



‘We all have the same 24 hours’: exploring the prevalence and impact
of ‘hustle culture’ amongst young people

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Abstract

This research explores prevalence of hustle culture in universities and its effect on student athletes. The current literature on the hustle culture phenomenon is limited, primarily investigating the impact on employees and not students. By focussing on student athletes, this research advances our understanding of hustle culture by addressing a gap in the academic literature.

The research design consisted of a non-systematic literature review and inductive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 3 student athletes currently attending UK universities. The aim of this research is to outline student hustle culture, analyse student athletes' perspectives, and propose solutions for prevention in university sports.

The results indicated that hustle culture affects student athletes when balancing their academics, sports, and social life. Results suggested the team dynamics have an influence on hustle culture, having a greater prevalence in teams at a higher training and competition level. The impact of hustle culture can result in student athletes pushing past limits and sacrificing mental and physical wellbeing. Improving welfare in university sport teams to reduce stress and improve education on hustle culture are solutions to prevent hustle culture in university sports.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Hustle Culture

1.1 Key Concepts and Definitions

Hustle culture is a growing phenomenon where overworking to the point of exhaustion is encouraged and praised. Forbes outlined hustle culture as ‘the collective urge we currently seem to feel as a society to work harder, stronger, faster’ (Da Costa, 2019). Hustle culture thrives in environments where success and ambition are prioritised, both of which are key attributes in student athletes (Molina, 2023). Student athletes are individuals who successfully balance their athletics and academic commitments (Woodruff and Schallert, 2008). A key concept of hustle culture promotes toxic productivity; the illusion that constant productivity is key to success resulting in burnout from stress (Molina, 2023).

1.2 Rationale and Aims

Current research on hustle culture is sparse and focuses on the impacts on workers. No research on the impacts of hustle culture on student athletes has been completed. This research aims to explore the prevalence hustle culture in UK universities and the impact on student’s athletic and academic performance and wellbeing. UK universities have infrastructure for student athletic development in a range of sports, such as rowing and hockey, which allows students to compete at a range of levels from intramural to the international level (Circuit, 2024; British Rowing, n.d.; Great Britain Hockey, n.d.). In the 2022-23 season over 100,000 student athletes competed in British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) competitions (BUCS, 2023). In addition, the collegiate structure of certain universities provides greater opportunities and inclusion in university sports such as Durham University where over 75% of students participate in sports (Durham University, n.d.). Therefore, there is a wide reach of students who could be affected by hustle culture in the UK alone. This research also includes data from US universities and colleges to compare regulations to the UK university and college system.

1.3 Research Questions

This research will explore the effects of hustle culture in university sports. The project aims to answer three main questions:

- (I) What is student hustle culture?
- (II) How does hustle culture affect student athletes?
- (III) What can be done to prevent hustle culture in university sports?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the research on student hustle culture and the effects on student athletes by reviewing information provided by student athletes and the current literature. A systematic literature review was considered but search for relevant research on hustle culture yielded a limited response. Therefore, a non-systematic literature review was completed. This chapter discusses the factors of hustle culture in universities, effects of hustle culture on student athletes, and solutions. The effects of overtraining are not specific to students and research has focused on overtraining in young and professional athletes. For that reason, this review includes research on a range of athletic levels.

2.2 Hustle Culture in Universities and University Sport

Students in general suggest that hustle culture has three main components; toxic productivity, exhaustion, and placing self-worth on success, all with disregard for personal wellbeing (Molina, 2023; Youngminds, 2024).

2.2.1 Toxic Productivity

University students in general report that hustle culture in universities is characterised by pressure to continue to work past their own limits with the promise that success will materialise and are beginning to voice their concerns with being constantly productive (Youngminds, 2024). Nicolas (2023) suggests that exhaustion is part of student life, and the premise of hustle culture is not harmful until there is no work-life balance. Students struggle with time management whilst attempting to maintain a work-life balance and meeting academic deadlines (Soares *et al.*, 2023). Students increasingly study from fear of failure in the approach of exam periods and use harmful methods to cope with their academic deadlines, such as all-nighters and not allowing time for study breaks (Capelle *et al.*, 2023; Hayashi, 2024).

Productivity may become toxic when students become fatigued due to excessive work. Unlike employees, students do not have distinct days off. The Quality Assurance Agency for higher education in the UK recommends that students spend 10 hours per credit participating in formal and independent study (QAA, 2021). Most students in UK universities complete bachelor's degrees of 300 to 360 credits, therefore this advice aligns with universities' guidance of a minimum of 30-35 hours a week studying, equivalent to a full-

time job (QAA, 2021; Rogers, 2024; University of Reading, 2024; University of Cambridge, n.d.).

Table 1. Advice for students on how to work out time spend in the day (University of Reading, 2024)

In one week there are 7 x 24 hours	= 168 hours
Subtract 8 hours a day for sleeping	= 112 hours
Subtract another 3 hours a day for eating, bathing etc	= 91 hours
Subtract 35 hours a week for study commitments	= 56 hours

An example of hustle culture being inadvertently in the advice promoted by universities is the University of Reading's guidance for time management where students are advised to consider the hours in a day that they have, shown in Table 1. The guidance explains that there are '8 hours a day for keeping fit, socialising, household chores, paid work, family commitments etc.' and suggests students should consider cutting out 'chatting with friends over coffee' to 'make your time work harder for you' when reconsidering work-life balance (University of Reading, 2024). Although the intentions of this guidance are innocent, minimising the importance of rest and socialising to continue working promotes toxic productivity and shows how hustle culture is ingrained into university life. This advice is communicating that sacrificing socialising is beneficial and will result in academic success, therefore promoting hustle culture to students. To combat hustle culture in higher education, universities need to be aware of toxic productivity and actively discouraging it.

The impression of success from constant productivity and the pressure of competition in higher education can lead students to continue with toxic working habits from fear of falling behind (Dunn, 2023). Students report that hustle culture in universities preys on students fear that they will fall behind if they are not balancing multiple activities beyond their degree (McGinnity, 2022). McGinnity (2022) shared that at university they have witnessed peers sacrificing their mental and physical wellbeing for their academics and extracurricular commitments. Consequently, students should be aware of hustle culture and recognise their peers' harmful working habits and encourage them to seek student support whilst at university to improve their wellbeing.

2.2.2 *Balancing Academics and Sports*

Throughout the academic year student athletes have the additional demands of athletic training alongside their academic commitments. This added pressure is often accompanied by early morning training session before lectures, such as the common 5am wake up in rowing and swimming (Patel 2017; Barretto, 2013). Unlike in the UK, the governing body for college sport in the US, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), has strict regulations for student athletes. As defined in section 17 of the NCAA Division II legislation (1991) student-athletes are limited to 20 hours of training per week in the athletic season and students cannot miss class time for practice. Although there is clear guidance in the UK for time spent studying, there are no training limitations in place like in US universities. The unregulated working hours and lack of guidance alongside intense pressure to keep up with academic commitments whilst competing, may be putting students at risk of overtraining, and sacrificing their studies for their sport.

2.3 **Effects of Hustle Culture on Student Athletes**

Hustle culture has the potential to result in overexertion in both students and student athletes. This can negatively affect all aspects of wellbeing including mental and physical health. Weber *et al.* (2023) found 22.3% of student athletes were at risk of depression and 12.5% at risk of anxiety with female student athletes being at higher risk for these disorders. A work-life balance deficit and the promotion of toxic productivity promoted by hustle culture may result in student athletes overtraining and eventual burnout.

2.3.1 *Overtraining and Fatigue*

Excessively long or intense training and competitions can result in under recovery and progressive fatigue (Budgett, 1998). Persistent overtraining and under recovery cause overtraining syndrome, defined as ‘a condition of fatigue and underperformance, often associated with frequent infections and depression which occurs following hard training and competition’ (Budgett, 1998, p.107) which persists after 2 weeks of rest (Budgett, 1998). Dambroz, Clemente and Teoldo’s (2022) systematic review of 12 articles assessing physical fatigue exposure on healthy football players found that physical fatigue negatively affects technical and physical performance. However, more research on the effects on cognitive performance need to be undertaken as results are inconclusive (Dambroz Clemente & Teoldo, 2022). Continuing research on the consequences of overtraining followed by promotion of

healthy training habits into students training schedules is necessary to minimise the effects of hustle culture.

2.3.2 Burnout

A student who experiences hustle culture may experience burnout due to the inability to balance their workload and pressure to be productive. Hustling is encouraged in sports and viewed as a valuable attribute of students with athletic potential (Stankovich, 2024). The problem with hustle culture arises when enthusiasm and potential turns into burnout.

Raedeke (1997) defined athlete burnout as ‘a syndrome of physical/emotional exhaustion, sports devaluation, and reduced athletic accomplishment’ (Raedeke, 1997, p.398). Goodger *et al.* (2007) meta-analysis of burnout in sports resulted in 5 themes relating to athlete burnout: ‘motivation, coping with adversity, response to training and recovery, role of significant others, and identity’ (Goodger *et al.*, 2007, p. 132). Stress and amotivation were significantly correlated with burnout in all studies whilst intrinsic motivation and burnout were negatively associated with each other (Goodger *et al.*, 2007). These findings suggest that student athletes who may struggle with stress from academics and sports commitments, and lack of motivation due to external factors, have a significant risk of burnout in their sports. The British Association of Sport and Exercise Science (BASES) released a statement in 2019 of burnout in sports outlining their recommendations for monitoring and intervention from coaches with future suggestions for research (Madigan *et al.*, 2019). Coaches and universities therefore may benefit from increased awareness of burnout and its consequences to implement strategies to reduce hustle culture in their teams.

2.4 Solutions to Hustle Culture in Student Athletes

To prevent hustle culture in university sports, intervention from coaches and sports psychologists to promoting healthy working habits could be implemented into teams to help students to balance their academic and sport commitments. Reducing the prevalence of hustle culture by preventing student athletes sacrificing their wellbeing for their academics and sports may lead to reduction in stress, anxiety, injuries, and burnout.

2.4.1 Rest and Recovery

To combat hustle culture, rest and recovery should be prioritised to prevent burnout and exhaustion during training seasons. Recovering both physiologically and psychologically is vital in athletes in training and competition seasons (Halsen, 2014). To optimise athletic performance, recovery after consecutive training is vital and includes sleep, stretching, and active recovery (Halsen, 2014).

Research has found that early afternoon naps significantly improve cognitive performance and are to be preferred as college students report that longer or later naps decrease sleep quality (Dutheil *et al.*, 2021; Ye *et al.*, 2015). Vitale *et al.* (2019) argues that sleep is the principal factor for optimising recovery in athletes and found that sleep deprivation causes both physical and cognitive effects such as reduced sprint times, increased reaction times, and in some cases exhaustion. With the intense training schedule of athletes, they tend to trivialise sleep especially throughout the training season (Vitale *et al.*, 2019). Napping is an extremely beneficial and a recommended way for athletes to improve their recovery. In elite basketball players, napping 40 minutes in the day reduces stress and fatigue whilst improving cardiovascular health (Souabni *et al.*, 2024). As student athletes are particularly disadvantaged in meeting the necessary sleep length due to their academic commitments, Samuels & James (2014) suggested strategic napping. Commonly known as ‘power naps’, strategic napping allows for student athletes to meet the necessary sleep length without missing training or academic contact hours. Samuels & James (2014) also recommended that diagnosis of sleep disorders is especially important in young athletes to prevent long term disruption of performance, suggesting maintenance of a regular sleep/nap schedule and a comfortable environment to prevent further disruption. Montrose & Charest (2019) suggests student athletes should consider napping as part of their training plan to fit around their studies whilst gaining the benefits of increased sleep. By reconceptualising sleep and recovery as part of a training plan not just a by-product of training, toxic productivity promoted by hustle culture could be prevented.

Improving education on the importance of sleep and strategies that can be beneficial to improve physical and mental performance as well as academics may reduce the prevalence of hustle culture in university sport. NCAA has been advised to provide collegiate athletes and coaches with sleep education to improve health and performance as sleep is often neglected by student athletes balancing academic and athletic demands (Kroshus *et al.*, 2019). Following this study, the NCAA has suggested to colleges to conduct annual surveys on sleep quality, complete sleep screening and improve sleep education for student-athletes and

coaches (NCAA, n.d). Miles *et al.* (2022) meta-analysis of sleep characteristics of elite female athletes over the age of 18 concluded that sleep disturbances are common post-training, pre-competition, and post-competition. Additionally, a high variability of sleep outcomes was reported, reflecting the objective nature of sleep quality in female athletes (Miles *et al.*, 2022). Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is exercises which concentrate on being present and non-judgemental of yourself and current situation used to reduce fatigue, anxiety, and stress (NHS, 2022). MBSR was found to reduce stress, improve sleep quality, coping skills, and athletic performance of female collegiate rowers (Jones *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, implementing MBSR techniques may be a useful to reduce stress in sports teams with a high prevalence of hustle culture.

2.4.2 Regulation of Training Hours

The current regulations in UK universities recommends how many hours per week students can study but does not regulate hours training for sports. Students may be unable to balance their academics and sports commitments resulting in working long hours as promoted by hustle culture. As rest and recovery are vital parts of training in sports, implementing into UK universities similar regulations of training hours during term times to those in US universities may reduce hustle culture in student athletes.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an outline of factors influencing student hustle culture and the consequences in athletes. Whilst students are beginning to speak up about the negatives of hustle culture in university environments, literature on hustle culture has not caught up. Toxic productivity and the stress of balancing academics and extracurriculars are factors driving hustle culture in universities. Hustling is prevalent in universities and encouragement to be productive and motivated can be beneficial to students. Problems arise when students push themselves past their limits risking overtraining, and their athletic and academic performance from the pressure to continuously work. Therefore, the environment of university sports should be actively discouraging hustle culture to prevent toxic productivity and encourage work-life balance to prevent these outcomes. Education on healthy sleep habits and the importance of rest during the academic and athletic season may reduce hustle culture in universities and improve student athlete's performance. The causes, effects, and solutions of student hustle culture will be expanded on in the following chapters, specifically to university student athletes.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter discusses the research aims, methods, and ethical considerations of this research. The use of thematic analysis is also justified.

3.1 Research Aim and Design

In this research qualitative data was collected through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with students currently involved in sports teams at UK universities. The purpose is to analyse student athletes' experiences with hustle culture to explore its prevalence in university sports and to provide solutions to reduce it.

3.2 Method of Analysis

3.2.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is flexible method of qualitative data analysis where themes and codes are identified from transcripts allowing for detailed analysis of patterns in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was used to analyse how student athletes perceive hustle culture and their opinions on reduction strategies to answer the research questions. As the purpose of this research is to explore student athletes' individual experiences with hustle culture, thematic analysis was identified as the best method. An inductive approach to thematic analysis requires the researcher to ignore preconceptions of what codes and themes should be expected (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach was the most appropriate due to the lack of prior research on hustle culture to provide a framework of what themes would be expected.

3.2.2 Method

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis approach was implemented to analysis patterns throughout the dataset of interview transcripts. The thematic analysis approach remained as the inductive mode and at the semantic level throughout the analytic process (see Appendices for example of coded transcript). Entire data set was coded entirely electronically using Microsoft Excel, aligning with data protection in ethics approval.

3.3 Method of Data Collection

3.3.1 Participants

Three participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Through this approach, the researcher used own contacts with UK university students to contact possible participants who fulfilled the selection criteria. Purposive sampling was chosen due to strict time frame of research. All students contacted agreed to participate. Two criteria were identified for participant selection:

- I) Are currently enrolled at a UK university
- II) Are a current member of a university or college sports team

Since the participants must be currently enrolled in a UK university an age range for selection criteria was deemed unnecessary.

Table 2. Interview Participant Profiles

Participant	University Attended	Position
1	University of Exeter	Athlete and Exec Committee Member
2	Durham University	Athlete and Exec Committee Member
3	Durham University	Athlete

A total of 3 students who fulfilled the selection criteria participated in the interviews (Table 2). The researcher aimed for 5 participants however was unrealistic in the research time frame. Although there is no defined sample size required for thematic analysis to generate adequate themes, Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest 6-10 interviews should be carried out for a small size thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.16). As this research project had a 6-week time frame, the sample size is less than recommended. After these interviews, the researcher decided that there was sufficient data in the 3 interviews to generate themes.

Participants were involved in a total of 7 sports: Cheerleading, Football, Rowing, Rugby, Triathlon, Touch Rugby, and Ultimate Frisbee. The sports are not linked to participants to maintain anonymity.

3.3.2 Interview Design and Process

Interviews were one-on-one and semi-structured in nature using predetermined questions. Interviews were chosen over quantitative methods, such as a questionnaire, since this research was completed over university summer holidays causing concern that responses would be limited. A mixed method approach was not chosen due to time restraints of research. One-on-one interviews were chosen over a focus group as the participants attended different universities and all competed in different sports. As a result, all participants experiences will vary dependent on their sports and university attended. The one-on-one format was chosen to allow an in depth of the student's personal experiences. Interviews were semi-structured as they allow for flexibility by using open ended questions and for the researcher to ask questions specific to participants sports and universities, which may influence their experience with hustle culture. All interviews lasted under half an hour. Interviewees were provided with information sheet outlining research topic and signed consent form in line with ethics approval. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using inductive thematic analysis.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval and risk assessment were completed prior to research. Participants all gave informed consent before interviews took place. All interviews were voluntary, and participants were given right to withdraw their data up to a week after their interview. All participants had a right to refuse to talk about a topic if they were uncomfortable. Data was anonymised to maintain confidentiality. Transcripts only visible to researcher and stored on Durham University's cloud system on a password protected computer and only viewed by researcher to ensure data protection.

Chapter 4: Results

Table 3. Themes from thematic analysis

Themes	Characteristics
Balancing Academics, Sports, and Social Life	The ability of students to cope with the demands of their academic and athletic commitments and respond to stress which influences the prevalence of hustle culture
Impact of Team Dynamics	The expectations and structures which influence the level of training and resources available to student athletes within a team which contribute to hustle culture within individuals of the team
Recognising Student Athlete Wellbeing	Considering the extent to which hustle culture effects the mental wellbeing of a student athlete

A total of 3 themes were identified: ‘Balancing Academics, Sports, and Social Life’, ‘Impact of Team Dynamics’, and ‘Recognising Student Athlete Wellbeing’ (Table 3). Themes links to subthemes are shown in Figure 1.

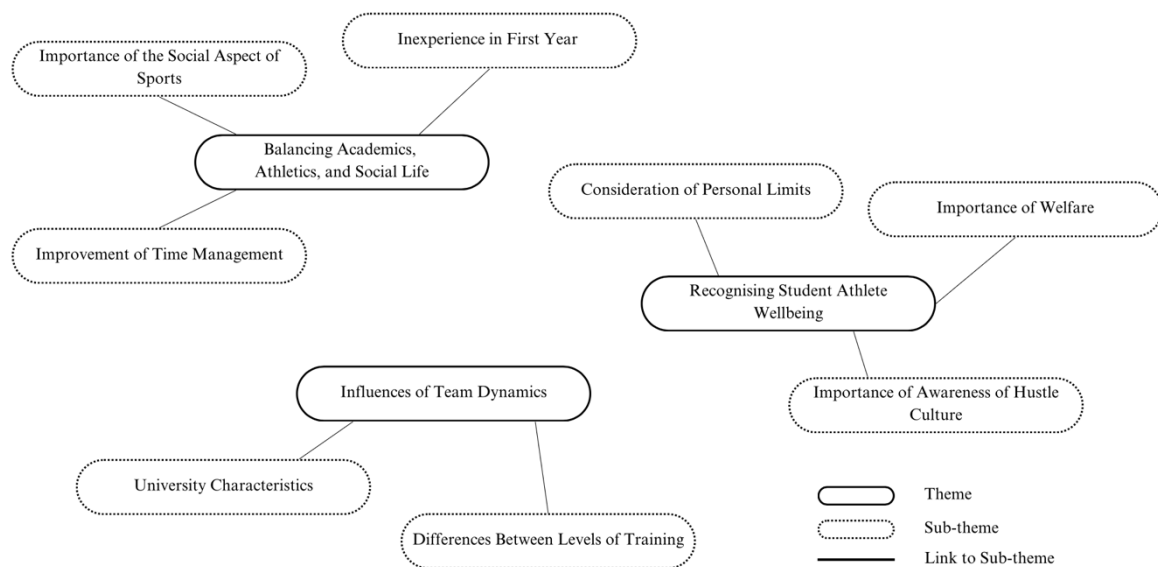


Figure 1. Thematic map of themes and sub-themes

4.1 Balancing Academics, Sports, and Social Life

Although the amount of time spent on participants athletic commitments ranged from 5-15 hours per week, all participants highlighted the difficulty balancing their time at university whilst participating in sport at university:

“I think it is quite hard trying to balance everything and I probably do do a lot more than like I should to prevent burnout, especially last year I found um I burned out quite a bit.” (3)

“I do think though it's a lot, especially if you're competing in multiple teams and you feel pressure to compete in matches at the weekend from coaches who don't stop messaging you saying 'will you play a match for us?' when you actually want to be writing, finishing your assignment. I think, yeah, you can feel pressure” (1)

Problems of balance arise when students are not able to prioritise their time. Difficulty to maintain balance was identified as contributor to student's participation in hustle culture. When asked if they try to resist hustle culture, participant 1 stated:

“Sometimes I do feel the need to always be doing something. So sometimes I can get swept away with it. I don't try to resist it because I do enjoy like being busy.” (1)

The result of hustle culture here is the pressure the student feels to always be productive so they can balance their academics and sports. Although the student recognised how hustle culture can be overwhelming, they suggest that being constantly productive has benefits at university as student athletes, demonstrating a positive effect of hustle culture. This suggests that although being constantly productive is an aspect of hustle culture, it can be used as a tool to complete their academics when the student is confident that they can cope with the workload. As well as commentary on the difficulties of balance, students comment on the added pressure which exams and assignments bring:

“I definitely felt like that during exams because [...] I was taking my laptop with me to [sport] and whilst I was waiting for everyone to arrive, I was just working on my essay.” (2)

Hustle culture in universities has created an environment of pressure to be productive resulting in students struggling to taking a break so they can balance all their commitments.

This extract becomes more insightful when considering support during exam periods explained by participant 1:

“At my uni we have to manage that ourselves there's no consideration for assignments or exam periods.” (1)

This suggests that stress of exams and competition between students can be a driving factor for hustle culture. In this context, the data reveals that students would benefit from guidance and support during stressful periods of the academic year to cope with the added pressure, to prevent unhealthy coping strategies being used, such as toxic productivity, to balance their workload. To help reduce hustle culture in university sport environments it is important for coaches and academic support to consider the pressure of exams during training season.

Improvement of Time Management

Students suggested that participating in sports at university improves their ability to manage time effectively even though it acts as an extra stressor. Participant 2 explained:

“I think probably having sports on the side of uni, it makes you have to kind of prioritise your time better, say outside of sports. I think people would probably be working harder in order to be able to do the sports whilst having the same goals as somebody else.” (2)

This suggests that sport participation is an added stressor to university life putting students at risk of using unhealthy coping strategies such as those encouraged by hustle culture e.g., ignoring rest and recovery. To prevent hustle culture, healthy strategies to improve time management should be promoted to student athletes and for universities to consider the added efforts of student athletes to succeed in their academic goals. It is also important to consider the benefits of sports for time management:

“As in like exams. Um. I'd probably say I can probably fit in a bit more, and that's [...] like not what many people do but, um, I feel like it helps you get out more and like have a bit more of a stress release for me during those like really high stress times” (3)

If students are able to balance sports during high stress periods, being constantly productive can be beneficial and not a negative result of hustle culture. This data suggests that hustle

culture should not be considered as universal experience of all student athletes. Since students react to pressure differently, it is important to consider each student separately when determining if they would benefit from interventions to reduce hustle culture or if they benefit from being constantly productive.

Importance of the Social Aspect of Sports

The social aspect is an important part of team sports and was a motivator for all participants to be involved in sports at university. Hustle culture can arise when social aspect of sports is forgotten, creating a lack of balance.

“Like sacrifice, especially social, their social lives for [...] bringing academics and training as they're like forefront. But I think as a whole [...] only like a I'd say the minority of people. I think like the vast majority like listen more to how they feel and [...], if it's like assessment season, like they'll actually like probably do less [...].” (3)

Maintaining the social aspect of sports may be a beneficial strategy to reduce hustle culture in university sports teams. As hustle culture can limit student's ability to take time off to socialise, advice from universities and coaches on how to improving work life balance may help improve student's wellbeing.

Inexperience in First Year

Students suggested how their inexperience during their first year of university influenced their ability to cope with hustle culture in both their sports and academics:

“A lot of them have been doing [...] [sport] for like first few years so they know like how much like they need to train and everything, whereas like being like new into a sport I think it takes up a lot more like time and energy to just work it all out.” (3)

Inexperience coping with university in first year combined with the extra stressor of participating in university sport can contribute to hustle culture. Therefore, improving support for freshers to reduce stress and prevent students becoming overwhelmed with the new experiences of university is a strategy to reduce hustle culture in student athletes.

4.2 Influences of Team Dynamics

The influences of team dynamics are the structures and relationships within a sports team which contribute to hustle culture in university sports. Two factors influencing team dynamics were discussed: university characteristics and differences between levels of training. Participant 2 commented on how hustle culture also can influence team dynamics:

“If I've got my mind on on work all the time and I come to one of my clubs [...] with the stress of stuff that I've got to do back at home, then I guess it kind of puts everyone in a bad mood. And if I'm not present, [...] If I'm thinking about my work, then that's just, it's not ideal.” (2)

Hustle culture has resulted in students being unable to separate their focus on work from their athletics effecting their state of mind and athletic performance. This outlines the importance of reducing hustle culture in university sport to maintain healthy team dynamics. Participants stated that hustle culture is more prevalent in team with competition at a high level. Different universities expectations for their student athletes training level results in varying levels of pressure:

“I think it depends on what Uni you're at because for me I'm at a smaller uni where there aren't as many opportunities to go into competitive competitions.” (1)

Consequently, hustle culture has a higher prevalence in teams with higher expectations for success resulting in an adverse effect on student athletes who are involved. The influence of team dynamics influencing hustle culture is also apparent between teams of different genders:

“I think in my uni there's more pressure on the men's [sports team] to be better because they've got to get into one team and one team only and there's not enough spaces. Which I think would imply more hustle culture there than the women's [team].” (1)

It was suggested that as sports teams at smaller universities have less pressure and more inclusivity due to a lower competition level compared to universities where student athletes have more opportunities to compete at the national level. This suggests that hustle culture is less prevalent in certain sports where the teams are still developing as the team dynamics are more inclusive and supportive of varying levels of participation, particularly in sports where

female participation is beginning to increase. Ensuring that there are multiple teams of varying levels of ability available in universities enables student athletes to compete at a suitable level. Participant 1 also suggested that teams of varying levels of training should be amalgamated allowing socialising and a greater community to prevent hustle culture.

Participant 2 talked about the differences between the prevalence of hustle culture within college sports teams compared to university teams at collegiate universities:

“They can definitely be less intense because, like from what [another student] said um about her doing DU [sport], it's just so, so much work and I would, I just could not do that and my university work at the same time, that's just too much. [...]. Whereas college sport, I think is definitely better.” (2)

This again suggests that hustle culture is less prevalent in sport teams with less pressure and at lower competition levels. The success of collegiate universities in providing opportunities for students to compete in sport at a level at which they can successfully balance their academics alongside, reiterates the importance of having a range of training levels at universities to reduce hustle culture.

4.3 Recognising Student Athlete Wellbeing

Recognising student athlete wellbeing considers student athletes mental health whilst competing in university sports. It is important to consider wellbeing when providing strategies to reduce hustle culture. This theme includes of 3 sub-themes: Importance of awareness of hustle culture, consideration of personal limits, and importance of welfare.

Importance of Awareness of Hustle Culture

Only participant 1 was aware of hustle culture although they were not overly familiar with the concept. The other two participants who were initially unaware both said that now they have received information on hustle culture they believe it is present in university sports:

“So, I'd actually never heard of it before you sent me the form and reading through it, I found it really interesting. So, I watched a few videos on it and it was really interesting, like hearing about something which kind of I guess defined my own work schedule, but I I'd just never heard of that word before.” (2)

“I think it is a very, um, it's very prominent thing, I think, at university especially if you're involved in uni sports.” (3)

Awareness allowed participant 2 clarification of their feelings when balancing their work and sports schedule and they realised that they should allow more time to relax. This demonstrates the importance of awareness of hustle culture to affirm student athlete's feelings of stress whilst participating in university sports. To improve awareness of hustle culture, universities should inform students on the hustle culture phenomenon and provide solutions such as education on the importance of rest and recovery to prevent burnout and overtraining, and information on how to seek support whilst at university.

Consideration of Personal Limits

Although participants stated the positive effects of hustle culture, participants also recognised that problems occur when student athletes push beyond their limits. Hustle culture in sports can be observed when students prioritise sport over wellbeing:

“But I think there has definitely been times I've tried to push past tiredness to complete like to do some training and I think like I've learned from that, that it's not worth it. You're not gonna be productive and yeah, there's more to life.” (3)

A consequence of hustle culture is student athletes pushing past their limits to perform in their sports and academics. This occurs when students feel the need to be productive at a detriment to their health and wellbeing.

“I've definitely tried to push through illness having like a fever and showing up to [sport]. Not advised, but again I've learned like I've never been so miserable and like out of breath and [...] it's not going to do me any good.” (3)

Student athletes need to be aware of their limits when training. With information from university support and coaches on the importance of rest and recovery for student's wellbeing, hustle culture may be reduced, improving student's mental and physical health.

Importance of Welfare

It was suggested that increased welfare in sports teams may prevent hustle culture:

“I guess having more like just support like people to go to [...] and like knowing who to go to because I feel like I don't know who I'd go to apart from like my welfare secs.” (3)

To prevent hustle culture in university sports, participant 3 suggested increasing funding for coaches to provide wellbeing support and to alter training load. Increasing training opportunities provided by universities for students in welfare positions may help prevent hustle culture by improving the welfare structures already in place in university sports teams, especially smaller teams with less funding and resources such as student run sports teams lacking coaches.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Overview

All participants have experienced hustle culture whilst at university although they all competed in different sports teams showing the widespread impact of hustle culture. It was expected that hustle culture would arise when student athletes struggle to balancing academics and sports due to the lack of guidance of training hours in UK universities alongside the 30-35 hours of academics work weekly suggested for undergraduate students (QAA, 2021). It was also expected that pressure to be productive and pushing past limits would be effects of hustle culture.

The benefit of hustle culture on time management was unexpected. It was expected that students would be aware of hustle culture before the interview. However, this was not the case reiterating the importance of education on the phenomenon. The impact of team dynamics was not discussed in literature review but was a topic of discussion in interviews and had a greater influence on the prevalence of hustle culture than expected.

5.2 Strengths

3 main strengths of this research were identified:

- I) Students participated in sports at different universities which was beneficial to discuss the impact hustle culture in different team dynamics.
- II) All participants compete in different sports. This was particularly beneficial to discuss how hustle culture effects teams and individual sports differently.
- III) Participants competed in a range of levels at university including college teams. This was useful to compare the prevalence of hustle culture in environments with various levels of training intensity and competition, and to discuss how the social aspect of sports can prevent hustle culture.

5.3 Limitations

4 main limitations of this research were identified:

- I) Sample size under recommended range for thematic analysis of interviews in small projects due to time restraints.
- II) Purposive sampling has limitation of selection bias.
- III) Participants attended only 2 universities.
- IV) No inclusion of socioeconomic status.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Overview

This research provides an insight to the prevalence of the hustle culture phenomenon in UK university sports and its effects on student athletes. Inductive thematic analysis of data from one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 3 current student athletes currently attending UK universities was conducted to establish the causes and effects of hustle culture on student athletes. All participants believed that hustle culture is prevalent in university sports teams. The major finding was that student athlete hustle culture is characterised by students feeling pressured to be productive whilst balancing their academics, sports, and social lives resulting in students pushing past their limits. The consequences of hustle culture are the inability of students to take their mind off academic work whilst training, having increased stress and pressure, and training whilst injured or ill. To prevent hustle culture in university sports an increased focus for student support including intervention from coaches to reduce stress whilst competing especially in exam periods, and increased funding for training student welfare officers in sports teams should be implemented in universities. These findings are useful to improve welfare in university sports by encouraging universities to focus on the impacts that a lack of work-life balance at university can have on student athlete's wellbeing.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on student athletes hustle culture could focus on the effects of hustle culture between genders and socioeconomic groups. All participants in this research were completing an undergraduate degree at a Russell group university. Therefore, repeating this research with a larger sample size and with students enrolled at more universities across the UK will result in a more extensive picture of the prevalence of student hustle culture.

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Appendices

Example of Coding

Codes	Transcript
	Interviewer: Are you aware of hustle culture and if you are can you say a little bit about your understanding and what aspects you are familiar with?
unfamiliar with hustle culture, pressure, productivity, push past limits	Interviewee: I wouldn't say I'm overly familiar with it, but I know of it. That it's about people feeling the pressure to be productive all the time and sometimes push themselves over the limit.
	Interviewer: Are you exposed to hustle culture at all? And what are your thoughts on it if you do feel the pressure?
awareness of hustle culture, experience with hustle culture, teammates, being the best at sports, training at university, pressure, socialising, experience with hustle culture	Interviewee: I know people who are involved in it and feel that they need to be doing stuff all the time especially like they need to be the best at their sport, and they train all the time, but I don't feel pressured to be a part of it. But I think that's because I more play for social element.