# Strong, Still, and Standing: Hustle Culture and Coping Mechanisms Among Millennial Employees

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**Abstract:** This research explored the lived experiences of millennial employees grappling with the pressures of hustle culture in Calamba City, Laguna. It employed a qualitative research design utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the methodological framework. Six (6) participants were selected through purposive sampling, each engaged in multiple job roles across corporate and service-related industries. Data were gathered through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted in person. Transcriptions were thematically analyzed to interpret the participants' lived experiences. Ten (10) superordinate themes emerged: Constant Workload and Sacrifice of Personal Time; Familial Obligation and Passion as Sources of Strength; Living Up to Expectations While Navigating Self-Worth and Role Identity; Exhaustion Fueled by Responsibility Overload; Joy and Rest Eroded by Demands; Disconnection, Emotional Withdrawal, and Sacrificed Social Bonds; Fluctuating Self-Worth amidst Continuous Productivity Demands; Planning, Releasing, Recharging, and Pushing Through; Slowing Down, Reprioritizing, Taking Breaks, and Setting Boundaries; and Support, Boundaries, Joy, and Self-Awareness.

The study revealed how hustle culture deeply influenced the mental health and emotional well-being of millennial employees, highlighting both adaptive strategies and the quiet toll of continuous productivity. It emphasized the emotional labor involved in proving one's worthwhile underscoring the value of boundary-setting, cognitive control, emotional grounding, and self-care. Grounded in the participants' narratives, the study produced the P.A.H.I.N.G.A. Program—Promoting Awareness, Healing, Intentional Nurturing, Growth, and Assertiveness as a proposed intervention framework to foster well-being, intentional rest, and self-compassion amid the demands of hustle culture.

*Keywords:* *Hustle Culture, Millennial Employee, Coping Mechanisms, Psychological Impact, Lived Experience.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, individuals increasingly experienced pressure to demonstrate their value through constant productivity. The challenges of securing stable employment and managing the rising cost of living intensified fears of falling behind and failing to meet societal expectations. As a result, many individuals took on additional responsibilities, multiple jobs, or extended working hours, often at the expense of their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. This pressure was further amplified by social media, where carefully curated portrayals of success and fulfillment created unrealistic standards and contributed to feelings of inadequacy. Consequently, individuals felt compelled to maintain a particular image of success, frequently sacrificing authentic relationships and self-care.

This phenomenon was commonly referred to as *hustle culture*, which idealized excessive labor, constant busyness, and achievement while minimizing the importance of rest and well-being. Hustle culture was widely promoted through social media platforms and reinforced by the expanding side-hustle economy. Technological advancements and the rise of virtual and flexible work arrangements further enabled individuals to engage in additional work beyond traditional working hours. In recent years, hustle culture became especially prominent among millennials, who were often characterized by high levels of ambition and work engagement. Many millennials held two or more jobs simultaneously or converted personal interests into income-generating activities due to financial instability and an unpredictable labor market. These pursuits included online tutoring, mentoring, content creation, and social media marketing, which were perceived as opportunities for skill development and financial security (Rizeanu, 2024).

Empirical evidence supported the growing prevalence of this trend. A study conducted by Revelio Labs, as cited by Catacora (2024), reported that approximately 3.2 million individuals engaged in freelance or gig work, representing a 60% increase compared to 2019 levels. Millennials accounted for 58.7% of all side hustlers, leading to their identification as the "side-hustle generation." On a global scale, the World Health Organization reported that 488 million individuals worked 55 hours or more per week, a workload associated with adverse health outcomes. Moreover, long working hours were linked to over 700,000 deaths worldwide in 2016 (Santhosh, 2024).

Within the Philippine context, a significant proportion of Filipinos engaged in multiple forms of employment to supplement household income. According to Kantar's annual Shopperscope study, as cited by *The Daily Tribune* (TDT, 2024), seven out of ten Filipinos sought additional income sources to meet their families' needs. The study, which surveyed 2,000 households across various regions in the Philippines, revealed that 73% of respondents prioritized covering basic expenses even if it required working longer hours or assuming additional responsibilities. Individuals in managerial and professional roles frequently undertook extra duties or initiated small businesses alongside their primary employment.

Despite being associated with productivity and success, hustle culture was increasingly linked to burnout, defined as a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion. Individuals immersed in hustle culture often experienced persistent stress, anxiety, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Over time, the relentless pursuit of achievement contributed to reduced creativity, impaired decision-making, and diminished overall well-being. Furthermore, the neglect of rest, reflection, and self-care compromised individual health and posed risks to organizational sustainability by fostering an emotionally exhausted workforce.

In response to these challenges, increased attention was directed toward understanding the coping mechanisms individuals employed to manage the pressures associated with hustle culture. Coping strategies ranged from adaptive approaches, such as mindfulness practices, physical exercise, and seeking social support, to maladaptive behaviors, including excessive overworking, social withdrawal, and substance use. However, limited research had explored how millennial employees specifically experienced hustle culture and the coping mechanisms they utilized to maintain mental health.

Therefore, this qualitative study examined the relationship between hustle culture and the coping mechanisms of millennial employees. It sought to explore how the demands of hustle culture affected their mental health and how they managed these pressures in their daily lives. By analyzing the lived experiences and narratives of millennial workers, the study aimed to uncover the often-overlooked challenges underlying productivity-driven lifestyles and to provide insights that could inform the development of healthier workplace practices and sustainable coping strategies.

## II. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

The study employed a qualitative research design, specifically adopting a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of millennial employees immersed in hustle culture. Phenomenological research aimed to understand and describe the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals, while bracketing the researchers' preconceived assumptions (Ho & Limpaecher, 2022). This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of participants' emotions, perceptions, and beliefs in order to capture the core meaning of their experiences.

To further enhance the depth of analysis, the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was utilized. IPA focused on understanding how individuals made sense of their lived experiences by identifying shared patterns and meanings across participants. This approach was deemed appropriate for investigating the psychological and experiential dimensions associated with hustle culture, as it emphasized both individual interpretation and commonalities within a relatively homogeneous group.

➤ *Research Locale*

The study was conducted in Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines, a highly urbanized and economically active area characterized by diverse employment sectors, including corporate offices, manufacturing firms, and service-based industries. The city also offered varied work arrangements, such as traditional office-based settings, hybrid models, and remote work environments, providing a comprehensive context for examining millennial work experiences.

Calamba City was recognized as one of the wealthiest cities in the CALABARZON Region. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2024), the region recorded approximately 1.42 million underemployed individuals as of April 2024, accounting for 19.1% of the employed population. This increase in underemployment highlighted the prevalence of extended working hours and secondary employment, reinforcing the relevance of the locale to the phenomenon under investigation.

➤ *Population and Sampling*

Purposive sampling was employed to identify and recruit participants who met specific criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. This sampling technique was selected because it enabled the inclusion of participants who could provide rich, relevant, and in-depth information regarding hustle culture (Heath, 2023). Selection was based on participants' experiences rather than numerical representation, which is consistent with qualitative research principles.

➢ *Participants of the Study*

The participants consisted of six millennial employees aged 28 to 43 who were engaged in hustle-driven work environments. Inclusion criteria required participants to be full-time employees, have exposure to hustle culture (e.g., involvement in side-hustle work), and possess at least one year of experience in such environments. The sample size was considered sufficient based on the recommendation of Guest et al. (2006), as cited by Bekele and Ago (2022), which indicated that 6–12 interviews were adequate for achieving data saturation in qualitative studies involving relatively homogeneous participants.

The participants represented diverse hustle roles, including TNVS driving, tutoring services, academic instruction, real estate brokerage, psychological consultancy, and virtual assistance. Their profiles were documented in terms of gender, age, type of hustle job, and duration of engagement, all of which were relevant to the study's objectives.

➢ *Research Instrument*

A semi-structured interview guide was used as the primary data collection instrument. The interview guide consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences with hustle culture, its psychological effects, and their coping mechanisms. Follow-up and probing questions were included to encourage elaboration and clarification, allowing participants to provide detailed narratives while maintaining consistency across interviews.

➢ *Validation of the Instrument*

The interview questions were researcher-developed and grounded in relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Content validation was conducted through expert evaluation involving five qualified professionals with expertise in psychology and qualitative research. These experts assessed the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the interview questions and provided recommendations for refinement.

The Content Validity Ratio (CVR), based on Lawshe's formula, was employed to determine the adequacy of each item. According to Dovetail (2023), a CVR value of 0.99 or higher indicated acceptable content validity. All items achieved a CVR score of 1.0, confirming that the questions were highly relevant and aligned with the research objectives.

➢ *Data Gathering Procedure*

Participants were recruited through social media platforms and personal networks. Both online interviews via Google Meet and face-to-face interviews were conducted to accommodate participants' availability and comfort. Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards, and informed consent was obtained.

Interview schedules were arranged based on participants' preferences. Online interviews provided convenience and efficient data recording, while face-to-face interviews allowed for the observation of non-verbal cues and facilitated rapport-building. A pre-interview briefing was conducted to address concerns and establish familiarity. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent to ensure accuracy and completeness of data.

➢ *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by assigning pseudonyms and restricting access to recorded data. All information collected was used solely for research purposes. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and ethical clearance and permissions were secured before conducting the study.

➢ *Treatment of Qualitative Data*

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were cross-checked against audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Field notes were used to supplement the transcripts and capture contextual details. Data analysis was facilitated using QDA Miner Lite software to support systematic coding and theme development.

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, as cited by Delve (2020) was employed to analyze the data. The process involved data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. Codes were grouped into themes and subthemes that directly addressed the research questions, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate representation of participants' experiences.

## III. RESULTS

The analysis of participants' narratives revealed ten major themes that described how hustle culture influenced their work patterns, motivations, mental health, relationships, self-perception, and coping strategies.

Table 1 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of Work-Life Balance

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| MM | *"Araw-araw, halos 5 AM pa lang gising na ako para maghanda. 8 AM hanggang gabi nasa opisina ako may meetings, may project proposals na kailangang habulin, tapos may mga commitments pa outside office hours. Hindi pa kasama yung overtime na halos gabi na ako nakakauwi. Tapos weekends, nagtuturo pa ako bilang part-time professor. Work-life balance? Sa totoo lang, halos wala na. Kailangan magsakripisyo para sa pamilya at sa mga anak ko na pinapaaral."* | MM appeared emotionally burdened and somewhat conflicted while responding to the questions. |
| SL | *"From Monday to Friday, I'm in school full-time, lesson planning, teaching, doing paperwork, at kung minsan pati extracurricular activities. Pag-uwi ko sa hapon or gabi, I tutor two students, isa sa weekdays, isa sa weekends. After that, nag-aasikaso pa ako ng bahay at finances kasi nagpapaaral din ako. Honestly, halos wala na akong oras para sa sarili ko. My life revolves around work and responsibilities."* | SL seemed composed but showed signs of fatigue, especially when describing the daily routines. |

> *Constant Workload and Sacrifice of Personal Time*

The findings showed that millennial employees experienced a persistent and overwhelming workload that shaped their daily lives. Hustle culture compelled participants to work extended hours, juggle multiple job roles, and remain constantly available, resulting in blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Time that could have been devoted to rest, leisure, and personal interests was frequently surrendered to work-related responsibilities. This continuous cycle of productivity led to chronic physical fatigue and mental exhaustion, making it increasingly difficult for participants to achieve a sustainable work–life balance. In connection with these results, Levanenia (2024) examined the effects of hustle culture on work–life balance and found that individuals were frequently compelled to give up time for family, social relationships, and personal well-being in pursuit of career advancement. Although immediate benefits such as professional progress and financial incentives were evident, the long-term effects included emotional exhaustion, social isolation, and a decline in overall well-being. The study further indicated that individuals juggling multiple jobs experienced reduced family engagement and heightened stress levels. These outcomes were consistent with the findings of the present study, supporting the view that the normalization of excessive work demands carries substantial personal costs. The researcher emphasized that without adequate support systems and a reorientation of societal values, individuals are likely to continue experiencing enduring psychological and relational challenges driven by persistent work pressures.

Table 2 Annotated Exemplars on the perception of Millennial Workers in maintaining High Level of Work Engagement

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| DR | *"Ang pamilya ko syempre ahmm lalo na ang mga magulang at kapatid kong umaasa sa akin. Bilang panganay, alam kong responsibilidad ko silang suportahan. Gusto ko rin silang maiahon sa hirap."* | DR appeared resolute and driven during the interview. |
| LV | *"Actually, what keeps me going is, I think the impact I see dun sa aking mga clients. Halimbawa sa university, whether ahhmm I see my students learning, dun naman sa mga clients ko they are progressing. And when it comes to research paper, when I see my advisee really progressing and success. Although like I've mentioned its really exhausting but it fires me and motivate me. And of course, my family motivates me a lot. And I think because I'm genuinely passionate to what I do and that passion fuels me even on the busiest days."* | LV spoke with clarity and enthusiasm. |

➢ *Familial Obligation and Passion as Sources of Motivation*

Participants' motivation to endure demanding work conditions was deeply rooted in familial responsibility and personal passion. Many viewed themselves as providers, caregivers, and role models, believing that their sacrifices were necessary to ensure their families' financial stability and future security. Work was not only a means of survival but also a source of meaning and identity. Passion for teaching, mentoring, or professional growth further reinforced their commitment, even when it came at the expense of personal well-being. In relation to the participants' accounts, Brewer and Clegg (2025) investigated the circumstances of low-income workers who remained financially vulnerable despite being employed. Their findings showed that taking on multiple jobs was often driven not by personal ambition but by a strong commitment to improving their families' living conditions. The study highlighted how structural inequalities forced individuals to compromise their personal well-being in order to provide a more secure future for their children. In a similar vein, the Kantar Shopperscope Study cited by TDT (2024) found that 73% of Filipinos exerted extra effort to meet their families' needs. Based on a survey of more than 2,000 households, the study underscored the significant role of financial responsibilities in shaping the work values and motivations of Filipino workers.

Table 3 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of Societal Expectations of Success and Productivity

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| MM | *"Malaking pressure din. Kapag breadwinner ka, parang expected na kaya mo lahat—walang reklamo, walang palya. Kaya kahit pagod na, tuloy pa rin. Parang hindi mo pwedeng ipakitang nahihirapan ka."* | MM appeared composed yet emotionally burdened during the interview. |
| DR | Parang sinasabi ng lipunan na dapat kapag lalaki ka at panganay, ikaw ang haligi ng tahanan. Kaya napipilitan akong magtrabaho ng sobra-sobra para hindi mapahiya o sabihing tamad ako. Success ngayon ay parang basehan ng dami ng trabaho at pera, hindi na sa kaligayahan. | DR expressed a deep sense of societal pressure. |

➢ *Living Up to Expectations and Role Identity*

Societal and cultural expectations played a significant role in shaping participants' self-concept. Success was often measured through constant productivity, financial contribution, and visible achievement. These external standards were internalized, leading participants to equate self-worth with their ability to meet expectations imposed by family, society, and workplace norms. Although some participants began questioning these standards, many continued to struggle with feelings of inadequacy when they perceived themselves as falling short, reinforcing internal pressure and self-criticism. According to ManoShala LLP (2024), contemporary hyper-connected societies have fostered a widespread notion that personal value is directly linked to productivity. The celebration of constant busyness further reinforced by carefully curated success narratives on social media encourages individuals to measure themselves against external standards, often at the cost of their mental and emotional well-being. As reflected in the accounts of the participants in this study, such pressures contribute to ongoing feelings of inadequacy and an enduring need to validate one's worth through continuous performance and output.

Within the framework of hustle culture, the traditionally male-associated role of the breadwinner continues to exert substantial pressure on individuals. Although gender roles have gradually evolved, men are still commonly expected to place financial responsibility above other aspects of life. Kumar (2024) reported that 76% of men experienced pressure to provide for their families, a burden rooted in long-standing cultural, social, and economic norms that define male success through financial stability and emotional restraint.

Table 4 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of Hustle Culture Affecting Mental Health and Well-Being

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| LV | *"Actually, this hustle culture does take a toll on my mental health. There were times, I feel drained and emotionally detached. I remember a time when I have lecture in the morning, online clinic work in the afternoon. I didn't realize I was burned out until I become short tempered and physically tired."* | LV spoke in a reflective and sincere manner |
| SS | *"Honestly, hustle culture takes a big toll on my mental health and emotional well-being. Since I'm always busy jumping between teaching responsibilities and VA work, my mind feels like it's constantly running—parang hindi siya nagpapahinga. Even during my free time, I still think about unfinished tasks and deadlines.* | SS appeared overwhelmed and mentally exhausted. |

➢ *Responsibility Overload and Emotional Exhaustion*

The accumulation of professional, familial, and social responsibilities resulted in responsibility overload, which severely affected participants' mental health. Participants reported emotional exhaustion, difficulty concentrating, persistent stress, and an inability to mentally disengage from work. Even during moments intended for rest, work-related concerns dominated their thoughts. This prolonged strain reflected classic symptoms of burnout, characterized by emotional depletion and reduced psychological resilience. According to Mandap (2024), breaking away from the burnout cycle associated with hustle culture is crucial for fostering healthier and more sustainable personal development. This culture frequently compelled individuals to place work above other aspects of life, leaving little opportunity for rest, nurturing relationships, or self-care. As this imbalance persisted, it evolved into a damaging pattern that undermined both physical and psychological health. Burnout manifested through ongoing exhaustion, sleep disturbances, decreased focus, and lowered immune resistance. Emotionally, it was characterized by increased cynicism, emotional disengagement, and a persistent feeling of powerlessness or self-doubt.

Table 5 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of their Ability to Experience Joy and Relaxation Outside of Work

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| DR | *"Halos wala na akong time mag-relax. Kahit may libreng oras, hindi ako mapakali. Parang laging may kailangan akong habulin o isipin. Hindi ko na maramdaman ang saya sa mga simpleng bagay."* | DR appeared mentally preoccupied and emotionally distant during the interview. |
| JR | *"Actually, it has affected me a lot. It's like the sense of enjoyment slowly disappears. Even if you're on vacation or during your day off, your mind is still occupied with the next task, the next project, the next deadline. So even when you're physically there to enjoy, mentally, you really can't feel it fully."* | JR seemed reflective and emotionally worn |

➢ *Erosion of Joy and Rest*

Hustle culture gradually diminished participants' capacity to experience genuine joy and relaxation. Leisure activities were often overshadowed by guilt, anxiety, or intrusive thoughts about productivity. Rest was perceived as unearned or unproductive, reinforcing toxic productivity beliefs. As a result, participants struggled to be emotionally present in moments of happiness, leading to a diminished sense of fulfillment and well-being. Rohonczy (2024) examined the idea of toxic productivity, highlighting that individuals strongly influenced by hustle culture often experienced guilt when taking breaks and struggled to genuinely relax. Her discussion noted that the persistent pressure to remain productive reduced people's capacity to appreciate simple pleasures and attain adequate rest. These insights

were consistent with the subthemes of psychological unease during leisure and a reduced sense of joy in everyday experiences. Rohonczy further explained that the unending emphasis on work cultivated a mindset in which enjoyment was seen as secondary rather than essential, while leisure was perceived as a sign of laziness. Consequently, many individuals found it challenging to mentally disengage from work, even during periods intended for rest.

Table 6 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of their Interpersonal Relationship

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| SL | *Nabawasan ang quality time ko with friends and even family. Minsan hindi ko na rin maasikaso ang mga relasyon sa paligid ko kasi inuuna ko lagi ang trabaho at mga obligasyon.* | SL appeared introspective and quietly regretful |
| LV | *"I think it affected my relationship kasi I sometimes prioritized work over personal time which I think is not healthy. Okay. I tend to cut my ties with some of my friends, especially some of friends na you know keep on inviting knowing the fact that I'm busy so I started to cut relationship with them kasi I prioritized work talaga."* | LV expressed her sentiments with a tone of acceptance but also hinted at emotional distancing |

➢ *Choosing Work Over Interpersonal Relationships*

The prioritization of work significantly affected participants' relationships with family, friends, and partners. Limited time and emotional energy resulted in reduced social interaction and emotional withdrawal. Participants expressed regret over missed gatherings and weakened connections, yet felt trapped by their obligations. Although they valued relationships, exhaustion and time constraints made sustained interpersonal engagement increasingly difficult. In connection with these findings, Health (2024) explained that persistent stress, burnout, and excessive work demands key characteristics of hustle culture often resulted in the neglect of personal relationships, leisure activities, and self-care practices. Her conclusions were consistent with the results of the current study, underscoring that individuals who became overly absorbed in work were more susceptible to emotional withdrawal and feelings of isolation. Health further noted that such imbalance heightened the risk of mental health concerns, including depression, while simultaneously weakening relational stability and social functioning. The participants' accounts echoed these observations, illustrating how sustained engagement in hustle culture gradually diminished emotional resilience and the capacity to maintain meaningful interpersonal connections.

Table 7 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of their Self-Perception and Confidence about their Abilities

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| DR | *"Ahmmm sa totoo lang, dalawa ang epekto sa akin. Una, may mga araw na mataas ang kumpiyansa ko. Sinasabi ko sa sarili ko, "Ang dami kong ginagawa, kaya ko pala kahit mahirap." Nakakataba ng puso pag may naaabot kang goal o kapag may naibibigay ka sa pamilya mo. Pangalawa, may mga araw na pakiramdam ko, hindi pa rin sapat lahat ng effort ko. Ahmm parang kahit anong kayod, parang kulang pa rin."* | DR expressed a mix of pride and self-doubt. |
| LV | *"Actually, being in the hustle culture for so long it actually boosted my confidence a lot. Yes because I tend to accomplished a lot. Just like what I mentioned seeing my impact on others it boosted my confidence."* | LV appeared self-assured and carried positive tone. |

➢ *Fluctuating Self-Worth and Performance-Based Identity*

Participants' self-esteem fluctuated in direct response to their productivity levels. Achievements temporarily boosted confidence and self-efficacy; however, these positive feelings were short-lived and often replaced by self-doubt and exhaustion. When participants were unable to maintain high output, they experienced feelings of failure and inadequacy. This cycle revealed a fragile self-worth that was heavily dependent on performance rather than intrinsic value. Rutherford Search (2021) highlighted that constant pressure to perform and succeed often fostered persistent feelings of inadequacy, which in turn contributed to reduced self-esteem and the development of imposter syndrome. These findings were consistent with the results of the present study, indicating that when the boundaries between work and personal life became unclear, individuals found it difficult to relax or disengage, remaining in a continual state of tension. The relentless demand for productivity within hustle culture shaped by societal expectations and internalized perfectionism was shown to result in burnout and a skewed perception of accomplishment. Despite measurable achievements, many individuals continued to feel insufficient. The participants' narratives reflected this experience, further demonstrating how hustle culture distorted perceptions of success and sustained emotional and psychological imbalance.

Table 8 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of their Personal Strategies in Managing Stress

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| **MM** | *"Ahhhm pano nga ba. Ahhmm gumagawa ako ng to-do list, inuuna ko yung urgent and important. Kahit overwhelm ako, sinasanay ko na unahin ang solusyon bago umiyak o ma-stress nang sobra. Tapos prayer and prayer talaga sobra."* | MM appeared emotionally aware but composed. |
| **JR** | *"Whenever I feel overwhelmed by work demands, the first thing I do is write everything down. It helps me see clearly what needs to be prioritized because I know I can't accomplish everything all at once. I take things step-by-step, focusing on one task at a time. Aside from organizing my tasks, I also make time for activities that help me manage stress physically and mentally. I engage in workouts like walking, doing push-ups, and even meditation to keep my mind and body balanced. I'm studying French to keep my brain active and give myself a mental break from work. These habits really help me stay productive without feeling completely drained."* | JR appeared proactive and mindful. His tone suggested self-discipline and self-awareness |

➢ *Problem-Focused Coping and Task Management*

To manage overwhelming demands, participants employed problem-focused coping strategies such as planning, scheduling, task breakdown, and prioritization. These approaches helped them regain a sense of control and efficiency amid chaos. By organizing responsibilities into manageable tasks, participants were able to temporarily reduce stress and improve productivity, although these strategies did not fully address emotional exhaustion. Lagemann (2024) stressed that coping with demanding workloads in a fast-moving environment required deliberate approaches, including effective planning and clear prioritization, to prevent individuals from becoming overwhelmed. In addition, integrating self-care practices—such as adequate rest, physical activity, leisure pursuits, and personal reflection—was identified as essential in protecting against burnout. When emotional needs were ignored or rest was consistently postponed, individuals faced potential long-term damage to their overall well-being, regardless of outward productivity. Although hustle culture tended to value continuous effort, it frequently did so at the expense of sustained physical, emotional, and psychological health.

Table 9 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of their Adjustments when Work Stress is beginning to Affect other Aspects of their Life

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| SS | *"Whenever I notice that work stress is starting to affect my life, my first instinct is to step away for a while. I don't necessarily go out of town, but I physically leave the space where I'm working or simply take a rest talaga. I just step out, take a deep breath, and try to clear my mind. After that quick reset, I go back and face my tasks again."* | SS appeared self-aware and introspective. |
| LV | *"Well, when I notice that work, stress crips into other areas of my life especially when it comes to my relationship with my family and of course with my health I pause and reassess. One more thing na ginagawa ko is to say no. Ayun ang mahalaga sa akin dapat we know our commitment or kung kaya naman just taking a day to rest. That's some of coping strategies na ginagawa ko."* | LV appeared assertive and emotionally attuned. |

➤ *Emotion- and Meaning-Focused Coping Strategies*

Participants also relied on emotion- and meaning-focused coping mechanisms to manage psychological distress. Practices such as prayer, reflection, mindfulness, and cognitive reframing helped them find meaning in their struggles and regulate emotional responses. These strategies provided comfort, strengthened resilience, and offered moments of clarity, particularly during periods of intense stress and uncertainty. The Wellbeing (2020) explained that although brief breaks taken during the workday may not provide the same immediate benefits as extended time off, research indicated that they play an important role in preventing or reducing stress, sustaining productivity across the day, and minimizing the need for prolonged recovery afterward. Evidence further showed that breaks involving relaxation or social interaction were particularly effective, as they supported recovery by returning mental and physical systems to their normal functioning and improving mood. These restorative effects contributed to enhanced well-being and lower stress levels.

Table 10 Annotated Exemplars on the Perception of Millennial Workers in terms of how they Balance Self-Care and Work Responsibilities

| PARTICIPANT | RESPONSES | RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION |
|---|---|---|
| DR | *"Sa sobrang daming trabaho, minsan nakakalimutan ko na ang sarili ko. Pero natutunan ko na mahalaga ang pahinga at simpleng "me time" hehe. Kinakain ko talaga lahat ng mga paborito kong pagkain. Nanunuod ako ng anime o mga video na nakakatawa. Natutulog ng diretso kahit 8 hrs kahit minsan lang at libot lang sa gabi. Dalaw sa mga kaibigan at inom ng onte para makalimot ng onte hehe."* | DR appeared emotionally candid and self-reflective. His tone carried a mix of exhaustion and relief. |
| MM | *Una sa lahat prayer talaga as in, inom ng vitamins, konting stretching, unat-unat ng buto, at kain ng fruits and vegetables. Saka lately nakakasanayan ko na manuod ng movie especially yung mga comedy na palabas hehe. Talagang naglalaan ako ng oras para sa sarili ko as in walang social media. Self-care na para sa akin 'yon.* | MM appeared emotionally grounded and balanced. His responses reflected a calm sense of intentionality. |

➤ *Slowing Down, Boundaries, and Support Systems*

Over time, increased self-awareness led participants to adopt healthier coping practices. Many intentionally slowed down, reprioritized commitments, set boundaries, and learned to say no to excessive demands. Support from family, peers, and small sources of joy played a crucial role in restoring balance. These adaptive strategies reflected a growing recognition of the need to protect mental health and redefine success beyond

constant productivity. Navarro (2024) emphasized that deliberately embracing small moments of joy in daily routines was essential for maintaining well-being amid the pressures of hustle culture. Even while pursuing ambitious goals, prioritizing self-care, mindfulness, and gratitude helped protect individuals from burnout and supported overall wellness. Everyday practices such as enjoying a cup of coffee, taking a walk, or listening to music acted as meaningful reminders of the value found in ordinary experiences. By reconnecting with these simple pleasures, individuals could loosen the grip of hustle culture and create a more balanced and fulfilling life. Beyond personal benefits, this perspective also contributed to a more positive and energized work environment where authentic connections, creativity, and collaboration were able to thrive.

## IV. PROPOSED OUTPUT BASED ON THE FINDINGS

Based on the findings, a psychoeducational mental wellness intervention called the **P.A.H.I.N.G.A** Program (Promoting Awareness, Healing, Intentional Nurturing, Growth, and Assertiveness) was proposed. The study revealed that millennial employees immersed in hustle culture experienced chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, blurred work–life boundaries, diminished self-worth, and strained relationships. These challenges highlighted the need for a structured and culturally responsive program that directly addressed the psychological costs of excessive productivity.

The PAHINGA Program was designed to promote emotional awareness, healthy boundary-setting, intentional rest, and adaptive coping strategies. Anchored in participants' lived experiences, the program emphasized slowing down, reconnecting with personal values, strengthening social support, and finding meaning beyond constant performance. Through guided modules and practical activities, the program aimed to foster resilience, restore balance, and support sustainable mental well-being amid the pressures of hustle culture.

## V. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of individuals engaged in hustle culture, focusing on its psychological, emotional, and relational implications, as well as the coping strategies employed to manage competing demands. The findings revealed that while hustle culture is commonly framed as a pathway to productivity, financial security, and success, it often resulted in chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, diminished self-worth, and strained interpersonal relationships. Participants described persistent pressure to remain constantly productive, difficulty disengaging from work, and guilt associated with rest, reflecting the internalization of social norms that equate productivity with personal value.

The results further highlighted the influence of financial responsibilities, familial obligations, and culturally embedded expectations particularly provider roles in sustaining participation in hustle culture. These pressures frequently led to role overload, limited opportunities for rest and self-care, and gradual erosion of emotional well-being and social connectedness. Over time, participants experienced symptoms consistent with burnout, including fatigue, cognitive strain, emotional detachment, and reduced capacity to experience joy.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated adaptive coping strategies that supported resilience. Intentional planning and prioritization, boundary setting, restorative breaks, engagement in self-care practices, and the conscious cultivation of small moments of joy emerged as protective mechanisms that helped mitigate the negative psychological effects of excessive work demands.

Overall, the findings underscore the need to critically re-examine hustle culture and its long-term consequences for mental health and well-being. Sustainable productivity cannot be achieved without adequate rest, supportive environments, and cultural shifts that recognize psychological health and relational well-being as integral to meaningful success. These insights contribute to the growing qualitative literature on work culture and mental health and highlight the importance of promoting humane and balanced definitions of productivity within educational, organizational, and societal contexts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations were proposed. Mental health professionals and institutional leaders were encouraged to implement culturally responsive interventions addressing chronic overwork, including mindfulness practices, emotional regulation strategies, and assertiveness training. Organizational policymakers were advised to promote humane labor practices through flexible scheduling, workload limits, mental health days, and evaluation systems that value well-being alongside productivity.

Community organizations were encouraged to challenge the glorification of hustle culture by normalizing rest and relational well-being through public awareness initiatives. Mental health practitioners were advised to facilitate peer-led support groups for individuals with multiple roles, fostering shared understanding and collective resilience.

Educators and training coordinators were recommended to integrate psychoeducational modules on stress management, self-compassion, and boundary-setting for working students and employees with dual roles. Future researchers were encouraged to explore long-term and intersectional impacts of hustle culture using mixed-method approaches.

Finally, workplaces and educational institutions were encouraged to adopt structured mental health initiatives such as the P.A.H.I.N.G.A Program (Promoting Awareness, Healing, Intentional Nurturing, Growth, and Assertiveness). This program was proposed as a culturally grounded, holistic intervention designed to promote emotional awareness, resilience, intentional living, and sustainable well-being amid the demands of hustle culture.

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