

A social network analysis and implementation study  
of an intervention designed to advance social and  
emotional learning and respectful relationships in  
secondary schools  
(funded by ANROWS)

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The intervention: a modified version of the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* program used with Years 7 and 9

**Topic 1: Emotional literacy**

**Topic 2: Personal strengths**

**Topic 3: Positive coping and stress management**

**Topic 4: Problem-solving**

**Topic 5: Help-seeking**

**Topic 6: Gender and identity**

**Topic 7: Positive gender relationships**

Around 18 lessons in total for each Year level

Advancing key social and emotional capabilities, relationship, coping, peer support and help-seeking skills

Additional advancing gender equality, consent conversations, affirmative consent and the law, prevention of gender-based violence, and help-seeking

To access the Resilience Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching resources:

<http://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/ResourcePackage/ByPin?pin=2JZX4R>

# Topics advancing social and emotional learning: using a gender and sexualities inclusive approach throughout

## YEAR 7

### Topic 1: Emotional Literacy

11 lessons

- Activity 1: Emotions vocabulary
- Activity 2: Hidden Emotions

### Topic 2: Personal Strengths

- Activity 1: Qualities that I admire
- Activity 2: Using strengths

### Topic 3: Positive coping & stress management

- Activity 1: Sources of stress and strategies for coping
- Activity 2: What is self-talk?
- Activity 3: Building skills in positive self-talk

### Topic 4: Problem-solving

- Activity 1: Tree change
- Activity 2: Introducing assertiveness

### Topic 5: Help-seeking

- Activity 1: Help-seeking – what could you do?
- Activity 2: Help-seeking – what could you say?

## YEAR 9

8 lessons

### Topic 1: Emotional Literacy

- Activity 1: Understanding complex emotions
- Activity 2: Empathy matters

### Topic 2: Personal Strengths

- Activity 1: Valuing character strengths

### Topic 3: Positive coping & stress management

- Activity 1: Understanding strengths
- Activity 2: Managing negative self-talk

### Topic 4: Problem-solving

- Activity 1: Using a pathways model for problem-solving
- Activity 2: Making an assertive I-statement

### Topic 5: Help-seeking

- Activity 1: Active listening for peer support
- Activity 2: How to ask for help

# Topics addressing gender norms, respectful relationships, consent using a gender and sexualities inclusive approach throughout

## YEAR 7

7 lessons

### Topic 6: Gender and identity

- Activity 1: Tracking gender: Investigating gender norms
- Activity 2: Negative health impacts of gender norms
- Activity 3: Positive & negative uses of power and privilege

### Topic 7: Positive gender relations

- Activity 1: What is interpersonal gender-based violence?
- Activity 2: Positive acts of peer support
- Activity 3: Critical thinking about gender-based violence in relation to sexting and online sexual imagery
- Activity 4: Safety and help-seeking in situations involving gender-based violence

## YEAR 9

9 lessons

### Topic 6: Gender and identity

- Activity 1: Gender policing and gender stress
- Activity 2: Dealing with gender policing
- Activity 3: Gender, safety and wellbeing
- Activity 4: Consent is more than asking: power relations

### Topic 7: Positive gender relations

- Activity 1: Gender-based violence and the law
- Activity 2: Consent and the law
- Activity 3: Peer support & peer referral in response to gender-based violence
- Activity 4: Conducting help-seeking conversations
- Activity 5: Race for respect

# Project aims and research questions

Mixed methods study investigating the impact of **Resilience Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR)** program on the social health of Year 7 and 9 students.

Research questions:

1. How does the RRRR program impact student social wellbeing, resilience, gender-equality attitudes, school connectedness and use of help-seeking and positive coping strategies?
2. How does participation in the program influence student relationships with peers?
3. What factors enable and/or inhibit the capacity of schools to implement the program with fidelity?

# Sample: 6 Victorian schools (4 State, 2 Catholic, 1 boys), 2022 intervention year

## Surveys

- Baseline surveys: 725 students (n=289 girls; n=398 boys; n=38 gender diverse) from 6 Victorian schools
- Baseline and endpoint: 397 students (n=169 girls; n=205 boys; n=21 gender diverse).
- Pre and post survey measures investigate resilience, gender attitudes, prevalence of bullying and peer-perpetrated sexual harassment, student social relationships with classmates (social network analysis)
- Endpoint survey includes evaluative questions in which students rate usefulness of program components

## Student focus groups:

- Eight endpoint focus groups with Year 7 and Year 9 students from 4 of the 6 schools
- Total: 61 students: (20 girls, 39 boys and 2 gender diverse students)
  - 29 students from Year 7
  - 32 students from Year 9

## Teacher and leader interviews

- Interviews at endpoint with 19 members of staff
  - 5 x Year 7 teachers
  - 4 x Year 9 teachers
  - 5 x implementation leads
  - 5 x principal class leaders

# Context of providing intervention in 2022

Post the lockdowns ... it was a perfect time to really put a focus on those interpersonal skills and self-management, social awareness skills.

(School 2, male implementation lead)

Out of all of the years ... I think this year's been one of the most challenging. ... students that have been even more defiant or entrenched in the ways that they want to do things ... Yeah, it's been really challenging, and I think for staff as well, they're **very** tired.

(School 1, male principal class)

## Key contributions from school leaders and champions

[It is important to have] a really clear sense from senior leadership that this is important, this is a priority of the school, and this is a whole-school approach, and that time is sacred. ...

It isn't just Friday Period 2.

This is something we live and we breathe, and this is about how we approach our relationships.

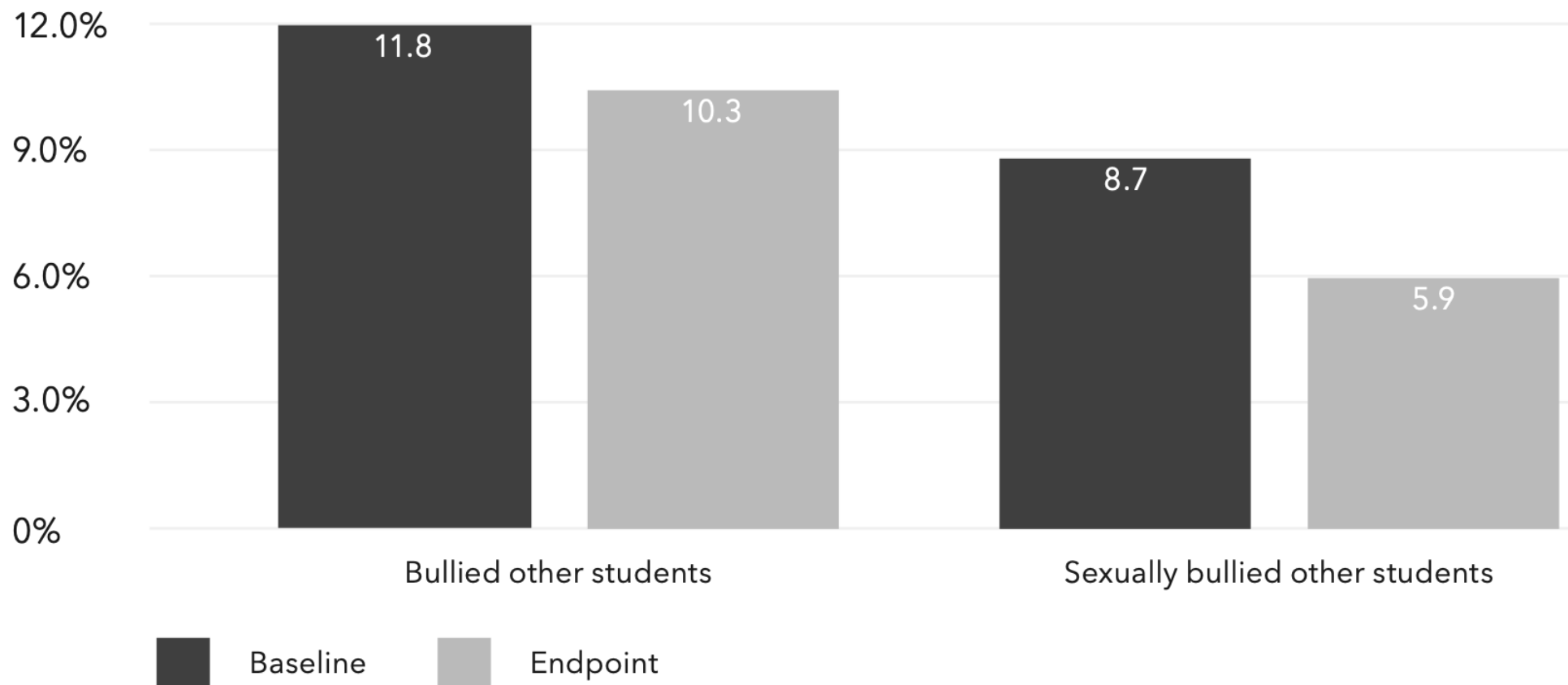
(School 3, female Implementation lead)



# Program led to reductions in bullying and sexual harassment in Years 7 & 9

- **Decrease in students who said they sexually bullied other students from Baseline (8.7%) to Endpoint (5.9%)**
  - How many times in last week did you make sexual comments about someone else?
  - How many times in last week did you call people gay in a mean way?
- **Decrease in bullying from Baseline (11.8%) to Endpoint (10.3%)**
  - How many times in last week did you make call people mean names, leave them out in a mean way, say mean things on social media, hit them?

**Figure 2:** Students self-reported bullying and sexual bullying other students at baseline and endpoint



**Relevance:** Longitudinal research shows boys who bully others at ages 11-12 more likely to engage in homophobic name-calling at ages 12-13. Those boys who reported greater bullying perpetration and higher use of homophobic name-calling were 6 times more likely to perpetrate sexual violence at ages 14-18.

Source: Espelage, D. L., Basile, K. C., Leemis, R. W., Hipp, T. N., & Davis, J. P. (2018). Longitudinal Examination of the Bullying-Sexual Violence Pathway across Early to Late Adolescence: Implicating Homophobic Name-Calling. *J Youth Adolesc*, 47(9), 1880-1893. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0827-4>

# Student ratings of program components as useful, very useful or extremely useful

	Understand & communicate about feelings and needs	How to have good friendships	How to avoid joining in bullying	Gender and equality	Effects of Gender-Based Violence
<b>Girls</b>	74.2%	76.3%	78.9%	85.6%	85.1%
<b>Boys</b>	73.9%	78.0%	72.5%	76.9%	78.3%
<b>Gender diverse</b>	69.4%	69.6%	82.6%	82.6%	91.3%

Student ratings of program components as useful, very useful or extremely useful. N.B. Girls and gender diverse young people more likely to rate the program as very useful than boys.

# Snapshot – Student views on social and emotional learning

I liked the emotion bit as well. But not just towards other people. Towards yourself and **how to deal with your emotions.** SCHOOL 1, YEAR 7 STUDENT

Because sometimes in life, people are going to be upset and **you want to be there for them.** You don't know what to do. So, this program helped us to learn what to do in certain scenarios.

(SCHOOL 2, Year 7 student)

Because the program talked about how people feel, and how they don't show it and stuff, so that sort of made you feel like, “Oh, **you need to make sure your friends are okay.** Oh, you need to make sure people are okay even if they don't seem upset.”

(School 2, Year 7 student)

# Snapshot – Student views on consent education

I'd probably say **the most important thing was consent** just because when we went over it, went over a bunch of things like what's acceptable, what is and what isn't consent, and knowing those kind of things, is good just to teach to a broader part of the school. **So having the whole of Year 9 learn that was probably the most important thing.** (SCHOOL 2, Year 9 student)

It was very useful (learning about consent).... students learned a lot about what to do and what not to do ... It's just having a girlfriend and **respecting her boundaries** and that kind of thing. Don't try to push past them, just respect them. Even if you don't like that, you've just got to respect it. SCHOOL 3, YEAR 9 STUDENT

I think it's pretty good that we get the opportunity to learn about this ... because things like drug education, sex education, usually they're considered kind of taboo. **So, we don't really have the conversation with our parents sometimes. So, it's good that we're learning this stuff.**

SCHOOL 2, YEAR 7 STUDENT

# Snapshot – Teacher views

## **ENGAGING:**

From Day 1 **it was engaging, just because of the teaching methods ...** and you could see the staff enthusiasm doing it, and that always translates well when kids get to do it.

(SCHOOL 5, YEAR 7 TEACHER)

**BREAKING DOWN STEREOTYPES:** When you talked about, what does being a girl or a female look like, sound like, what compliments do you get as a female versus what do you get compliments as a male ..., they were like: *'I've never thought of that before. Girls get commented on their appearance. Boys get commented on their ability to do things. ...**We've never actually thought of that before!**'* (SCHOOL 2, YEAR 9 TEACHER)

**BECOMING UPSTANDERS:** **Some of the boys started to actually challenge their peers** directly, instead of me having to do the challenging. And then all of a sudden more of them got onboard, and then there was this turning point where... Those voices suddenly got very quiet and actually started to shift their own narrative ... (SCHOOL 3, YEAR 9 TEACHER)



# Snapshot – Teacher views

I thought the resources were brilliant ... The information in the teacher manual, again with the evidence-based information that you could present to the students so they could find relevance in why we are doing this ... I really liked a lot of the activities and how it met curriculum ... Recent statistics and data especially. (School 1, Year 9 male teacher)

I felt anxious talking about ... consent and things like that because I was worried about making people feel upset, or triggering things that I didn't know were going on. And once or twice there were some students who were challenging some things. And it was a kind of tricky conversation to have. (School 5, Year 9 female teacher)

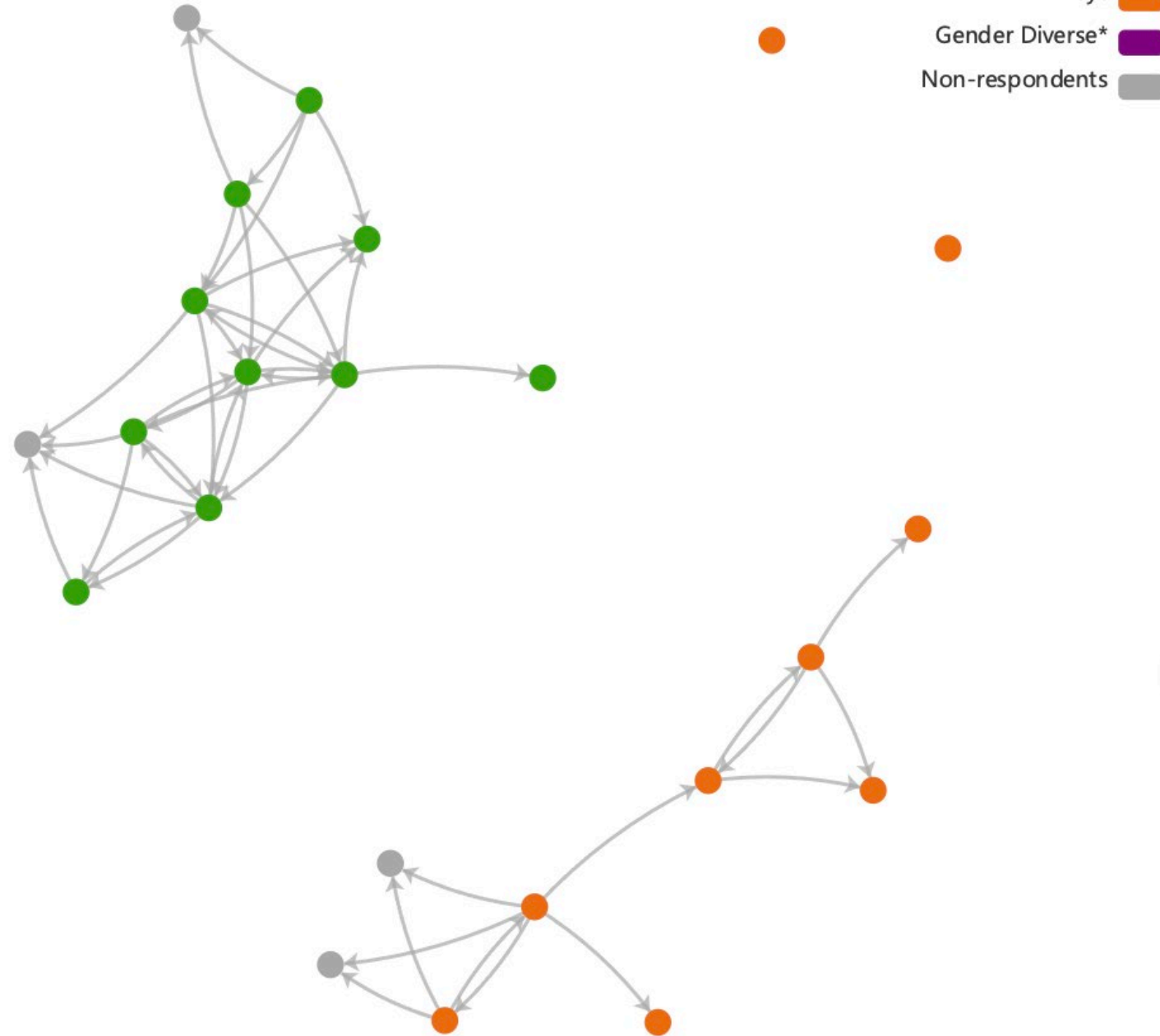
# Use of social network analysis

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The inclusion of student social relationships (as social networks) provided a valuable insight into the structure of social connections between students

## Social network questions

1. In your class, who do you consider a close friend?
2. In your class, who can you work with on group tasks?
3. In your class, which students are disrespectful towards you?
4. In your class, who would you like to spend more time with?





# SNA analysis shows gender divides are the norm

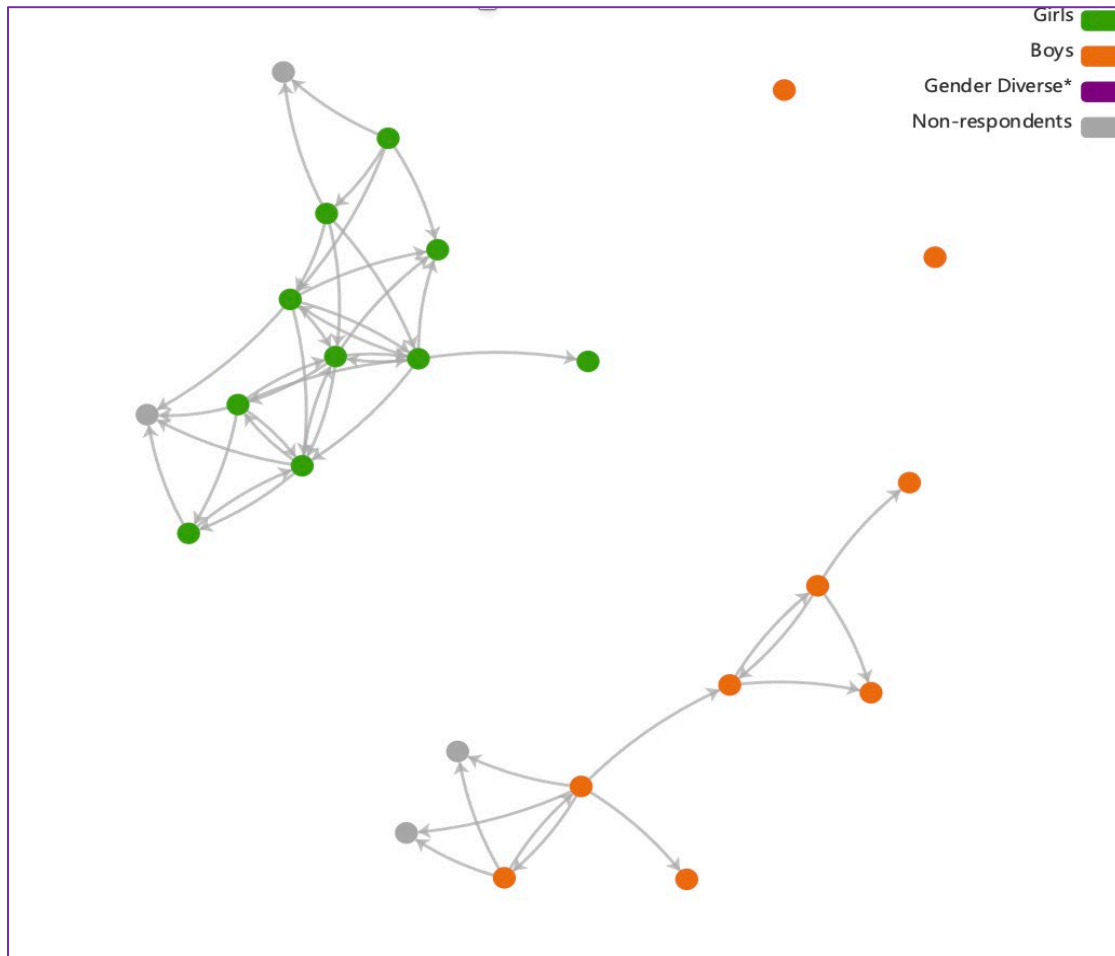
## **We found:**

- Student school life marked by pronounced gender divides
- Students rarely befriend or work with others of a different gender
- Social penalties exist for those who crossed these divides, particularly in the form of sexualised teasing of girls.

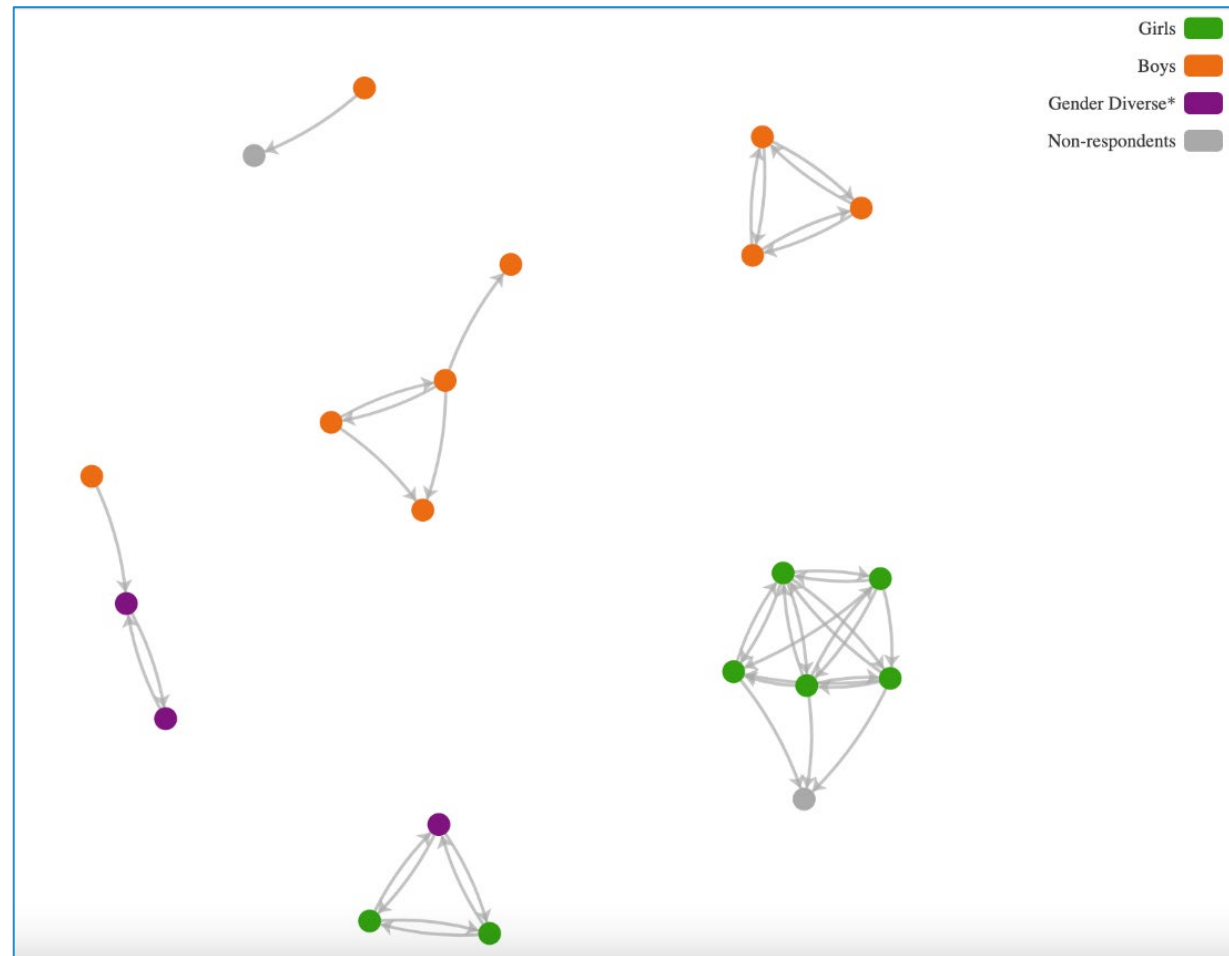
## **Implication:**

This is concerning as wider research shows that those with mainly male friends are less likely to endorse gender equality and more likely to endorse use of violence (Politoff et al., 2019).

Year 7 class – who I like to work with on group tasks (School 2)



Year 9 Class: People I am close friends with (School 2)



Gender segregation is the norm for friendships and working relationships

SNA also shows students group with like-minded peers

**Students who sexually bully others:**

- Are friends with those who also sexually bully others
- Prefer to work with those who also sexually bully others
- Aspire to become friends those who also sexually bully people

**Students who hold gender equality attitudes:**

- Are more likely to be socially connected as friends
- Prefer to work with each other
- Aspire to spend more time with those who also hold pro-gender equality attitudes

# Attitudes to violence and gender equality

Attitudes relating to violence strongly linked to attitudes relating to gender equality for boys, girls and gender diverse young people:

## **Gender as a factor**

- Boys held significantly higher pro-violence attitudes and lower gender equity attitudes than did girls and gender diverse young people

## **Age/year level as a factor**

- Pro-gender equality attitudes were lower and endorsement of violence higher amongst Year 9 boys than Year 7 boys, indicating increasing influence of negative masculinity norms affecting boys as they age into mid high school

# Intention to intervene if a boy tells a sexual joke about a girl

## **I would intervene:**

- Year 7 and 9 boys were less likely than girls and gender diverse young people to say they would intervene
- Year 9 boys (12.8%) were even less likely to say they would intervene than Year 7 boys (20.2%)
- Girls much more likely to say they would intervene than boys - (Year 7 girls, 38.2% and Year 9 girls, 33.3%)
- Gender diverse young people similar to girls (Year 7, 30.8% and Year 9, 33.3%)

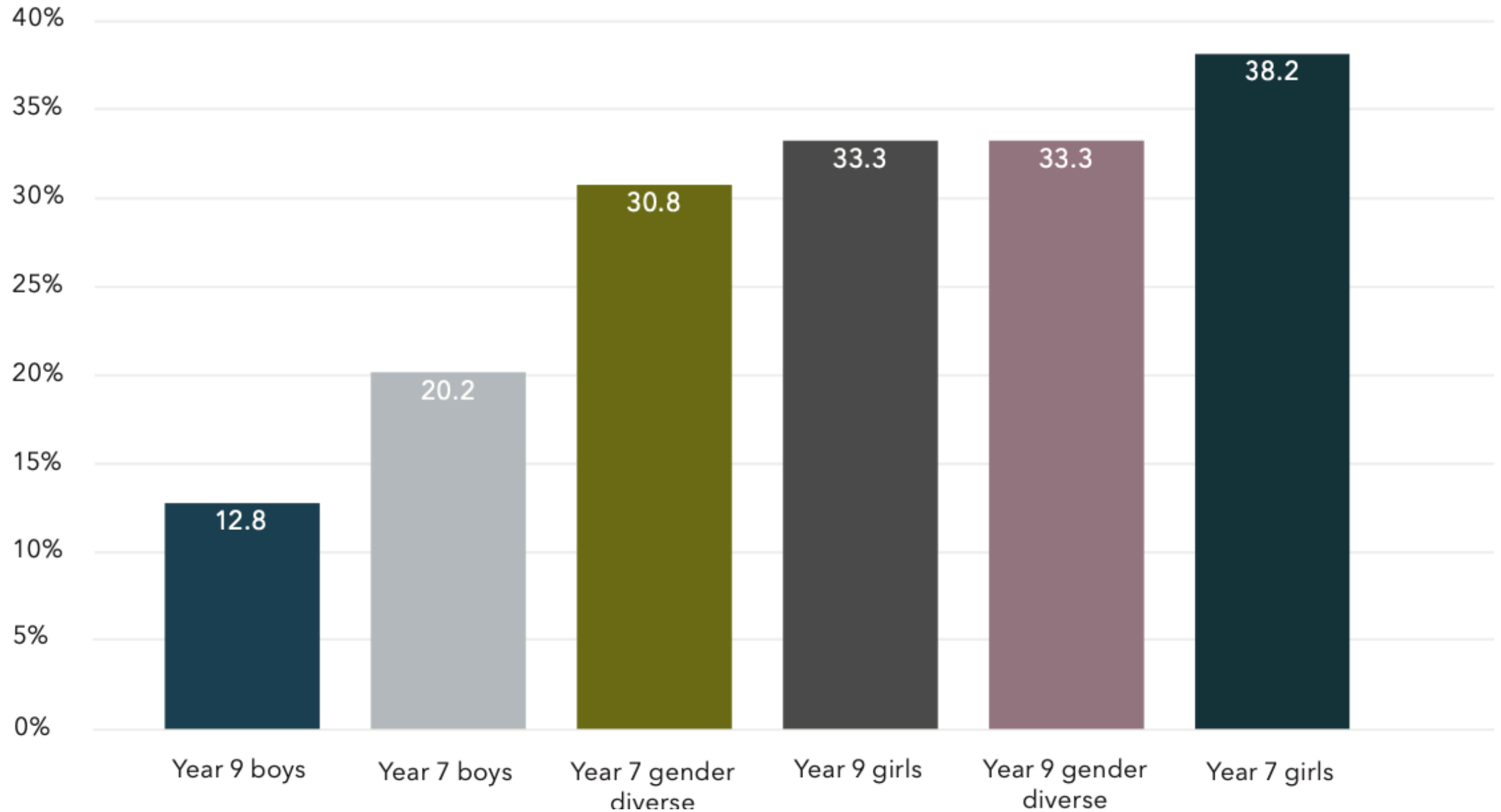
## **I would like to do or say something but wouldn't know what to do:**

- Around a quarter of boys - Year 7 (23.9%) and Year 9 (24%) said they would like to do or say something **but wouldn't know what to do**

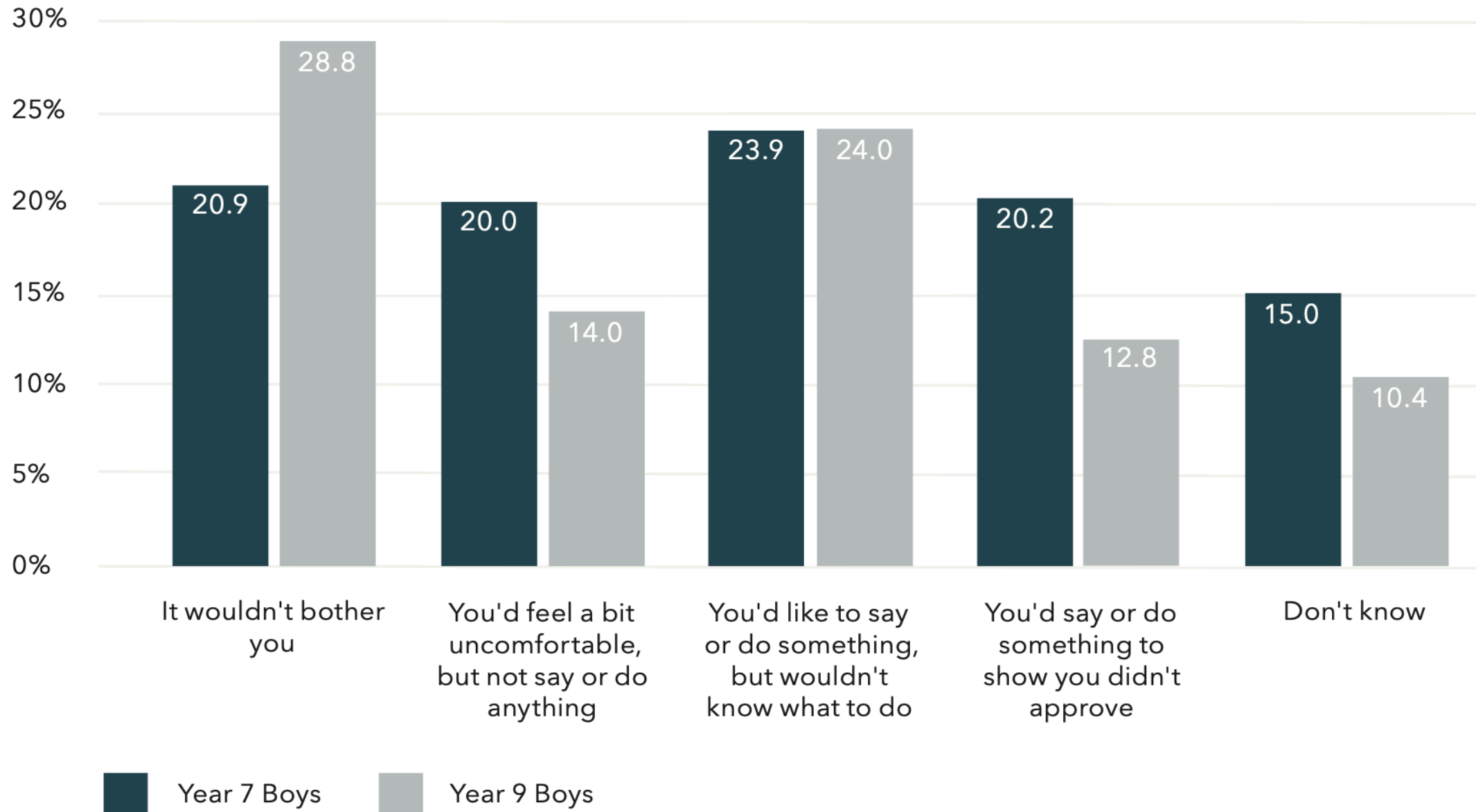
## **This behaviour wouldn't bother me**

- Over a fifth of Year 7 boys (20.9%) and close to a third of Year 9 boys (28.8%) and said this wouldn't bother them

Proportion of students who would intervene if a boy in their class told a sexual joke about a girl (in their class)



## If a boy in your class told a sexual joke about a girl (in your class), how would you respond?



## Student experiences of backlash and resistance from peers

If they're in your Year Level, and you tell someone about it (the harassment), they're most likely going to get mad at you and get a lot worse with it. So that's why people don't really talk about it. (School 1, Year 7 boy)

I just go outside and there's like, I'm not trying to be really stereotypical, but it's usually boys who do it, and they'd be like, "Oh my god, you're touching me, that's assault, that's rape!" And then they really joke around those sensitive topics and it's like a stab in the heart ... (School 2, Year 9 girl)

One of my friends in another class, she divides her class into, when she explains it to me, the homophobic and transphobic girls and boys, and then her friends, it's kind of that bad. (School 2, Year 9 student)

When it comes to ... gender-based violence and stuff, where a majority of it does happen to women ... some kind of got defensive about it ... some of the boys at the back of the class ... I think it's ... defending. You feel like they're saying that you [a girl] would do that [too]. (School 4, Year 7 girl)



# Respectful regard and social capability measures: Key findings

- High social capability and strong respectful regard associated with rejection of use of violence and support for gender equality.
- We did not find a relationship between self-confidence and social capability, but rather a strong relationship between social capability and respectful regard.

## **For boys:**

- High social capability and respectful regard linked not only to positive gender equality attitudes, but also with violence dis-endorsing attitudes and intentions to speak up against sexual harassment.
- Using our resilience measure boys who showed higher levels of confidence were more likely to hold pro-violence attitudes and lower gender equality attitudes. Potentially the confidence measure was capturing entitlement, rather than self-confidence, indicating importance of developing resilience instruments that include social measures relating to gender equality and attitudes towards interpersonal violence.

# Strong growth of respectful regard and social capability for high implementation students

Figure 3: Respectful regard scores at baseline and endpoint by status of working in small groups (no, yes)

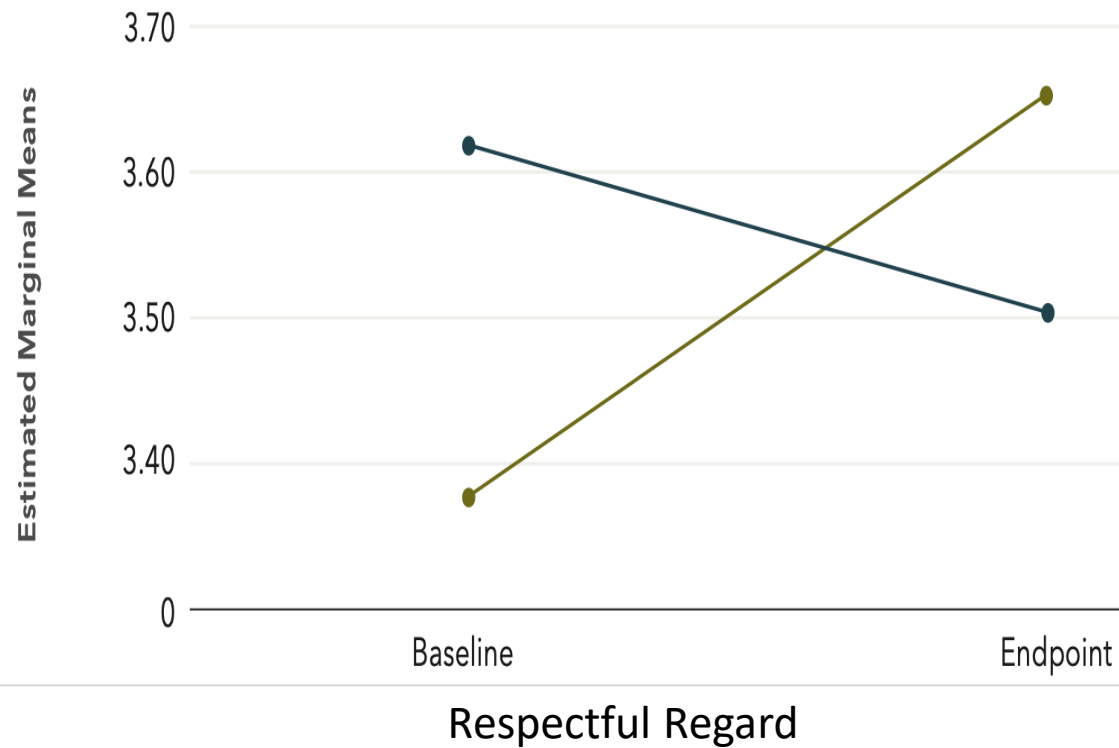
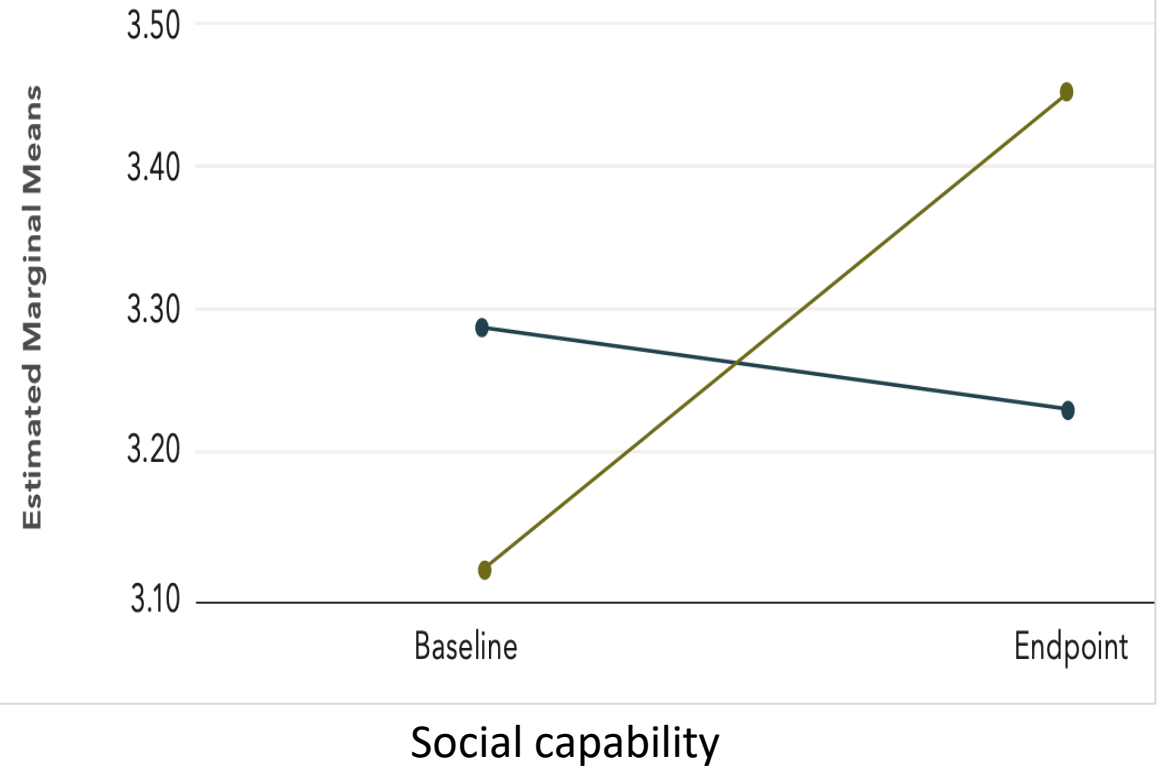


Figure 4: Social Capability scores at baseline and endpoint by status of working in small groups (no, yes)



Significant increases over time for high implementation students

# Respectful regard and Social capability

Average of the following items

## Respectful Regard

- I think about other people's feelings before I say things
- I am patient with people who can't do things as well as I can
- I think things through carefully before making decisions
- Other people's feelings are easy for me to understand

(Cronbach  $\alpha$  = .748)

## Social capability

- I can share my personal thoughts with others
- If I have a problem, I know there is someone I can talk to
- If I can't handle something I find help

(Cronbach  $\alpha$  = .722)

# Structural factors affecting implementation

## **Drivers:**

- Access to training
- The teacher guidance provided within the RRRR program
- In-school support from leaders and colleagues
- Sufficient time to prepare
- Sufficient time in timetable to provide the program in full

## **Barriers:**

- Curriculum crowding
- Insufficient access to professional learning
- Heightened wellbeing and behavioural problems following the pandemic
- Additional workload affecting schools
- Teacher churn, absences and shortages
- Concern about potential for aggressive backlash and resistance causing distress
- Low confidence to facilitate the collaborative learning activities



# Implications for policy and practice at a system level:

- ✓ Set clear policy directions around gender equality and inclusion of students of diverse genders and sexualities to ensure that school is a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for all
- ✓ Address curriculum crowding
- ✓ Invest in teacher development
- ✓ Provide teachers with research-informed instructional tools which integrate social and emotional learning and respectful relationships education
- ✓ Resource schools such that time for teacher learning, planning, program provision and wellbeing support fit within viable teacher workloads
- ✓ Equip school leaders and teachers with strategies to help deal with backlash and resistance expressed by students, parents/carers and/or community members



# Implications for policy and practice at a school level

- ✓ Implement the policies, practices and codes of conduct designed to ensure school is a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for all
- ✓ Provide a comprehensive social and emotional learning and respectful relationships program designed to advance the knowledge, skills and attitudes that inform positive relationships
- ✓ Provide in-school support for those teaching the program
- ✓ Include students in needs analysis, program evaluation and broader school improvement efforts

# Implications at a teacher level

- ✓ Establish positive relationships with students
- ✓ Foster a respectful class climate
- ✓ Organise for students to mix across friendship and gender divides
- ✓ Provide the collaborative learning activities to foster engagement, critical thinking, relationship skills and student voice
- ✓ Persist. Some students have adopted negative influencers as role models. Surrounding others may experience negative peer pressure. It may take significant program exposure before students feel safe enough to openly challenge discriminatory attitudes or behaviour on the part of their peers

# Key takeout messages

- **Use relationship-centric approaches:** Students value integrated approaches to social and emotional learning, respectful relationships and consent education
- **Provide comprehensive programs:** sustained programs such as RRRR can advance social capabilities & respectful regard & reduce sexual harassment and bullying
- **Use collaborative learning:** Higher fidelity via use of the collaborative learning activities leads to stronger growth in social capability and respectful regard
- **Students find it useful:** even without high fidelity of delivery, the program achieves strong student-endorsement for usefulness
- **Support teachers:** provide training, research-informed resources, curriculum home, time to prepare and deliver, protective policies, support from leaders and colleagues
- **Address gender policing:** include focus on gender-based harassment of boys by boys as part of GBV prevention education
- **Interrupt gender divides:** Mix students during collaborative tasks to provide opportunity to grow respect and friendship