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### Identifying the challenges and social support needs of undergraduate James Madison University students with mental health concerns.

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# Identifying the challenges and social support needs of undergraduate James Madison University students with mental health concerns.

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## Background

- Data collected from undergraduate students in the Fall of 2022 through the National College Health Assessment revealed:
  - 72.4% experienced moderate to severe psychological distress
  - 32.9% were diagnosed with anxiety
  - 25.5% with depression (ACHA, 2023).
- Mental health can impact academic performance (ACHA, 2023; Eisenberg et al., 2009; Arria et al., 2013).
- Research lacks on the specific impacts of mental health on academics (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018).

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## Research Questions and Study Purpose

- **Research Questions**
  1. Identify the academic challenges and support needs of college students with anxiety and/or depression.
  2. Determine the social challenges and support needs of college students with anxiety and/or depression.
- **Study Purpose**
  - To gain in-depth, first-hand information on the academic and social challenges and support needs of college students with anxiety and/or depression.

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## Methodology

- IRB approval through JMU – Summer 2023
- Qualitative study
  - Phenomenological approach (Husserl, 1981)
- Purposive sampling used to identify key informants
  - Bulk email sent in August and again in September 2023
  - PI screened for inclusion criteria
- One-on-one semi-structured interviews (60 minutes)
  - Audio recorded for verification purposes
  - Professionally transcribed
- Study and data quality

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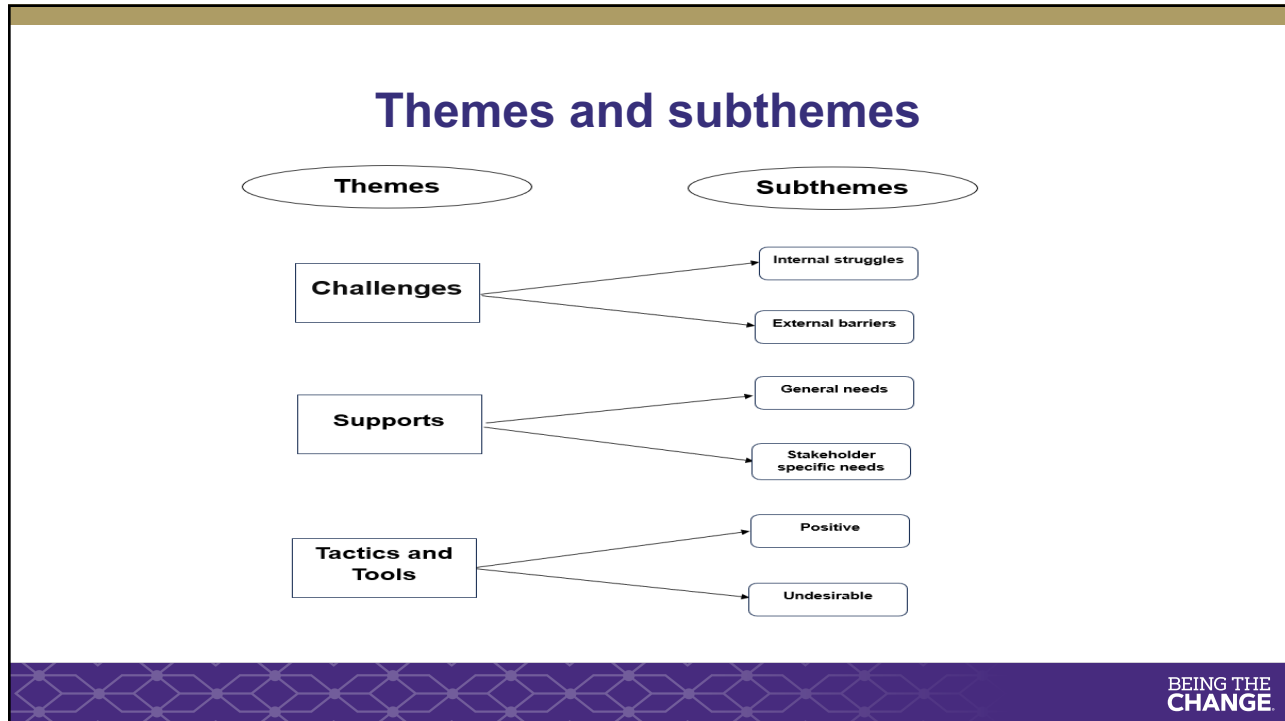
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## Data analysis

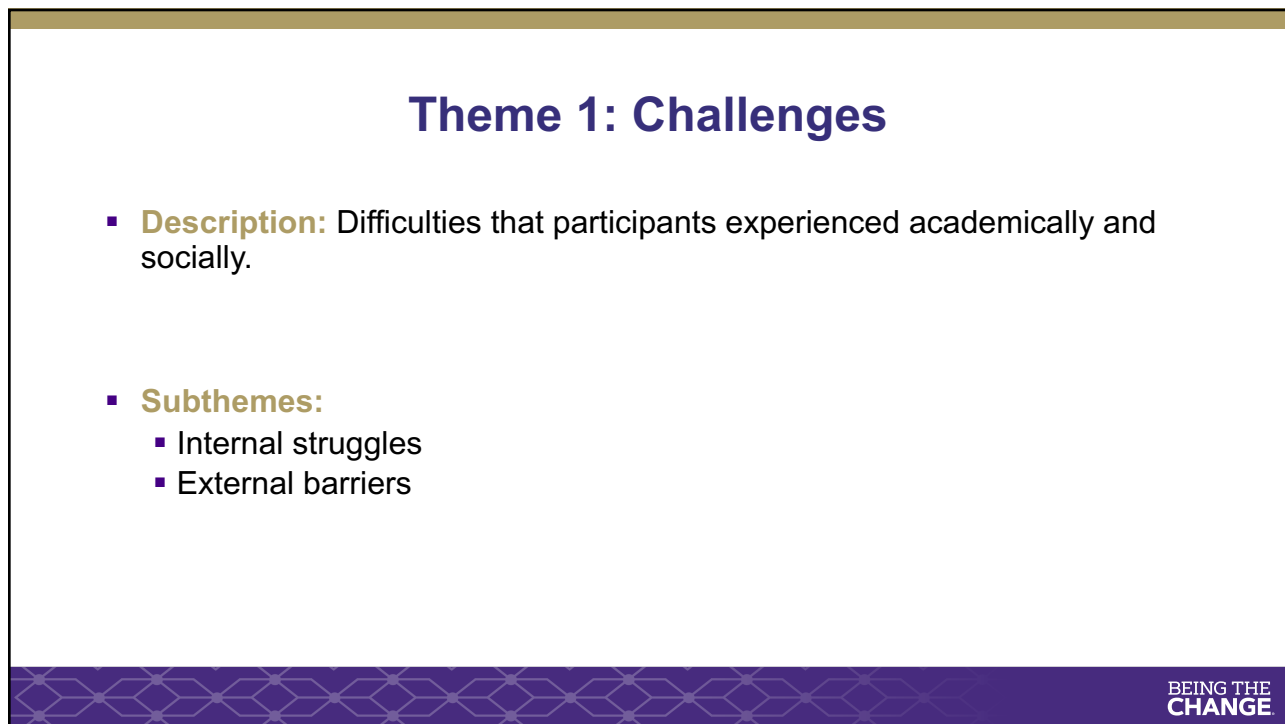
- Coded each transcript independently
  - Utilized thematic analysis by Braun and Clark (2006)
- Compared and agreed upon codes
- Identified themes and subthemes

## Participants

- 17 undergraduate college students
- 18-47 years of age
- Somewhat diverse ethnic group
- 11 self-identified as females; five as males; and one as non-binary
- One first year, one sophomore, eight juniors and eight seniors
- Variety of majors



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## Theme 1: Challenges Quotes

- “So, depression is definitely a challenge in getting out of bed and going to class at times.” (CS)
- “I had a very hard time leaving my room or just getting out and about on campus and trying new things.” (DM)
- “Say there’s a class where this professor is not very accommodating towards anxiety and doesn’t understand certain ways that the symptoms might show up, those classes kind of make me feel really burnt out.” (TP)
- “I wish there would be registration differently because everybody’s going on same time, jumping on the computer, and praying the computer doesn’t crash.” (HE discussing the stress related to registering for classes)

## Theme 2: Supports

- **Description:** Desires that participants felt would help them be successful academically and socially.
- **Subthemes:**
  - General needs
  - Stakeholder specific needs

## Theme 2: Supports Quotes

- “I just feel like we’re made to jump through hoops to prove anything, instead of just sitting down and spending time and speaking to a professor...” (BJ discussing difficulties with obtaining ODS accommodations)
- “They (campus resources) should make themselves more known, I feel because, sometimes they’re just... We know about them but not like the extent to what they do, actually.” (BK discussing the various campus offices and resources)
- “I think maybe like, a therapy group might be helpful or just like a gathering of like minded people.” (PI)
- “I personally like when instructors post their slides for class.” (HE)
- “So, I think something like a little check-in survey would be super helpful.” (DM)

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## Theme 3: Tactics and Tools

- **Description:** Techniques utilized to succeed academically and socially.
- **Subthemes:**
  - Positive
  - Undesirable

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## Theme 3: Tactics and Tools Quotes

- “I’m very adamant on my planner. If my planner was missing tomorrow, I think I would not do well kind of thing. I live off of that.” (MK)
- “But my psychiatrist has me do these breathing exercises for specially when I am - I think it’s called the Bumblebee technique , or something. (DM)
- “I was in quite a few clubs, so I think that definitely helped...” (PI)
- “I guess academically, stress-wise, that’s how I cope with it. I will smoke or vape. I just use drugs as a way to de-stress as well as maybe obviously hanging out with my friends.” (KJ)

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## Discussion

- Participants struggling with anxiety and/or depression experienced academic and social challenges.
- There are specific support needs that participants felt could benefit them and increase likelihood of success in college.
- Study participants noted specific tactics and tools that they employed to succeed in and out of the classroom.

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## Implications

- Focus on needed academic and college-ready skills.
- Provide more opportunities for students to engage with others within a healthy environment.
- Increase need for and better understanding of various resources.

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## Limitations and Future Research

- **Limitations:**
  - Sample was from a single university
  - *Participants were somewhat diverse, but still had 59% self-reporting as Caucasian/White.*
  - Study only looked at current students who were enrolled at JMU in the Fall of 2023.
- **Future Research:**
  - Expand the sample to explore the impact of a more diverse population.
  - Conduct an intervention-based study exploring various supports and strategies that were outlined by participants in the study.

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# Questions

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