

# Principals' perspectives on bullying, cyberbullying as well as other youth disturbances and the obstacles of prevention in Hungarian schools

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## ABSTRACT

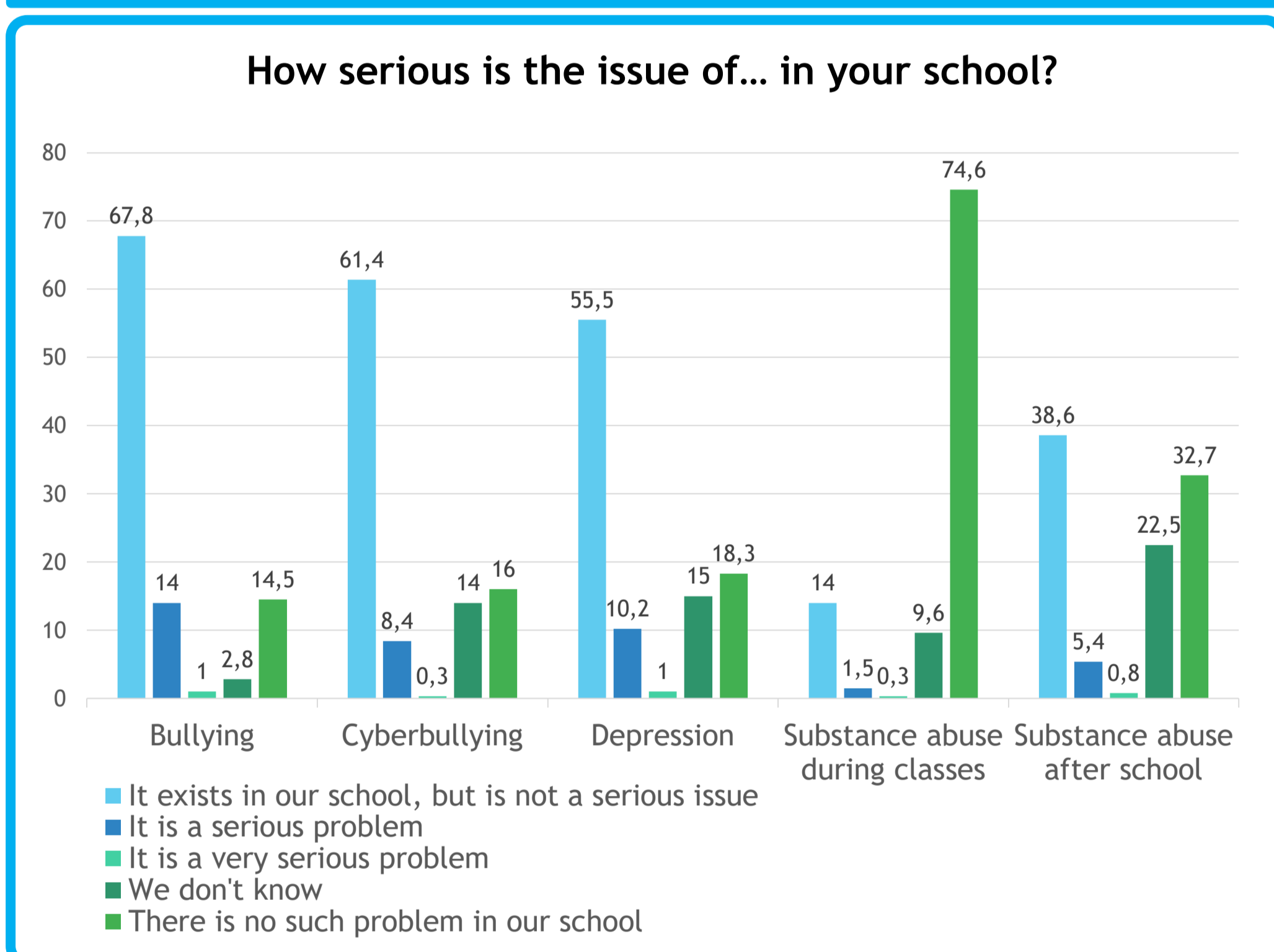
The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of Hungarian school principals regarding the prevalence of bullying, self-harm, suicide, substance abuse, eating disorders and adolescent depression in their institutions, and also on the subject of the relationship between bullying and other youth disturbances. School-based prevention efforts and methods were also surveyed. An online self-report questionnaire regarding these issues was sent to the entire population of Hungarian primary and secondary education institutes, specifically addressed to the principals. The vast majority (82,8%) of the respondents admitted to having bullying problems among their students. Other urgent issues seem to be substance abuse, depression, eating disorders and self-harm. While a perceived relation between bullying and other disturbances is observed by the principals in some cases, the link is complex. As for currently employed prevention measures, there is a general lack of long-term whole-school approaches, and schools are clearly less active in dealing with self-harm, suicide, depression and eating disorders than in preventing bullying and substance abuse. A further study about the perspectives of Hungarian students and a comparison of their answers with that of the principals is currently in progress.

## AIM and METHOD

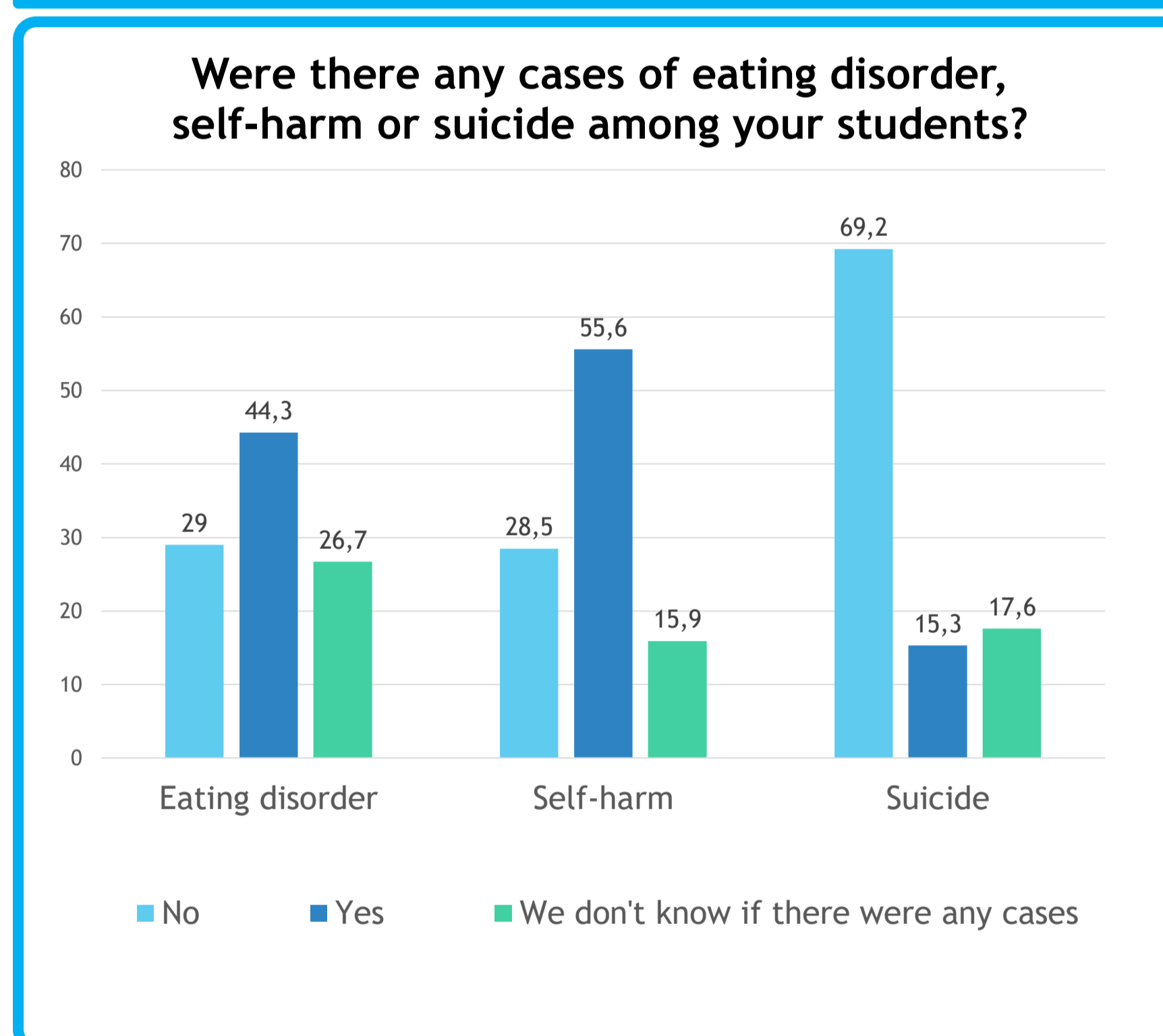
- In order to introduce successful prevention programs for youth disturbances in schools, support from school principals and administration is essential. Therefore it is crucial to understand their perspective.
- The **aim** was to examine the perception of Hungarian school principals regarding:
  - the prevalence of bullying, cyberbullying, substance abuse, depression, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide among their students,
  - the relationship between bullying and other youth disturbances and
  - the applied prevention methods.
- **Method:** online self-report questionnaire (and phone interviews) (2017)
- 394 responses (20%) from the entire population of Hungarian educational institutes (Population: 1971)

## RESULTS

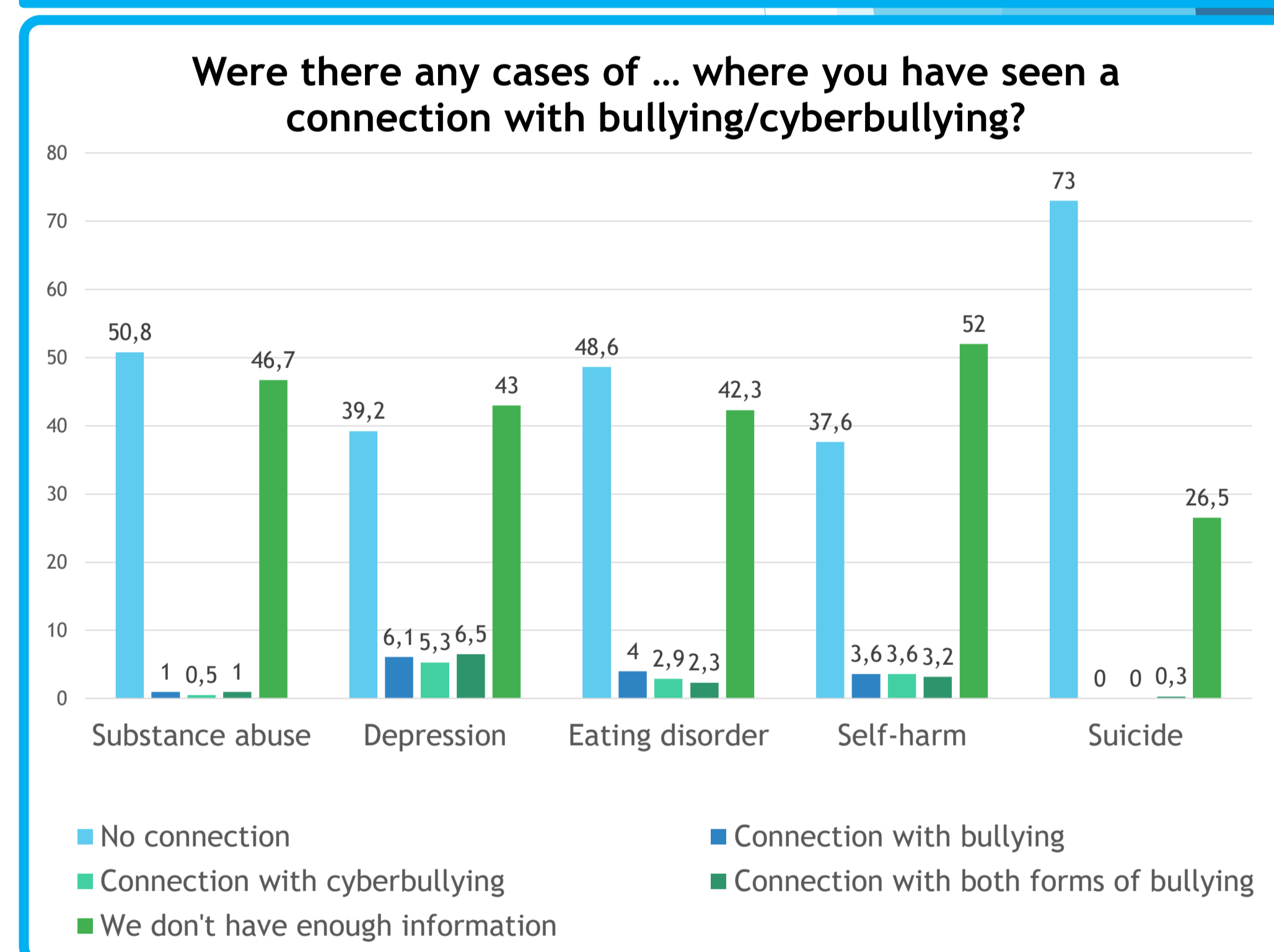
### PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTION OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF YOUTH DISTURBANCES



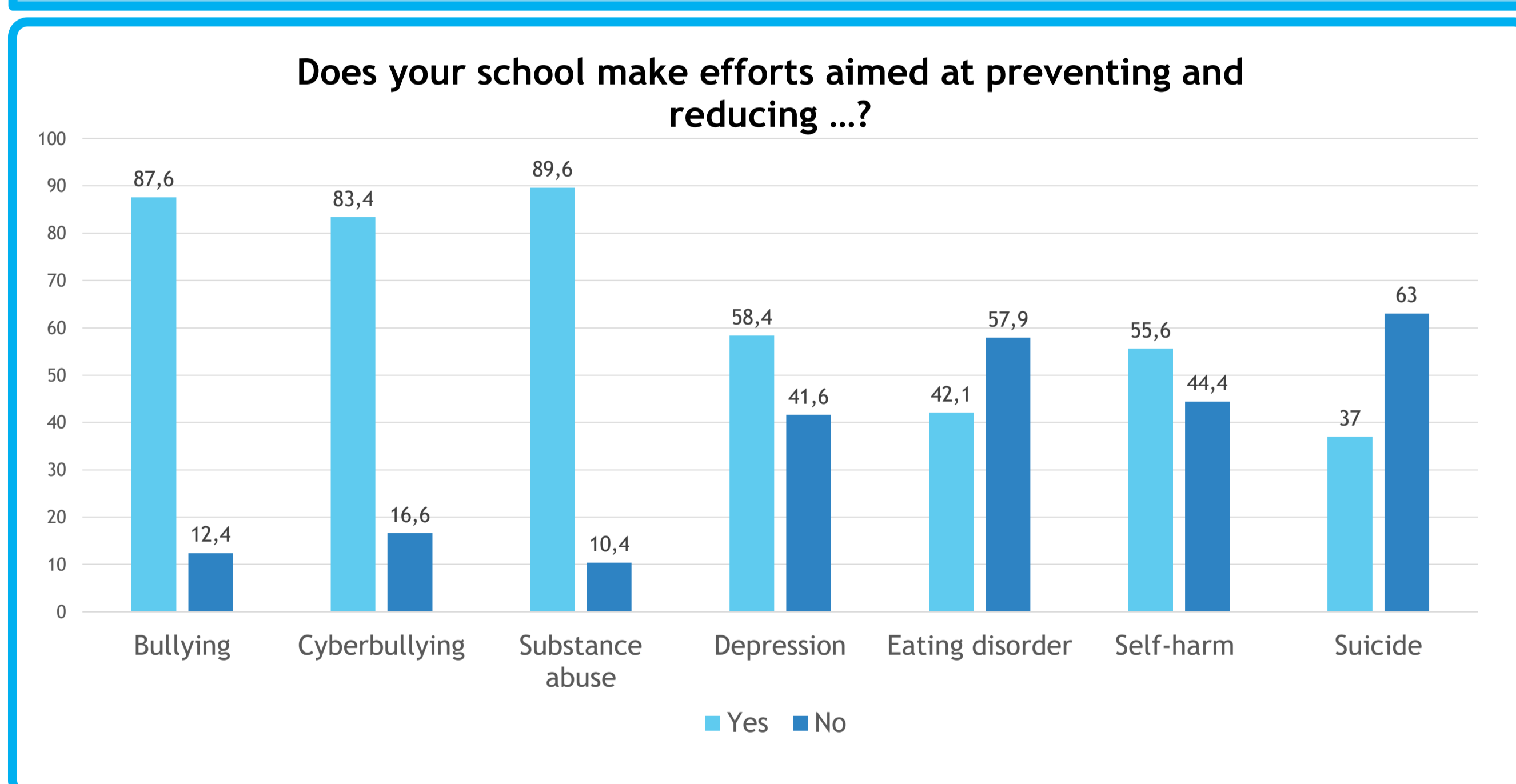
### PREVALENCE OF EATING DISORDER, SELF-HARM AND SUICIDE



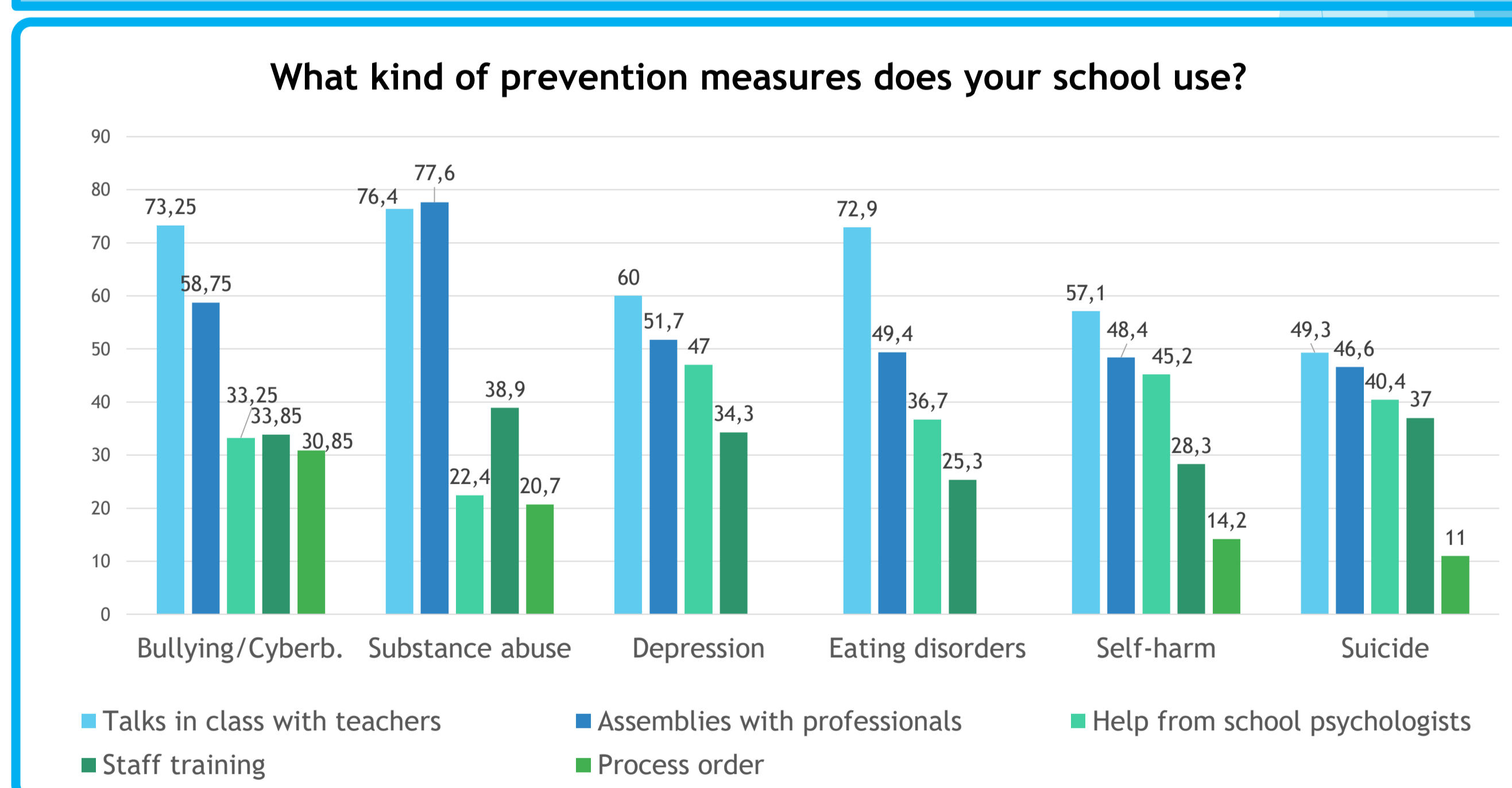
### CONNECTION BETWEEN BULLYING/CYBERBULLYING AND OTHER YOUTH DISTURBANCES



### PREVENTION EFFORTS



### PREVENTION METHODS



## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

### PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES

- Principals regard **substance abuse as their least severe problem**, yet they make the **biggest prevention efforts** against this issue.
- **Bullying and cyberbullying** are both regarded as quite serious problems, and the **prevention effort-rates** are proportionally **high**.
- In preventing and dealing with **depression, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide** schools are relatively **less active** – it seems that only those schools make efforts where principals become aware of such cases.
- **Bullying and substance abuse often take the form of behavioral problems** and that may explain why **schools feel more responsible to prevent them and deal with them**.
- Principals saw on some occasions a **link between bullying/cyberbullying cases and depression, eating disorders as well as self-harm incidents**.

### OBSTACLES OF PREVENTION

- **Lack of information** in many schools about the state of affairs in the own institution regarding youth disturbances
- **Lack of long-term whole-school approaches**
- **Not enough school psychologist** (only schools with more than 500 students can get a school psychologist status).
- **Lack of special trainings** for school staff in most schools
- Schools often **only deal with the behavioral aspects** of youth problems and not with underlying interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts.
- A lot of school **principals feel helpless and overwhelmed**, because there is **not enough information and money** for introducing prevention programs.
- **Insufficient cooperation within the child support system** including schools, families, education counselling service, family support service etc.