Psychological Well-Being & The Role of Social Support: A Qualitative Exploration of Black Women and Latina College Student Experiences

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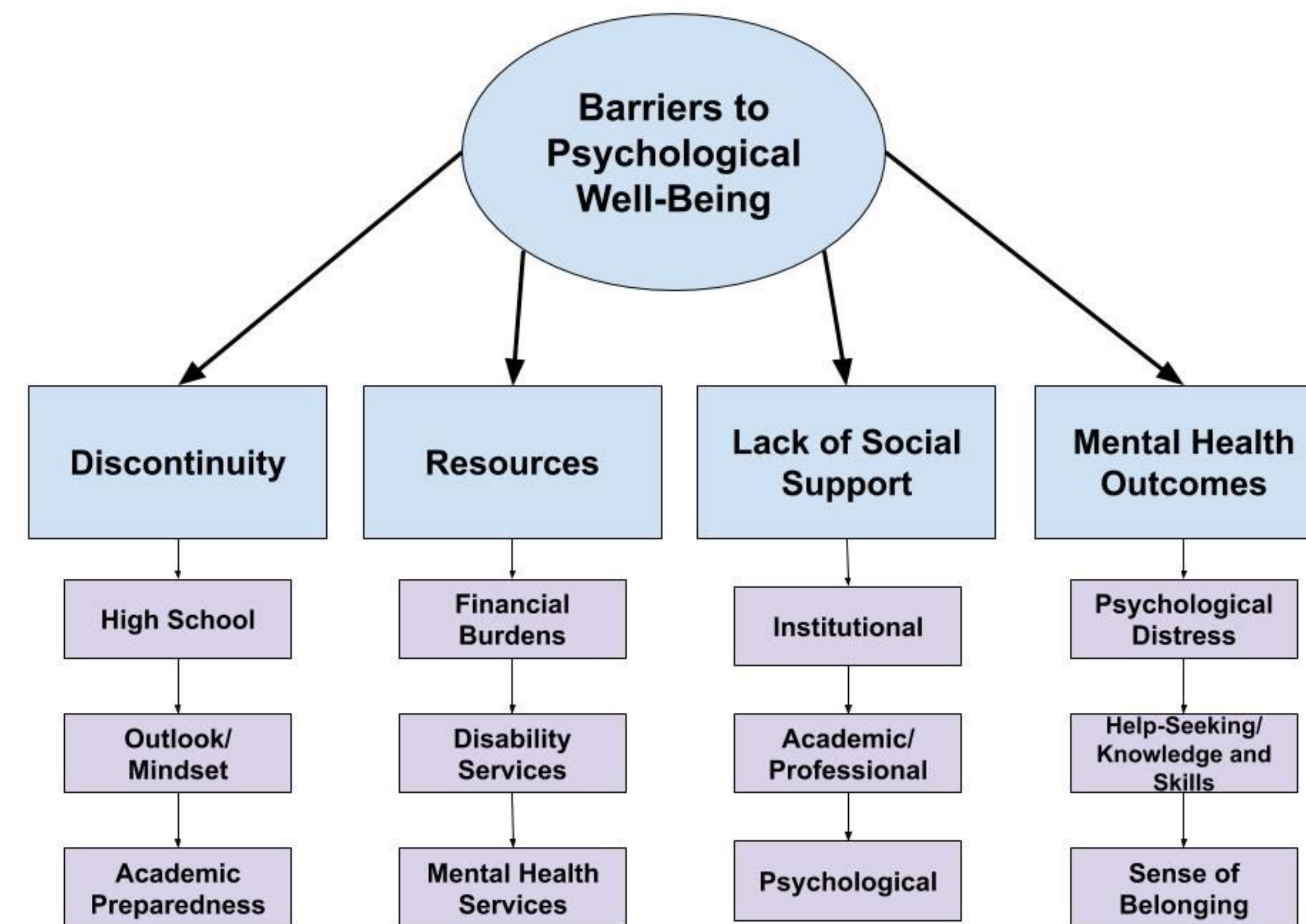TEXAS
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Background

- The need to address mental health problems among young adults is a growing concern among researchers, but there is a gap in addressing the unique needs of underrepresented minority groups.
- Black women and Latinas are vulnerable to psychological distress due to a combination of stressors related to transitional-age youth, college adjustment, minority status, and intersectional identity.[1]
- A critical component of reducing psychological distress is the ability to recover from adversity, termed resilience. Social support is a known factor in the development of resilience and can serve as a major factor in a general college student's experiences of positive psychological well-being.[2]
- However, there is a gap in addressing the utilization of social support resources by Black women and Latinas on college campuses.

Research Goals

To explore and identify the types of social support utilized by Black women and Latina students on college campuses, how they utilize them, and why they use them. We aim to investigate the link between their experiences of social support and outcomes of psychological well-being.

Methods

- Participants (N=14) were undergraduate students currently enrolled in a college or university, age 18-25 years, self-identified as female, and Black/African American (10) or Latina (4)
- A qualitative descriptive thematic analysis was performed on participants' responses to a free-response questionnaire that they completed online.
- The questionnaire consisted of demographic information and eight free-response questions related to the students' experiences of social support on their college campus.

Barriers to Psychological Well-Being

Discontinuity
- High School
- Outlook/ Mindset
- Academic Preparedness

Resources
- Financial Burdens
- Disability Services
- Mental Health Services

Lack of Social Support
- Institutional
- Academic/ Professional
- Psychological

Mental Health Outcomes
- Psychological Distress
- Help-Seeking/ Knowledge and Skills
- Sense of Belonging

Discontinuity barriers, resource barriers, lack of social support, and overall mental health outcome barriers are four major categories of Barriers to Psychological Well-Being

Psychological Well-Being

Types of Social Support
- Program Support
- Peer Support
- Faculty/Staff Support
- Institutional Support
- Academic/ Professional Support
- Psychological Support
- Sense of Belonging: Ethnic/Identity Similarity

Ethnic/Identity Similarity was found to be the common factor among all the types of social support that influenced positive psychological well-being
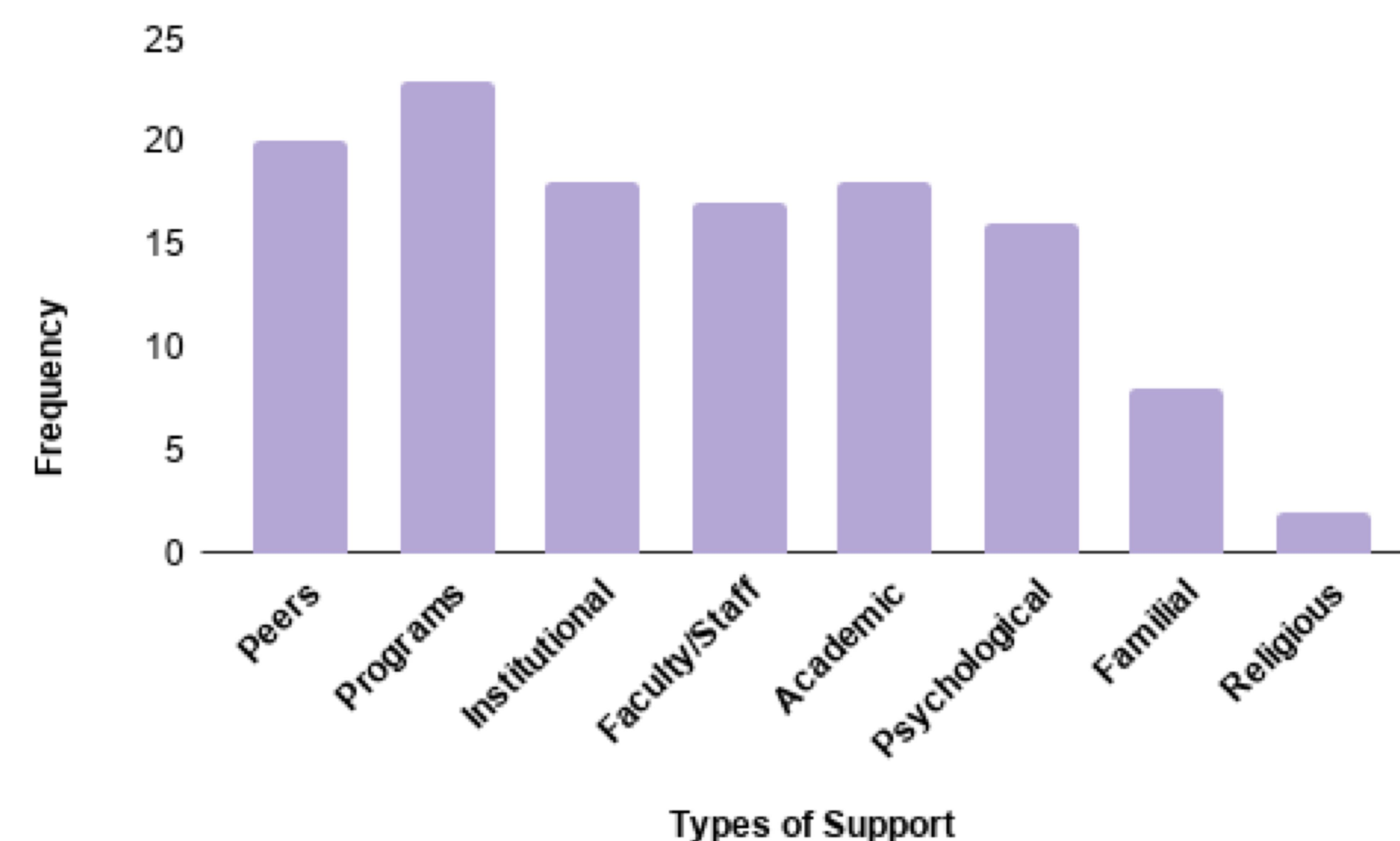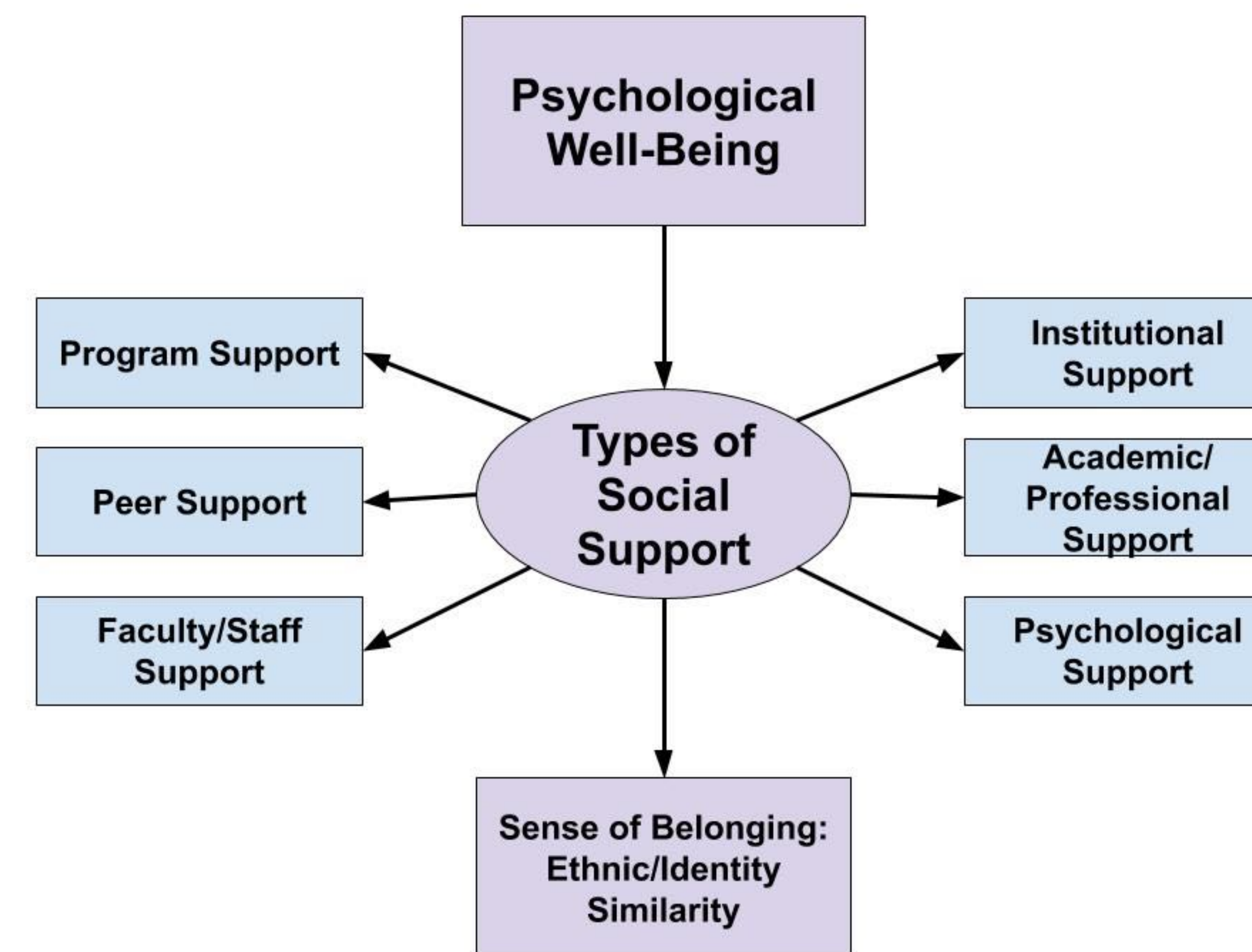
Programs, peers, faculty/staff, academic, and institutional are the top types of Social Support themes that were coded for participant responses

Findings / Results

- Key themes that emerged as barriers to psychological well-being were developed into four major categories: discontinuity barriers, resource barriers, social support barriers, and overall barriers to positive mental health outcomes.
- Key themes that emerged as the types of support to aid psychological well-being were developed into six major sources: programs, peers, faculty/staff, institutional level, academic, and psychological. The common factor among all of theses sources of support was a sense of belonging, related to ethnic or identity similarity.

Conclusion

- Across all key themes, this study found that our Black women and Latina student's sense of belonging and ethnic/identity similarity to their academic and social environments play key roles in their experiences of positive psychological well-being.
- A holistic approach to delivering social support resources, particularly through targeted programming, emerged as the most meaningful approach that contributed to our Black women and Latina students feeling supported.
- Given the vulnerability of historically marginalized students, future research should continue to explore the relationship between social support resources and positive health outcomes, and develop necessary interventions to help young Black women and Latinas thrive in the face of adverse circumstances.

Acknowledgments

References

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2.) Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2012). Resilience: The science of mastering life's greatest challenges. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139013857