Student-Athlete Mental Health: A Content Analysis of TikTok

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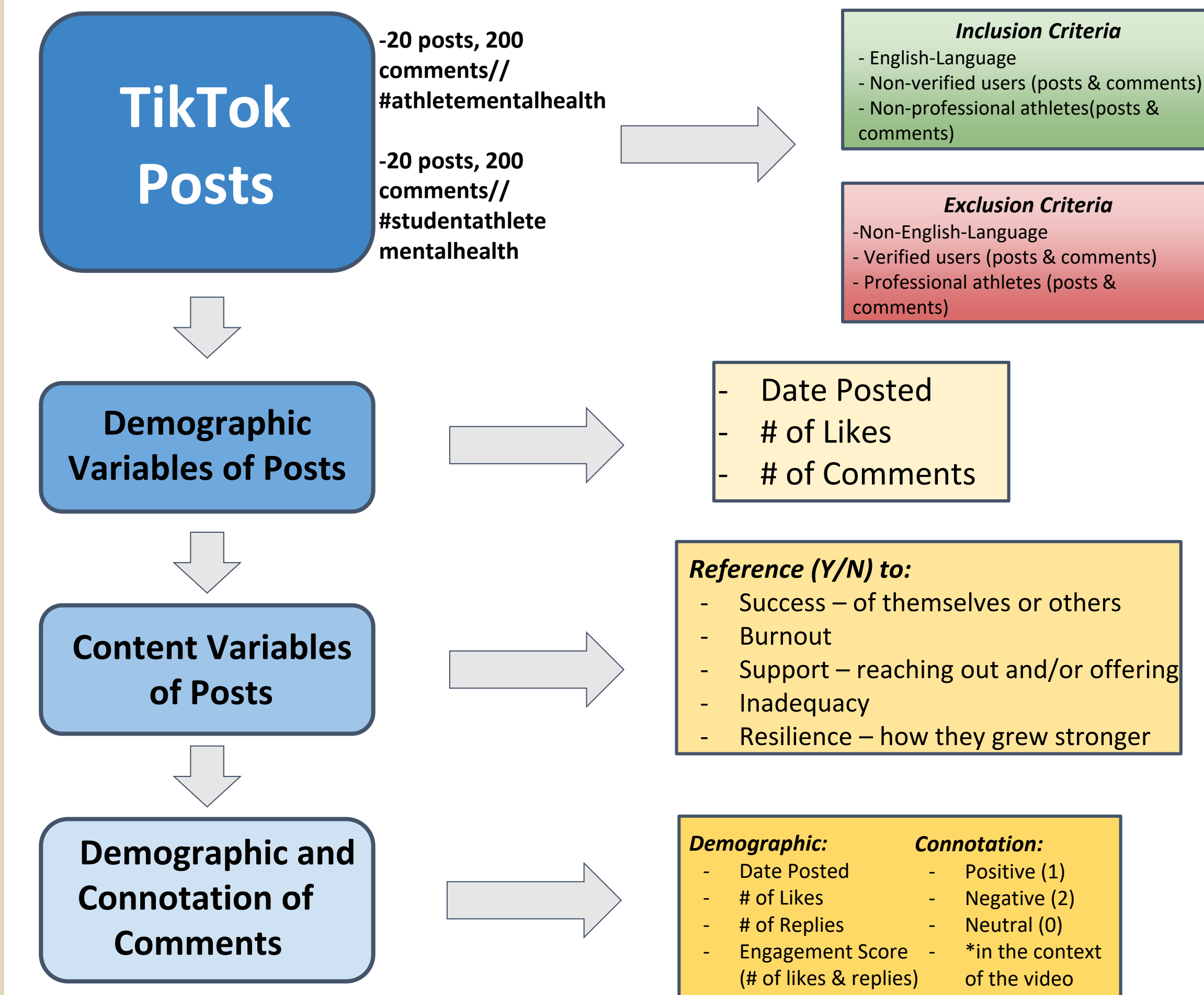
INTRODUCTION

- There is about 8 million high school athletes and 480 thousand collegiate athletes in the USA.
- 95% of male and 85% of female athletes report higher stress compared to 52% of non-athlete students
- The mental health stigma in sports often deters people from expressing their emotions, which results in suppressing them.
- Although some people use social media to highlight their successes, others seek support from the online community.
- While they may motivate some to surpass their competitors, these posts may contribute to deteriorating others' mental health: including responses such as feelings of inadequacy and isolation, depression and anxiety, and self-absorption and burnout.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how student-athletes' TikTok posts about mental health affect other student-athletes.

METHOD

A). Content Analysis
- ❖ Posts selected from TikTok through an advanced search using **#athletementalhealth** and **#studentathletementalhealth** hashtags
- ❖ Post text verbatim(captions and comments), references to mental health, and demographic variables were collected

TikTok Posts

-20 posts, 200 comments// #athletementalhealth

-20 posts, 200 comments// #studentathletementalhealth

Inclusion Criteria
- English-Language
- Non-verified users (posts & comments)
- Non-professional athletes(posts & comments)

Exclusion Criteria
- Non-English-Language
- Verified users (posts & comments)
- Professional athletes (posts & comments)

Demographic Variables of Posts
- Date Posted
- # of Likes
- # of Comments

Content Variables of Posts

Reference (Y/N) to:
- Success – of themselves or others
- Burnout
- Support – reaching out and/or offering
- Inadequacy
- Resilience – how they grew stronger

Demographic and Connotation of Comments

Demographic:
- Date Posted
- # of Likes
- # of Replies
- Engagement Score (# of likes & replies)

Connotation:
- Positive (1)
- Negative (2)
- Neutral (0)
- *in the context of the video

B). Data Analysis
- ❖ Descriptive statistics used to calculate prevalence of codebook variables
- ❖ ANOVA used to compare engagement score between the 3 types of comments
- ❖ Chi squares used to compare posts' content variables with comment connotation

RESULTS

1). Overall Demographics
- 40 total posts analyzed
  - 20 posts from #athletementalhealth
  - 20 posts from #studentathletementalhealth
- 393 total comments analyzed
  - 200 from #athletementalhealth
  - 193 from #studentathletementalhealth
  - 7 comments omitted due to lack of text (i.e., only usernames)

.	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
# of Likes	228357	83	229200	25682.9	2501.158
# of Comments	2212	8	220	20.78	403.161

2). Posts and Comments

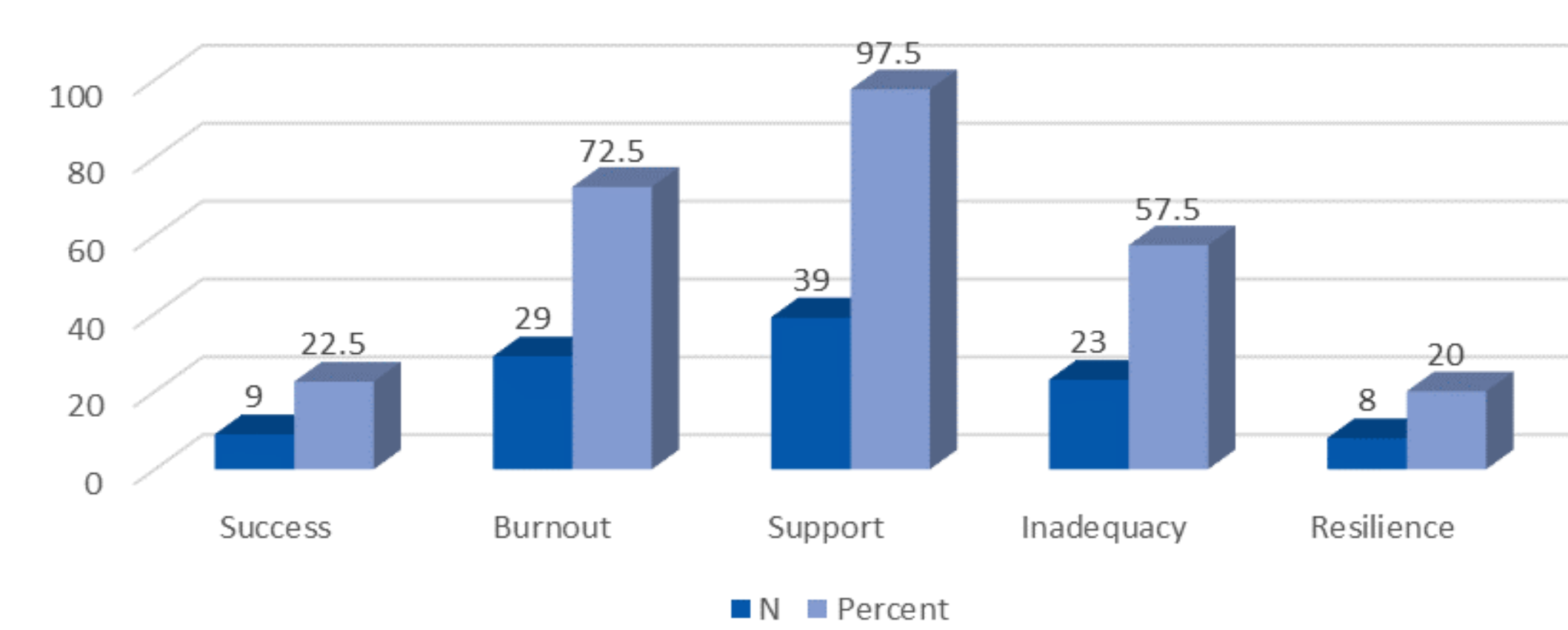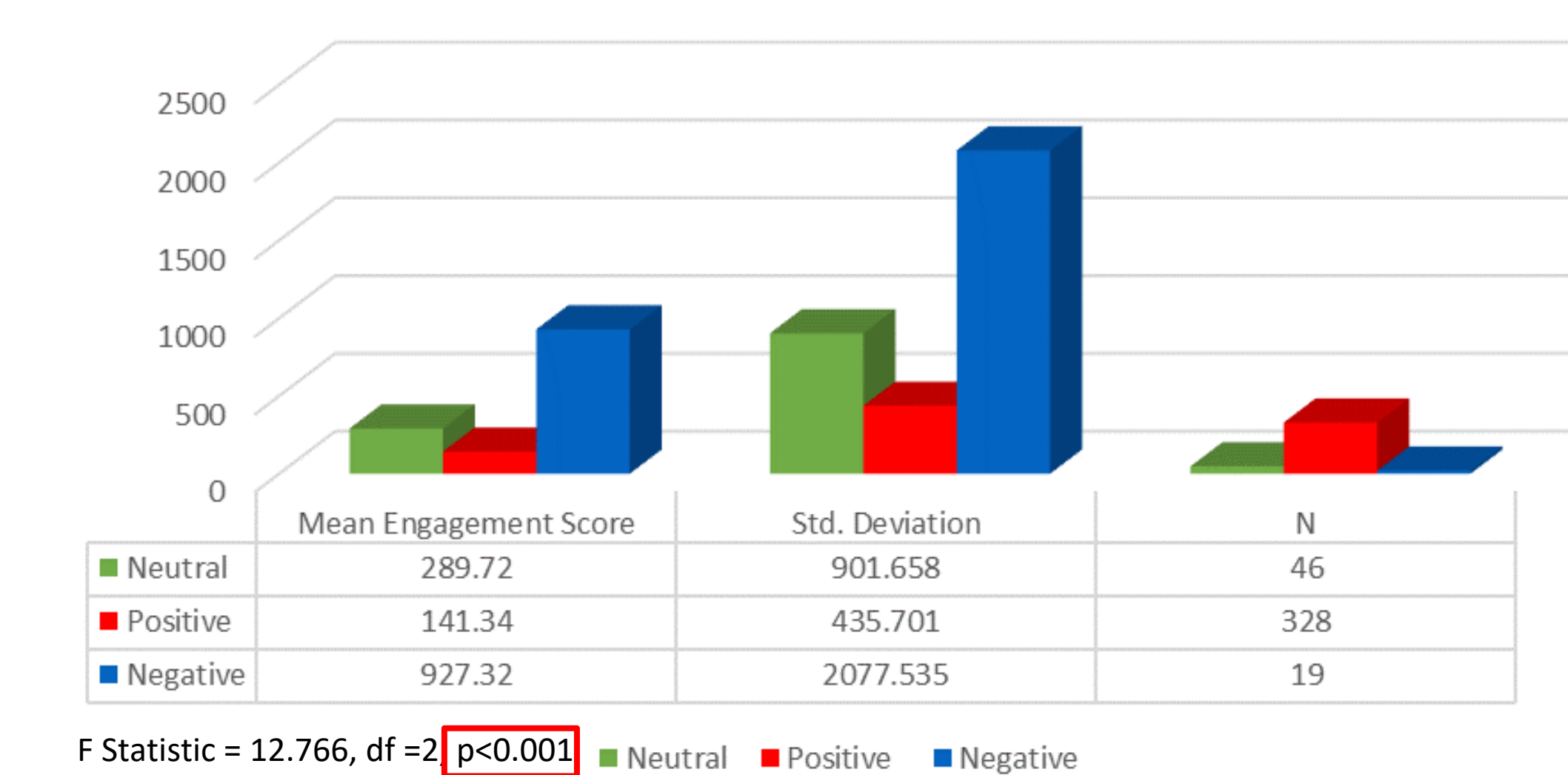**Fig 2.1: % and N of TikTok Posts Referencing Success, Burnout, Support, Inadequacy, Resilience**

**Fig 2.2: Mean Engagement Score, Std. Deviation, N of Neutral, Positive, Negative Comments**

	Mean Engagement Score	Std. Deviation	N
Neutral	289.72	901.658	46
Positive	141.34	435.701	328
Negative	927.32	2077.535	19

F Statistic = 12.766, df =2 p<0.001

- ➢ Posts *most frequently* referenced **support** (39, 97.5%) and *least frequently* referenced **resilience** (8, 20&). (Fig 2.1)
- ➢ While **negative comments** were *least common*, they received the **highest engagement score**, although also having the **highest std. deviation**.(Fig 2.2)
- ➢ Although **positive comments** were the *most common*, they received the **lowest engagement score**, although having the **lowest std. deviation**. (Fig 2.2)

RESULTS

Sample Comments

Positive

Negative
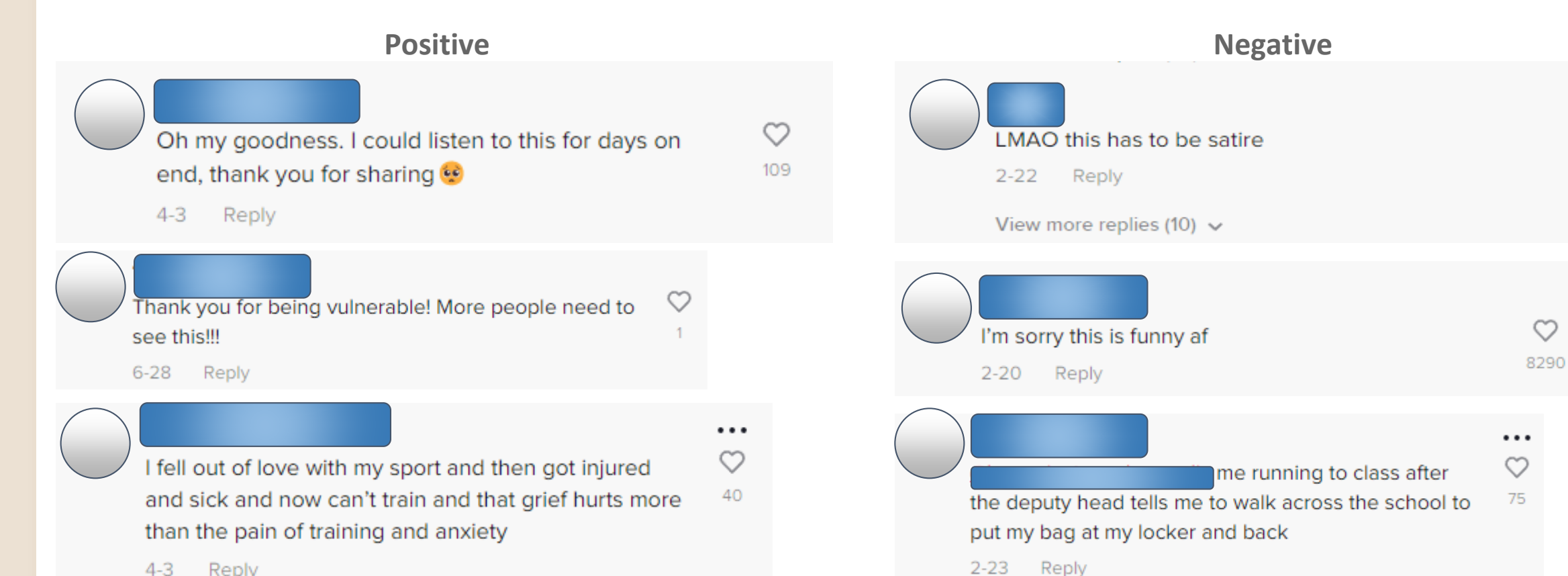
- ❖ LIWC was avoided during comment analysis because particular keywords – ex: injured, sick, grief – and phrases – ex: can't train, hurts more – may result in misinterpreted comment connotation in relation to the post

3). Post-Comment Comparison

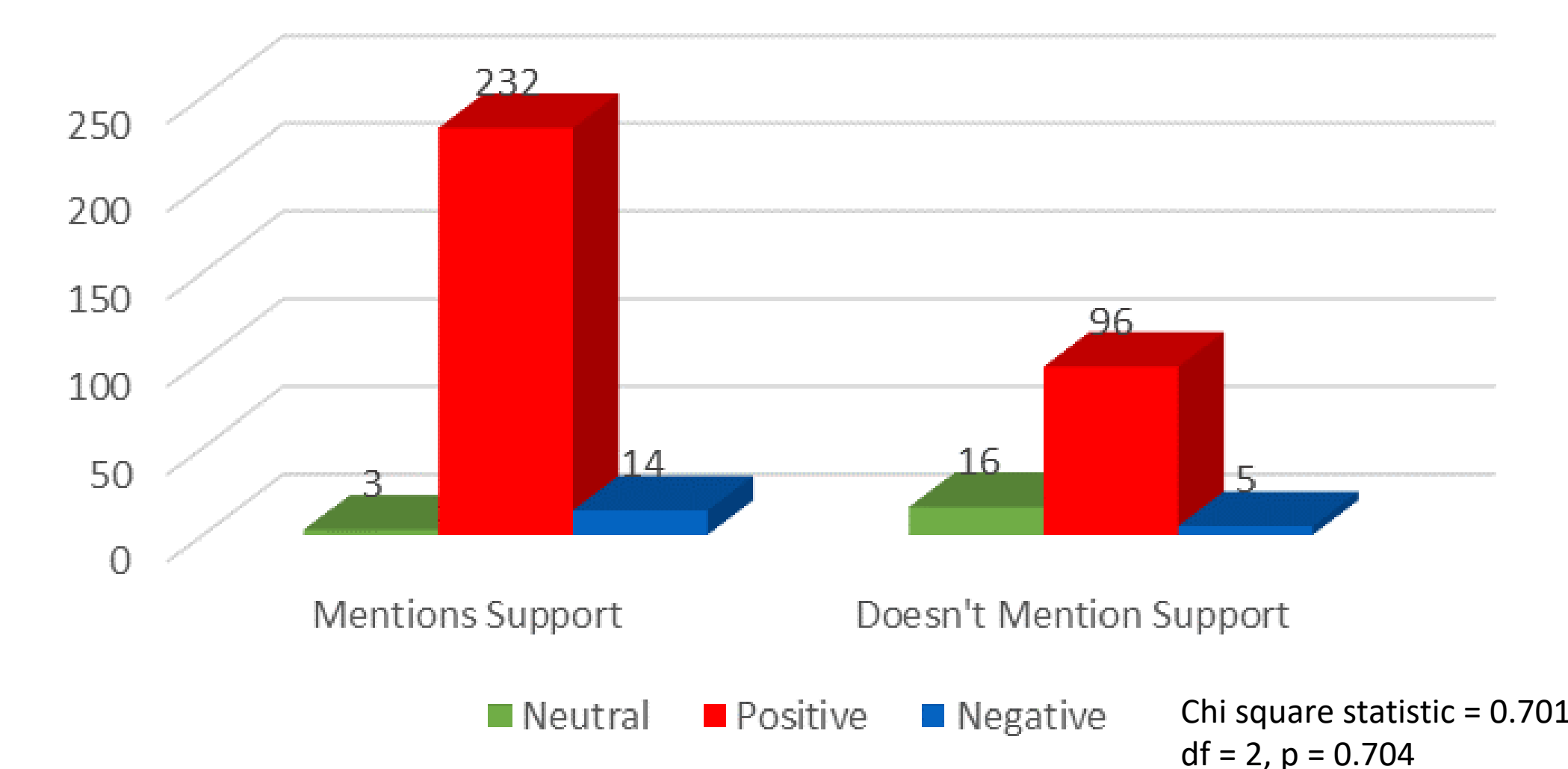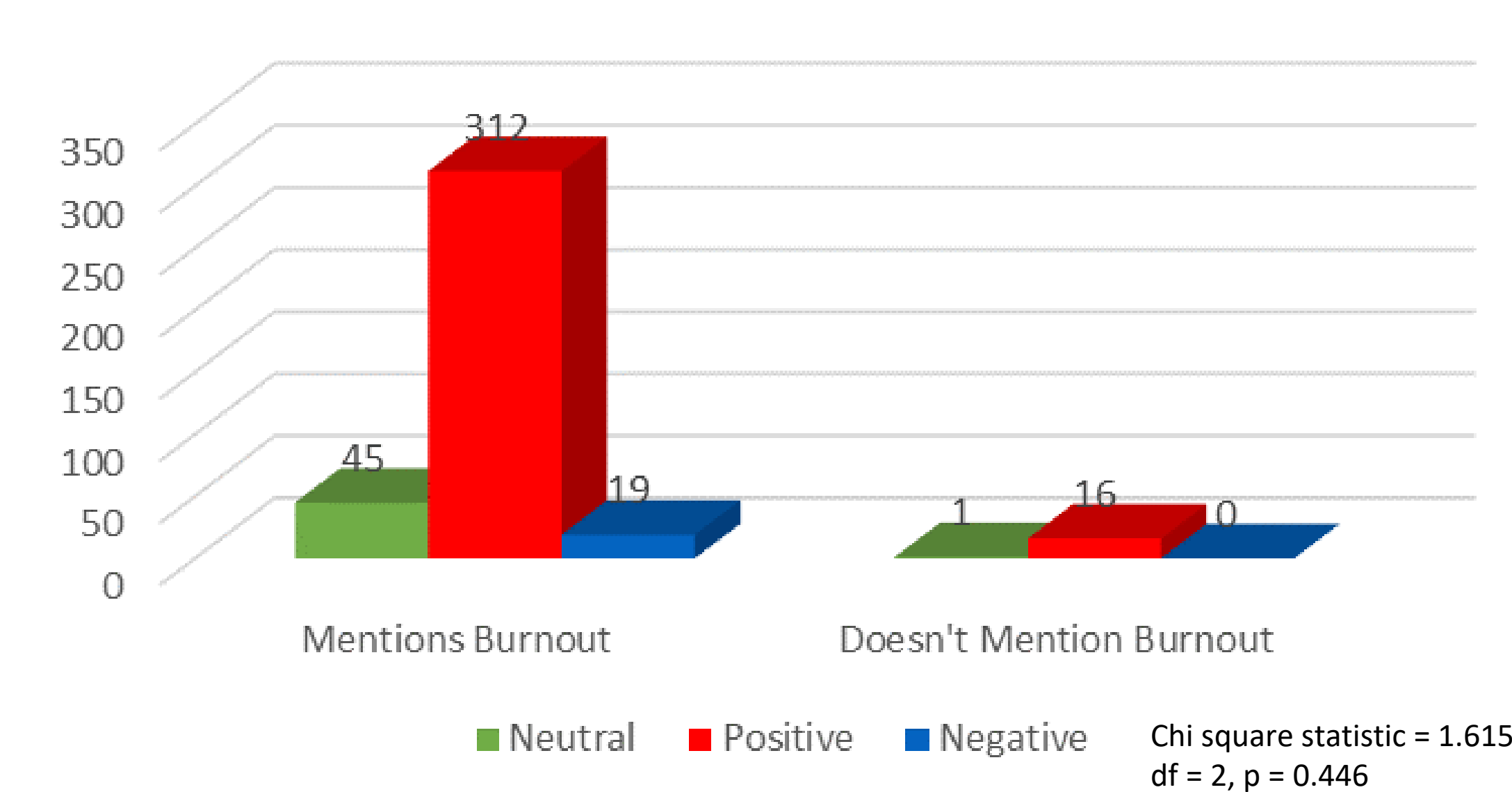**Fig 3.1: Positive, Negative, or Neutral * Video Mentions Support Cross Tabulation**

Chi square statistic = 0.701
df = 2, p = 0.704

Fig 3.2: Positive, Negative, or Neutral * Video Mentions Burnout Cross Tabulation

Chi square statistic = 1.615
df = 2, p = 0.446

- ➢ **Positive comments** were the *most common* in posts that did or did not mention support or burnout (Fig 3.1, 3.2). However, both Chi square analyses yield a **p > 0.05** (p = 0.704 & p = 0.446), indicating **no effect was observed**. (Fig 3.1, 3.2)

CONCLUSIONS

Main Findings
- **Support** was the **most common** variable in posts
- There was a **significant difference** between the average engagement score on positive, negative, and neutral comments. **Negative comments** had the **highest engagement score**, and **positive comments** had **lowest engagement scores**.
- There was **no difference** in the proportion of positive, negative, and neutral comments on videos that **mentioned burnout** compared to videos that **did not mention burnout**.
- There was **no difference** in the proportion of positive, negative, and neutral comments on videos that **mentioned support** compared to videos that **did not mention support**.

Limitations & Further Research

Limitation: TikTok Algorithm:
- Unique "For You Page", difficult to reproduce
- Exposure from previous posts may affect current attitude and perception
- Increased accuracy from larger sample
- Values and sensitivity differences among multiple people may yield different results

Further Research:
- Analyze replies to positive, negative, and neutral comments
- Conduct study with verified users
- Increase sample size

Context & Implications

Context
- Mental health is often misinterpreted as a minor excuse and neglected
- Associated with weakness, quitting, losing, often causing emotional suppression and/or backlash
- 21st century's growing cancel culture has caused negative, conflicting attitudes and/or values to be prone to public shaming

Implications
- Negative comments received the highest engagement score because potentially, it attracts cancel culture more than negative comments
- TikTok's platform is geared towards entertainment as opposed to serious topics

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