



Social factors in the mental health of young adults

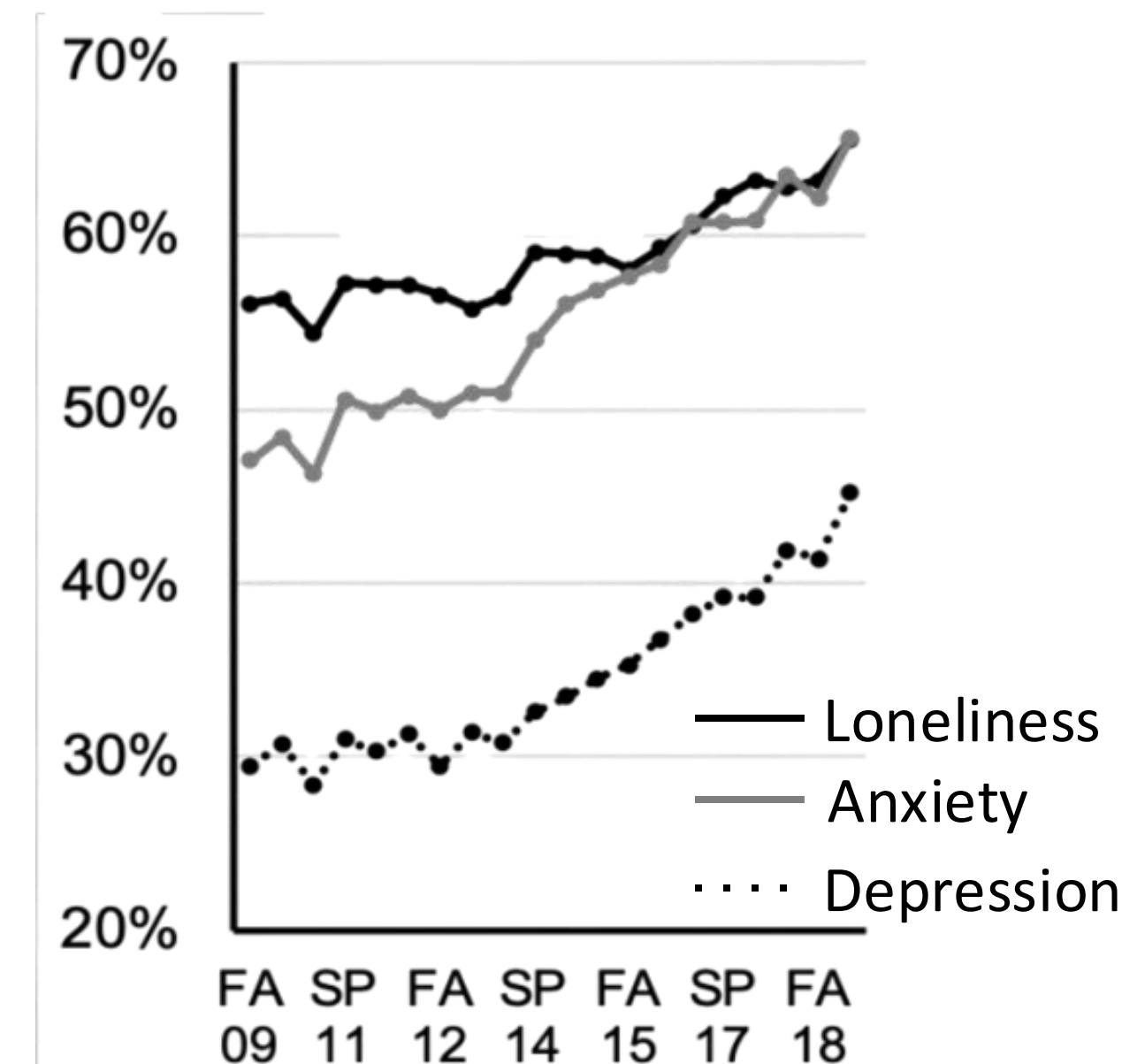
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Background

- Young adults are experiencing a mental health crisis. Rates of depression (dotted line) and anxiety (gray line) continue to rise among college students¹.
- Although social connection play a key role in sustaining mental health, college students report increasing levels of disconnection from their peers (black line)¹.



- The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this crisis: college students report higher levels of depression and loneliness during the pandemic².
- Current research is limited in its ability to assess the formation of real-world networks and their effects on mental health.

Aims

Bridging social network, psychological, and brain-based methods to quantify predictors of well-being.

Aim 1. To holistically quantify the impact of social factors on young adult mental health.

Aim 2. To quantify the role of social ties in mental health under stress.

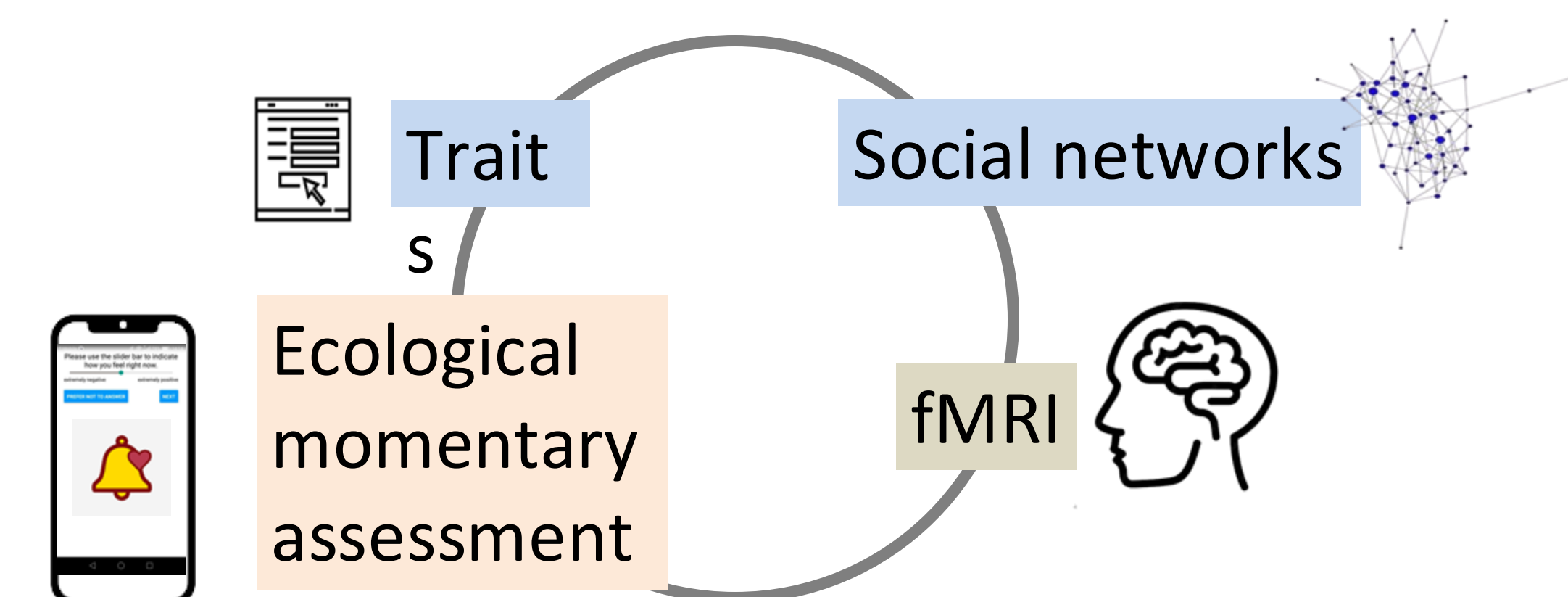
Aim 3. To relate brain markers of connectedness to long-term mental health.

References

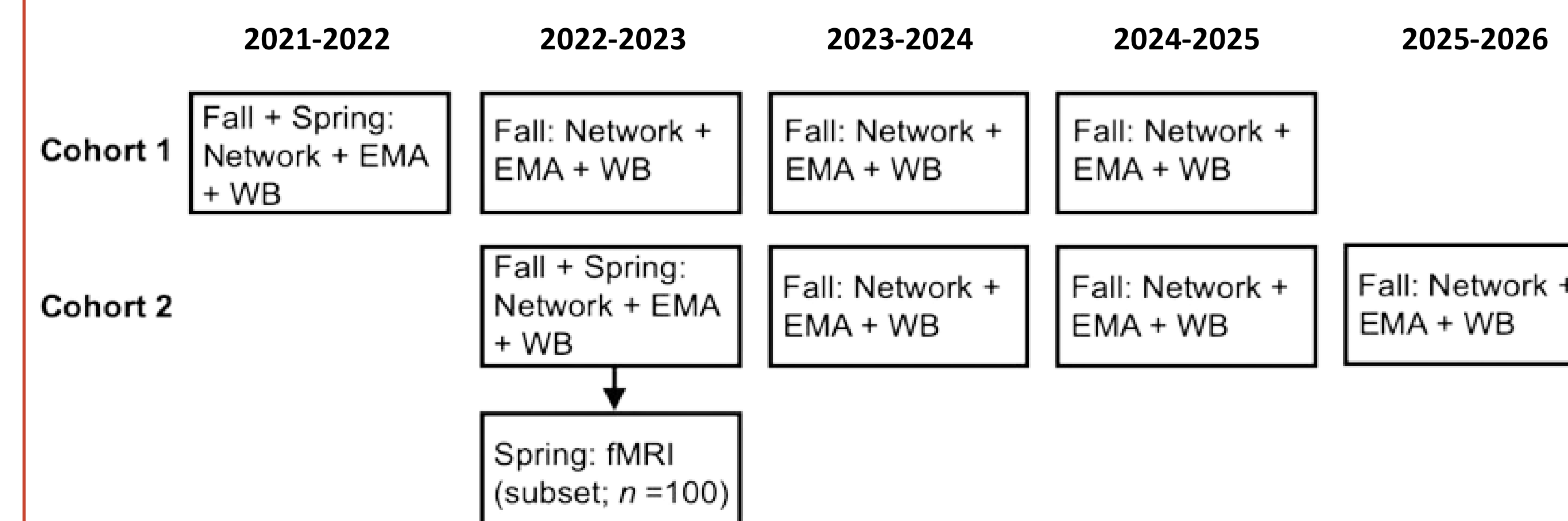
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Methods

Multi-level assessment

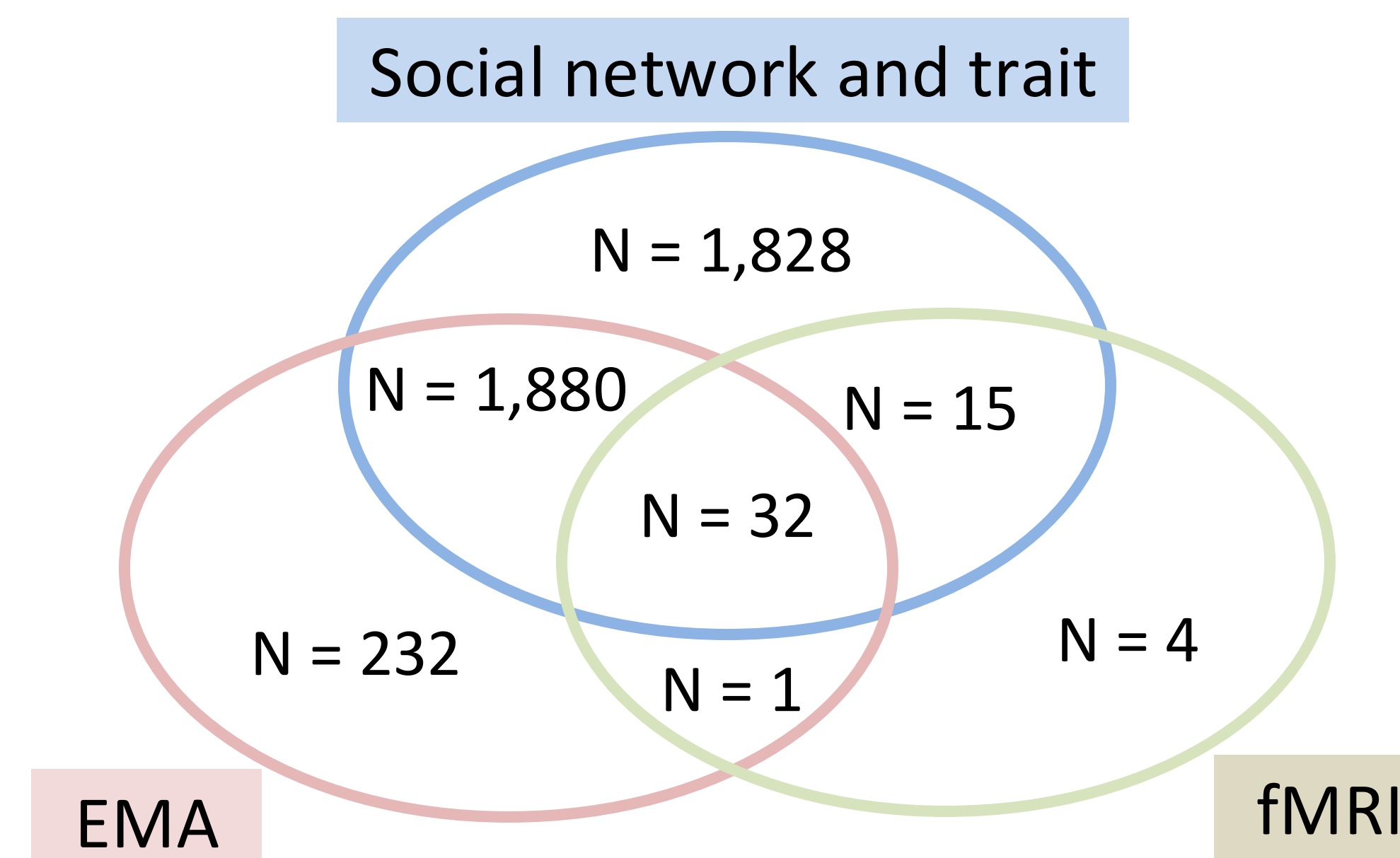


Longitudinal sampling



2021-2022 Data collection

Across five data collection points, a total of 3992 participants were recruited in the 2021-2022 academic year.



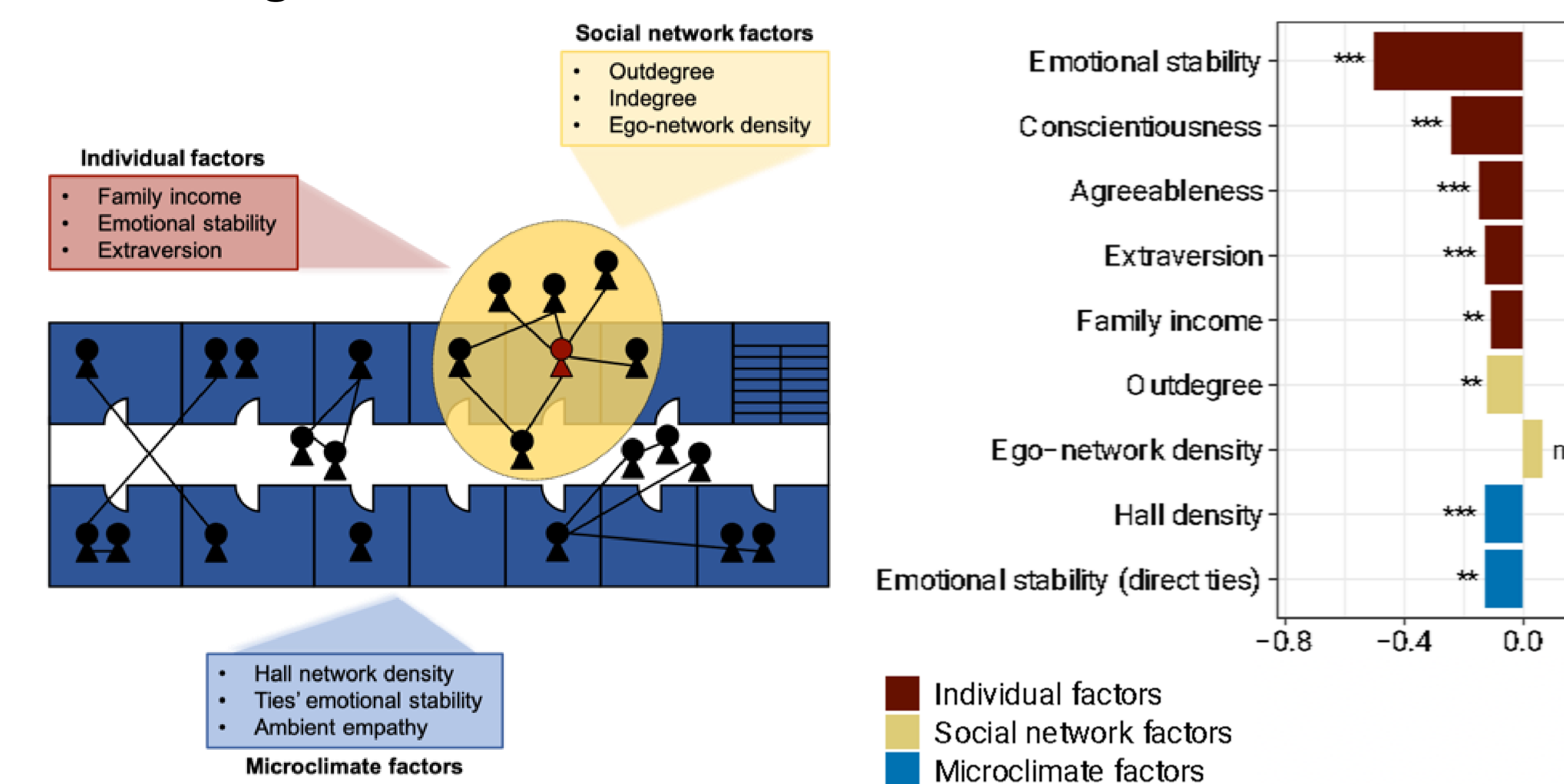
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Preliminary findings

1. Social micro-climate contributes to student wellbeing³ (under journal review)

- We quantify the collective impact of individual, social network, and microclimate factors in the well-being of a cohort of first-year college students.
- Students who belonged to emotionally stable and tight-knit microclimates reported reduced psychological distress, even when controlling for individual and social network factors.



2. Biased empathy perception as barrier for social connection and wellbeing

- Students consistently underestimated the average peer's empathy, sociality, and openness compared to what the student body actually reports.
- Underperception of empathy was associated with fewer friends, less subjective happiness, and higher anxiety and depression.

