

# The role of bystanders in cyberbullying prevention: An ecological approach

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# Cyberbullying

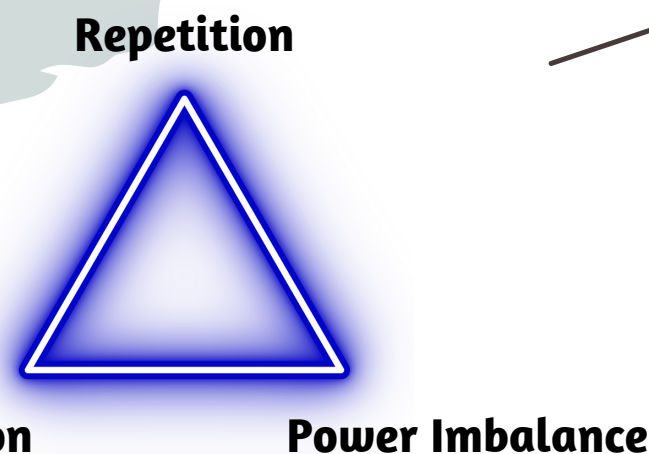
“Using information and communication technologies (ICT) to **repeatedly and intentionally** harm, harass, hurt and/or embarrass a target”

Peter and Petermann, 2018



**1 out of 3** adolescents are involved as victims

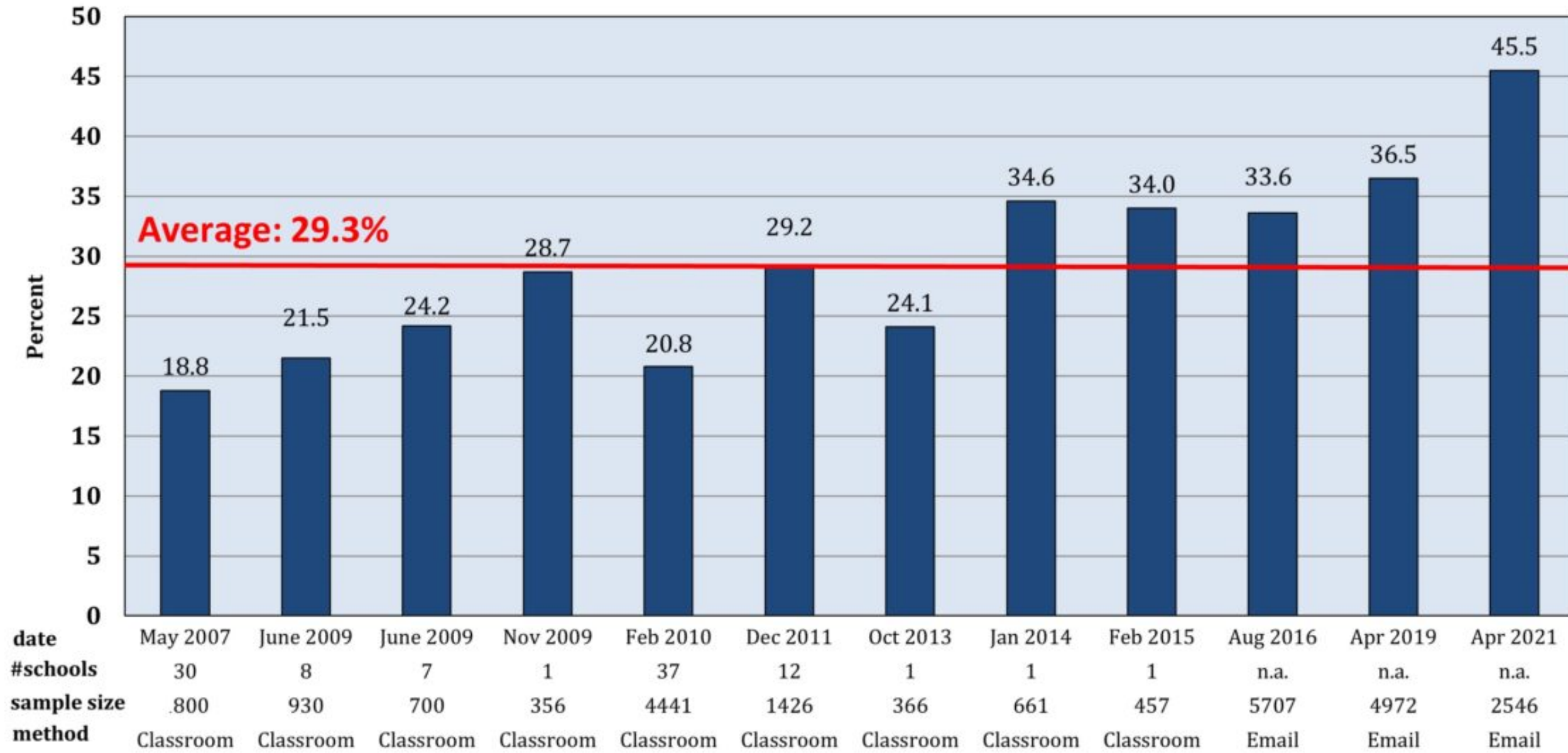
Zhu et al., 2021





# Lifetime Cyberbullying Victimization Rates

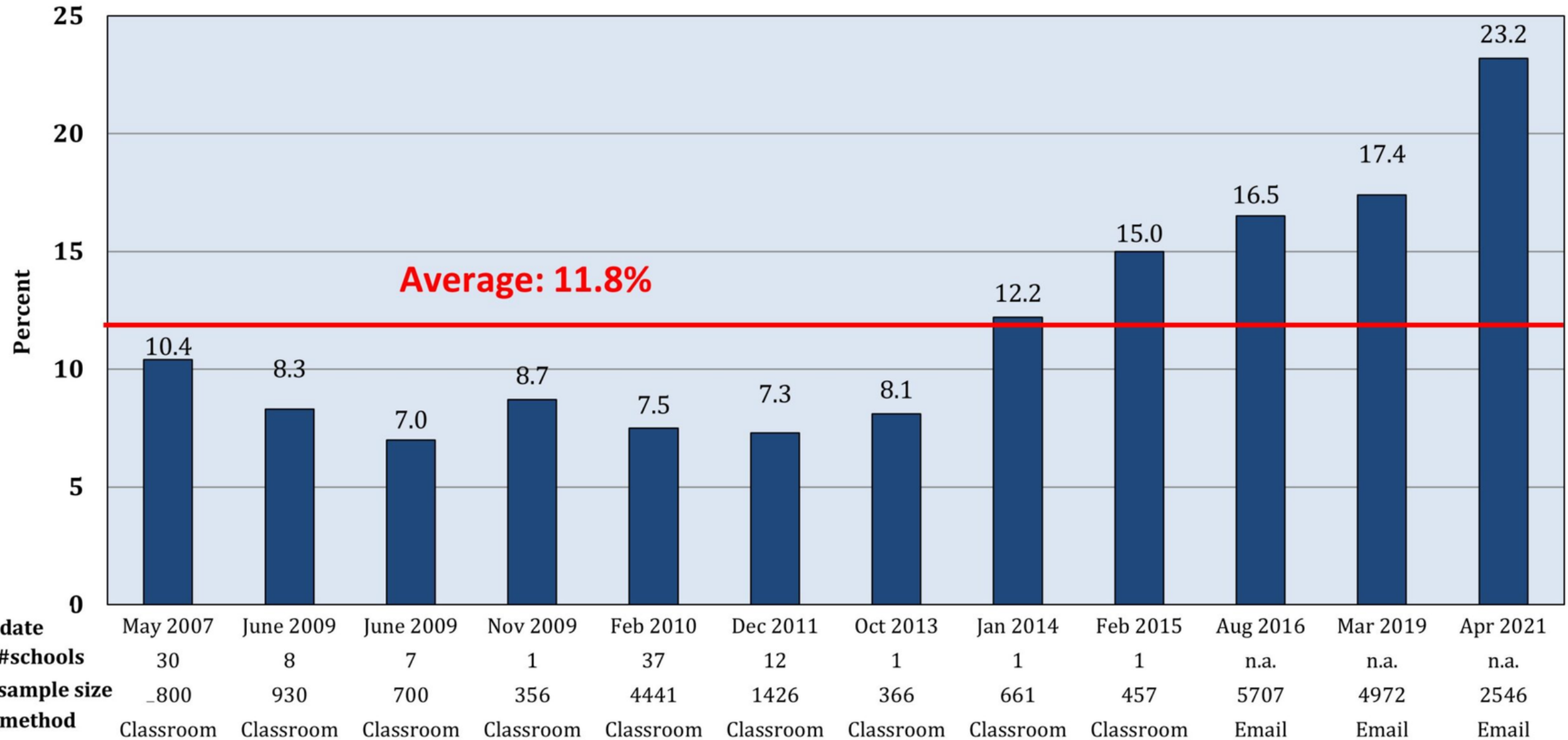
## Twelve Different Studies 2007-2021



Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja  
 Cyberbullying Research Center  
[www.cyberbullying.org](http://www.cyberbullying.org)

# 30-Day Cyberbullying Victimization Rates

## Twelve Different Studies 2007-2021



Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja  
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Mean or hurtful  
coments online

Threatening to hurt

Flaming

CyberStalking

Spreading rumors /  
Denigration

Harassment

Tricky or outing



Happy Slapping

Impersonation

Exclusion

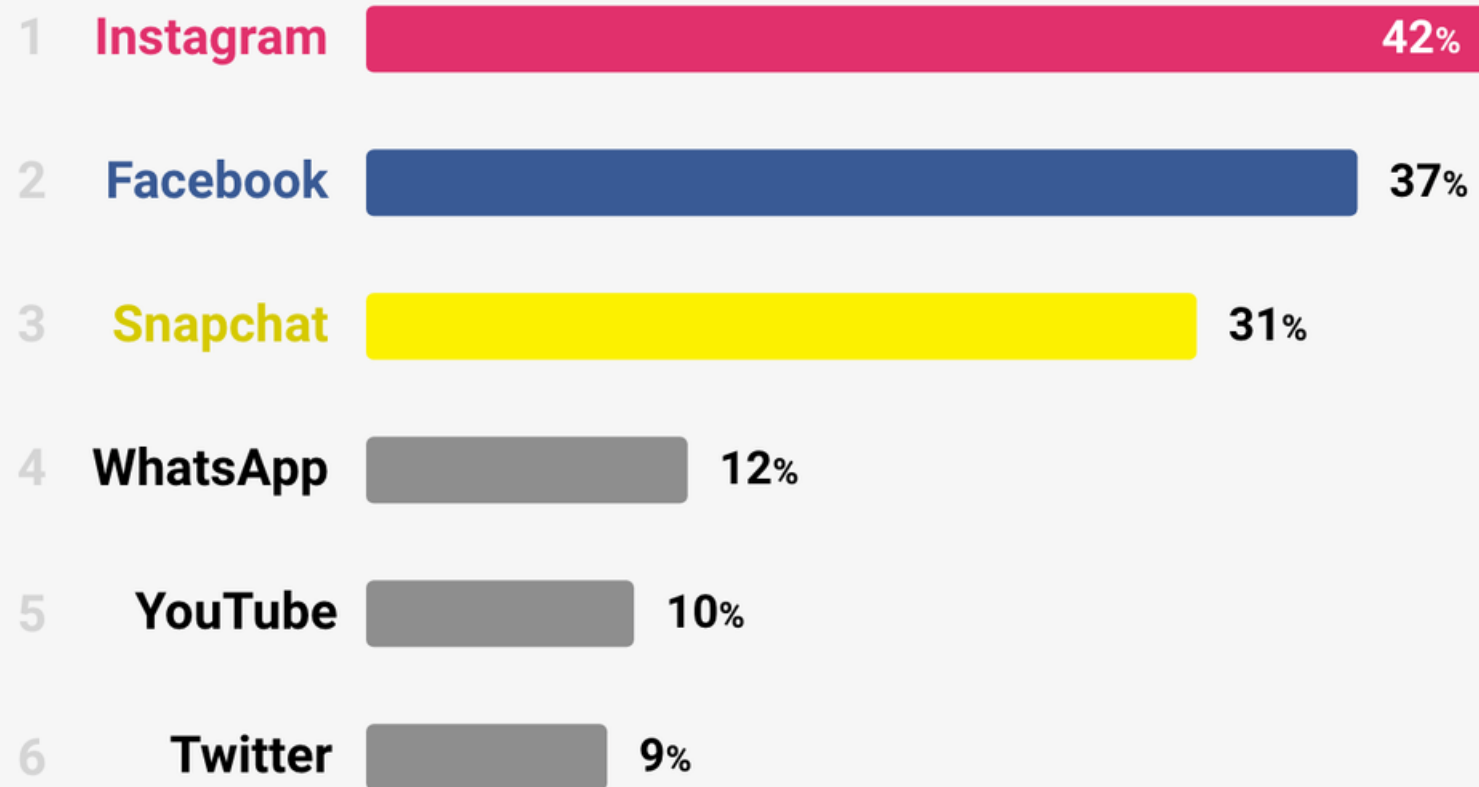
Myers & Cowie, 2019;  
Saladino, et al., 2020



# Cyberbullying in social media

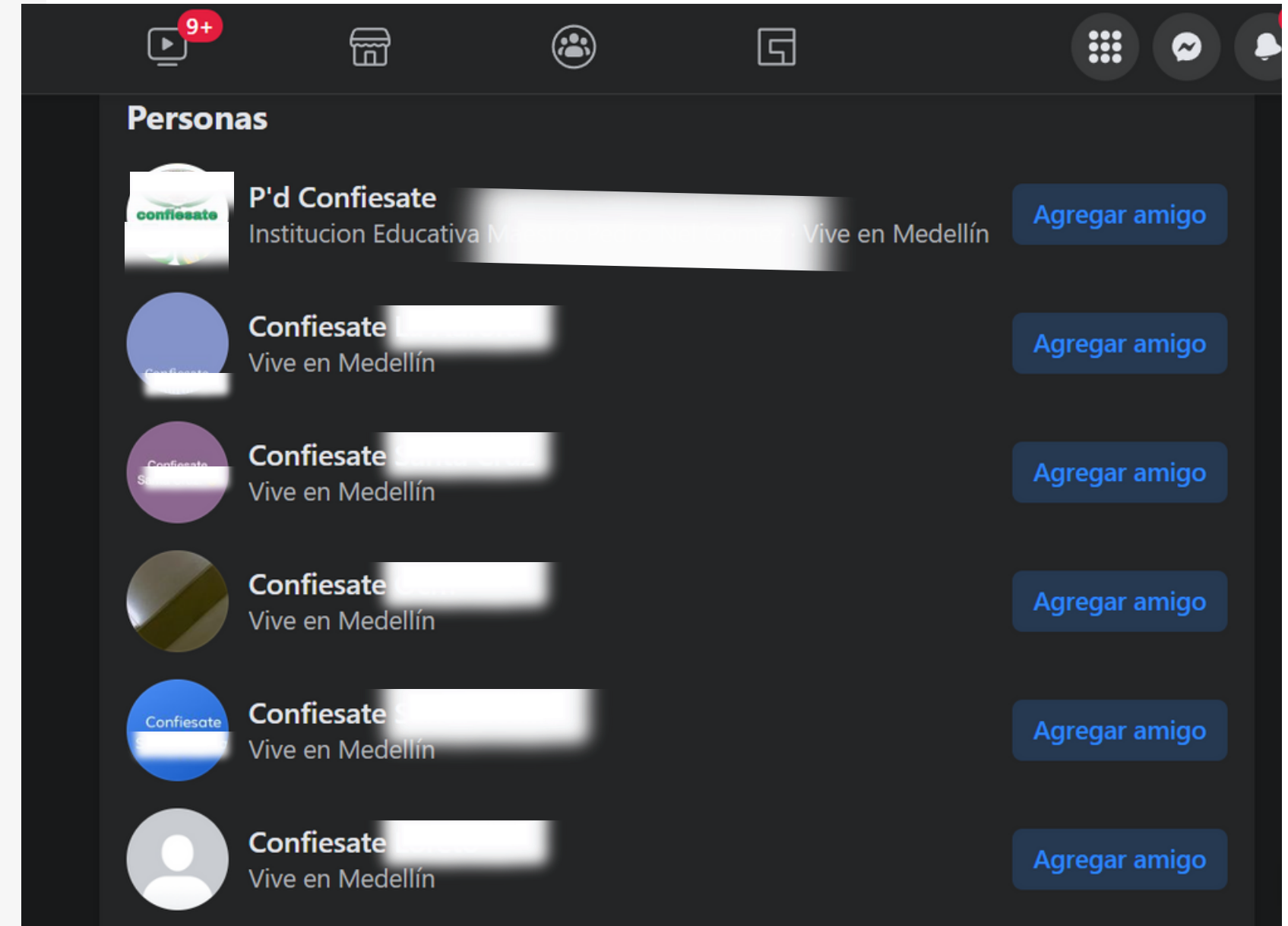


Share of social media platforms where cyberbullying occurs the most: Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter



Source: enough.org

firstsiteguide.com



✓ The possible 24/7 nature of the bullying

✓ The ability to quickly reach large audiences

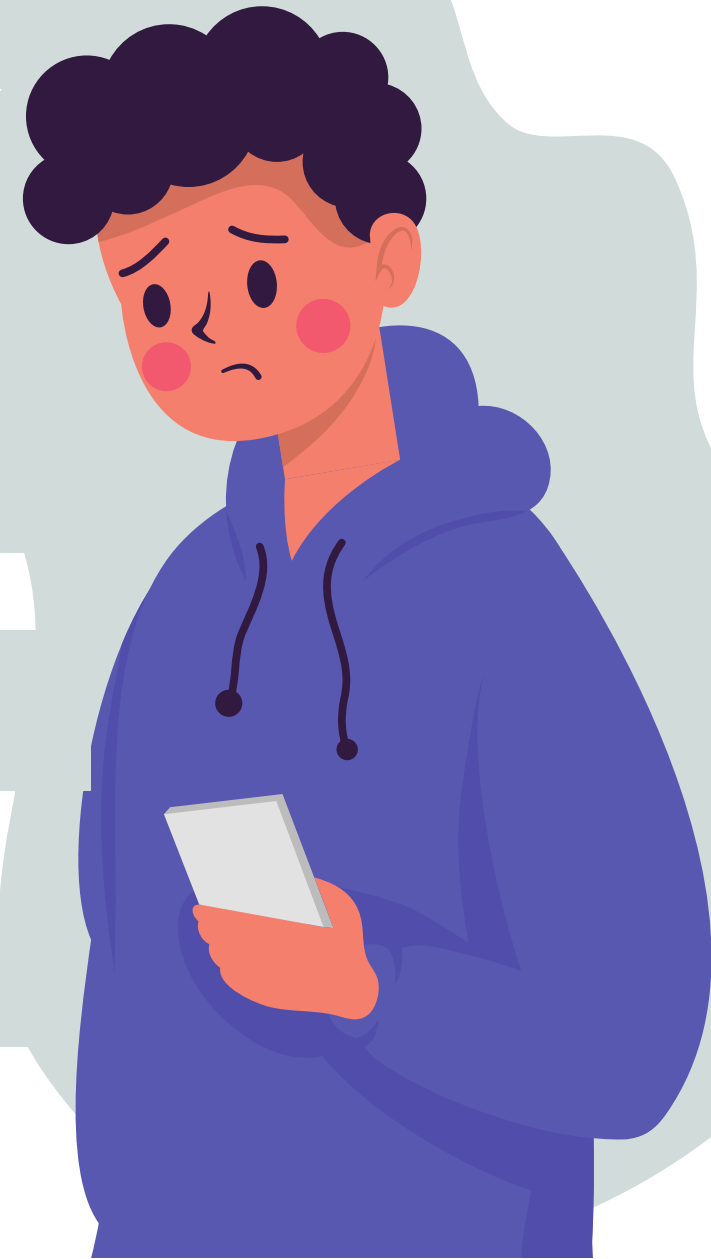
✓ Dificulty to delete contents

✓ The potential for anonymity

✓ The distance afforded by screens

It is perceived as more severe, hurtful, and uncontrollable by the targets

Increased sense of helplessness and vulnerability



## Perpetrator

- Drug and alcohol use
- Anxiety and Depression
- Low Self-esteem
- Low Life satisfaction

Zych et al., 2015

## Target

- Somatic difficulties (e.g., headaches, stomach aches, etc.)
- Depression and Anxiety
- Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts
- Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Academic difficulties

Vaillancourt et al., 2017

## Bystanders

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Somatic symptoms
- Fear about becoming a target themselves
- Cognitive dissonance
- Desensitization

Wright et al., 2018

Doumas & Midgett, 2020



# Bystanders

Song & Oh, 2018.

## Reinforcer (10%)

Gives positive feedback to bullying

## Outsider (60%)

Keeps bullying.  
Silent acceptance of the situation.

## Defender (30%)

Potential to end the dynamics of cyberbullying. Strengthens the resilience of the victim and reduces the negative effects on their mental health.



Aggressive

Constructive

# Stages of research

**01** Individual  
Traits and  
characteristics  
Psychological  
determinants of  
behavior

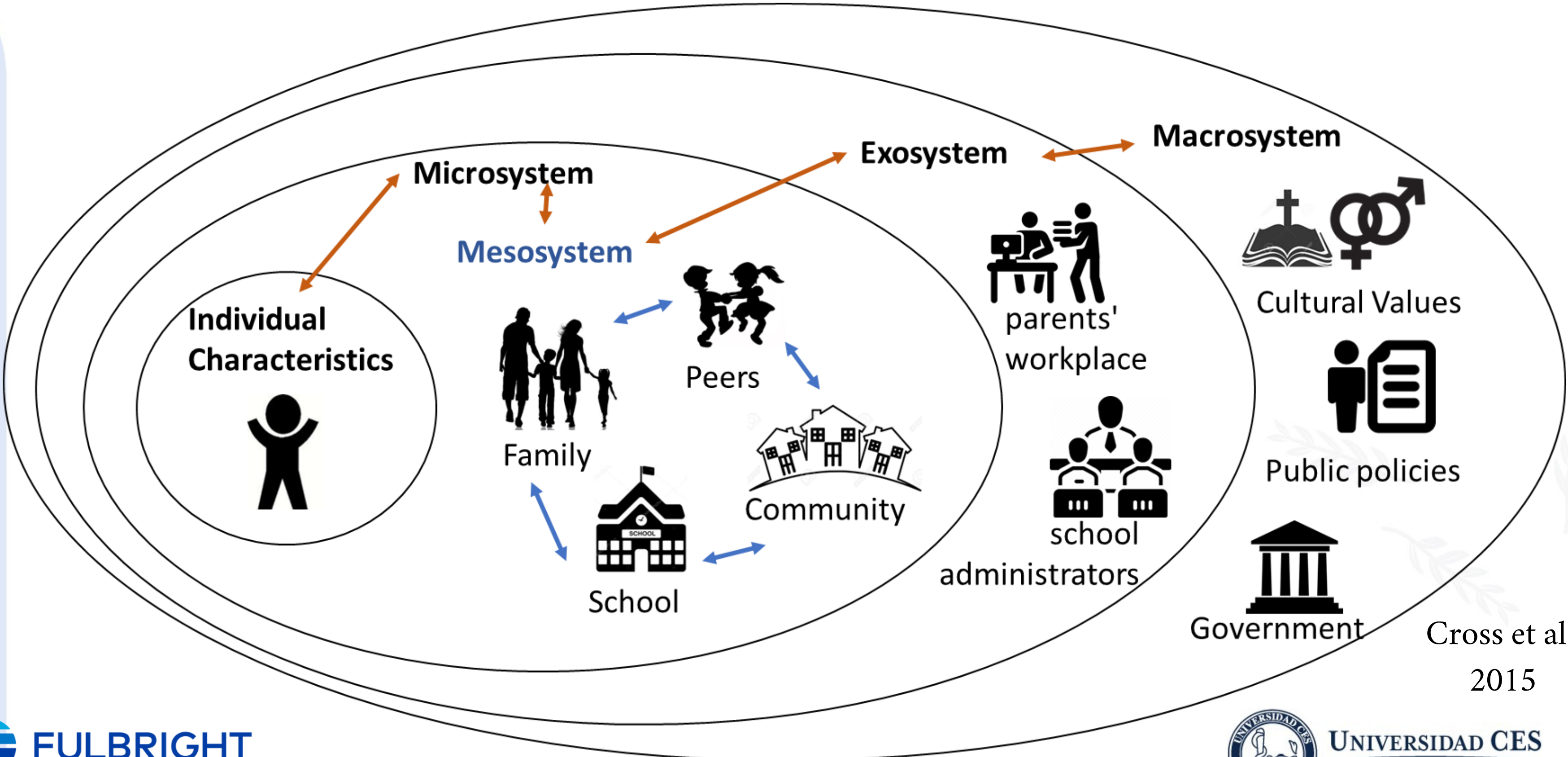
**02** Group  
Phenomenom  
Inclusion of  
bystanders.  
Social interaction

**03** Ecological  
Model  
Systems





# Ecological Framework



Cross et al.,  
2015

# Individual



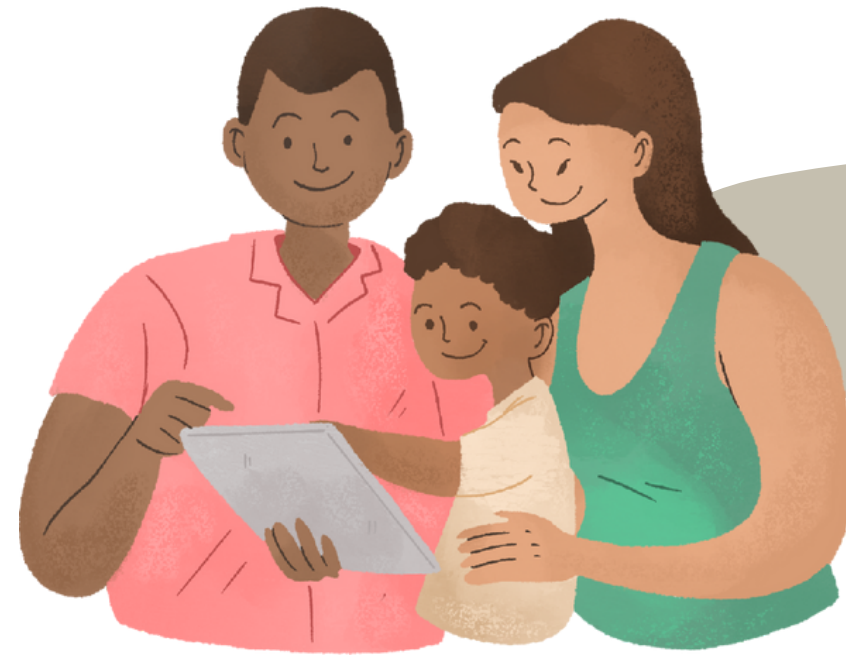
Empathy

Moral Disengagement

Self-efficacy



# Microsystem and mesosystem



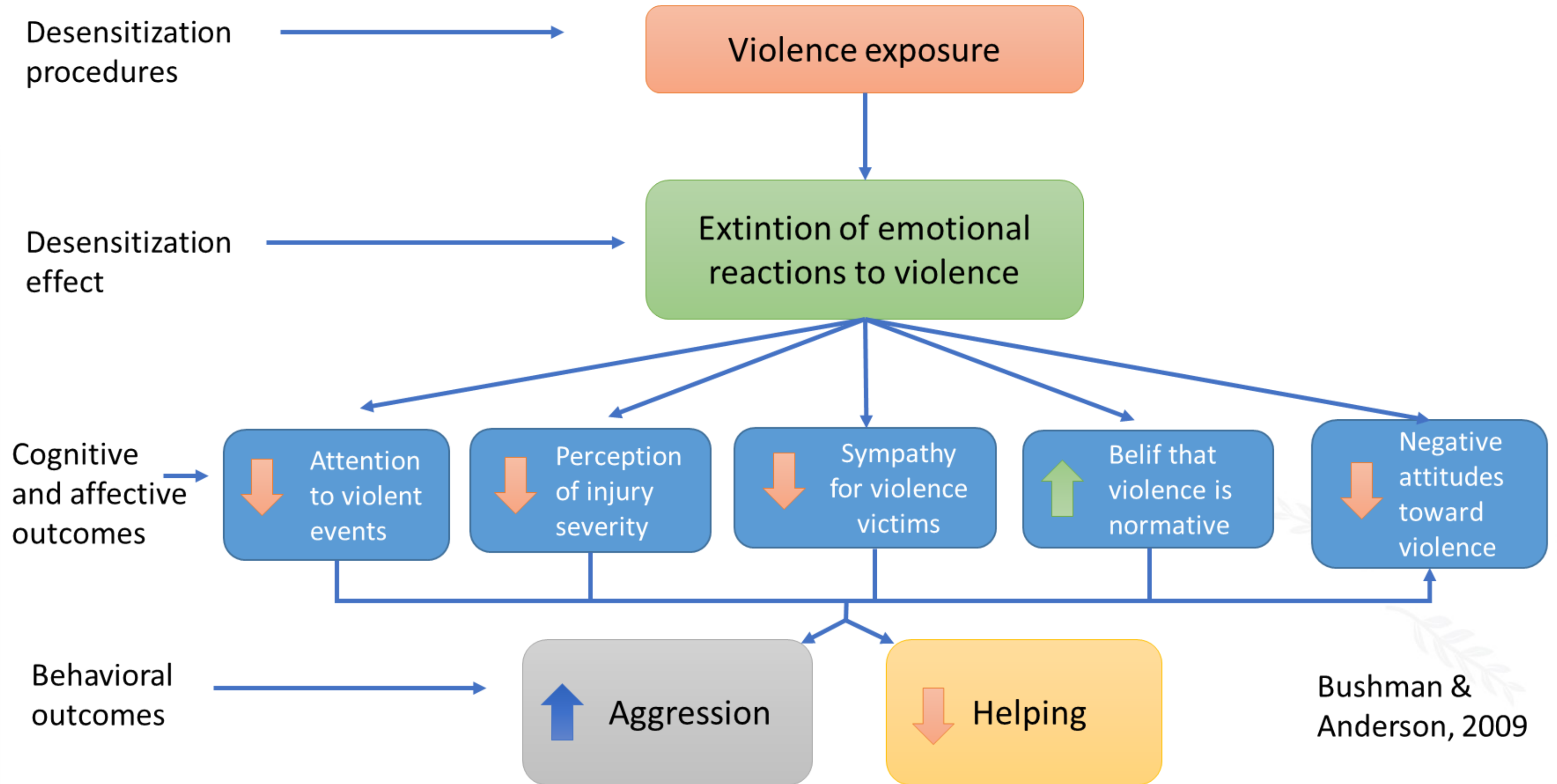
Family



Peers



School







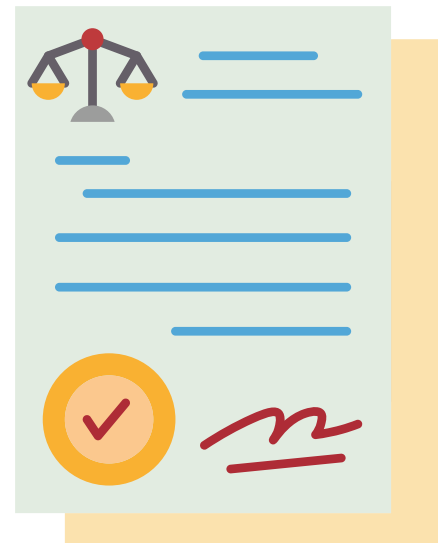
Culture, values



# Macrosystem

Globally, it is estimated that **one out of two** children aged 2–17 years suffer some form of violence each year.

(WHO, Global status report on preventing violence against children, 2020  
(Hillis et al., 2016))



Policies

# Are cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs effective?

**Gaffney, et al., 2019.**

School-aged participants

24 publications

Anti-cyberbullying programs can reduce cyberbullying perpetration by approximately 10%–15% and cyberbullying victimization by approximately 14%.

**Chen et al., 2022.**

16 studies

Digital Health Interventions in Reducing Cyberbullying

The random effect of intervention was 0.19 on cyberbullying



# Are cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs effective?

**Torgal et al., 2021.**

School-Based Cyberbullying Prevention Programs' Impact on Cyber-Bystander Behavior among K-12 students

**9 studies**

Students that received an intervention reported 29% of one standard deviation higher active bystander behavior than students in a control group.

Programs that included an empathy activation component produced a significantly greater treatment effect on promoting active cyber-bystander behavior compared to intervention programs that did not include an empathy activation component.

# Actions oriented to promote bystander intervention



- Promote cyberbullying knowledge. Helping bystanders recognize situations of cyberbullying.
- Develop policies and systems for reporting and train bystanders on how to effectively use them
- Promote empathy improvement in the design of interventions



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# Actions oriented to promote bystander intervention



- Design interventions with higher duration and booster session as maintenance strategies to prolong the intervention effect
- Design a more systematic curriculum through primary to college to avoid repeated efforts and to intervene as early as possible



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# Actions oriented to promote bystander intervention



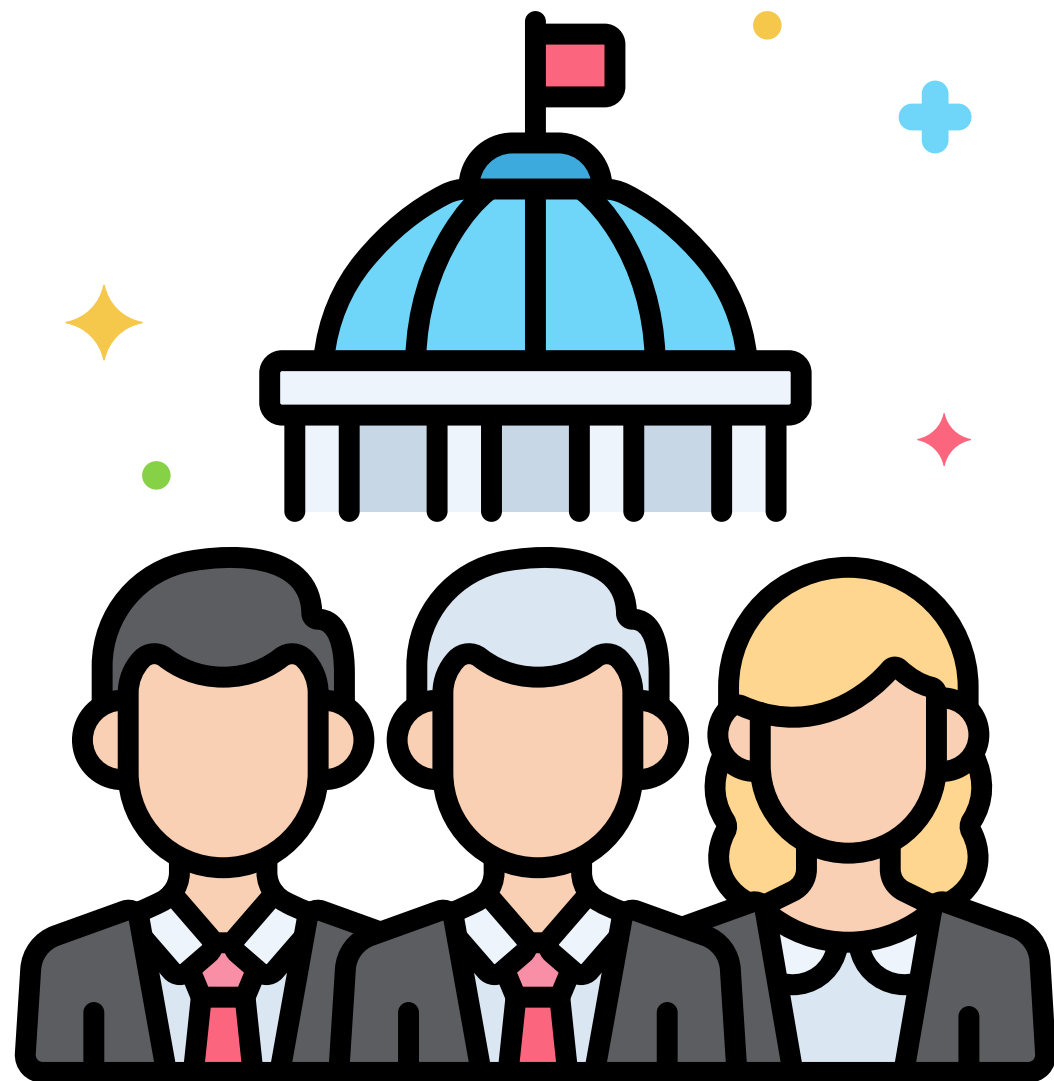
- Teach how to identify and prevent moral disengagement mechanisms in cyberspace.
- Teach how to avoid reinforcing cyberbullying content.
- Include parents, teachers and school staff on strategies oriented to respond effectively to reports of cyberbullying



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# Prevention of cyberbullying

## Inter-sectorial actions



- Anti-cyberbullying programs should be considered for significant funding resources and national-level implementation
- Health care providers as a potential new resource in bullying and cyberbullying identification and prevention.

(Vaillancourt et al., 2017)



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# Future research



Future research should make better use of direct comparison of bullying and cyberbullying interventions within the same program, with continuous exploration of bystander intervention strategies



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# Healthy environments





# Actions to harness the power of digitalization



- Provide all children with affordable access to high-quality online resources.
- Protect children from harm online – including abuse, exploitation, trafficking, cyberbullying and exposure to unsuitable materials.
- Safeguard children’s privacy and identities online.
- Teach digital literacy to keep children informed, engaged and safe online.
- Leverage the power of the private sector to advance ethical standards and practices that protect and benefit children online.
- Put children at the centre of digital policy.

(UNICEF, State of the World’s Children, 2017)

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