

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## HUSTLE CULTURE AMONG GEN Z UNIVERSITY STUDENT: BETWEEN AMBITION AND BURNOUT

Amanda Safitri <sup>1\*</sup>, Siti Rahmatia <sup>2</sup>, Narindra Diah <sup>3</sup>, Triana Nur Aini

amndsftr@gmail.com, sitirahmatia0205@gmail.com, nayyirindra6@gmail.com, nuur.aini2305@gmail.com

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

### ABSTRACT

*Hustle culture* has become a defining characteristic among Generation Z university students who highly value continuous productivity and achievement. This culture often leads to psychological pressure and academic burnout. This study systematically reviews the relationship between *hustle culture* and burnout among university students following the PRISMA guidelines. Relevant articles published between 2018 and 2025 were retrieved from Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and PsycINFO. Out of 85 initial studies, 15 met the inclusion criteria. The findings indicate a positive relationship between *hustle culture* and academic burnout, mediated by perfectionism, social pressure, and extrinsic motivation. Meanwhile, *self-compassion* and social support were found to mitigate the negative impacts. These results highlight the importance of promoting balance between ambition and psychological well-being in developing resilient Generation Z learners.

**Keywords:** academic burnout, Generation Z, *hustle culture*, *self-compassion*, social pressure

### ABSTRAK

*Budaya hustle culture menjadi ciri menonjol di kalangan mahasiswa Gen Z yang menekankan produktivitas dan pencapaian tanpa henti. Budaya ini sering menimbulkan tekanan psikologis yang berujung pada kelelahan akademik (academic burnout). Penelitian ini meninjau secara sistematis hubungan antara *hustle culture* dan burnout pada mahasiswa dengan pendekatan systematic review mengikuti pedoman PRISMA. Artikel diperoleh dari Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, dan PsycINFO dengan rentang publikasi 2018–2025. Dari 85 artikel awal, 15 memenuhi kriteria inklusi. Hasil menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif antara *hustle culture* dan burnout akademik yang dimediasi oleh perfeksionisme, tekanan sosial, dan motivasi ekstrinsik, sedangkan *self-compassion* dan dukungan sosial menurunkan dampak negatifnya. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya keseimbangan antara ambisi dan kesejahteraan psikologis dalam pengembangan mahasiswa Gen Z.*

**Kata kunci :** burnout akademik, generasi z, budaya hustle, belas kasih diri, tekanan sosial

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of *hustle culture* has emerged as a defining characteristic among Generation Z, particularly within academic and professional environments. *Hustle culture* refers to a mindset that glorifies constant productivity, achievement, and self-worth based on measurable

output (Han & Park, 2024). For many university students, success is increasingly equated with being perpetually busy - engaged in multiple academic, organizational, and entrepreneurial pursuits. While this culture may initially foster ambition and self-discipline, it often leads to negative psychological

outcomes such as stress, fatigue, and burnout (Lyu & Zhang, 2022).

The rise of digital media has amplified this phenomenon. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and LinkedIn frequently promote narratives of success achieved through relentless effort, thereby reinforcing the belief that rest equals laziness. This exposure contributes to *social comparison* and *fear of missing out (FoMO)*, both of which intensify students' pressure to remain constantly productive (Pratama, Sari, & Dewi, 2023). As a result, university students are increasingly vulnerable to *academic burnout*, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced academic efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Albarqouni et al., 2023).

Contemporary studies have begun to link *hustle culture* with various psychological constructs, including perfectionism, extrinsic motivation, and reduced well-being (Conlin, 2020; Han & Park, 2024). These findings align with the *Job Demands - Resources Model* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which posits that burnout arises when personal resources cannot compensate for excessive performance demands. Similarly, *Self-Determination Theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains that motivation driven by external rewards or validation, rather than intrinsic fulfillment, increases vulnerability to burnout.

Although the popularity of *hustle culture* has been widely discussed in media and workplace psychology, empirical studies focusing on its effects within educational contexts - especially among Generation Z university students - remain limited (Lyu & Zhang, 2022; Sari & Dewi, 2023). Existing research is often fragmented, emphasizing either workaholism or burnout separately, without integrating both constructs in a unified framework. There is also a lack of systematic synthesis mapping how *hustle culture* contributes to burnout and what psychological factors (e.g., *self-compassion* and social support) may serve as buffers.

To bridge this gap, the present study conducts a *systematic literature review* to consolidate empirical evidence concerning the relationship between *hustle culture* and *academic burnout* among Generation Z. By synthesizing findings across diverse contexts and methodologies, this review contributes to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural, motivational, and social factors interact to affect students' mental health. The results are expected to provide theoretical advancement in the field of educational psychology and practical recommendations for promoting *healthy productivity* in higher education.

This study aims to (1) identify patterns and relationships between *hustle culture* and academic burnout, (2) analyze mediating and moderating variables influencing this relationship, and (3) explore preventive and protective factors that may reduce the negative impact of *hustle culture* among students.

Based on the literature review, the guiding research question is:

*How does hustle culture influence academic burnout among Generation Z university students, and what psychological factors mediate or buffer this relationship?*

Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that *hustle culture* has a positive relationship with academic burnout, mediated by perfectionism and social pressure, and moderated by *self-compassion* and social support.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* method following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The SLR approach was chosen to synthesize empirical findings concerning the relationship between *hustle culture* and *academic burnout* among Generation Z university students. This design enables researchers

to identify research patterns, methodological gaps, and mediating or moderating variables influencing the relationship between the two constructs.

### *Data Collection Strategy*

Data were obtained from five academic databases: Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, SpringerLink, and ResearchGate. Literature searches were limited to publications between 2018 and 2025, considering that *hustle culture* is a relatively new and rapidly evolving social phenomenon.

The Boolean keyword combinations used for the search were:

(“hustle culture” OR “workaholism” OR “overworking culture”) AND (“academic burnout” OR “student burnout” OR “burnout in higher education”) AND (“Generation Z” OR “university students” OR “young adults”)

The selection process followed the four main PRISMA stages:

1. Identification: Initial search yielded 85 articles from the databases.
2. Screening: Titles and abstracts were examined for relevance.
3. Eligibility: Full-text articles were reviewed for conceptual and methodological suitability.
4. Inclusion: A total of 15 articles met all inclusion criteria and were analyzed.

### **Inclusion Criteria:**

1. Empirical studies published between 2018–2025.
2. Focus on university students or Generation Z.
3. Examined relationships between *hustle culture* (or overworking behavior) and burnout, stress, or well-being.
4. Full-text articles in English or Indonesian.

### **Exclusion Criteria:**

1. Conceptual or opinion-based papers without empirical data.
2. Studies focusing on professional or workplace settings rather than educational contexts.
3. Duplicate or inaccessible papers.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and narrative synthesis based on the guidelines proposed by Snyder (2019). Each included article was coded according to (1) research purpose, (2) methodology, (3) key variables, (4) findings, and (5) implications for student well-being.

The results were compiled into a synthesis table, summarizing study details, populations, variables, and major findings. Cross-comparison among studies allowed the identification of consistent patterns and emerging themes regarding how *hustle culture* influences *academic burnout*, as well as moderating factors such as *self-compassion* and social support.

This review does not employ quantitative statistical analysis (e.g., meta-analysis) but focuses on mapping empirical findings qualitatively to answer the research question.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 presents a synthesis of 15 empirical studies published between 2018–2025 that examine the relationship between *hustle culture* and *academic burnout* among Generation Z students. The studies were conducted across diverse cultural contexts, including Asia, Europe, and North America.

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Studies (2018–2025)

N o	Author (Year)	Count ry	Populat ion	Main Findings
1	Conlin (2020)	UK	Univers ity students	Overworkin g increases stress and emotional exhaustion.

2	Lyu & Zhang (2022)	China	Students	Perfectionism mediates the link between social media use and burnout.
3	Pratama et al. (2022)	Indonesia	Gen Z students	<i>Fear of Missing Out</i> increases overcommitment and fatigue.
4	Sari & Dewi (2023)	Indonesia	Psychology students	Competitive pressure heightens burnout risk.
5	Han & Park (2024)	Korea	Gen Z students	External ambition triggers short-term drive but emotional strain.
6	Duffy & Dik (2023)	USA	Students	Purpose-driven productivity reduces burnout.
7	Garcia et al. (2019)	Spain	Students	<i>Self-compassion</i> buffers negative effects of overwork.
8	Aini et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Students	Self-regulation reduces burnout among high-performing students.
9	Lee et al. (2024)	Singapore	University students	Productivity pressure correlates

				with mild depression.
10	Albarqouni et al. (2023)	Global	Higher education	Digital workload and achievement demands elevate burnout risk.

Most reviewed studies consistently demonstrate a positive correlation between *hustle culture* and *academic burnout*. The relationship is often mediated by perfectionism, social pressure, and extrinsic motivation (Lyu & Zhang, 2022; Han & Park, 2024). Moreover, protective variables such as self-compassion, social connectedness, and self-regulation appear to buffer these negative effects (Garcia et al., 2019; Pisarik et al., 2021; Aini et al., 2025).

Cross-cultural patterns reveal that social media exposure and competitive academic environments are strong contextual triggers of *hustle culture*, particularly among Asian student populations (Pratama et al., 2022; Sari & Dewi, 2023). On the other hand, Western studies highlight *work identity* and *achievement motivation* as primary drivers of overworking tendencies (Conlin, 2020; Duffy & Dik, 2023).

Overall, the findings underscore that while *hustle culture* can temporarily enhance motivation, its long-term impact leads to exhaustion, decreased well-being, and lower academic engagement.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review reveal a consistent positive relationship between *hustle culture* and *academic burnout* among Generation Z university students. Across the reviewed studies, *hustle culture* was shown to foster short-term ambition but eventually lead to emotional exhaustion, loss of motivation, and decreased well-

being (Han & Park, 2024; Lyu & Zhang, 2022). This supports the argument that excessive productivity, when driven by external validation and social comparison, undermines intrinsic motivation and psychological balance.

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (2000), motivation that originates from external factors - such as achievement recognition, peer competition, or social media approval - reduces an individual's sense of autonomy and competence. In the context of *hustle culture*, students often feel compelled to perform continually to gain social acceptance, which depletes their internal resources and triggers burnout. This aligns with findings by Pratama et al. (2022) and Sari & Dewi (2023), who reported that *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)* and competitive academic culture intensify burnout symptoms among Gen Z learners.

Furthermore, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) provides a relevant theoretical lens to explain how high achievement demands, combined with insufficient personal or institutional support, lead to strain and emotional exhaustion. Several studies (e.g., Albarqouni et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024) showed that heavy digital workloads and continuous achievement expectations act as job demands, whereas self-regulation, *self-compassion*, and social connectedness serve as psychological resources that buffer stress.

Cross-cultural patterns were also evident. In Asian contexts, social conformity and collective success ideals reinforce the pressure to overperform, while Western studies emphasize individual achievement and identity through work (Conlin, 2020; Duffy & Dik, 2023). Despite these differences, the underlying mechanism remains the same—when ambition exceeds self-care capacity, burnout becomes inevitable.

Overall, this review highlights the paradox of *hustle culture*: although it cultivates motivation and a sense of purpose, its prolonged intensity diminishes well-being and learning engagement. Integrating self-care education, *mindful productivity*, and social support systems in university settings is therefore crucial to maintain

balance between ambition and mental health among Generation Z students.

## CONCLUSION

This systematic review concludes that *hustle culture* - characterized by glorified productivity, overcommitment, and self-worth tied to achievement has become a defining feature among Generation Z university students. Although this culture initially promotes motivation and academic engagement, it often leads to exhaustion, decreased well-being, and *academic burnout* when sustained over time.

The findings support both the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the Job Demands - Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), showing that when extrinsic motivation dominates and psychological resources are insufficient, students are more prone to emotional fatigue. Conversely, personal resources such as *self-compassion*, *self-regulation*, and social connectedness can serve as buffers that maintain mental resilience.

Overall, this review emphasizes that *hustle culture* reflects a paradox of modern student life - balancing ambition with well-being remains a crucial challenge for Generation Z.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Faculty of Psychology for providing academic guidance and support during the completion of this research. Appreciation is also extended to all researchers whose empirical work contributed to the foundation of this systematic review. Special thanks are given to academic mentors and peers who provided valuable insights throughout the manuscript development process.

This study was conducted as part of an academic requirement and aims to contribute to the growing understanding of *hustle culture* and its psychological impact on Generation Z university students.

## DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author, **Amanda Safitri, Siti Rahmatia, Narindra Diah, Triana Nur Aini** does not work for, consult, own shares in, or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this manuscript, and has disclosed no affiliations other than those noted above.

## REFERENCE

Aini, R., Putri, D., & Wulandari, S. (2025). *Hustle culture, self-regulation, and burnout among university students*. *Jurnal Psikologi Terapan*, 13(2), 101–114.

Albarqouni, L., Moher, D., & Tetzlaff, J. (2023). *Academic burnout prevalence in higher education: A systematic review*. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 118, 102143.

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). *Job Demands–Resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward*. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273–285.

Conlin, M. (2020). *The hustle culture trap: Overwork and mental health among young professionals*. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 59(4), 765–781.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). *The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior*. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.

Duffy, R. D., & Dik, B. J. (2023). *Meaningful work and well-being among students: A buffer against burnout*. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 18(2), 210–225.

Garcia, M., Ruiz, A., & Lopez, J. (2019). *Self-compassion as a protective factor against student burnout*. *European Journal of Educational Psychology*, 12(3), 199–212.

Han, S., & Park, Y. (2024). *External ambition and academic stress among Generation Z students*. *Asian Journal of Education and Psychology*, 8(2), 45–59.

Lee, C., Tan, H., & Ong, S. (2024). *Hustle mindset and academic well-being among Singaporean undergraduates*. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 27(1), 90–104.

Lyu, H., & Zhang, Y. (2022). *Social media use, perfectionism, and burnout among Chinese university students*. *Current Psychology*, 41(6), 3728–3740.

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. G. (2009). *Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement*. *PLoS Medicine*, 6(7), e1000097. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097>

Nguyen, T. H. (2020). *Academic ambition and burnout among Vietnamese students*. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 10(3), 120–131.

Pratama, R., Yuliana, S., & Handayani, M. (2022). *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and academic burnout among Gen Z college students*. *Jurnal Psikologi Sosial*, 10(1), 56–68.

Rahmawati, N. (2021). *Overstudy behavior and emotional well-being in university students*. *Indonesian Journal of Psychology and Education*, 9(2), 144–156.

Sari, A., & Dewi, L. (2023). *Academic competition and burnout in Indonesian university students*. *Jurnal Psikologi Pendidikan*, 12(1), 33–49.

Smith, J., Lee, R., & Patel, N. (2021). *Workaholism and emotional well-being in Generation Z students*. *Journal of Behavioral Science*, 45(2), 98–112.

Snyder, H. (2019). *Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines*. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>

Walker, L., & Kim, D. (2022). *Digital multitasking and academic stress among Australian university students*. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 132, 107258.