

Patterns of Minor Office Discipline Referrals in Schools using SWIS

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“Small things matter. Paying attention to minor ODRs is important.”

Schools using the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) database are often collecting information on Minor Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs), as well as Major ODRs. In this evaluation brief we examined the role of Minor ODRs in elementary, middle and high schools. We investigated what types of Minor ODRs are most prevalent at each grade level and where these Minor ODRs occur. This information was compared to what types of Major ODRs are most prevalent and where Major ODRs occur. Finally, we examined the relative rates of Minor and Major ODRs over the course of an academic year.

Minor ODRs are comparative to Major ODRs, but are described as inappropriate behaviors that are low in intensity and non-serious (Todd, Horner, & Tobin, 2010). This differs from Major ODRs, which describe students' behavior as dangerous, or potentially dangerous, and/or are more intense and serious than what would warrant a Minor ODR. Studies have shown that students who receive Major ODRs exhibit subsequent chronic problem behavior, and are more at risk for later violent behavior and academic failure (McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010; Tobin & Sugai, 1999; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Recording and responding to Minor ODRs has been assumed to allow detection and remediation of minor problem behaviors before they become more severe. Early detection of behavior problems can also lead to interventions that are less resource intensive, and can provide a more sensitive measure of behavior problems to aid in intervention planning and progress monitoring. By examining the extent to which schools are currently collecting Minor ODRs, we can get more information about how SWIS is being utilized in schools and how schools can possibly use SWIS more effectively to intervene early with problem behavior.

Specific questions examined for this evaluation brief were:

1. What proportion of elementary, middle, and high schools using SWIS collect and enter Minor ODRs?
2. Where are Minor and Major ODRs most likely to occur?
3. What problem behaviors lead to Minor and Major ODRs?
4. What are the relative rates of Minor and Major ODRs over the course of a school year?

Methods

Data were summarized from results reported by schools using the School-Wide Information System (SWIS v 4.4; May et al., 2010) database for the 2011-2012 academic year, including only data from schools granting approval to summarize and report anonymous information for evaluation purposes. The data consisted of ODR data at the school level and ODR data at the referral level (Table 1). The school-level data were used to answer question one, and the referral data were used to answer questions two, three, and four.

The school-level ODR Data consisted of 3,092 schools from ten different states (i.e., CO, FL, IL, MD, MI, MN, NC, NY, OH, OR). The data set consisted of 2,124 elementary (K-5), 630 middle (6-8), and 338 high (9-12) schools. Schools that were excluded from this brief were K-12, K-8, Pre-K, and schools listed as Other. These schools were excluded to allow clear separation at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The referral data consisted of 4,407,677 total ODRs. There were 1,940,686 elementary (K-5), 1,574,311 middle (6-8), and 892,680 high school (9-12) ODRs. To answer question four, this brief only included referrals from schools collecting both Minor and Major ODRs from the dataset. Schools collecting only Major ODRs were excluded to draw more accurate conclusions regarding relative use of Minor and Major ODRs. Referrals from the months of June, July, and August were also excluded because these months are typically considered as partial months of an academic year.

Table 1.

	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
School Data	2,124	630	338	3,092
Referral Data	1,940,686	1,574,311	892,680	4,407,677
Question 4	1,583,512	1,219,916	582,973	3,386,401

Results

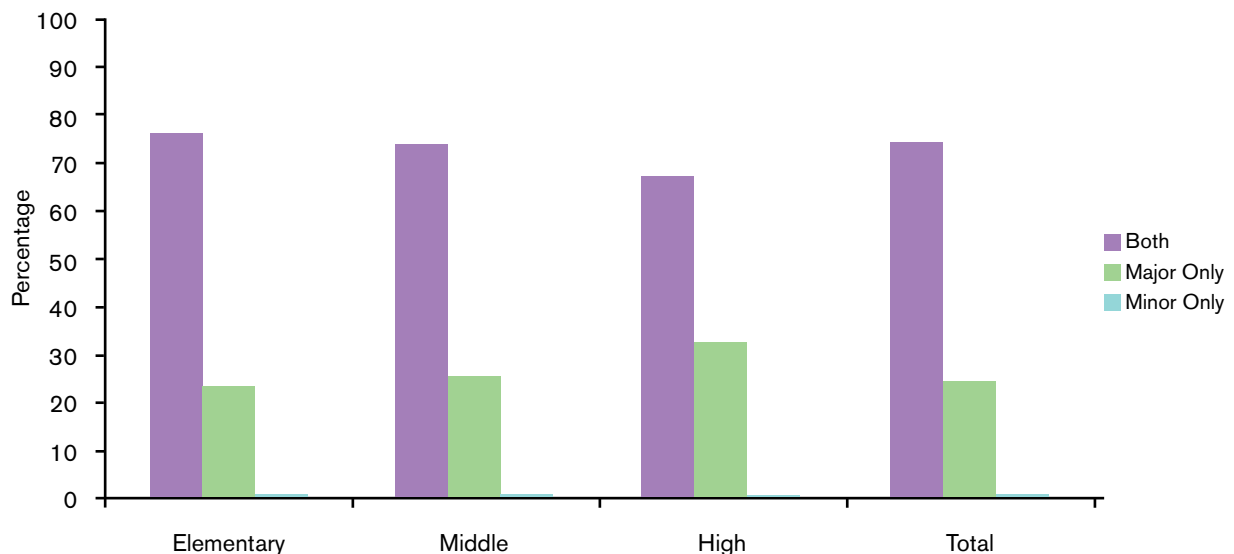
Question 1:

What proportion of elementary, middle, and high schools using SWIS also collect minors?

Data summarized in Figure 1 indicate that about 75% of schools in the SWIS sample collected both Minor and Major ODR data, about 25% collected only Major ODRs, and fewer than 1% collected only Minor ODRs. Minor ODRs were more likely to be collected in elementary and middle schools than in high schools, but nearly 70% of high schools collected Minor ODRs.

Figure 1.

Percentage of schools collecting Majors, Minors, and Both Majors and Minors



Question 2:

Where are Minor and Major ODRs most likely to occur?

Minor and Major ODRs occurred most often in the classroom, with classrooms associated with a greater proportion of Minor ODRs than Major ODRs (i.e. 48-60% of Majors, and 53-75% of Minors). At the elementary level (Figure 2), the second most common location for both Major and Minor referrals was the playground. At the middle and high school levels (Figures 3 & 4), the second most likely location for referrals occur was in the Hallway/Breezeway.

Figure 2.

Percentage of Minor and Major ODRs by location in elementary schools

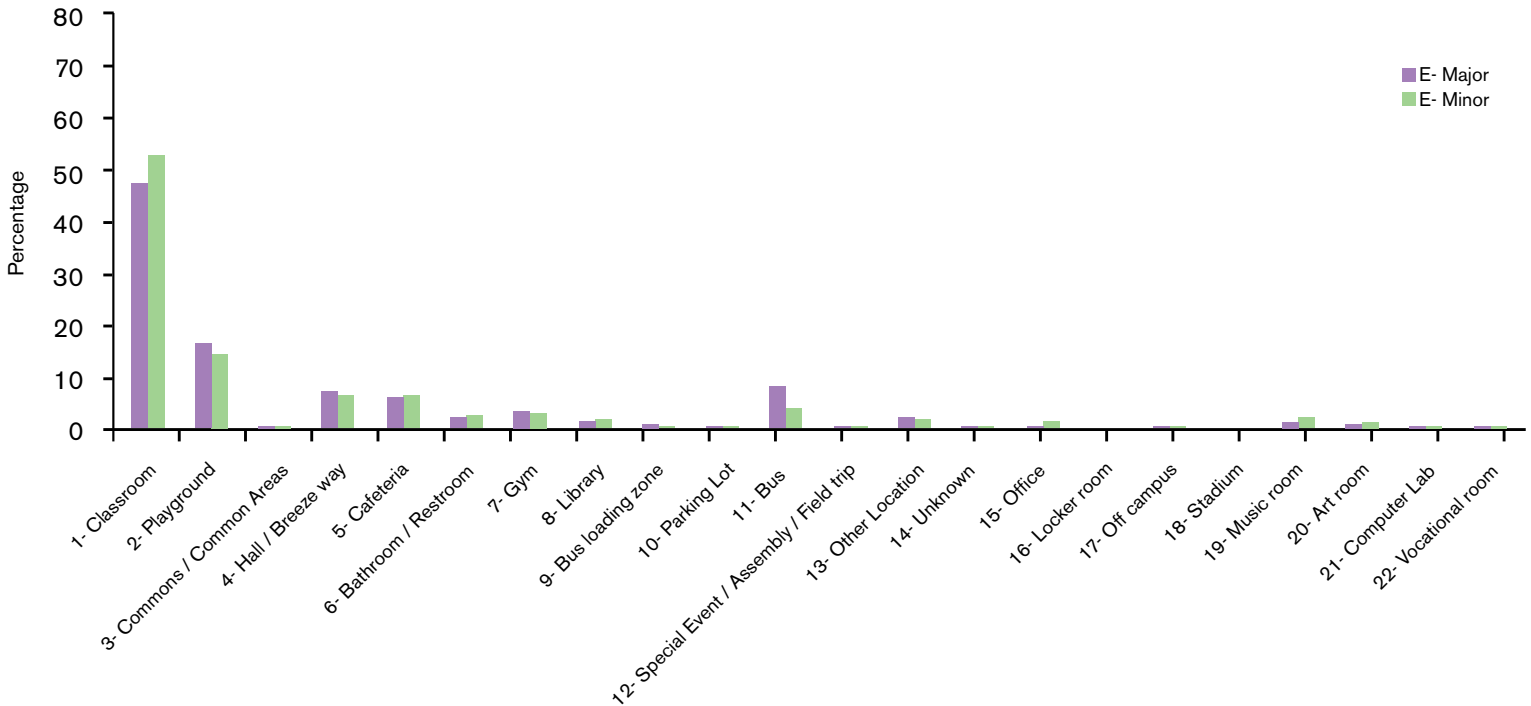


Figure 3.

Percentage of Minor and Major ODRs by location in middle schools

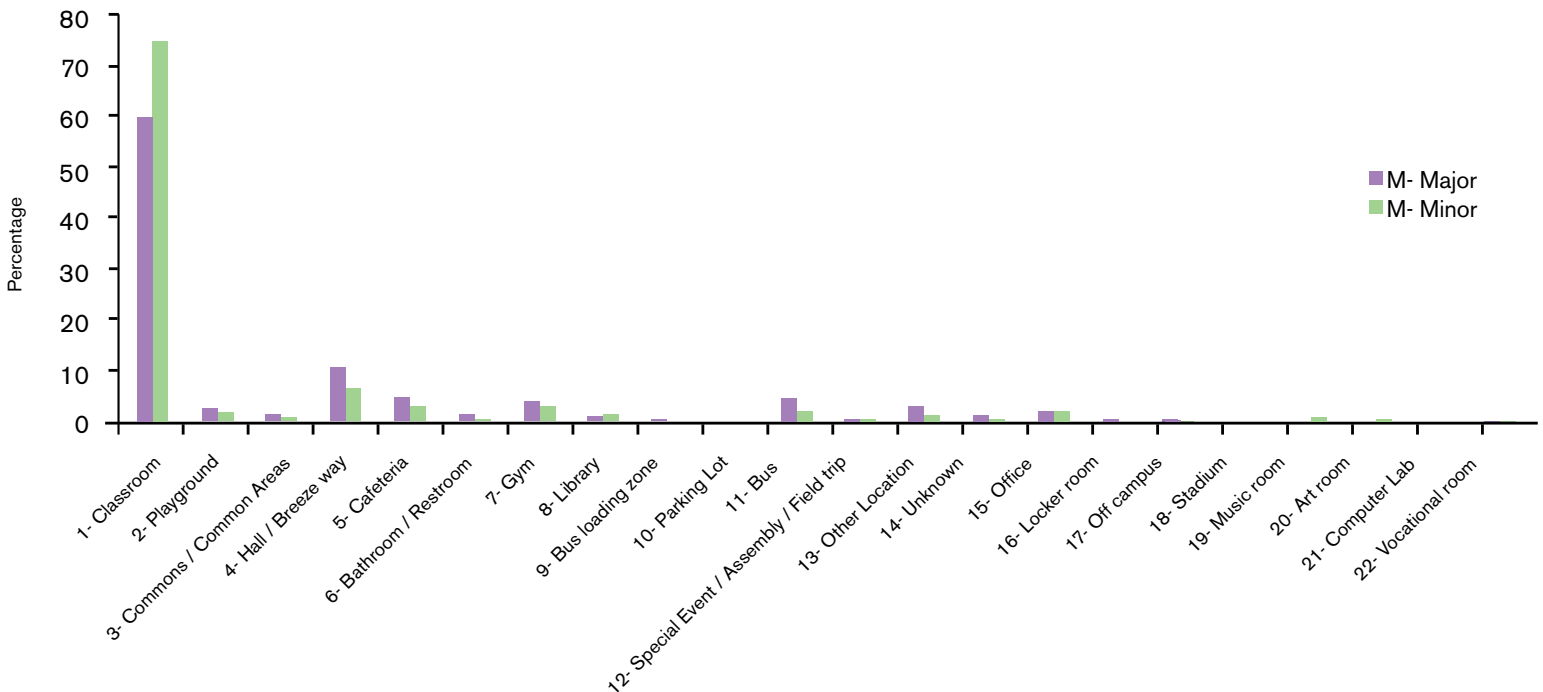
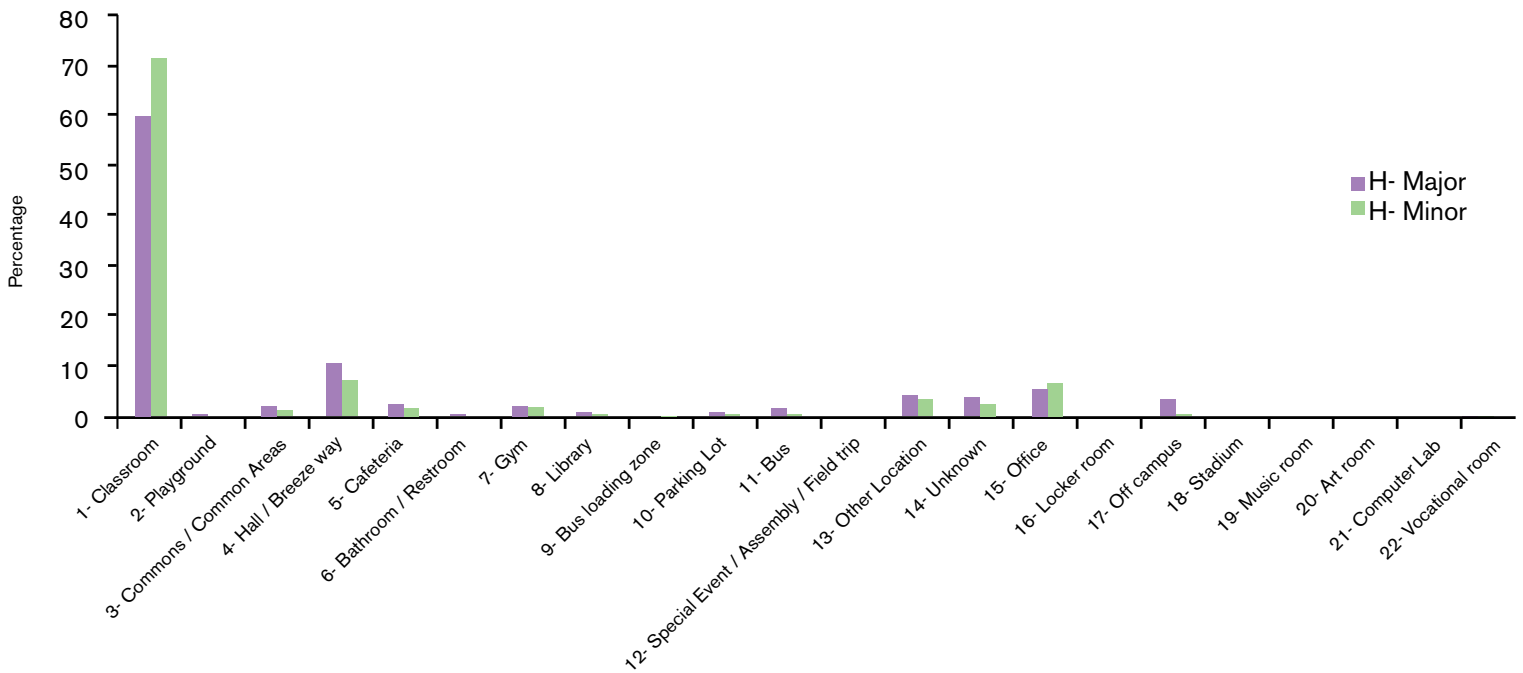


Figure 4.

Percentage of Minor and Major ODRs by location in high schools



Question 3:

What problem behaviors lead to Minor ODR and Major ODRs?

At the elementary level (Figure 5), Minor ODRs were most likely to be issued for Defiance/Disrespect (36%), Disruption (22%), and Physical Aggression (19%). Major ODRs were associated with Defiance/Disrespect (27%), Physical Aggression (27%), and Disruption (21%). At the middle school level (Figure 6) Minor ODRs were primarily given for Defiance/Disrespect (37%), Disruption (23%), and Tardy (13%). Major ODRs were given for Defiance/Disrespect (33%), Disruption (14%), and Physical Aggression (9%). In high school (Figure 7), the prominent Minor ODR type was Tardy (35%), followed by Defiance/Disrespect (25%), and Disruption (11%). Major ODRs were primarily given for Defiance/Disrespect (25%), followed by Tardy (16%) and Skipping (15%).

Figure 5.

Percentage of Minor and Major ODRs by type of problem behavior in elementary schools

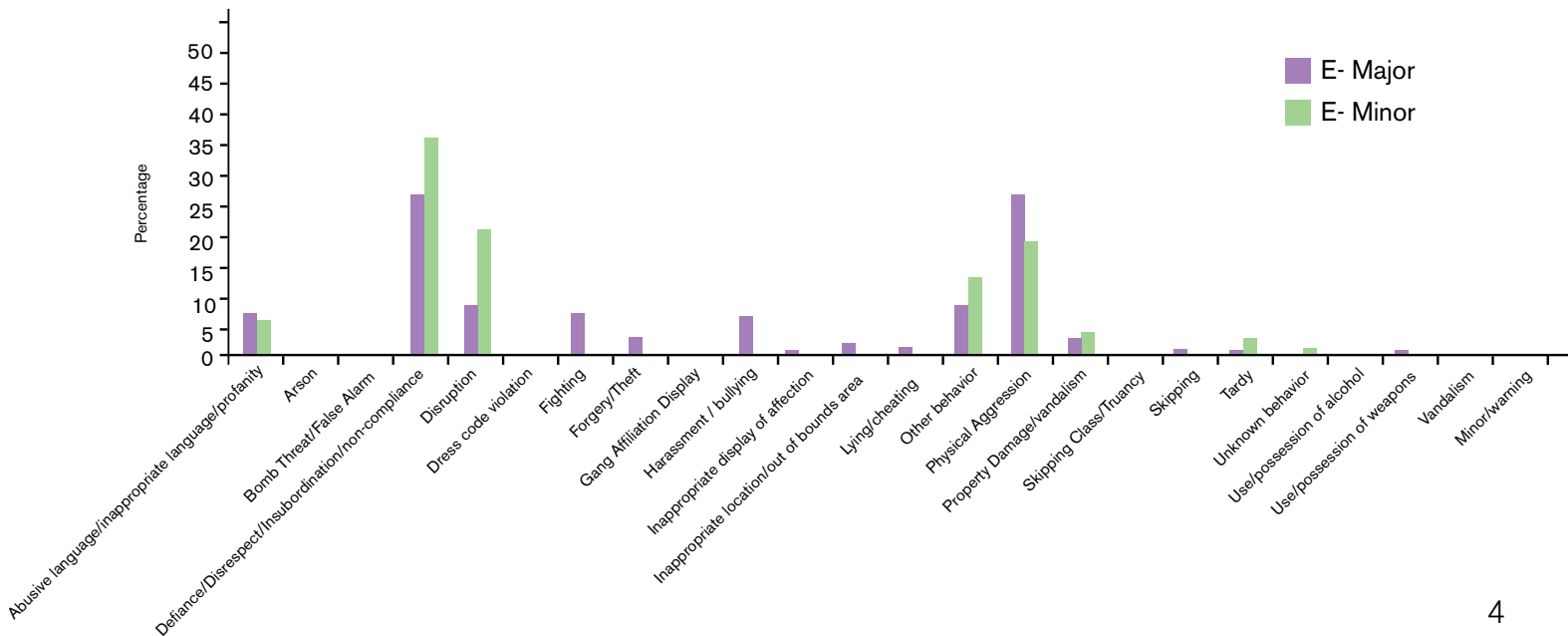


Figure 6.

Percentage of Minor and Major ODRs by type of problem behavior in middle schools

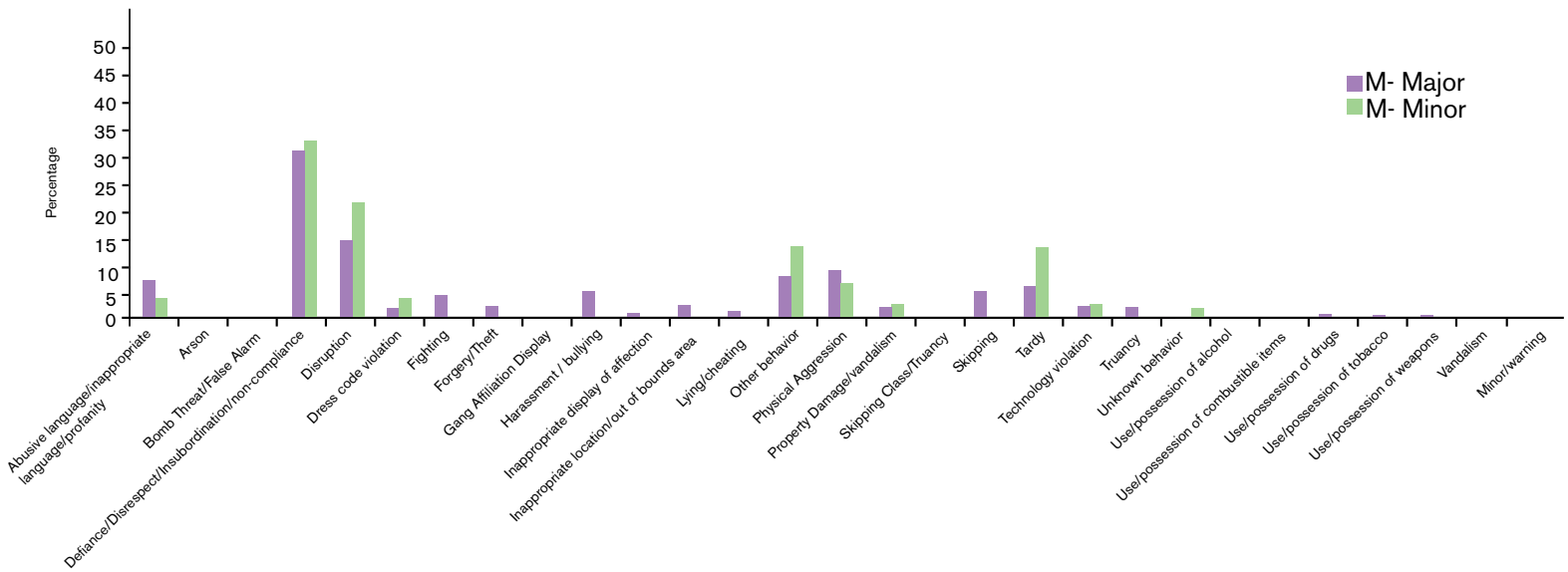
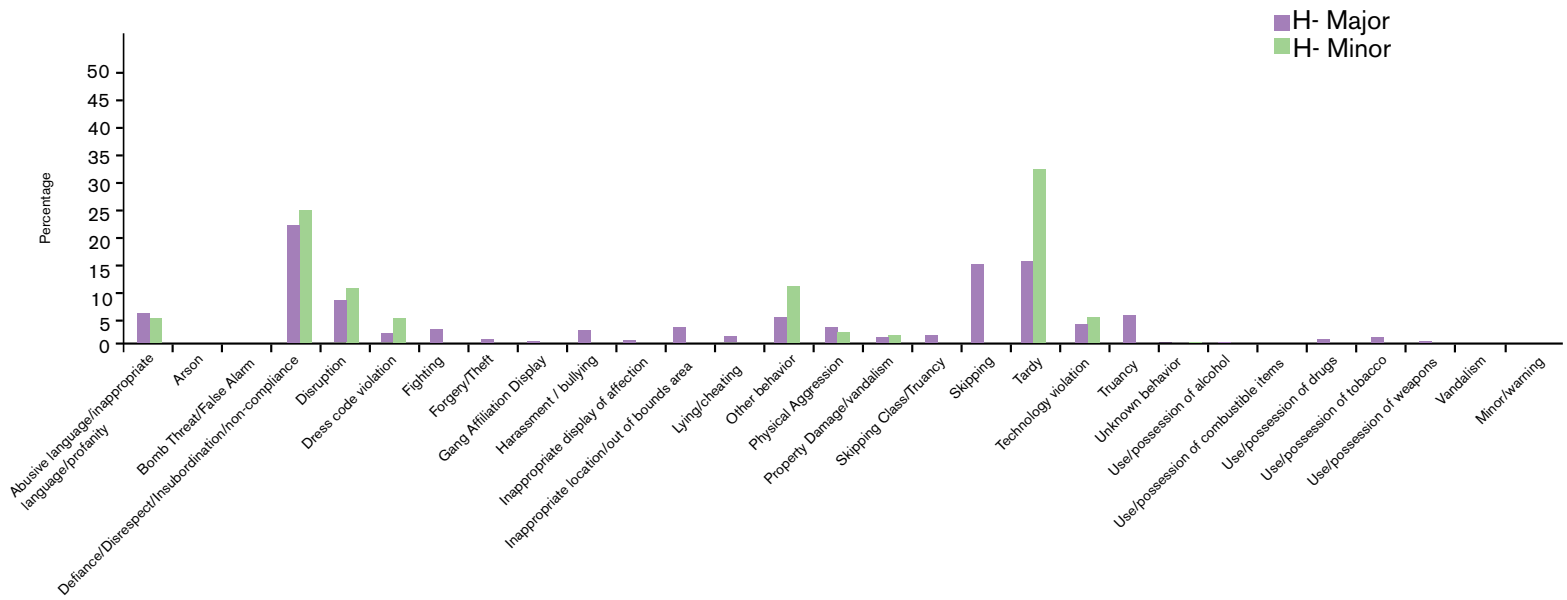


Figure 7.

Percentage of Minor and Major ODRs by type of problem behavior in high schools



Question #4

What are the relative rates of Minor and Major ODRs over the course of a school year?

The final question examined differential patterns of use of Minor and Major ODRs throughout the school year. Figures 8, 9, and 10 show the rate of Minor and Major ODRs (i.e., ODRs per day, per school) for elementary, middle and high schools, respectively. Results indicate more Minor ODRs than Major ODRs at the elementary level. The gap between Minor ODRs and Major ODRs became narrower throughout the academic year with Major ODRs increasing. At the middle school level, the gap between Minor and Major ODRs closes throughout the year, and by the end of the year there were more referrals for major behavior than for minor behavior. Additionally, Minor ODRs had a slight decreasing trend and Major ODRs had a slight increasing trend at this level. At the high school level, there were more Major ODRs than Minor ODRs throughout the entire year. The Minor ODR rate had a decreasing trend over the course of the academic year, whereas Major ODRs stayed fairly constant. Finally, when we looked across levels, problem behavior was recorded at the highest rate at the high school level, followed by middle school, and then elementary.

Figure 8.

Rate of Minor and Major ODRs by month in elementary schools

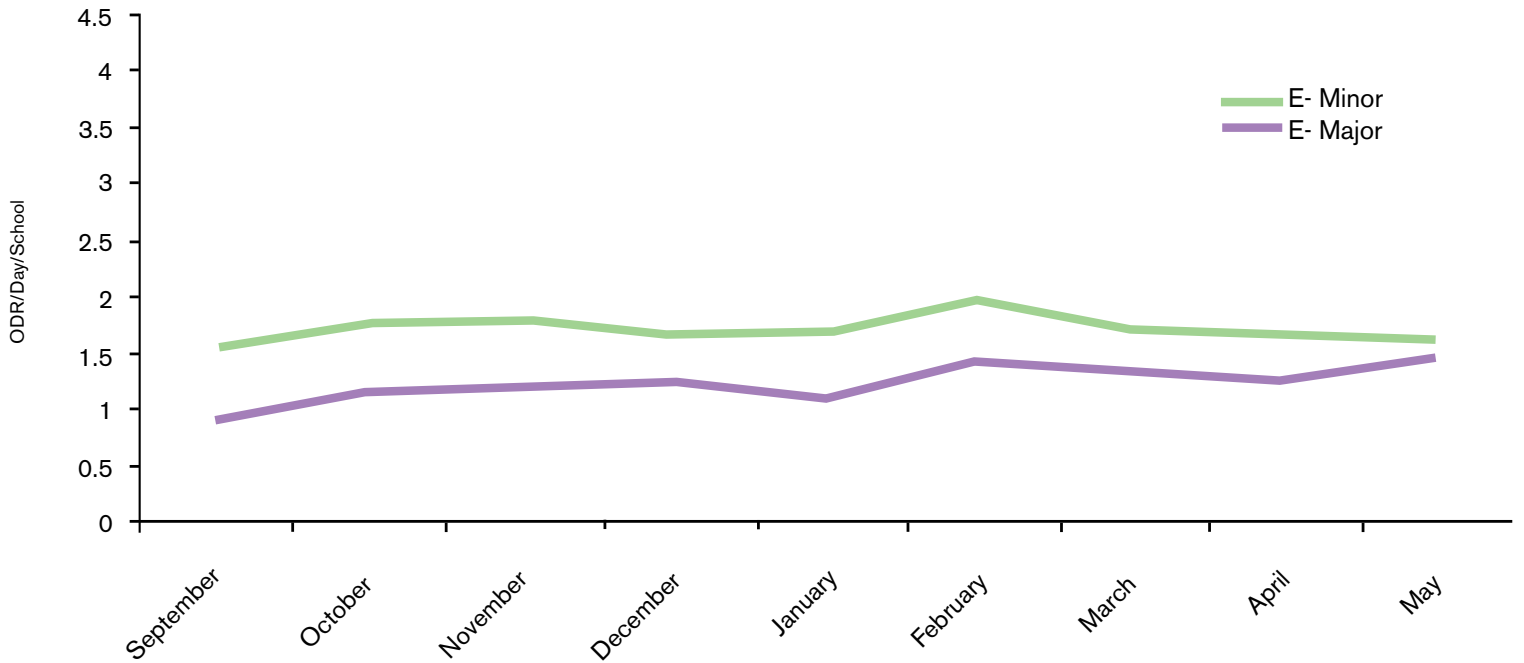


Figure 9.

Rate of Minor and Major ODRs by month in middle schools

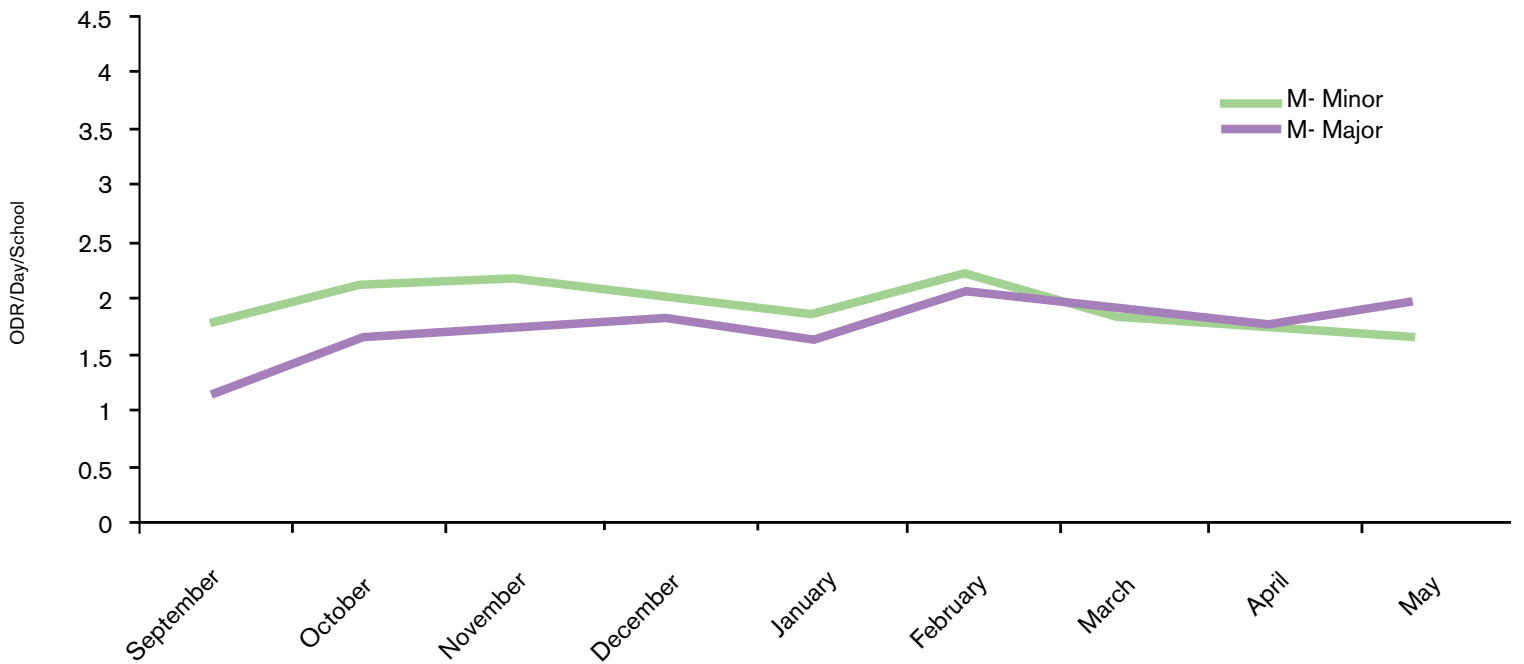


Figure 10.

Rate of Minor and Major ODRs by month in high schools



Discussion:

The purpose of this brief was to examine how schools are currently using Minor and Major ODRs in schools. The results of this brief indicate that about three-fourths of schools using SWIS collect and enter Minor and Major ODRs. This finding is encouraging because the use of Minor ODR data may possibly help schools detect problem behavior earlier and intervene before it becomes more severe.

Across all school levels, there were some commonalities in uses of Major and Minor ODRs. In analysis, both Minor and Major ODRs were issued most commonly in the classroom. In addition, Defiance/Disrespect was the most common type of ODR at all levels of education. Beyond the classroom, at the elementary level, the playground was the second most common location. This could relate to the high

numbers of referrals for Physical Aggression. At the middle and high school levels we begin to see more referrals in the Hallway/Breezeway area, with more referrals of Tardy and Skipping. Within school levels, there were few differences between proportions of Minor and Major ODRs by location and type.

The patterns of Minor and Major ODRs over the course of the academic year varied by school level. ODRs were issued at the highest rate in high school, with more Major ODRs occurring than Minor ODRs. In elementary and middle school, Major ODR rates increased over time, with more Major than Minor ODRs during the last two months of the academic year in middle school.

There are two different theories that may explain the results. The first theory pertains to severity of student problem behavior. In this

theory, over time (both across the academic year and across grade levels), minor problem behavior leads to more serious problem behavior, becoming more intense over time. The data from questions two and three support this theory by suggesting that Minor and Major ODRs were issued at the same location and for the same reasons, but at different intensities. The fourth question supports this theory by indicating more Minor ODRs, and less ODRs in general, occurring at the elementary level than at both the middle and high school levels, and with the most Major ODRs occurring at the high school level.

The second theory that can be drawn from the data is that adult behavior (in terms of issuing ODRs) changes over time. In other words, problem behaviors occur at the same intensity over time, but as

students get older, problem behavior is perceived as more major. This theory is supported when looking at the data from questions two, three, and four. A possible example to support this theory would be when an elementary student kicks a peer, school staff may do more teaching and coaching around why the behavior was inappropriate, and may not record the behavior as Major, or not record it all (McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Boland, & Good, 2006) . This same scenario at the middle or high school level may be seen as more severe, thus warranting a Major ODR. Adults may also perceive that students at these levels should know the appropriate behavior, thus needing a more serious response to problem behavior than a documented warning. In this theory, adults in the school may assume that a Major ODR will more effectively deter problem behavior than a Minor, although repeated ODRs may be more likely to reinforce problem behavior (Maag, 2001). These

behaviors may actually be the same, but the way school staff record ODRs is different based on different perceptions at different grade levels. These theories bring up interesting steps for both practitioners and researchers. The first theory would suggest that minor behaviors are predictive of later major behaviors. This would call for more research looking at this relation (e.g., What are the chances that a student receiving a Minor ODR will later receive a Major ODR?). It would also call for practitioners to be diligent in collecting Minor ODRs in order to intervene earlier to prevent more serious problem behavior from occurring. Future research following individual students across time needs to be looked at to draw more firm conclusions about the predictability of Minor ODRs for later problem behavior and academic outcomes.

The second theory calls for more effective professional development

in preventing problem behavior than issuing Major ODRs, especially at the high school level. In addition, this theory also calls practitioners to better define these constructs within their own buildings. These clearer definitions at the building level could help practitioners examine this relationship using local norms, thus better being able to find patterns of where and why problem behaviors are occurring to guide intervention.

In summary, this brief was meant to give schools and researchers descriptive data about the manifestation of problem behaviors in schools across the country. It is meant to guide practitioners in making better decisions about students, and guide research questions that change school outcomes. It is about building systems that allow us to detect behavior problems and intervene earlier before problems become more severe and resource intensive.

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