Hustle Culture and Workplace Anxiety: The Psychological Effect of Overworked Behavior among Working Individuals

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Abstract

This study investigates how "hustle culture" behaviors, which include intense work participation, high internal motivation, and a strong desire for job satisfaction, impact anxiety levels among working professionals in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. Understanding the psychological effects of these behaviors is crucial for boosting employee well-being and organizational productivity, especially as they become more prevalent. The effect of hustling culture behaviors on anxiety in Nepali workers was investigated utilizing a cross-sectional, causal study design and a quantitative approach. SPSS version 20 was used to analyze data collected from 226 working participants using a structured questionnaire. Results show a substantial positive connection between hustle-culture behaviors and anxiety among Nepali workers. Participants with moderate to high levels of work participation, self-driven motivation, and job happiness also reported higher levels of anxiety. Job satisfaction can lead to emotional distress due to over commitment and internal pressure, despite its normally positive impact on well-being. Research indicates that high levels of job commitment and self-imposed performance pressure might increase employee anxiety. Even job happiness, when combined with extreme devotion, can worsen mental stress. Effective task management and proactive recovery assistance are critical to reducing anxiety and fostering healthy workplace dynamics. This study applies the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model to the Nepali workplace, including hustle-culture dynamics into existing occupational stress theories. It provides practical ideas for Nepali organizations, including integrating mental health care, fostering work-life balance, and setting reasonable performance targets to improve long-term productivity and employee well-being.

Keywords – Hustle culture, Occupational stress, Productivity, Work enjoyment, Work life balance

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1. Introduction

Anxiety has been studied in relation to employee work cultures and behaviors throughout the modern corporate era. Prolonged overwork and constant performance pressure have been associated to increased anxiety and psychological stress (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Spurk et al., 2020). Understanding employee mental health is critical because it has a direct influence on individual health, organizational productivity, and the long-term viability of modern workplace practices. Hustle culture, a modern work ethic that promotes continuous productivity, long working hours, and prioritizing work above personal life or well-being, develops steadfast devotion and self-sacrifice for professional goals (Bennett et al., 2021).

Although often associated with ambition and high performance, this lifestyle is also associated with unfavorable psychological outcomes: people immersed in hustle culture report increased anxiety, burnout, and emotional fatigue as a result of the constant pressure to be "on" and do more (Adhikari et al, 2025; Schiffrin & Godfrey, 2012; Spurk et al., 2020). Overworking has become normalized, and unwinding has been undervalued, resulting to chronic stress and poor mental health, particularly among those with high aspirations but few means (Choi, 2020; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Despite its prevalence, few studies have investigated how the specific behavioral components of hustle culture, such as work involvement, motivation to work, and work enjoyment, directly affect employee anxiety.

Although the effects of hustle culture on mental health have been extensively documented in international literature, there is still a dearth of empirical research on these effects in Nepal, where workplace mental health is not given enough attention by scholars and is stigmatized by culture (My Republica, 2023). According to a 2022 article in The Kathmandu Post, social media, startup conventions, and distant corporate dynamics where productivity is equated with professional success are all ways that young Nepali professionals are being impacted by the global hustling culture. This changing perspective makes it harder to distinguish between personal and professional life, which increases worry and emotional tiredness.

In Nepal, hustle-oriented ideals have been especially ingrained in urban industries like banking, IT, and marketing, which associate excessive production and long hours with professional value (Shrestha & Mishra, 2019). As such, mental health issues like anxiety and exhaustion are becoming more prevalent, yet they are still mostly unreported in Nepali academic research. Therefore, in order to investigate how three important hustle culture behaviors, work involvement, feeling driven to work, and work enjoyment influence anxiety levels among working professionals in Kathmandu Valley, this study uses the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Langelaan et al., 2005), which separates workplace demands that increase psychological strain from resources that mitigate such strain. The approach allows for systematic research into how high levels of internal motivation and over-engagement may increase anxiety while job satisfaction may act as a psychological buffer. Furthermore, the Two Dimensional Affect Model (Russell, 1980) enhances the interpretation of hustle-culture effects by conceptualizing anxiety as a high-arousal, unpleasant emotional state.

Anxiety-driven productivity loss, burnout, and attrition can worsen without proactive workplace interventions, increasing both the financial cost and the suffering of people. By combining occupational stress theory with empirical data unique to Nepal, this study closes a significant research vacuum and offers organizations practical advice on how to promote long-term productivity and worker well-being. The present study aims to examine the association between work involvement and anxiety among working individuals in Kathmandu Valley. It also seeks to explore the relationship between the feeling of being work driven to work and the levels of anxiety experienced by these individuals. Furthermore, the study intends to assess the overall status of anxiety among working individuals within the Nepali context.

2. Review of Literature and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Review

This study is based on two fundamental theoretical models: The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the Two-Dimensional Affect Model (Russell, 1980). Both perspectives provide light on how hustling culture behaviors such as job participation, internal urge to work, and even work enjoyment affect anxiety among Nepali workers inside the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

Demerouti et al. (2001) established the work Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, which describes how work features impact employee well-being. It categorizes job demands as those aspects of work that require sustained effort (e.g., long hours, high pressure, and emotional investment) and are associated with physical and psychological costs, while job resources are those elements that help in achieving work goals, decreasing job demands, or encouraging personal growth. This approach is directly relevant to hustle culture, in which job participation, internal motivation to work, and even work enjoyment are internalized demands rather than resources. In the context of this study, these hustling behaviors serve as strong job demands that deplete mental and emotional resources if left uncontrolled. For example, work involvement the degree to which people identify with their jobs (Kanungo, 1982) can cause the lines between personal and professional life to become blurred, which can lead to anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Schaufeli et al., 2009). According to some studies, feeling motivated to work often due to self-imposed or the societal expectations reinforces the constant pressure to perform (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Snir & Harpaz, 2012), and people intend to leave the company (Pokhrel et al., 2022) if they experience workplace intimidation at a different level of offensive supervision, which is strongly correlated with elevated anxiety. If it pushes people to over commit and makes them feel bad for taking breaks, even work enjoyment which is normally a resource may turn into a demand in hustle culture (Schiffrin & Godfrey, 2012; Langelaan et al., 2005; Spence & Robbins, 1992).

Therefore, the JD-R model lends credence to the idea that excessive hustle culture behavior can increase anxiety if it isn't offset by coping strategies like rest, independence, or psychological support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Mosanya, 2022). These demands are especially pertinent in Nepal's high-stress urban sectors like marketing, tech, and finance (Shrestha & Mishra, 2019), where mental health services are still developing and hustle culture is idealized (My Republica, 2023).

Two-Dimensional Affect Model

Russell's (1980) Two-Dimensional Affect Model categorizes emotions along two axes: valence (pleasant–unpleasant) and arousal (low–high). Anxiety is defined as a high-arousal, unpleasant emotional state in this model, offering a lens to understand how individuals can be emotionally activated yet distressed at the same time. This is particularly relevant for the current study, which examines how even seemingly positive hustle behaviors like motivation and work enjoyment can produce negative emotional outcomes. For example, individuals may be energized by goal pursuit or job satisfaction (positive arousal), but still feel overwhelmed or guilty for not doing enough, thus slipping into an anxious state. This emotional contradiction aligns with the high-arousal, negative-valence quadrant described by the model.

In hustle culture, being constantly "on", even when enjoying work, creates a persistent emotional high that may ultimately lead to fatigue and anxiety. This model, therefore, provides a psychological basis for understanding how internal activation driven by hustle norms can become

a source of stress rather than fulfillment reinforcing the study's findings that all three hustle behaviors are positively linked to anxiety among Nepali professionals inside Kathmandu Valley.

Empirical Review

Hustle Culture and Anxiety

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory suggests that employee well-being is influenced by the interaction between job demands and available resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). When employees experience excessive job demands such as overwork, high pressure, and the constant need to perform, as seen in hustle culture behaviors without sufficient resources like rest, autonomy, or social support, it can lead to psychological strain and anxiety (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Studies have shown that hustle culture glorifies constant productivity and over commitment, which increases mental health issues including anxiety (Choi, 2020; Mosanya, 2022). Even positive-seeming traits like work enjoyment can contribute to anxiety if the engagement is obsessive and driven by external pressure or self-imposed expectations (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Langelaan et al., 2005). The review of these theoretical and empirical studies has deepened the understanding of how hustle culture behaviors can function as psychological stressors.

Work Involvement and Anxiety

Work involvement refers to the degree of psychological identification individuals have with their work and the extent to which they consider their job as central to their identity (Kanungo, 1982). While work involvement is often seen as a positive trait associated with commitment and engagement, excessive identification with work may result in psychological strain when individuals struggle to separate personal and professional life. In hustle culture contexts, high work involvement may increase vulnerability to anxiety due to over commitment, unrealistic expectations, and reduced time for recovery (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Further, there is a relationship between psychological agreement and exhibition of work behavior, and when supervisor breaks the psychological promise that make resentment to employees leading to counterproductive work behavior (Ban et al., 2023).

However, it may also offer a sense of purpose and structure that could protect against anxiety in some cases. Given these contrasting possibilities, this study adopts a two-tailed hypothesis to explore whether a significant relationship exists between work involvement and anxiety among working individuals in Nepal. However, not all studies have found a positive relationship. For example, a study by Gorgievski et al. (2010) found that work involvement can be associated with greater resilience and psychological well-being, especially when individuals experience autonomy and recognition in their roles. This suggests that context and resource availability may moderate the link between work involvement and anxiety. Hence based on the above literature, the following hypothesis has been proposed for this study.

Hypothesis (H1): Work Involvement has a significant relationship with Anxiety.

Feeling Driven to Work and Anxiety

Feeling driven to work captures the internal compulsion or psychological pressure individuals feel to work excessively, often regardless of enjoyment or necessity (Schaufeli et al., 2009). In the context of hustle culture, this drive is often fueled by societal expectations, self-imposed standards, and an internalized need for productivity. While this internal drive may

enhance achievement in the short term, it may also lead to chronic stress, reduced recovery, and emotional fatigue (Clark et al., 2017). However, in some individuals, this drive may be interpreted as ambition or high personal standards, potentially leading to emotional fulfillment rather than distress, if you recognize your emotional feeling, you will have greater chance to manage emotion and thus reduce anxiety (Chaudhary et al., 2024). As such, this study examines the two-tailed relationship between feeling driven to work and anxiety, without assuming the direction of the effect. However, other research has shown that an internal drive can contribute positively to meaning-making and motivation, particularly in goal-oriented individuals who feel a sense of purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, the impact of drive on anxiety may vary depending on whether the motivation is autonomous or controlled. Hence based on the above literature, the following hypothesis has been proposed for this study.

Hypothesis (H2): Feeling Driven to Work has a significant relationship with Anxiety.

Work Enjoyment and Anxiety

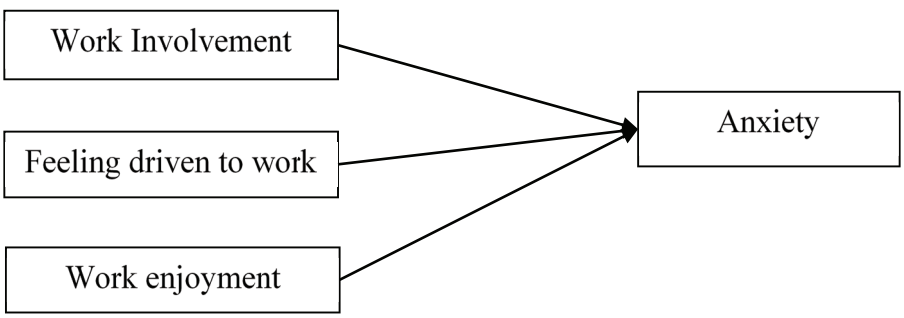
Work enjoyment refers to the degree of pleasure, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation individuals derive from their job (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Enjoying one's work is generally associated with positive outcomes such as engagement, motivation, and well-being. However, within the hustle culture framework, even enjoyable work can become a source of pressure when combined with excessive hours, blurred boundaries, and societal glorification of productivity (Schiffrin & Godfrey, 2012). Therefore, it is possible that work enjoyment could either buffer individuals against anxiety or, paradoxically, intensify it when enjoyment masks deeper stress or guilt about resting. Contrastingly, studies like Warr (2002) have suggested that work enjoyment can act as a protective factor against stress and anxiety when accompanied by adequate support and manageable workload. This indicates that while enjoyment may buffer against anxiety in some cases, it could worsen it under conditions of high demand. Hence based on the above literature, the following hypothesis has been proposed for this study.

Hypothesis (H3): Work Enjoyment has a significant relationship with Anxiety.

Based on the theoretical foundations discussed above, the following conceptual framework has been developed to illustrate the hypothesized relationships between hustle culture behaviors work involvement, feeling driven to work, and work enjoyment and anxiety among working individuals in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal.

Figure 1

The research framework of the study



(Source: Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2009)

3. Research Method

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between hustle culture behaviors and anxiety among working individuals in Kathmandu Valley. The quantitative method was chosen because it enables the numerical measurement of variables, allowing for objective analysis, generalization, and hypothesis testing through statistical tools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is particularly useful in identifying patterns, correlations, and statistical significance between independent and dependent variables in psychological and behavioral studies. The research design employed for this study is cross-sectional and causal in nature. A cross-sectional design was used to capture data at a single point in time, offering a snapshot of the variables under investigation. The causal design aimed to explore the influence of independent variables work involvement, feeling driven to work, and work enjoyment on the dependent variable, anxiety, without manipulating any conditions. This design is suitable for identifying natural associations between variables in real-life settings.

The population for this study comprised working individuals in Kathmandu Valley across various industries, including private sectors. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed due to the exploratory nature of the research and the practical challenges of accessing a complete sampling frame. This method was chosen due to its practicality, time efficiency, and suitability for exploratory research where a defined sampling frame is not available (Etikan et al., 2016). Participants were approached through online platforms such as email, and social media, using a structured questionnaire shared via Google Forms. Initially accessible individuals were contacted directly and invited to participate, with outreach designed to capture diverse professional backgrounds. Out of a total of 243 responses collected, 226 valid responses were retained after data cleaning, which involved removing incomplete or duplicate entries. The final sample size fulfills the requirements for multivariate analysis, as Hair et al. (2019) recommend a minimum of five respondents per item for factor-based studies, with this study comprising 25 measurement items. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least two years of work experience, ensuring they had sufficient exposure to workplace dynamics and hustle culture behaviors. Individuals with less than two years of experience were excluded, as their limited exposure might not accurately reflect long-term psychological patterns. This inclusion threshold was chosen to enhance the reliability and contextual validity of the findings, ensuring that participants could provide informed responses on the impact of sustained work behavior on anxiety.

Measurement Instruments

A structured questionnaire consisting of 25 closed-ended items was used to collect data. The questionnaire was designed in English and administered via Google Forms. The measurement items were adapted from established and validated instruments. The items for Work Involvement were adapted from Kanungo's (1982) Job Involvement Scale, which has been widely used in organizational behavior research. The sample item includes "I am always fully engaged in my work tasks, even during personal time''. It comprises seven items. "Items measuring Feeling Driven to Work were drawn from Snir and Harpaz's (2012) framework on heavy work investment and internal work compulsion. The sample item includes "I am often motivated by the desire to prove my worth through my achievements". It comprises seven items. For Work Enjoyment, items were adapted from the Workaholism Battery (WorkBAT) developed by Spence and Robbins (1992), which captures positive emotional engagement with one's job. The sample item includes "I enjoy the challenges that come with pursuing my goals." It comprises seven items. Finally, Anxiety was measured using selected items adapted from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) by Goldberg et al. (1997), contextualized to reflect work-

related anxiety. The sample item includes "I frequently feel anxious about not doing enough or achieving enough in my work". It comprises four items. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The Likert scale is widely used in behavioral research to quantify subjective attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Likert, 1932). It provides a reliable means to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement with various work-related statements. A pilot study was conducted with a small sample to assess internal consistency, and all variables showed acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7. The questionnaire was self-administered, and participation was voluntary and anonymous to ensure ethical integrity.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Table 1

Respondents Profile

Profile	Specification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	129	57.1%
	Female	97	42.9%
Age Group	21–30 years	163	72.1%
	31–40 years	43	19.0%
	41–50 years	16	7.1%
	51–60 years	4	1.8%
Employment Status	Full-time (incl. Business Owners & Managers)	120	53.1%
	Part-time / Freelance / Contract / Interns	106	46.9%
Working Industry	Technology & IT	64	28.3%
	Education	53	23.0%
	Finance, Banking & Audit	52	23.0%
	Healthcare	19	8.4%
	Hospitality, Retail & Marketing	35	15.5%
	Manufacturing & Services	22	9.7%
Years of Service	2–3 years	142	62.8%
	4–5 years	33	14.6%
	6–7 years	17	7.5%
	More than 7 years	34	15.0%

Table 1 presents the demographic and professional profile of the respondents. The study included 226 participants, comprising 57.1% males and 42.9% females. Most participants were young professionals aged between 21 and 30 years (72.1%), followed by 31–40 years (19.0%), 41–50 years

(7.1%), and 51–60 years (1.8%). Regarding employment status, more than half of the respondents (53.1%) were employed full-time. Participants represented diverse industries, including Technology & IT (28.3%), Finance, Banking & Audit (23.0%), Education (23.0%), Healthcare (8.4%), Hospitality, Retail & Marketing (15.5%), Manufacturing & Services (9.7%). Most respondents had 2–3 years of work experience (62.8%), while 14.6% had 4–5 years, 7.5% had 6–7 years, and 15.0% had more than 7 years of service. Overall, the table reflects a sample predominantly consisting of young professionals with early-career experience across various industries.

Descriptive Analysis

This section analyzes the basic statistical characteristics of the key variables related to hustle culture behaviors work involvement, feeling driven to work, work enjoyment and their association with anxiety among working individuals inside Kathmandu Valley. Descriptive statistics such as mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions are presented to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these variables manifest within the sample.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Work Involvement	226	3.57	0.79
Feeling Driven to Work	226	3.72	0.74
Work Enjoyment	226	3.54	0.82
Anxiety	226	3.66	1.10

Table 2 summarizes significant descriptive data for four psychological characteristics tested in this study (work participation, feeling compelled to work, job pleasure, and anxiety) among 226 respondents. Participants indicated moderate levels across all categories, with the highest mean score being Feeling Driven to Work (M = 3.72, SD = 0.74), followed by Work Involvement (M = 3.57, SD = 0.79), Anxiety (M = 3.66, SD = 1.10), and Work Enjoyment (M = 3.54, SD = 0.82). The relatively low standard deviations for involvement, drive, and enjoyment suggest that responses were clustered fairly tightly around the means, indicating consistent experiences among respondents on these dimensions; however, anxiety exhibited greater variability (SD = 1.10), highlighting a broader range of emotional responses.

Table 3

Correlational Analysis

Variables	Work Involvement	Feeling to Driven Work	Work Enjoyment	Anxiety
Work Involvement	1.00			
Feeling Driven to Work	.40**	1.00		
Work Enjoyment	.15	.40**	1.00	
Anxiety	.45**	.50**	.42**	1.00

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore how Work Involvement, Feeling Driven to Work, Work Enjoyment, and Anxiety relate to each other among 226 participants. The results show that Feeling Driven to Work has a moderate positive relationship with Work Involvement (r = .40), indicating people who feel more driven tend to be more involved in their work. Work Enjoyment displays a weak connection with Work Involvement (r = .15) but a moderate link with Feeling Driven (r = .40), suggesting enjoyment aligns more with feeling driven than involvement. Anxiety is moderately associated with all three other variables -Work Involvement (r = .45), Feeling Driven (r = .50), and Work Enjoyment (r = .42) showing higher anxiety tends to co occur with higher involvement, drive, and enjoyment. All reported correlations are positive, meaning as one variable increases, the others tend to increase too. This alignment in direction and magnitude helps clarify how these psychological constructs interact in your dataset. In simple terms, stronger drive and involvement go hand in hand with greater anxiety, while enjoyment is somewhat tied to drive and anxiety, but less so to involvement.

Table 4

Regression Analysis-Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.71	.50	.48	0.76

Predictors: (Constant), Work Enjoyment, Work Involvement, Feeling Driven to Work.

Table 4 presents the overall fit of the regression model predicting the outcome variable (unspecified) from three predictors: Work Enjoyment, Work Involvement, and Feeling Driven to Work. The model yields a multiple correlation coefficient of R = .71, indicating a strong collective association between the predictors and the outcome. The R^2 value of .50 means that these variables together explain 50% of the variance in the dependent measure. The adjusted R^2 of .48 accounts for the number of predictors and sample size, and is slightly lower, suggesting modest shrinkage in explained variance when penalizing for model complexity. The standard error of estimate (0.76) reflects the typical distance between observed and predicted values essentially the average prediction error in the same units as the dependent variable

Table 5

Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.28	0.42	—	0.67	.502	—	—
Work Involvement	0.46	0.10	.34	4.60	.001	0.62	1.61
Feeling Driven to Work	0.42	0.12	.30	3.50	.001	0.60	1.66
Work Enjoyment	0.28	0.09	.23	3.11	.002	0.65	1.54

In the regression analysis for predicting the dependent variable, three predictors were included: Work Involvement, Feeling Driven to Work, and Work Enjoyment. The unstandardized coefficients (B) show that Work Involvement (B = 0.46, SE = 0.10, β = 0.34), Feeling Driven to Work (B = 0.42, SE = 0.12, β = 0.30), and Work Enjoyment (B = 0.28, SE = 0.09, β = 0.23) were

all positive and statistically significant predictors (t = 4.60, 3.50, 3.11 respectively; p ≤ .002), indicating that higher scores on each predictor are associated with higher values on the outcome variable. Multicollinearity diagnostics were also acceptable: VIF values ranged from 1.54 to 1.66, and tolerance values ranged from 0.60 to 0.65, indicating low to moderate correlation among predictors and minimal concerns about multicollinearity.

Table 6

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F	p
Regression	72.45	3	24.15	41.80	.000b
Residual	72.30	222	0.33		
Total	144.81	225			

Table 6 presents the results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) conducted to assess the overall significance of the regression model predicting the dependent variable from three predictors: Work Involvement, Feeling Driven to Work, and Work Enjoyment. The computed F-statistic is 41.80, indicating that the model explains a significant portion of the variability in the dependent variable. The associated p-value is .000, which is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This suggests strong evidence against the null hypothesis, leading to its rejection. Consequently, it can be concluded that at least one of the predictors makes a significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable. The ANOVA results demonstrate that the regression model, comprising Work Involvement, Feeling Driven to Work, and Work Enjoyment, provides a statistically significant explanation of the variability in the dependent variable.

Table 7

Hypothesis Confirmation Table

Hypothesis	Relationship	Result
H1	Work Involvement has a significant relationship with anxiety.	Supported
H2	Feeling driven to work has a significant relationship with anxiety	Supported
H3	Work enjoyment has a significant relationship with anxiety	Supported

The regression analysis reveals that Work Involvement has a positive and statistically significant relationship with anxiety ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that higher levels of work involvement are associated with increased anxiety levels. Research supports this finding, indicating that individuals who are highly involved in their work may experience higher stress and anxiety levels due to increased workload and pressure. The analysis shows that Feeling Driven to Work also has a positive and significant relationship with anxiety ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that individuals who feel compelled to work excessively may experience higher anxiety levels. Studies have found that such feelings can lead to burnout and increased anxiety due to constant pressure to perform and meet expectations. Contrary to the previous hypotheses, the analysis indicates that Work Enjoyment has a positive relationship with anxiety ($\beta = 0.23$, p<

0.01). This suggests that higher levels of work enjoyment are associated with increased anxiety levels. While this finding may seem counterintuitive, it could be explained by the possibility that individuals who enjoy their work may take on more responsibilities or work longer hours, leading to increased stress and anxiety.

5. Discussions

This study investigated the relationships between hustle culture behaviors work involvement, feeling driven to work, and work enjoyment and anxiety among working individuals. Consistent with previous research, work involvement was positively associated with anxiety. This aligns with Schaufeli et al. (2006), who found that excessive work engagement, especially without adequate recovery, can lead to emotional exhaustion and anxiety. Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) similarly argue that high job involvement, coupled with insufficient psychological detachment, exacerbates stress and burnout. However, Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) provide a contrasting perspective, emphasizing that work engagement can serve as a protective resource against stress when supported by adequate personal and job resources. Our findings suggest that in hustle culture contexts characterized by relentless demands and scarce recovery opportunities work involvement functions more like a demand than a resource, intensifying anxiety rather than buffering it. This divergence underscores the critical role of contextual factors in determining whether engagement acts as a stressor or a buffer.

The strongest predictor of anxiety was feeling driven to work, echoing Shimazu et al. (2012), who link controlled motivation and internal compulsion to negative psychological outcomes. This finding supports Clark et al.'s (2016) meta-analytic evidence that workaholism, marked by a compulsive drive to work, relates to poor mental health. Contrastingly, Van Beek et al. (2012) differentiate between maladaptive compulsive working and harmonious passion, noting that the latter involves autonomous motivation and does not predict anxiety. Our results emphasize that the internal drive in hustle culture more closely resembles maladaptive compulsion, which may explain the elevated anxiety. However, this stands in partial contradiction to studies suggesting that passion for work can coexist with positive well-being (Vallerand et al., 2003), highlighting the need to disentangle the nuanced forms of motivation present in hustle culture.

Unexpectedly, work enjoyment was positively correlated with anxiety. While traditionally viewed as protective against stress (Hakanen et al., 2006), emerging research reveals a more complex picture. Shimazu and Schaufeli (2009) found that even when employees enjoy their work, over commitment can increase anxiety and burnout risk. This "engagement-related strain" phenomenon, described by De Jonge et al. (2008), occurs when intrinsic motivation interacts with high job demands and insufficient recovery. Real-world studies among nurses and educators corroborate this paradox, showing that passion and enjoyment can coexist with increased anxiety in high-pressure environments (Bakker et al., 2014). This challenges the simplistic notion that work enjoyment is universally beneficial, illustrating how in hustle culture, positive affect can mask underlying emotional strain. In contrast, other studies suggest that work enjoyment fosters resilience and protects against burnout (Salanova et al., 2010), highlighting a contradiction that warrants further exploration. The research findings imply that people perform better once they feel enjoyment as well as fulfilment of their personal needs, leading to a willingness to engage and fulfil the job responsibilities of the company (Shilpakar et al., 2024).

Taken together, these findings refine the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) by illustrating how internalized pressures and over commitment characteristic of hustle culture transform otherwise positive work engagement into a source of anxiety. While work

involvement and enjoyment are often seen as protective resources, in the context of relentless work demands and limited recovery, they may instead exacerbate psychological distress. This duality aligns with emerging perspectives on the "dark side" of engagement (Beevaart et al., 2015), underscoring the importance of organizational and individual interventions that promote healthy engagement boundaries. Future research should investigate moderators such as perceived organizational support, work-life boundary management, and individual coping strategies to clarify when work engagement enhances well-being versus contributes to anxiety. Longitudinal studies could further elucidate causal pathways and potential feedback loops between engagement, motivation, and anxiety within hustle culture frameworks.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that all three hustle culture behaviors -Work involvement, Feeling driven to work, and Work enjoyment are significantly associated with higher anxiety levels among Nepalese workers. Work involvement, representing the extent of employee engagement in tasks, emerged as the strongest predictor, emphasizing how intense dedication without adequate recovery can elevate psychological distress. Feeling driven to work, reflecting internal pressures and compulsion, also significantly contributed to anxiety, aligning with concerns around workaholism and maladaptive motivation. Interestingly, even work enjoyment showed a positive relationship with anxiety, highlighting the complex nature of engagement where passion and pleasure in work may coexist with emotional strain, especially in high-demand environments where boundaries between work and rest are blurred.

Together, these findings underscore the multifaceted risks of hustle culture on mental health, emphasizing that both the quantity (involvement, pressure) and quality (enjoyment) of work engagement can contribute to anxiety when not managed mindfully. To mitigate these risks, organizations especially in emerging economies like Nepal should foster work environments that balance motivation with mental well-being. Practical strategies include promoting healthy work-life boundaries, encouraging psychological detachment, and embedding mental health resources within workplace policies. This balanced approach can help preserve employee resilience, improve productivity sustainably, and counter the potential downsides of hustle culture.

7. Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study adds to the current literature by experimentally confirming the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) in the context of hustling culture behaviors and anxiety among working adults. The findings demonstrate how excessive job expectations, portrayed as work participation, motivation to work, and work enjoyment, can drain individuals' mental resources and cause anxiety. This reinforces and expands on the JD-R framework by demonstrating that even good work-related behaviors, such as pleasure, can have a negative side when they lead to over commitment. As a result, the study advances theoretical knowledge of how internal work demands influence employee well-being and mental health outcomes.

Managerial Implications

From a management standpoint, the study emphasizes the need of combining job expectations with sufficient resources to protect employee mental health. Organizations should be aware

of the possible psychological dangers connected with hustle culture behaviors' and take proactive measures to monitor staff workloads and internal pressures. Implementing rules that promote work-life balance, mental health assistance, and acceptable job expectations can help to reduce anxiety levels. Managers should also create an environment in which employees feel encouraged in taking breaks and recovering, minimizing the risk of burnout and increasing overall productivity.

8. Limitations and Future Directions for the Research

Despite providing valuable insights into hustle culture and workplace anxiety among Nepali employees, this study has certain limitations. The research was conducted using convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the sample was not randomly selected and may not fully represent the broader working population. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on the private sector and was limited to three districts within the Kathmandu Valley – Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur disticts, which further constrains the external validity of the results. Nevertheless, given the exploratory nature of the study and practical constraints such as time, resources, and participant accessibility, convenience sampling was a practical choice to collect preliminary data in this under-researched context. The sample still included participants from diverse industries and demographic backgrounds, offering meaningful initial insights. Future research could expand the study to include other sectors and regions of Nepal, employ more rigorous sampling techniques like stratified or cluster sampling, and increase sample size and diversity to enhance the representativeness and applicability of the findings.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declared no conflict of interest while preparing this article.

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