

Investigating SWPBIS and Equitable Discipline: Relationships Between Implementation and Referral Categories



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Background and Purpose

Educational equity has been promoted in legislation for 60 years (Brown v. Board, 1954; NCLB, 2001; IDEIA, 2004), yet disparities for minorities persist in academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2006), special education placement (Donovan & Cross, 2002), and in disciplinary practices (ODRs, suspensions, expulsions; Brown & Tillio, 2013; Finn & Servoss, 2014; Skiba et al., 2002; 2011)

- Black students face higher rates K-12; Hispanic students in secondary

Few studies have investigated the disparities in *infraction types* for office disciplinary referrals (ODRs):

- **Subjective** categories (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002)
- **Most/all** categories in elementary (Martinez et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2011)

Many have recommended School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) as a solution (McIntosh et al., 2014)

- Set of universal structures and procedures to promote social success by developing positive behaviors and relationships,
- Consistent reinforcement and consequences aligned to behavioral expectations proactively and explicitly taught to all students
- Data-based decision-making for aligning supports to needs, based on monitoring of student behavior in all school settings (Sugai & Horner, 2006)

There is minimal empirical evidence that SWPBIS is related to the discipline gap

- Reduces *overall* rates of ODRs (Bradshaw, Mitchel, & Leaf, 2009; Horner et al., 2009;; Safran & Osald, 2003)
- Evidence of reduced racial gap for expulsion, esp.in schools properly utilizing reinforcement practices (Tobin & Vincent, 2011)
- No evidence of more equitable ODR practices (Sandomierski, 2011)

Research Questions

1. To what degree does racial/ethnic disproportionality exist in the office disciplinary referral (ODR) practices of elementary schools implementing school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS)?
2. To what degree does race/ethnicity predict student risk for receiving an ODR for various types of infractions in elementary schools implementing SWPBIS?
3. To what degree does elementary school-level implementation fidelity of SWPBIS interact with student race/ethnicity to predict risk for receiving an ODR for various types of infractions?

Method

Data Source: Florida's PBIS Project

- *Rtl: Behavior Database*: a free, voluntary online data system for Florida schools with which qualified personnel at the district and/or school level record office disciplinary referrals and graphs are generated to assist school teams with problem-solving
- *Positive Behavior Supports in Schools Database*: monitors implementation of SWPBIS for schools receiving technical assistance

Inclusion Criteria

1. District/school elects to utilize the Rtl:B dataset
2. District/school receives technical assistance that includes monitoring of SWPBIS implementation using the PBSIS dataset
3. District/school provides access to *complete* student roster

Sample Characteristics

- 6 districts; 40 schools in the 2013-14 school year serving 24,512 students
- 51.0% White (3-89% range); 20.9% Hispanic (2-84%); 19.8% Black (1-92%); 12.8% Other (1-18%)

Variables

Student Race/Ethnicity

- School records; database entry (Y/N per category)

Office Discipline Referral

- Separate variables for overall referral and each infraction type
- 7 infraction types (e.g. disrespect, aggression) developed from 23 problem behavior categories

Fidelity of SWPBIS Implementation

- School-Wide Benchmarks of Quality (BOQs; Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007)
- Collaboratively reported by school-based leaders and coaches

Hierarchical Linear Multi-Level Logistic Regression Models

Step-Wise Models Considered

- a. Unconditional (no individual- or school-level predictors)
- b. ODR Receipt = race

Research Questions 1 & 2 (disproportionality):

- c. ODR Receipt = race + SWPBIS

Research Question 3 (SWPBIS interaction for equity):

- d. ODR Receipt = race + SWPBIS + race*SWPBIS



Results

Prevalence of ODRs

- 11.5% of students received an ODR (school range 3-32%)
- 7,082 ODRs (288.92 per 1,000 students; range 29.41-460.99)
- Referred students averaged 2.44 ODRs

SWPBIS Implementation Fidelity

- Average 85.4 (range 59-100)
- 85% "High Implementers" (BoQ > 70)

Prevalence of ODR Categories

- 37.97% Aggression/Fighting
- 19.70% Disrespect
- 19.51% Disruption
- 8.75% Verbal Abuse
- 6.09% Major Other
- 4.22% Miscellaneous
- 3.76% Property Damage

Research Questions 1 & 2: See Figure 1

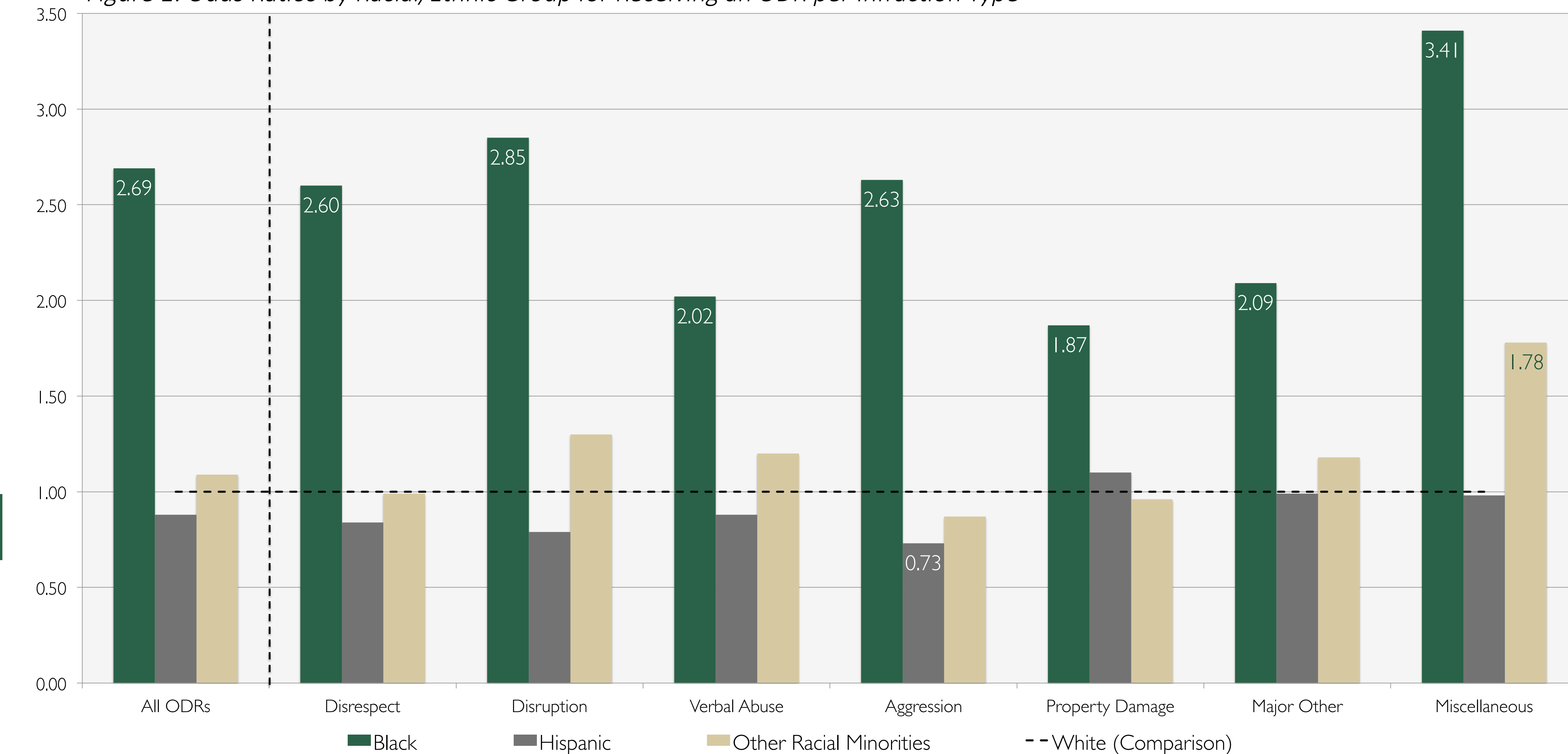
Research Question 3:

SWPBIS fidelity was related to risk of:

- receiving ODR ($p < .05$)
- receiving ODR for Aggression ($p < .05$)

No interaction between SWPBIS and any racial/ethnic group in predicting students' risk for receiving an ODR for any infraction category

Figure 1: Odds Ratios by Racial/Ethnic Group for Receiving an ODR per Infraction Type



Note. Columns with odds ratio labels indicate statistically significant differences ($p < .001$ for Black students; $p < .05$ for other groups). ODR = Office Discipline Referral.

Discussion

Black Students: Gap exists across all ODR categories

- Inconsistency with earlier literature (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002) may be due to multi-level models, units of analysis

Hispanic Students: ODR rates similar to White peers

- Inconsistency with earlier literature (Skiba et al., 2011) may be due to low ODR rates in sample, or region – specific to Florida (i.e. academic achievement differences, national/cultural identities)
- Similar discipline rates despite lower expectations from educators (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) suggests protective factors at the elementary stage

Implications:

- Research equitable classroom-level practices with ecological assessments, teacher interviews, disciplinary decision-making vignettes
- Expand vision of behavior supports to explicitly integrate relationships and culture into practice

Limitations

- **External Validity:** SWPBIS high implementers, selection bias for technical assistance
- **Internal Validity:** SWPBIS ceiling effect, lack of student gender and SWPBIS components

Aggression: Most common infraction category

- Susceptible to individual and contextual differences – largest variance between students and schools; only category with both disparities
- Related to SWPBIS implementation fidelity, perhaps because:
 - Educators prioritize violent over disruptive behavior
 - Alternative skills taught in social-emotional curricula (i.e. "violence prevention," "bullying prevention")
 - More explicit violation of behavioral expectations (i.e. "be safe, respectful")

Closing the Discipline Gap

- No evidence that SWPBIS implementation fidelity interacts with race to produce equitable outcomes
 - Consistent with previous literature (Sandomierski, 2011)
 - SWPBIS in its current state does not address key factors producing the gap
- Practices with supporting evidence:
 - Target support for teachers in the classroom (Gregory, Bell & Pollock, 2014; Childs et al., 2015)
 - Build student-teacher-peer relationships (Gregory et al., 2014)
 - Use restorative discipline practices (Gregory et al., 2014)