School-Wide Positive Behavior Support: Can It Help Address The Problem Of Disproportionate Minority Representation In The Emotional Disturbance Disability Category?

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SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT: CAN IT HELP ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY REPRESENTATION IN THE EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE DISABILITY CATEGORY?

A Dissertation

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This research project investigated the possibility of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) as a way to address racial/ethnic disproportionality in the Emotional Disturbance (ED) category. The sample consisted of 114 elementary schools from a suburban school district in the Mid-Atlantic region. There were 57 SWPBS schools and 57 non-SWPBS schools. SWPBS and non-SWPBS schools were matched on four demographic factors—student enrollment, ethnicity, free and reduced lunch, and English proficiency.

Archival data collected included ED eligibility data segregated by student sex, race/ethnicity, and grade. Each student’s number of special education service hours was also collected. Scores from the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET; Horner et al., 2001) and Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ; Kincaid et al., 2005) were used to determine if fidelity of SWPBS implementation influences outcomes. The statistical procedures used to analyze the data included a within group analysis of variance (ANOVA), a within group multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), a within group factorial ANOVA, and simple linear regression.

Results suggested there were no differences between SWPBS and non-SWPBS schools with respect to number of ED eligibilities, student sex, race/ethnicity, or grade. There were more students with ED who were White and male; male students from all race/ethnic groups outnumbered students who were female. SWPBS status did not impact disproportionality. Also,
there were no differences between schools’ SWPBS status, students’ race/ethnicity, and restrictiveness in placement. SWPBS implementation, as measured by the BoQ, was not a good predictor of ED eligibility, restrictiveness in placement, or disproportionality. When specific SWPBS features found on the BoQ were examined, there were eight significant regression models. However, results are questionable because small sample size made the disproportionality ratios unstable.

The results of this study are to be considered in light of several threats to validity that can impact how outcomes can be generalized to the target population. Internal threats such as selection and statistical regression are possible as are external threats such as population validity, multiple-treatment interference, and measurement of the dependent variable. Nonetheless, this study includes implications for how results relate to the practice of school psychology and areas for future research.