

# Cyberbullying and the Effect on School Climate

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Students who are bullied at school, are bullied online; Students who bully at school, bully online!

## Research Purpose

- At least one in five middle and high school students have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their lifetime.
- School climate influences a student's social and emotional well-being and ability to succeed academically.
- **Question:** Does the quality of the climate at school influence the extent to which students engage in cyberbullying?

95% of students (aged 12+) use the Internet [1]

## What is Cyberbullying?

“Willful and repeated harm inflicted through use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” [2]

### Examples of Cyberbullying

- mean or hurtful messages sent online or via cell phones
- rumors or threats posted or sent
- humiliating pictures or videos being posted online
- imposter profiles on social networking websites

Victimization rates range from 5.5 percent to 72 percent (average of 24.4 percent) [3]

At least 1 in 5 students have experienced cyberbullying [4]



## What is School Climate?

“The unwritten beliefs, values, and attitudes that become the style of interaction between students, teachers, and administrators” [4]

### Multi-Dimensional Definition

- Safety, Relationships, Teaching/Learning, External Environment
- Quality and Character of School Life (Physical/Psychological Aspects)

54% of students have never had a teacher talk to them about the responsible use of technology [4]

## Current Study

### Sample

- Data were collected in 2010 from a random sample of approximately 4400 students from 33 different middle and high schools in one large school district in the southern United States using a cross-sectional survey design
- Students reported their experiences with cyberbullying and their perceptions of the quality of their school climate

### Measures

#### Cyberbullying (previous 30 days)

Been cyberbullied  
Someone...

posted mean or hurtful comments about me online  
posted a mean or hurtful picture online of me online  
posted a mean or hurtful video online of me online  
created a mean or hurtful web page about me  
spread rumors about me online  
threatened to hurt me through a cell phone text message  
threatened to hurt me online  
pretended to be me online and acted in a way that was mean or hurtful to me

Individual mean score average: 1.69

#### School Climate

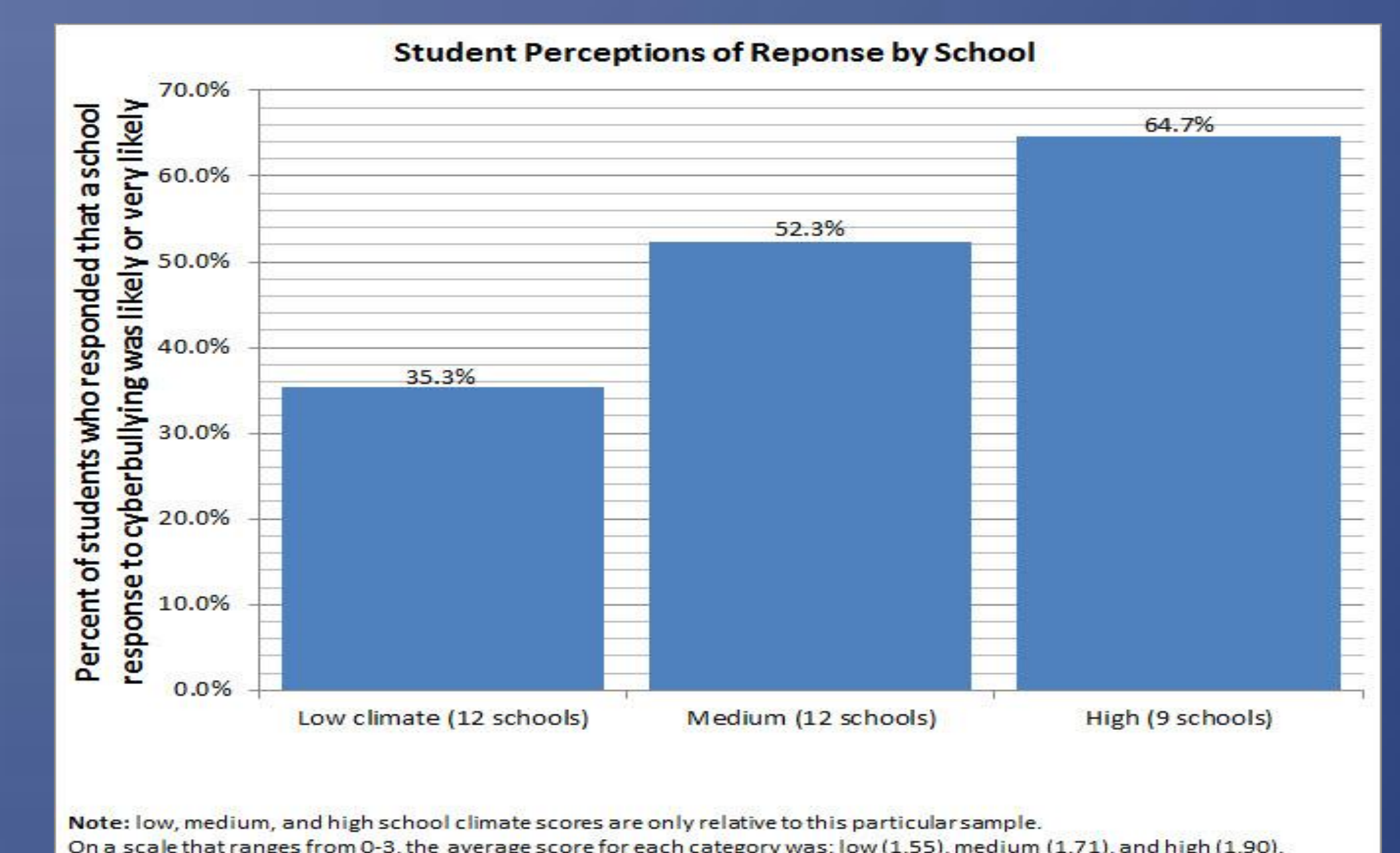
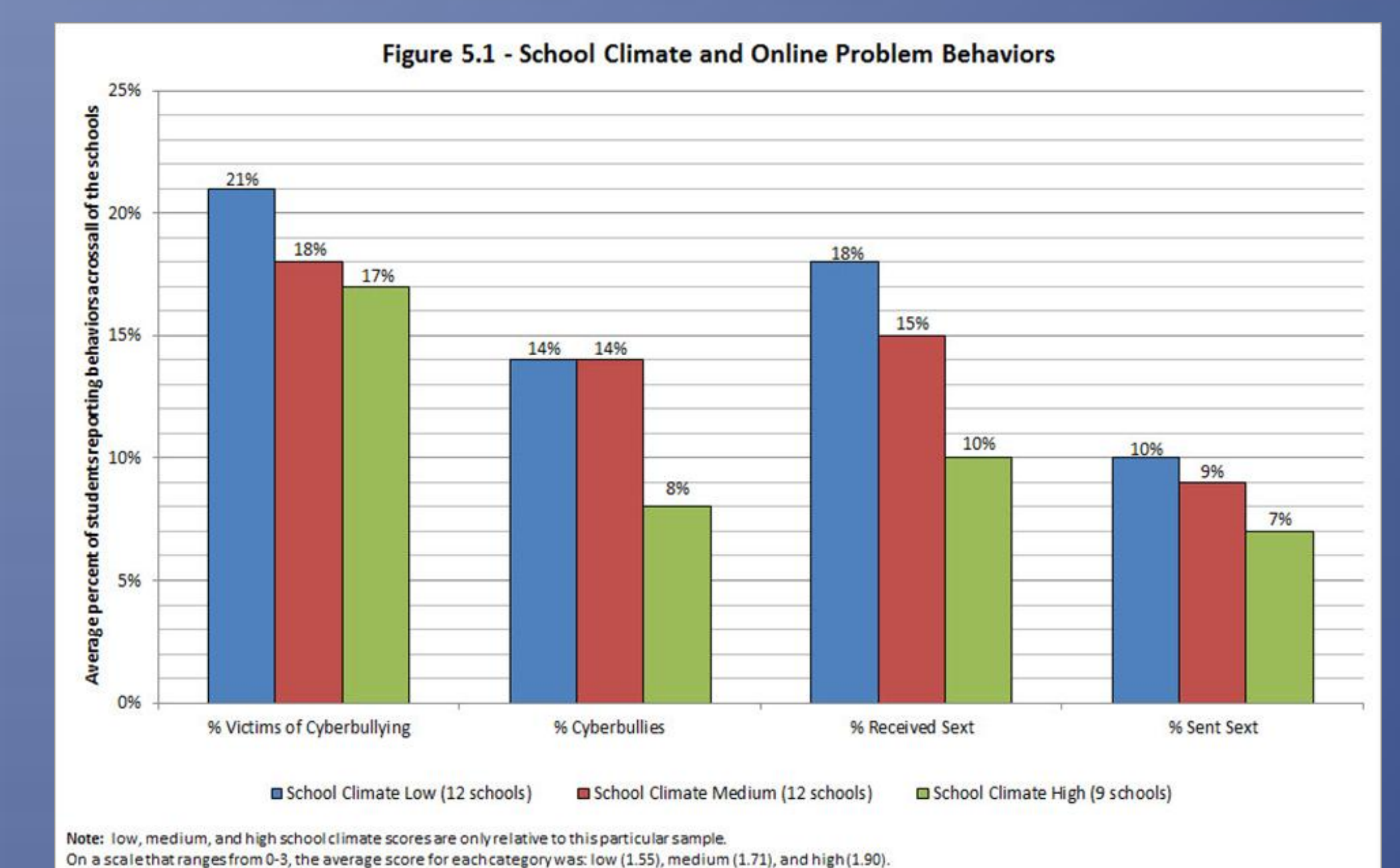
I feel...

safe at my school  
that teachers at my school care about me  
that teachers at my school really try to help me succeed  
that students at my school trust and respect the teachers  
that teachers at my school are fair to all students  
that teachers at my school take bullying very seriously

Average school scores ranged from 1.41 to 2.1; schools were divided into three categories based on natural breaks in scores (Low, Medium, High)

### Results

- Students who reported more positive perceptions about their schools reported fewer experiences with online behavioral problems
- Students in a higher school climate report greater school response to cyberbullying behaviors
- Students who said that they felt their teachers cared about them were less likely to report participating in cyberbullying



## Discussion

### Cyberbullying and School Climate: A Relationship Revealed

The results of the current study suggest that there is a relationship between the amount of online problem behaviors and the climate of a school. Current research suggests that students who are cyberbullied tend to exhibit negative emotions which can hinder learning. Research also suggests that schools with a positive climate are associated with fewer emotional and behavioral problems. The results from the study reveal that cyberbullying does have an effect on a school's climate. The quality and character of a school and how a student feels is negatively impacted by negative online behaviors such as cyberbullying.

### Implications: The Requirement of Education

Numerous implications can be taken away from this research. One implication that is worth noting is the need for educators and legislators to be made aware of the detrimental effects cyberbullying can have on the climate of a school. Implementing programs to educate about online misbehaviors and the need to foster a more positive school climate, may increase a student's ability to learn and, therefore make the school and community more enjoyable and safe for everyone.

### Suggestions: The Growing Need for Criminal Justice Research

Suggestions for future research may be to examine not only the behaviors of students and how school climate is related to online behaviors, but how cyberbullying, specifically, may influence the social and emotional well-being of students, and how the social and emotional well-being may or may not influence a school's climate. The professionals in the criminal justice field have always had a relationship with schools. With the growing amount of youth using technology and going online, criminal justice researchers analyzing online youth misbehavior can help, through the latest research, both educators and community members develop more positive and bully free schools.



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[1] A. Lenhart, M. Madden, A. Smith, K. Purcell, K. Zickuhr, and L. Rainie, *Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites: How American Teens Navigate the New World of Digital Citizenship* (Washington, D.C. Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, 2011)

[2, 3, 5, 6] Hinduja, S. and Patchin, J. *School Climate 2.0: Preventing Cyberbullying and Sexting One Classroom at a Time* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publications, (2012).

[4] W.N. Welsh, J.R. Greene, and P.H. Jenkins, "School Disorder: The Influence of Individual, Institutional, and Community Factors," *Criminology* 37, 1 (1999).