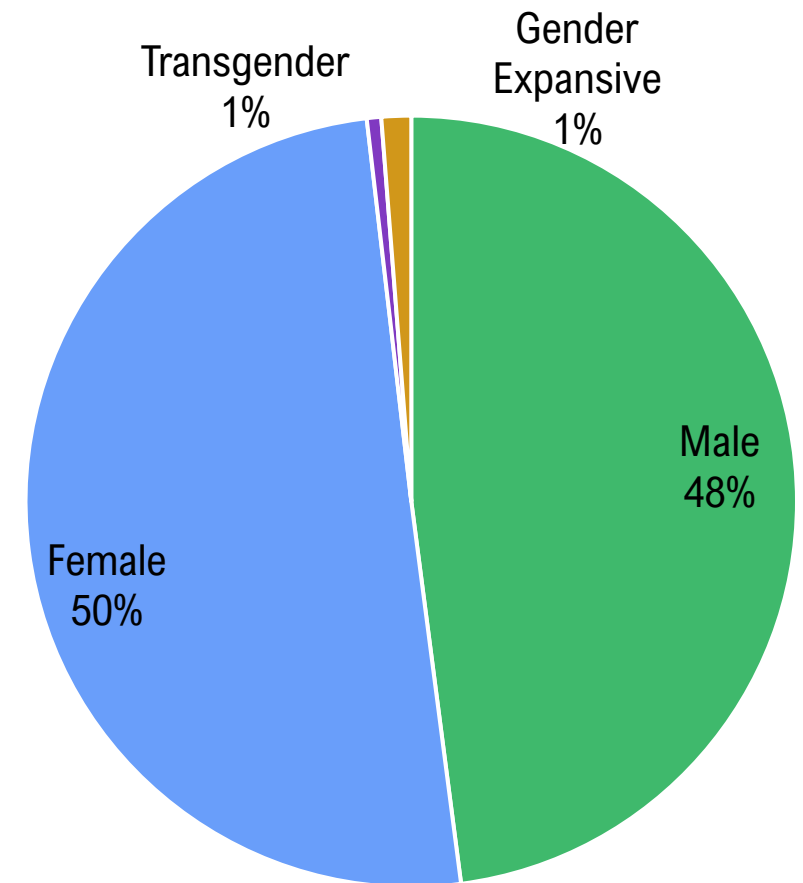
Design: Illinois Youth Survey

- Secondary Data: Cross-Sectional 2018 Illinois Youth Survey (IYS)
- Self-report survey administered biennially in schools
 - Health, social, behavioral indicators
- Available to all public and private schools in Illinois
- Anonymous & voluntary
- Passive parental consent



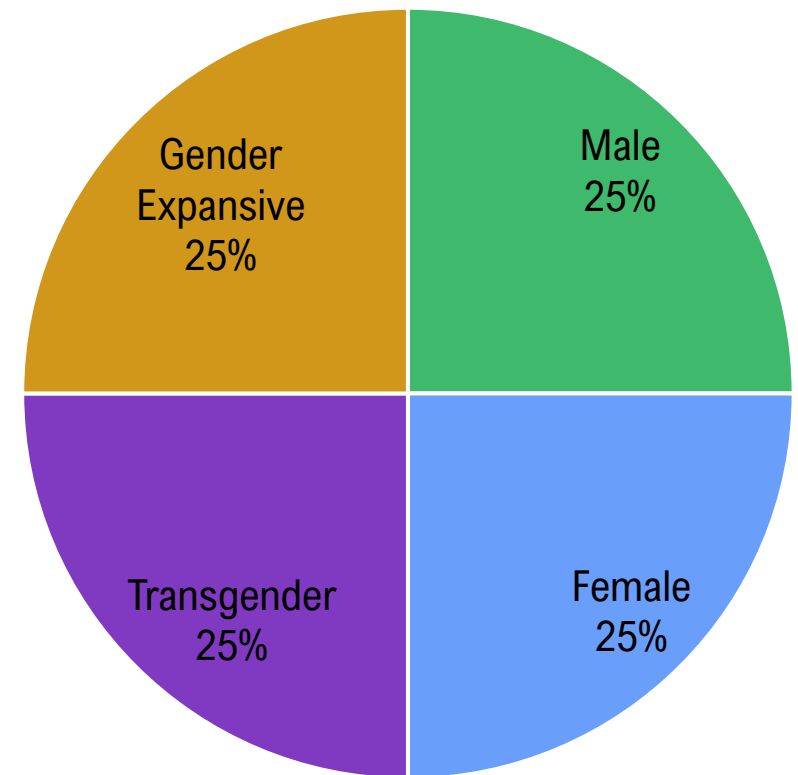
Full Sample

- Over 230,000 youth (grades 8-12) in 935 schools across 98 counties participated in the 2018 IYS.



Matching Analysis

- Imbalanced proportions among gender identities:
 - Frequency matching was performed in the selection of a subsample based on four variables:
 - Grade, free/reduced lunch, race, and geographic region
- Analytic sample
 - N = 4,464 consisting of 1,116 youth from each gender group (i.e., male, female, transgender, and gender expansive youth)

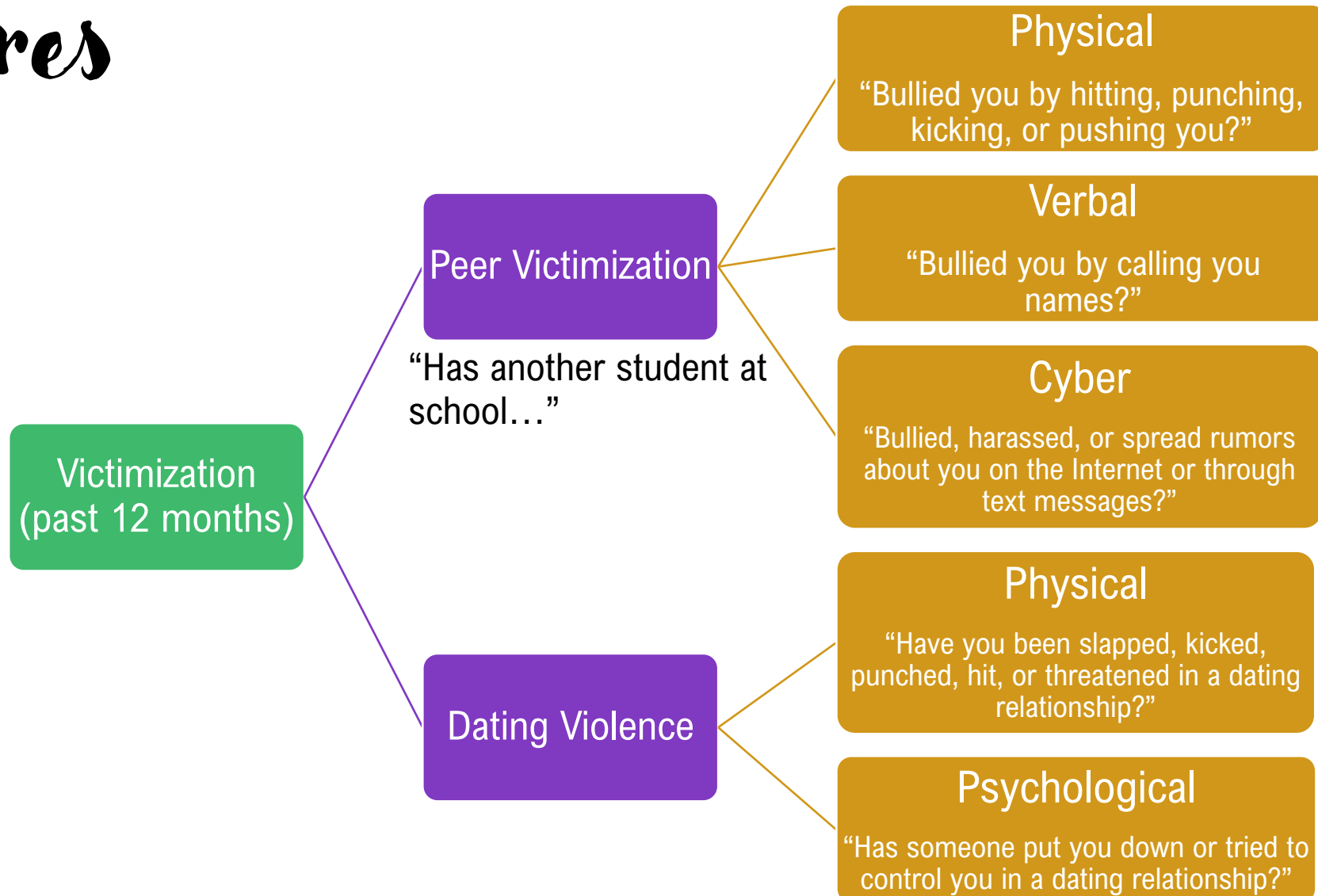


Participants

- Primarily in Eighth (26.61%), Tenth (30.2%), and Twelfth (25.09%) Grades
- From Chicago (3.14%), Suburban Chicago counties (62.99%), Other Urban and Suburban counties (22.4%) and Rural counties (11.47%)
- 41% eligible for free or reduced-price lunch

| | N | % |
|---------------------------------|------|-------|
| Race/Ethnicity | | |
| White | 2536 | 56.81 |
| Black/African American | 248 | 5.56 |
| Latino/Latina | 476 | 10.66 |
| Asian American | 184 | 4.12 |
| Native American/American Indian | 52 | 1.16 |
| Multi-racial | 784 | 17.56 |
| Other | 144 | 3.23 |
| Missing | 40 | 0.9 |

Measures



Measures

Screening assessments:

- **Depressive symptoms** (past 12 months: “did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?”)
- **Substance use** (past 12 months: Alcohol, marijuana, non-prescribed prescription drugs, and other drug use) and **substance use problems** (CRAFFT Screener; 6 items)
- **Suicidal ideation** (past 12 months: “did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?”)

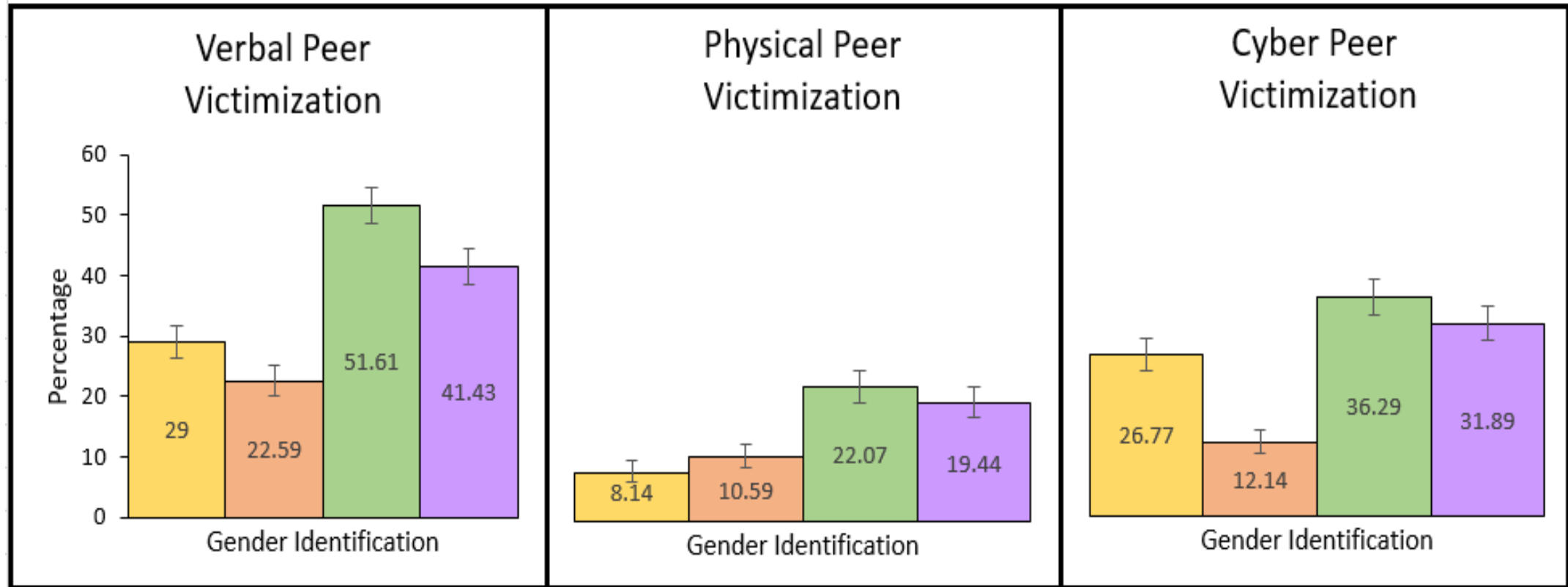


The Prevalence of Victimization

Data Analysis - Prevalence

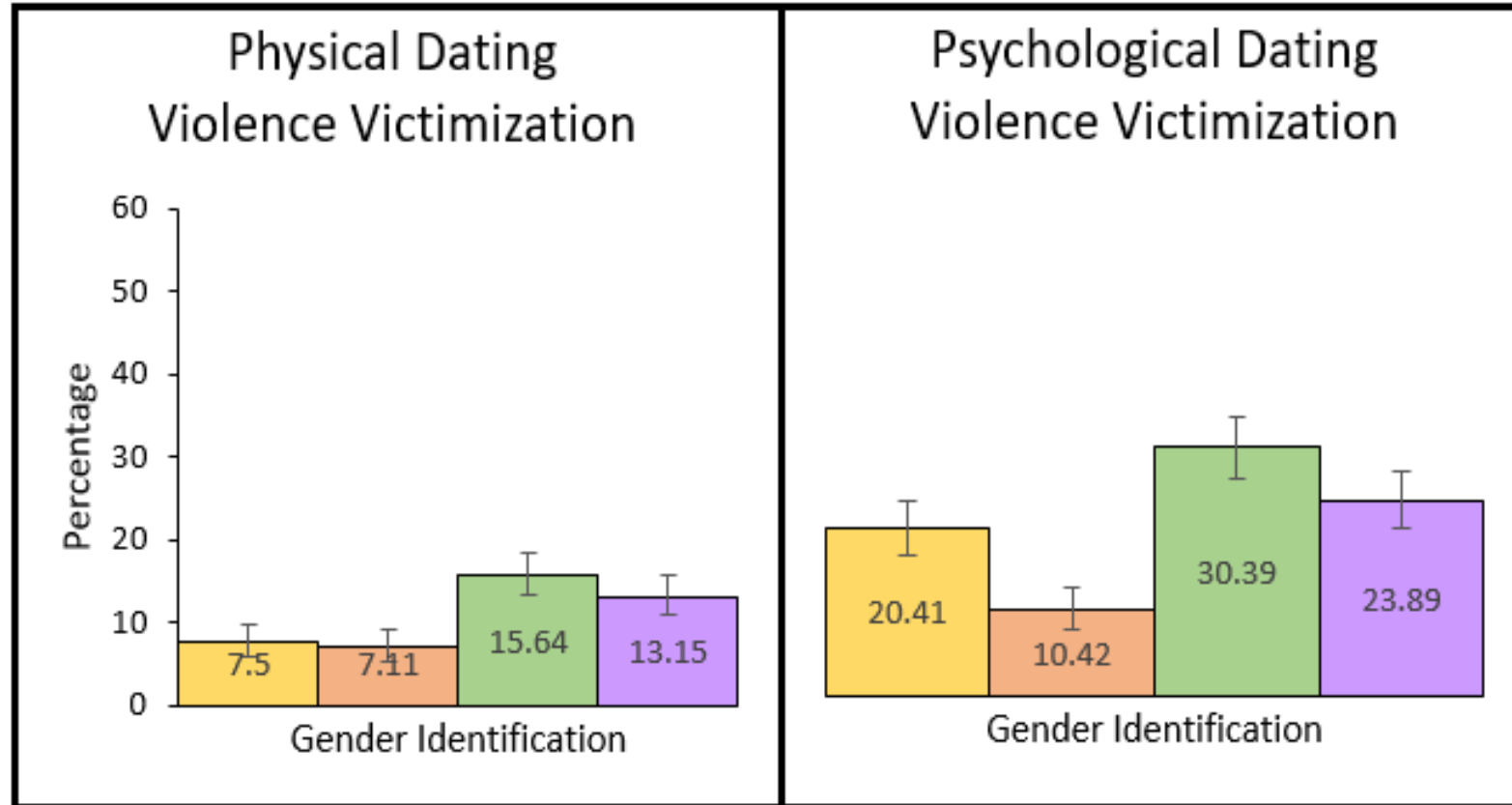
- Prevalence with 95% Confidence Interval for each form of violence by gender identity
- Log-binomial regression model was conducted to assess the relative risk of peer and dating violence victimization between gender identities
 - Adjusting for grade, free/reduced lunch, race, and geographic region

Results: Peer Victimization



Female Male Transgender Gender Expansive

Results: Dating Violence Victimization



Female Male Transgender Gender Expansive

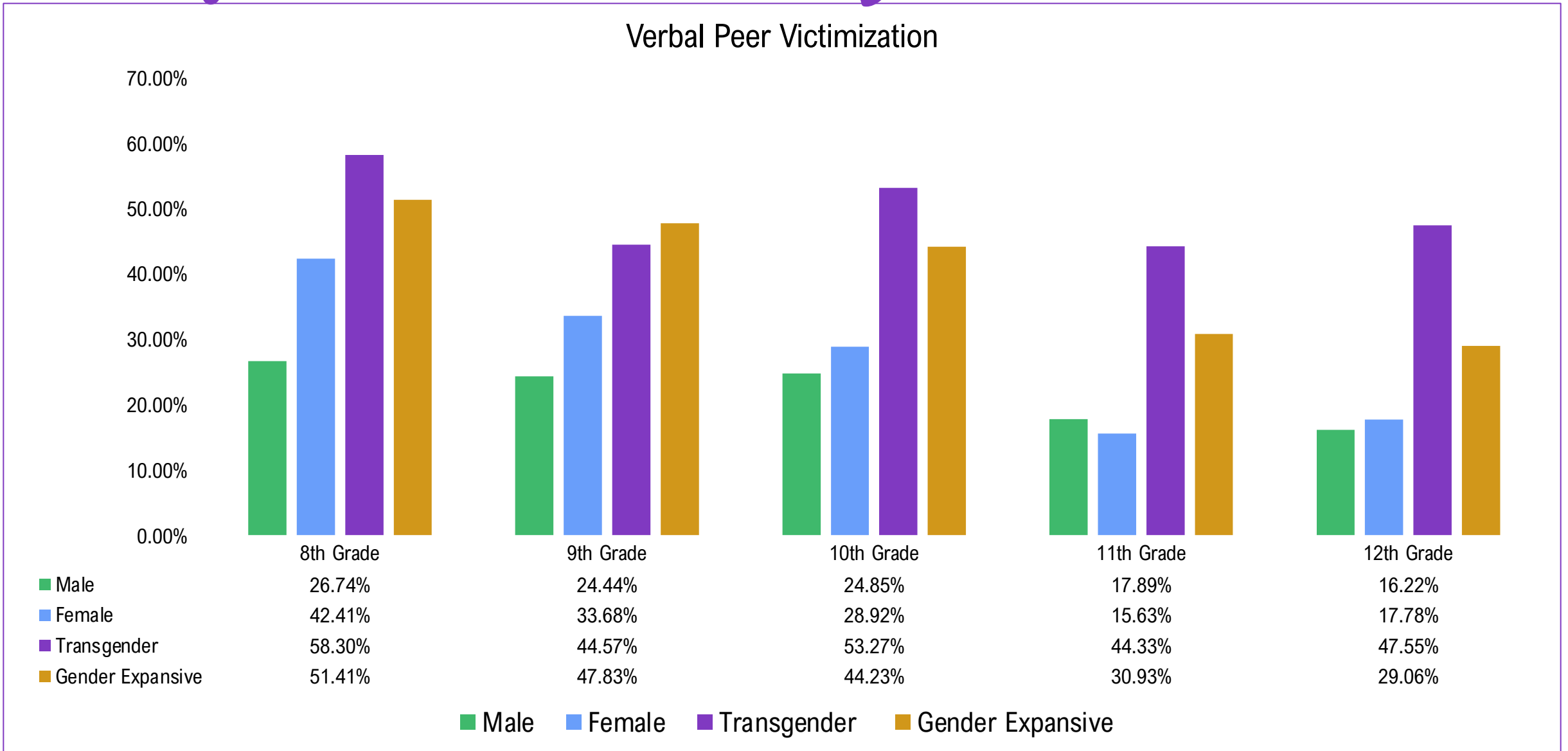
Results: Prevalence Ratios

| Variable | Transgender versus Female ^a Youth | Transgender versus Male ^a Youth | Transgender versus Gender Expansive ^a Youth | Gender Expansive versus Female ^a Youth | Gender Expansive versus Male ^a Youth |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| | Prevalence ratio [95% CI] | Prevalence ratio [95% CI] | Prevalence ratio [95% CI] | Prevalence ratio [95% CI] | Prevalence ratio [95% CI] |
| Peer Victimization (PV) | | | | | |
| Verbal PV | 1.70* [1.53, 1.90] | 2.21* [1.95, 2.50] | 1.21* [1.10, 1.32] | 1.41* [1.25, 1.58] | 1.83* [1.61, 2.09] |
| Physical PV | 2.65* [2.11, 3.34] | 2.09* [1.69, 2.57] | 1.13 [0.96, 1.34] | 2.35* [1.85, 2.97] | 1.84* [1.49, 2.28] |
| Cyber PV | 1.34* [1.18, 1.51] | 2.96* [2.47, 3.55] | 1.14* [1.01, 1.28] | 1.18* [1.03, 1.34] | 2.61* [2.17, 3.14] |
| Dating Violence Victimization (DVV) | | | | | |
| Physical DVV | 2.10* [1.57, 2.81] | 2.21* [1.64, 2.98] | 1.19 [0.93, 1.51] | 1.77* [1.30, 2.41] | 1.86* [1.36, 2.55] |
| Psychological DVV | 1.49* [1.22, 1.82] | 2.91* [2.23, 3.79] | 1.25* [1.04, 1.51] | 1.19 [0.96, 1.47] | 2.32* [1.76, 3.06] |

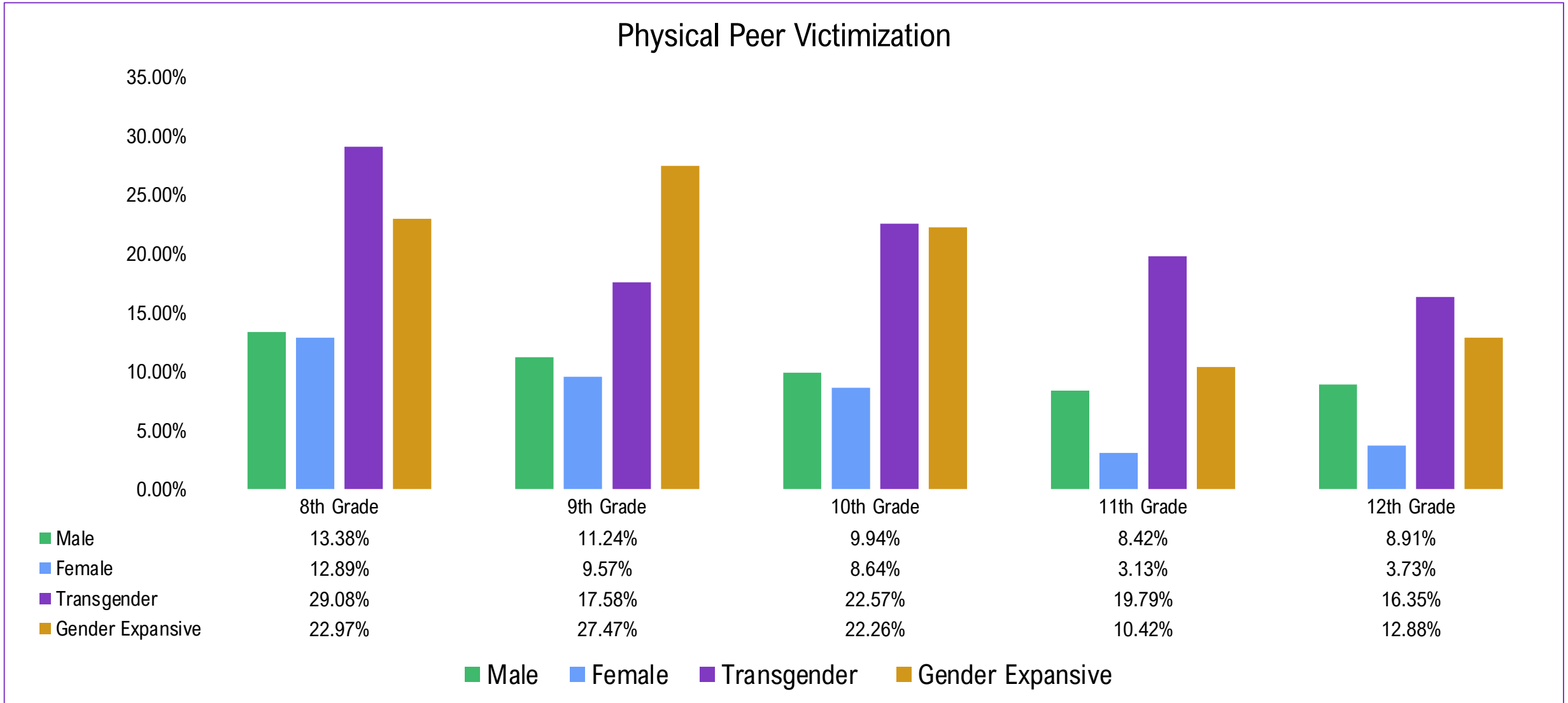
Data Analysis – Prevalence across Grades

- Prevalence ratios with 95% Confidence Interval for each form of violence by gender identity and grade
- Log-binomial regression model was conducted to assess victimization among gender identities by grade (with a multiple comparisons adjustment)
 - Adjusting for grade, free/reduced lunch, race, and geographic region
 - The prevalence ratio along with 95% CIs were calculated

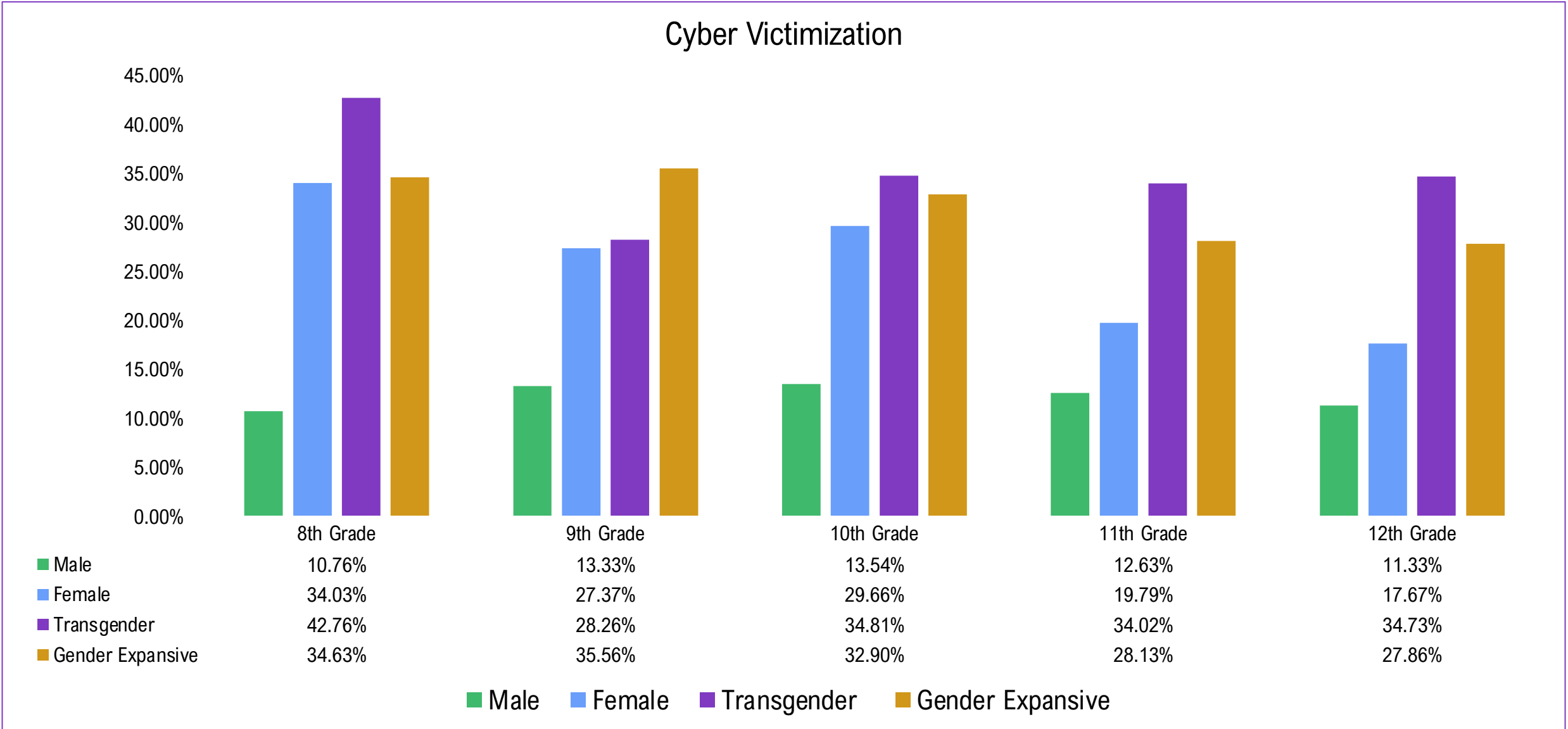
Rates of Verbal Peer Victimization across Grades



Rates of Physical Peer Victimization across Grades



Rates of Cyber Victimization across Grades



Summary

Transgender youth, followed by gender expansive youth, face significantly higher rates of physical, verbal, and cyber forms of peer victimization & dating violence victimization compared to male and female youth.

Transgender and gender expansive youth face higher rates across grade levels, while male and female youth mostly experience declines in rates of victimization.



Mechanisms of Risk

Data Analysis – Impact & Mechanisms of Risk

- To assess the total, direct, and indirect effect of gender identity on suicidal ideation, we employed the Karlson, Holm and Breen (KHB) mediation method.
 - Stata software; same covariates were included as previous studies

Results: Prevalence

Suicidal Ideation:

- Transgender youth: 49.29%
- Gender expansive youth: 41.31%
- Female youth: 19.08%
- Male youth: 10.82%

Depressive Symptoms:

- Transgender youth: 63.33%
- Gender expansive youth: 59.78%
- Female youth: 41.06%
- Male youth: 25.34%

Substance Use:

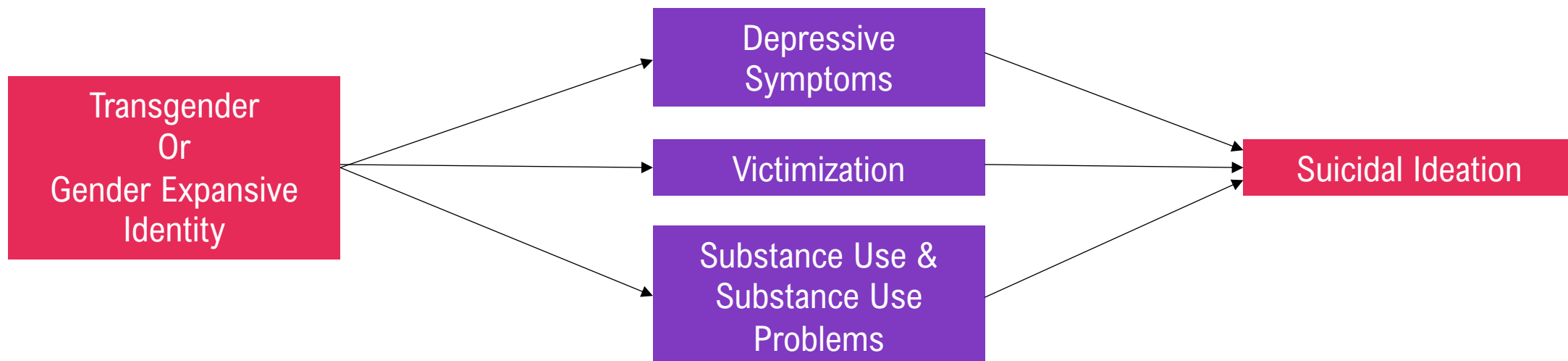
- Transgender youth: 51.85%
- Gender expansive youth: 52.93%
- Female youth: 47.26%
- Male youth: 41.13%

Substance Use Problems:

- Transgender youth: 30.2%
- Gender expansive youth: 28.61%
- Female youth: 21.52%
- Male youth: 17.79%

Results: Direct & Indirect Effects

- Gender had a direct association with suicidal ideation
- Indirect associations
 - Depressive Symptoms
 - Victimization
 - Substance use (3+ substances) & Substance use problems



Summary

Gender minority youth report alarmingly high rates of victimization, depressive symptoms, substance use & substance use problems, and suicidal ideation.

Mechanisms of risk for suicidal ideation among gender minority youth include victimization, depressive symptoms & substance use/substance use problems.



The Protective Role of School Climate

Protective Role of School Climate Factors

School climate: includes perceptions of safety, connectedness, student-teacher and student-staff relationships, academic engagement, etc.

- Very limited research examining the role of school climate factors when transgender & gender expansive youth experience victimization

Methods: Measures -

School Climate Variables included:

- School connectedness (“I feel close to people at school,” “I feel safe in my school” – 4 items)
- Meaningful school participation (“At school, I do interesting activities” – 3 items)
- Caring adult relationships (e.g., “At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who really cares about me” – 8 items)

Additional variables:

- Peer Victimization
- Depressive Symptoms & Suicidal Ideation

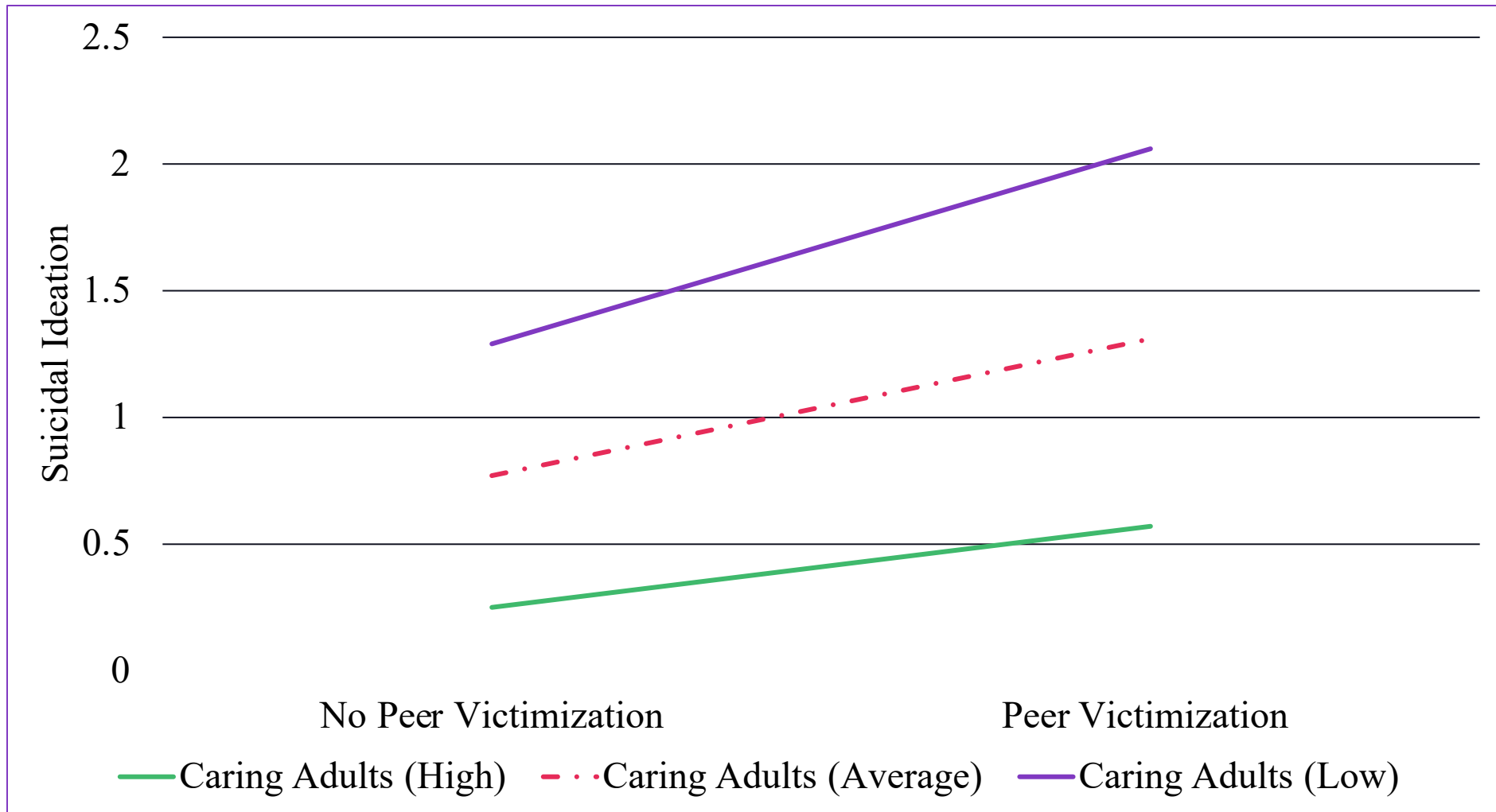
Methods: Data Analysis -

- Multivariate regression with moderation analysis
- Victimization and School Climate Factors on Suicidal Ideation & Depressive Symptoms
- Analyses were conducted in Mplus
- Focus on transgender and gender expansive adolescents (n = 2,232)

Main Findings

- All 3 school climate variables had a direct (negative) association with depressive symptoms & suicidal ideation
- Significant interactions:
 - High victimization, but high school connectedness → less suicidal ideation
 - High victimization, but high caring adult relationships at school → less suicidal ideation

Caring Adults





Overall Discussion & Implications

Discussion: Overall Findings

- Transgender & gender expansive adolescents at a significantly higher risk for victimization
- Risks for victimization remain high across 8th to 12th grades for gender minority youth
- Victimization, depressive symptoms & substance use are mechanisms of risk for gender minority youth to experience suicidal ideation
- However, school climate factors may protect youth who experience victimization from experiencing suicidal ideation

A Call to Action

Violence prevention programs are critically necessary, especially ones that are inclusive of gender diverse adolescents, and span middle & high school.

Programs that promote mental health and work to prevent victimization and substance use are needed, as targeting these mechanisms may play a critical role in reducing suicidal ideation.

Work is necessary to enhance school climates so that transgender and gender expansive adolescents feel safe, connected, and cared for at school.

Implications

Multi-level interventions are needed that address both contextual risk factors stemming from stigma and the consequent intrapersonal mental health problems

Shift: addressing intrapersonal mental health problems from the marginalized individual...

(Which can create further marginalization)

(Which leaves the ecological risk in tact)

...to a shared, community effort

Limitations

Cross-sectional

Screening questions with limited responses (yes/no)

Unable to assess for other forms of victimization (sexual, stalking, bullying because of gender identity)

Self-reported gender identity, lacking nuance

- Transgender male, transgender female, etc.
- “Gender expansive” vs. “I do not identify as male, female, or transgender”
- Unable to assess for “cisgender”



Recommendations for Schools & Prevention Efforts

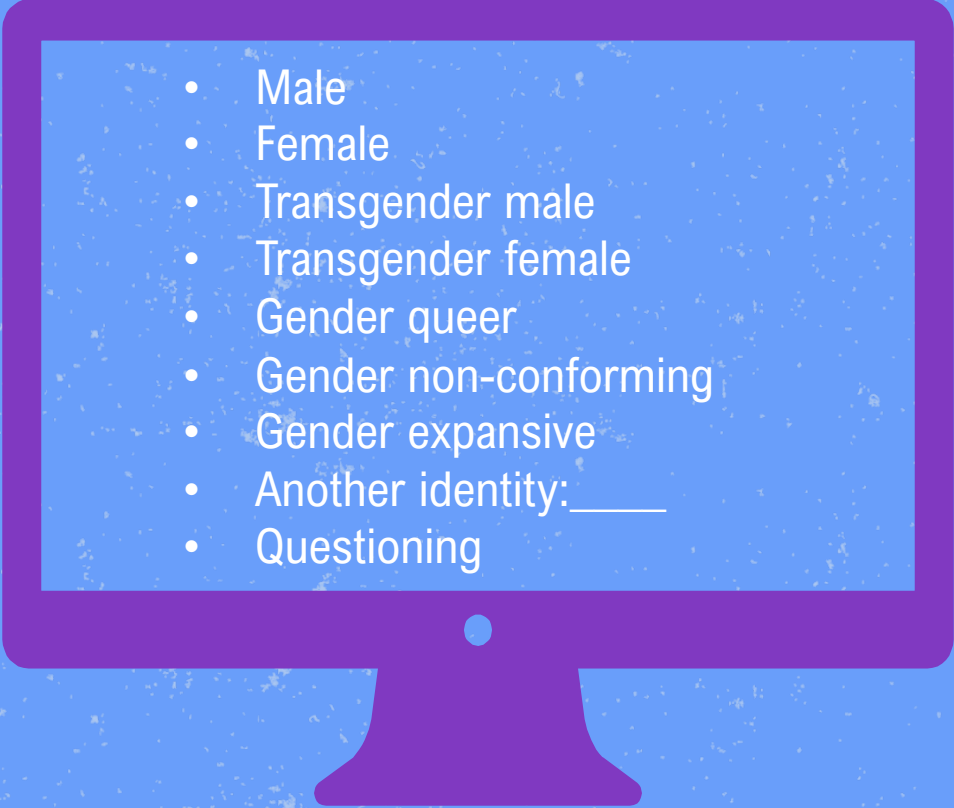
Screening Surveys & Gender

Recommendation #1: how we ask about sex & gender

1. What sex were you assigned at birth (on your original birth certificate)?

- Male
- Female
- Intersex
- Unknown

2. What is your current gender identity?

- 
- Male
 - Female
 - Transgender male
 - Transgender female
 - Gender queer
 - Gender non-conforming
 - Gender expansive
 - Another identity: _____
 - Questioning

School Policies & Programs

Recommendation #2: Review, Update, Strengthen School Policies & Programs

Policies: include protections for LGBTQ+ students

- Regularly assess & monitor school climate
- Gender pronouns
- Chosen name
- Gender-neutral bathrooms
- Get rid of clothing requirements that force an adolescent to wear clothing incongruent with their identity or expression
- Anti-transphobic education
- Increase violence prevention programs: bullying, cyberbullying, dating violence prevention (with a focus of making these programs inclusive and responsive to gender)

Violence Prevention Programs

Bullying prevention:

Dominguez-Martinez, T., & Robles, R. (2019). Preventing transphobic bullying and promoting inclusive educational environments: Literature review and implementing recommendations. *Archives of Medical Research, 50*, 543-555.

- Focus on bullying prevention for LGBTQ+ youth, though more follow-up on programs is needed.

Effectiveness of cyber-victimization prevention:

Gaffney, H., Farrington, D. P., Espelage, D. L., & Ttofi, M. M. (2019). Are cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs effective? A systematic and meta-analytical review. *Aggression & Violent Behavior, 45*, 134-153.

- Lack of focus on gender and sexual identities in these programs

Importance of teacher and school staff trainings & inclusion in violence prevention programs

School Efforts to Enhance Climate

Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA)

- Collectively engage in educational dialogue about sexual identity, gender identities, and related issues
- Avenue for enhancing school climates for LGBTQIA+ adolescents

State-level Change

Recommendation #3: State-level changes

- **Be informed and keep informed about laws to protect transgender and gender expansive students**
 - New York State Human Rights Law, Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA), The Gender Recognition Act, New York State Education Law, Dignity for All Students Act, Title IX
- Taskforces: gender support coordinators and teacher trainings
- Needs assessments
- Public school curricula: contributions of LGBTQ+ people (e.g., Inclusion Curriculum Law in Illinois)
- Review existing violence prevention programs and mental health interventions
- New York - State Education Department Framework for Safe, Supportive, and Affirming School Environments for Transgender and Gender Expansive Students
<https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/student-support-services/creating-a-safe-supportive-and-affirming-school-environment-for-transgender-and-gender-expansive-students.pdf>

Current Work:

Intersectionality

Examine rates of victimization and gender identity by:

- Grade (8th-12th), race, geographic location, federal lunch assistance

Bullying Policies

Review school districts' implementation of policies that are inclusive of gender minoritized populations

Visibility within State Planning

Disseminate findings at state hearings & meetings to make sure gender minority youth are included in violence prevention planning efforts

Resources

- <https://transequality.org/>
- <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/52-things-you-can-do-transgender-equality>
- <https://www.glaad.org/resources/ally/5>
- <https://www.glsen.org/activity/respect-all-policy-recommendations-support-lgbtq-students>
- https://www.aclu-il.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/affirming_and_inclusive_schools_task_force_report.pdf
- <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/147/4/e2020004317/tab-e-letters>



We dedicate this work to the transgender and gender expansive youth who shared their experiences with us on the IYS.

Thank you!

Thank you to the Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention, University at Buffalo!

Questions?



Contact Rachel Garthe:
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<https://violencepreventionresearchlab.com/>

