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Commercialism and Emotional Exhaustion: A Qualitative Study of Depression in Fast-Paced Business Environments

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ABSTRACT

The pace of business demands in the modern business environment has increased the discussions around the conditions of employees and particularly the correlation between the emotional exhaustion and depressions. This qualitative study explores how commercial interests shape the professional identity, sabotage the balance between work and life, and cause depressive experiences amongst high-demand professionals. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to take part in a phenomenological design and 25 participants in the fields of finance, corporate law, information technology and sales were interviewed. Participant narratives aided in thematic analysis of data that helped to give a comprehensive picture of workplace stress and coping. Five major themes emerged. First, employees called commercial target internalization identity in which the self-worth was conflated with organizational performance indicators. Second, the desperate work-life balance and the exhaustive fatigue due to numerous hours and constant connection were mentioned by the respondents. Third, emotional exhaustion was usually manifested through the depressive symptoms of hopelessness, withdrawal and diminishing productivity. Fourth, the overall culture was one of stigma and silence where mental distress was not to be shared and this encouraged isolation. Finally, the participants had a range of coping methods such as adaptive coping methods, such as exercising and mindfulness and maladaptive, such as alcohol use and disengagement. The significance of its findings lies in the fact that commercialism not merely overestimates the work requirements, but also changes the self-concept, putting the employees at the risk of a spoilt psyche. Theoretically, the research reconciles the notions of burnout and depression as reinforcers and practically, it suggests reforms to organizations in the pursuit of mental health besides profitability. Policy-level interventions to be addressed also include structural drivers of distress. Lastly, the paper introduces the desperate need of sustainable business cultures that protect the welfare of the employees.

Keywords: Commercialism, Emotional Exhaustion, Workplace Depression, Qualitative Study, Work-Life Balance.

INTRODUCTION

The pace of modern business has led to the scenario whereby achievement in sales is generally accorded more weight than the well-being of the employees. In every industry- finance and technology to corporate sales - individuals are pressurized to achieve aggressive targets, optimize efficiency, and compete with one another at all times. Despite being a positive environment to business organizations, the psychological well-being of the workers is devastating. It is discovered that these work pressures are directly related to emotional exhaustion experiences, and the indicators of depression, particularly in the high-stress work sectors (Maslach and Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli, 2017).

The concept of commercialism in the workplace may be approximately described as the prevalence of profit-

making objectives and the commodification of the time and the productivity of the employees (as well as their identities) (Hochschild, 2012). Where success is assessed mostly in monetary terms, employees can internalize unrealistic expectations, and this results in incessant stress. Research on organizational culture emphasizes that the greater the commercial considerations take precedence over intrinsic work satisfaction, the more an employee would record a higher degree of fatigue, lack of engagement, and motivation (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Emotional exhaustion is a major expression of these pressures and one of the main elements of burnout. Emotional exhaustion is a situation where one is exhausted with his work demands and is not equipped emotionally to handle it well (Maslach et al., 2001). Fast-paced and commercialized workplaces tend to have longer work hours, increased performance control, and continuous connectivity with the help of digital technologies that contribute to exhaustion (Sonnentag et al., 2017). The long-term exhaustion, in its turn, has been linked to the onset of depressive symptoms, such as hopelessness, low self-esteem, and work and social withdrawal (Ahola et al., 2017).

The rates of depression in working-age groups have increased by a significant margin all over the world, and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) has acknowledged workplace stressors as the cause of the burden of mental illness. The overlap between commercialism and mental health has been especially acute in the states where the business culture is rapidly expanding, like India and China (Kawakami et al., 2020). Identity problems and absence of institutional back-up of mental health, work-life imbalance are typical of the employees making them vulnerable to psychological torment.

Even though this problem is gaining more and more recognition, there are still gaps in empirical research. The existing literature devotes much attention to the notion of burnout as an occupational phenomenon but does not accentuate enough on the fact that the phenomenon in question has a strong linkage with depression under the circumstances of commercialized high-pressure environments (Leiter et al., 2021). Moreover, the quantitative research has been in a position to point out prevalence although fewer studies of qualitative research have incorporated the actual experiences of employees who have been forced to work in the conditions of commercialism. Qualitative method plays a critical role in that it gives delicate information on how individuals perceive, resist or internalize the requirements of the fast-moving business cultures (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The existing study will fill this gap in that it will analyze the lived experiences of workers in high-demand regions. To be clear, it analyzes the influence of commercial imperatives: their impact on the emotional depletion and, therefore, on the depressive symptomatology. By conducting the in-depth interviews and by the application of the thematic analysis, the study will uncover the psychological burden of commercialism, and the coping mechanisms that employees themselves adopt. These dynamics can be employed in the motivation of organizational strategies and in the overall policies of the government on the management of depression in the workplace. Lastly, the study is expected to add some contribution to a more widespread debate of sustainable business practices that would not discord profitability and individual emotional well-being of the employees.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
The body of literature on the topics of commercialism, emotional exhaustion, and depression in fast-paced working settings is cross-disciplinary and includes the areas of organizational psychology, sociology, and even public health. This review summarizes the available scholarship in the four thematic groups as follows: (1) commercialism and workplace culture conceptualization, (2) emotional exhaustion and burnout theory, (3) depression in high-demand business settings, and (4) gaps in the current empirical research and the necessity of a qualitative study. All themes are elaborated with the help of the contributions of the authors, emphasizing the course of research and the existing gaps.

Workplace Culture and Commercialism.
Commercialism in organizational life has been a subject of a lot of debate in sociological and management literature. In her powerful book The Managed Heart, Hochschild (2012) stated that the work environments within capitalistic economies commercialize the emotional as workers are expected to control their emotions to suit their commercial interests. This emotional piece of work strains individual authenticity, and organizational requirements and it is quite easy to succumb to psychological stress. Similarly, Fleming (2014) paid attention to the effect of increasing commercialization of employee identity, which, according to the author, leads to alienation when individuals perceive their value in the context of productivity and profitability.

In their business ethics view, Alvesson and Willmott (2016) observed that the contemporary organizational space exposes the business to accounts of performance, innovation, and growth that justify the exploitation of the working environment. These stories reinforce a culture where the long hours and 24/7 presence are romanticized and there is no rest and health of the individual. Offering similar tones, Scherer et al. (2016) pointed out that multinational corporations promote globalized competition and, in the process, add to commercialism by setting demanding targets that are directly translated into performance pressure at every level of hierarchy.
The empirical studies in the recent past have supported these theoretical assertions. Indicatively, Kalleberg (2018) observed that precarious employment practices, which are usually attributed to commercial competitiveness, increase stress among both the

developed and developing economy workers. Similarly, Conley and Wu (2019) also reported internalization of commercial objectives by professionals in fast-moving financial industries to the point where self-worth becomes equated with sales quotas, further fading the personal/professional lines. Together, these studies present a picture of how commercialism has been integrated into the culture of the workplaces, defining the identity of the employees and their psychological life.

Emotional Exhaustion/Burnout Theories.
Emotional exhaustion as a construct has been explored widely in the context of burnout. Burnout was conceptualized by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) as a syndrome marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. Among them, the most significant dimension is taken as emotional exhaustion, as it is a kind of the direct manifestation of the exhaustion of psychological resources that is needed to maintain the working performance.

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) developed the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model further to the previous framework,, in which high job demands (e.g., workload, time pressure, emotional demands) can cause burnout in the absence of sufficient resources (e.g., autonomy, support, recognition). In this model, emotional exhaustion acts as an intermediary between the demands and negative organizational behaviors including turnover and absenteeism. Subsequent advances of the JD-R model also focus on the importance of individual resources (optimism, resilience) as a buffer against exhaustion (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Schaufeli (2017) took this line of thinking further by utilizing the JD-R framework to commercialized workplaces. He claimed that workplaces where profit-making is the primary motivating factor tend to rise in the job pressure and reduce the restorative facilities, resulting in a bias that leads to exhaustion in employees. Likewise, Halbesleben and Buckley (2019) found that unremitting exposure to performance monitoring and digital surveillance in the business environment intensifies the emotional needs of the employees and, therefore, increases burnout faster.

The empirical studies also support these structures. As an example, Taris et al. (2017) have created a strong relationship between emotional exhaustion and commercial performance targets amongst healthcare professionals who were gradually being subjected to business-like metrics of efficiency. In another research by Leiter et al. (2021), it was demonstrated that highly emotionally exhausted employees were far more likely to report instances of depression, which reflects psychological burnout cost in the contemporary organization.

Depression under High-demand Business.

The problem of depression at the workplace is the subject of increased research activities in the field of psychology and the facet of community health. During a systematic review, Ahola et al. (2017) developed the idea that the development of clinical depression is closely related to burnout, emotional exhaustion. They argued that exhaustion is a predicting condition due to which chronic stress and resource depletion eventually become depressive disorder.

Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) emphasized in the framework of organizational behavior that poor recovery of high job demands not only leads to exhaustion but prevents psychological disengagement of work, one of the most important sources of protection against depression. They suggest that employees in highly-demanded business setups are especially vulnerable since a continued connectivity exists, which smartphones and digital tools can offer. The worldwide occurrence of this problem has been drawn to light in cross-national studies. Kawakami et al. (2020) reported an increase in depression levels among the Asian business cultures where a high rate of industrialization and commercialization increased the work-induced stress. Likewise, in their work with the model of the effort-reward imbalance, Siegrist and Wahrendorf (2016) concluded that employees who experience disproportionate requests in the absence of sufficient rewards reported more cases of depressive symptoms among the European cohorts.

The lived experience of depression in the business world is also enlightened by qualitative inquiries. As an example, Kinman and Jones (2019) interviewed those who work in the financial sector and discovered that the respondents attributed their depression to more than their job duties and all that surrounded them in their profession: commercialization of identity and the unrelenting pressure to deliver. Similarly, Harvey et al. (2018) pointed to the fact that organizational stigma of mental health tends to deter employees seeking assistance, which only worsens the outcomes of depression.

Resilience and Coping in a Business Environment.
Although a lot of the literature focuses on the negative impact of commercialism, a number of studies cover coping mechanisms and resilience. Hobfoll and colleagues (2018) developed the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which states that employees actively aim to preserve and develop resources (time, social support, autonomy), in order to mitigate stress. Mindfulness training, social support network, and boundary-setting are coping mechanisms that have been identified to buffer emotional exhaustion in high-commercial settings (Good et al., 2016).

Such strategies have been proven to be effective based on empirical studies. In general, as Avey et al. (2017) discovered, when employees had a more positive psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism), they reported a low level of exhaustion and depression even in high-pressure jobs. On the same

note, Michel et al. (2016) have recorded that flexible working and organizational support systems minimize the risk of depression by enabling recovery and work-life balance.

But these have also included maladaptive coping mechanisms like drug use or dissociation. According to Cranford et al. (2018), in the field of competitive industries, alcohol or stimulants are acute purposes of professionals that contribute to mental health problems in the long term. These results remove the single perspective of coping in business settings: adaptive coping can lead to resilience, but maladaptive coping may promote exhaustion and depression.

Gaps in Existing Research

Even with such scholarship, there are still a number of gaps. First, much of the research is still quantitative based on prevalence rates, correlations and a test of a model. Though helpful, those methods usually do not reflect the experienced life of workers who have to deal with commercialism and its psychological cost. Though less common, qualitative studies offer more information on how different people perceive and react to commercial pressures (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Second, the current literature is inclined to understand burnout and depression distinctly, but there is an emerging body of literature that indicates a flowing and overlapping association. Exhaustion can be both the symptom of burnout and the precursor of depression, yet the mechanisms are not properly explored (Leiter et al., 2021).

Third, the cultural differences about commercialism interaction with mental health are looked into very sparsely. To illustrate, collectivist societies might socialize the overworking as loyalty to the group, whereas individualist societies might socialize the overworking as ambition, resulting in various exhaustive and depressive feelings (Kawakami et al., 2020).

Lastly, at the workplace, interventions are not well theorized in a commercial setting. Although the literature on mindfulness and resilience training is increasing, there is a lack of research investigating critically whether such interventions can fix underlying causes, i.e. structural commercial pressures, or only offer a band-aid solution (Fleming, 2014).

Summary

It is evident that the literature has defined that commercialism increases job demands and minimizes recovery opportunities, which makes the soil of emotional exhaustion and depression. Basic theoretical frameworks include the burnout model (Maslach et al., 2001), JD-R framework (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), and the model of effort-reward imbalance (Siegrist and Wahrendorf, 2016) that describe the conversion of organizational processes into psychological strain. Empirical research proves that the problem of depression is becoming a common one in high demand business environment, and qualitative research gives an opportunity to study personal experiences. Nevertheless, there are still major gaps especially in the qualitative insights, cultural settings and sustainable interventions. Such gaps explain why the current research concentrates on the lived experiences of practitioners working in a high-paced business setting.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative design is used in the current study because it seeks to explore the lived experiences of the professionals who must withstand commercial pressures, emotional exhaustion and depression in the hectic business environments. In order to better understand the subjective meanings and on-ground realities of the participants, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate instrument because it is not fully applicable to quantitative surveys or statistical frameworks (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The section offers the research design, sampling plan, data collection methods and data analysis framework and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The design of the research was a qualitative phenomenological approach in that the researchers set out to find out how individuals feel and understand the essence of commercialism and emotional burnout in their professional life. Phenomenology can be applied most of the time in research studies related to mental health as it is a kind of research that is concerned with subjective meaning, lived experiences, and emotional elements of the narratives of the subjects (Smith et al., 2009). It was not aimed at testing hypotheses but to generate descriptive, rich descriptions of depression in the form of commercialized workplace cultures.

Participants and Sampling

The industries sampled with respondents are usually characterized by a lot of commercial pressure such as finance, corporate law, information technology and sales-based industries. To establish a variety of opinions, the employees who represented various levels of organizational hierarchy (entry level, middle level, top level managers) were included in the research.

The sample was selected in a purposive manner that targeted the individuals who had served in high pressure business environments at least three years. This ensured that the participants were subjected to commercial requirements with time and could report the impact it had on the mental health. The snowball sampling was also abused because the initial respondents suggested the friends and peers that have encountered the same experience. In total, 25 participants were enlisted (balanced in terms of gender and age (25-50 years old).

Data Collection

The research used semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, which is flexible, yet not too much, because it enables a researcher to delve deeper into the descriptions of participants (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). All interviews ranged between 60 and 90 minutes with each being either face to face or secure video conferencing platforms depending on the choice of the participants and geographical location.

Areas that were discussed in the interview guide included:

- The experience of commercial targets and organizational culture.
- Emotional exhaustion and work-life balance.
- Symptoms of depression in reference to work demands.
- Adaptive and maladaptive coping.

Organizational and social support systems.
Besides interviews, field notes were kept to reflect on contextual observations, non-verbal behaviors and researcher thoughts. All interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the participants and then transcribed word-to-word.

Data Analysis
The research adopted a thematic analysis, which consists of six phases as put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006). The reason behind the choice of this method is that it is flexible when determining, analyzing and reporting trends in qualitative data. It was analyzed in the following steps:

Familiarization: There were repeated readings of the transcripts to ensure that the transcripts were immersed in the data.

Coding: The first codes were created manually and using NVivo software with emphasis on repetitive phrases of commercial pressure, exhaustion, and depressive experiences.

Theme Development: Codes were grouped into larger themes, such as, commercial targets as identity, loss of emotional energy, stigma and silence, coping by avoidance or resilience.

Reviewing Themes: Themes were narrowed down so as to maintain coherence, distinctiveness and relevance to the research targets.

Defining and Naming Themes: The themes had a good definition as each one captured the essence in terms of the general research question.

Reporting: The analysis included extracts of the interviews with the participants to demonstrate and support every theme.

This process of iteration was used to ensure that findings were not only deep but also diverse to the extent that the participant experiences were.

Trustworthiness and Rigor
Various methods were used to increase the validity of the results. Interviews and field notes were used together to reach triangulation by providing numerous interpretations of what the participants went through. Member checking was undertaken by giving members of five subjects preliminary findings which they substantiated as true and reflected in the themes. Moreover, there was an audit trail that showed the decision on coding, memos and reflexive notes, which facilitated transparency during the analytic process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations
Since there is a sensitivity of the information that is going to be discussed about depression and stress at work, strict ethical considerations were upheld. The study participants were provided with comprehensive information sheets, which explained the purpose of the study, the procedures of confidentiality, and their right to pull out of the research process anytime without punishment. Prior to participation informed consent was received in written form. Transcripts and reports were done with pseudonyms to secure anonymity.

Since the discussion of depression may lead to the experience of emotional discomfort, the participants were given the sources of mental health helplines and counseling. The researcher also utilized a positive, understanding style of interviewing where the participant was free to take a break or withdraw the interview in case he or she felt upset. The institutional review board of the host university gave ethical approval to the study.

RESULTS

Introduction to Findings
This paper is based on the results of the in-depth interviews that were conducted with 25 financial, corporate law, information technology and sales-driven professionals. The subjects involved different age groups (25-50 years), gender and organizational roles and therefore guaranteed diversified views. Thematic analysis identified five themes that were general: commercial targets as identity, work-life imbalance and exhaustion, depressive manifestations, stigma and silence, and coping mechanisms. All the themes demonstrate how commercial interests are influencing emotional burnout and causing depression in busy work settings. The next sections include the demographics of the participants and provide in-depth thematic information with the direct quotes.

Participant Characteristics
The sample consisted of 25 subjects who were selected by areas that are generally well-known in commercial intensity: finance, corporate law, information technology and sales. The respondents were aged between 25 and 50 years with most

respondents being between 31 and 40 years (40%). The presence of gender was fairly even with 14 males and 11 females in the dataset. This age and gender diversity offered a diversity of insights into the interrelationship of commercialism with professional identity, emotional exhaustion, and depressive experiences.

The demographic profile of the participants such as age group, gender, and sectoral distribution can be summarized as follows in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Participant Demographics Summary

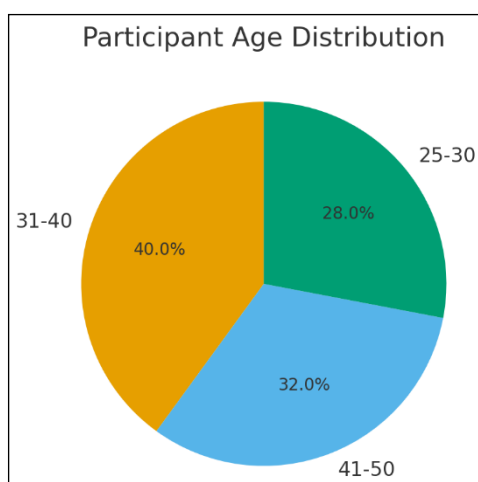| Category	Count
Age 25–30	7
Age 31–40	10
Age 41–50	8
Male	14
Female	11
Finance	7
IT	6
Corporate Law	6
Sales	6

Figure 4.1: Participant Age Distribution

Figure 4.1 displays the age profile of the participants in order to visualize these distributions. The share of the age groups was large (31-40), meaning professionals in the middle of the career, at risk of burnout and depression, in particular, because of professional commitments and family.

Figure 4.2: Industry Representation of Participants
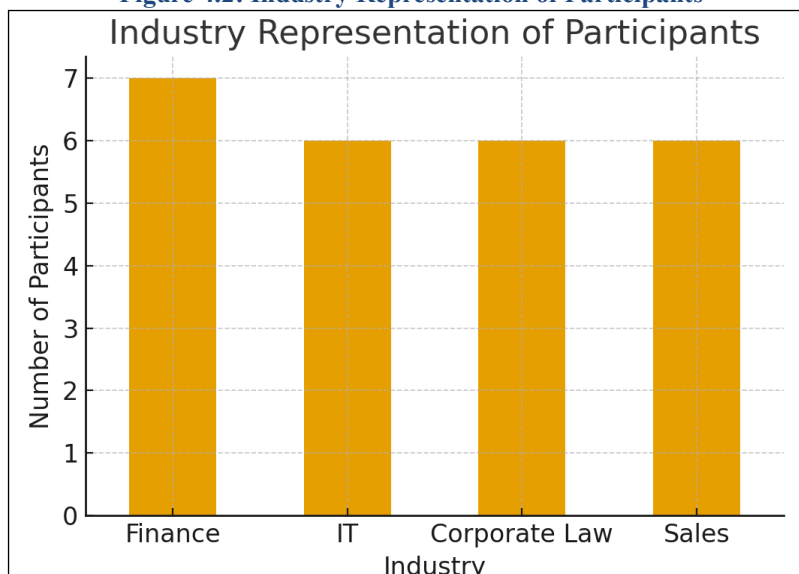
Equally, Figure 4.2 shows the industry representation. There was an equal distribution of participants in the IT, sales and corporate law (six apiece), although finance was somewhat overrepresented (seven). The range of industries served to assure that any given access to findings was not only sector-specific pressure but also a collective experience of commercialism.

Such a demographic profile does not simply place the findings into certain occupational contexts but forms the basis of thematic patterns to be discussed in the following sections.

Thematic Findings
The thematic analysis produced five interrelated themes that demonstrate how commercialism in the high-paced business worlds redefines employee identity, encourages emotional drains, and adds to depressive experiences. The theme is backed up by narratives of the participants and is structured into sub themes to make it clear.

Theme 1: Commercial Targets as Identity
One of the prevailing themes was commercial internalization as a measure of self-esteem. A professional identity was narrowed down to performance measurements to many participants. A finance specialist described:
"I get the feeling that I have failed not only my company but myself when I miss a target."

SubTheme 1.1 embodied the promotion of profit as personal value, whereas SubTheme 1.2 disclosed the decline of intrinsic motivation as a result of the employees seeking numbers and not engagement. This caused identity crises where goals were impossible and their stress and hopelessness were enhanced.

Theme 2: Work-Life Imbalance and Exhaustion
The respondents complained of serious work-life boundary interference which they attributed to long hours, always being on, and being expected to be available. An IT employee noted:
"I leave at midnight, but I get mails at 2 a.m. The workday never ends."

Chronic overwork was brought to the limelight in Subtheme 2.1, and the loss of family and social roles in Subtheme 2.2. The impossibility to get away with the work promoted the physical exhaustion and emotional draining.

Theme 3: Emotional Exhaustion and Depressive Symptoms
The exhaustion was often transformed to the forms of depression. According to the respondents these included feelings of emptiness, detachment and lack of productivity. One corporate attorney commented:
"It's not just tiredness. Waking up some days I think that there is no use to go to work at all."

This theme highlighted the fact that exhaustion goes beyond work-related stress to become a mental health disorder. Subtheme 3.1 captured hopelessness and lack of motivation, and Subtheme 3.2 captured the withdrawal behavior, absenteeism and lack of engagement.

Theme 4: Stigma, Silence, and Non-Disclosure
Mental health Stigma turned out to be an obstacle to recognition and care. Employees were afraid that their reputation or career opportunities would be damaged in case they were exposed. Since one participant stated:
"Discussion of depression is weakness. No one in my office, dares to say it."

Subtheme 4.1 disclosed the fear of professional consequences, and Subtheme 4.2 depicted coping by means of silence or covering. Such a stigmatizing culture reinforced isolation and access to care.

Theme 5: Coping Mechanisms and Resilience
Adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies were described by the participants. Modification techniques were exercise, mindfulness and finding social support. A mid-level manager shared:
"Running in the mornings makes me sane. It is the only period when I can say that I am in control."

On the other side there was also maladaptive coping such as alcohol use and emotional withdrawal which were common. Subtheme 5.1 illustrated positive strategies of resilience and Subtheme 5.2 exalted destructive patterns that aggravated depressive symptoms.

Table 4.2: Themes and Representative Quotes

Theme	Subtheme	Representative Quote
Commercial Targets as Identity	Profit as value	"When I miss a target, I feel like I have failed not just my company but myself."
Work-Life Imbalance	Chronic overwork	"I log out at midnight and still receive emails at 2 a.m."

Emotional Exhaustion → Depression	Hopelessness	"Some days I wake up and feel there is no point in going to work at all."
Stigma & Silence	Fear of disclosure	"Talking about depression is like admitting weakness."
Coping Mechanisms	Resilience vs avoidance	"Running every morning keeps me sane."

Figure 4.3: Thematic Framework of Commercialism, Exhaustion, and Depression
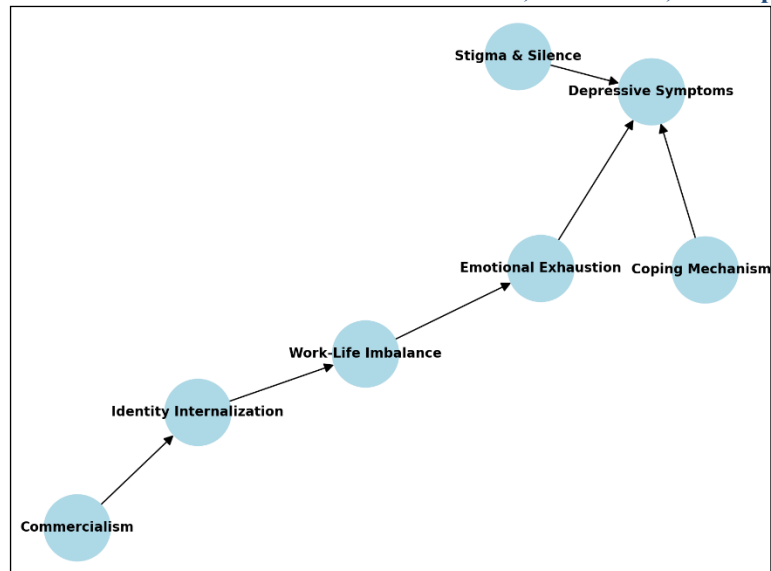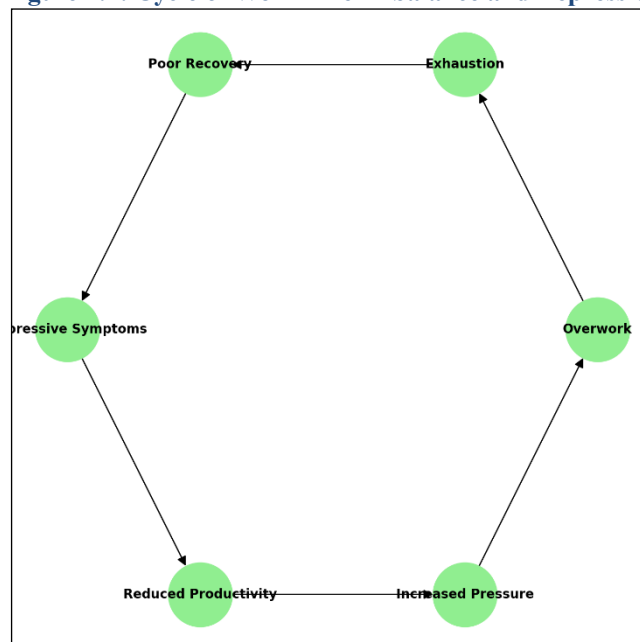

Figure 4.4: Cycle of Work-Life Imbalance and Depression

Summary of Findings

All these themes considered collectively show the interdependence and mutualistic relationship between commercialism and depression. Such findings suggest that although commercial targets mediate identity and work-life disbalance mediates exhaustion, stigma prevents the acknowledgment of distress and, therefore, delays help-seeking. The coping strategies are significant intervening factors and the adaptive coping approaches offer relief and maladaptive strategies restore the damage. Together, these results underscore the complexity of processes by which commercialized workplace cultures create psychological pressures.

DISCUSSION

The current work has examined the influence of commercial interests in a fast-paced business context on professional identities as well as emotional fatigue and subsequently depressive symptoms. Through the lives of professionals in the finance, corporate law, information technology, and sales, the study has revealed five key themes, which include commercial

targets as identity, work-life imbalance, emotional exhaustion in form of depression, stigma and silence, and coping. This chapter explains these findings with reference to available literature, assesses their theoretical and practical implications as well as making wider cultural references.

Commercialism and Forming Identity

One of the key contributions of this paper is that there is a direct effect of commercialism on professional identity. Participants repeatedly stated that their sense of value was related to achieving performance targets, which is consistent with the argument by Hochschild (2012) who stated that capitalist work places commodify not only labor, but also identity. When the situation at hand is highly limited with respect to the profitability, then organizational goals are more likely to be translated into personal ones by the workers. This can be compared to the case of Scherer et al. (2016), who asserted that the discourse of growth and efficiency that overshadows the value of nature is disseminated by the global corporate cultures.

The peculiar feature of the results of the given research is the severity of the identity conflict presented by the interviewees. Blurring of self-worth and commercial outcomes in addition to heightening the vulnerability to depression in the case of non-met targets not only decreased intrinsic motivation, but also added to the vulnerability to depression. In contrast to the study by Leiter et al. (2021) where exhaustion is deemed as an occupational risk factor, the research paper under consideration has revealed identity dissonance as one of the routes to psychological strain that is essential. This means that commercialism does not merely escalate the job demands but actually restructures the manner in which individuals formulate themselves.

Work-Life Imbalance as a Fatigue Process

One more theme, which became evident, is the blurring of personal and professional boundary. The reasons that the respondents gave included unremitting digital connectivity, increased hours of work, and how they have turned overwork into the norm. These testimonies coincide with the model of Sonnet and Fritz (2015) according to which the stressor-detachment model is more concerned with the importance of the recovery to possess mental health. Laborers cannot detach themselves and consequently, it contributes to exhaustive accumulation.

This study contributes to the literature as it reveals that work-life imbalance is used as a process that shapes the relationship between commercial demands and emotional burnout. To the IT professionals the always-on trend was making the sleep pattern to be struck as well as the sales staff were complaining about the pressure on the family due to travelling and bizarre work. These findings are comparable to that of Kawakami et al. (2020) who discovered that the culture of overwork is exaggerated by the high rate of economic growth in the Asian environment. However, the existing literature has offered a spin related to

imbalance as it has shown that the concept does not only relate to working hours but the allegorical invasion of work into the identity and daily rhythms.

Emotional Exhaustion and the Onset of Depression

In line with the model proposed by Maslach et al. (2001), emotional exhaustion was identified as one of the fundamental results of the commercial demands. Subjects referred to cynicism, fatigue and diminished productivity. Nonetheless, a single novel discovery is that exhaustion predisposed to develop depressive symptoms including the absence of hope and withdrawal. This confirms the claim by Ahola et al. (2017) that exhaustion can be a cause of depression.

Unlike in the literature, in which the burnout and the depression are two distinct constructs (e.g., Schaufeli, 2017), the present findings demonstrate that there exists a significant overlap. In many cases, the terms exhaustion and depression were used interchangeably as they are made to be synonymous. This blurry aspect demonstrates that the concept of the relationship between burnout and depression needs to be revised to be not independent of one another, but interrelated phenomena in a dynamic manner. It implies that the intervention in the workplace should be directed not only at the prevention of burnout but also at the reduction of the symptoms of its subsequent manifestation as a clinical depression.

Stigma and Culture of Silence

One of the acute barriers that were evident in this study was the stigma of the revelation of mental health. The respondents feared the outcomes of acknowledging that they were depressed: being thought ill, professional repercussions or being excluded of the opportunities. This finding corroborates the study of Harvey et al. (2018) who stressed that even with the availability of resources, employees are not able to receive support because of organizational stigma.

The process through which commercialism is imposed through the culture of silence elucidated by the participants explains the culture of silence. In the place of work where excellence is appreciated, instead of health, a manifestation of the psychological distress is seen as a weakness or inability to work. This is particularly acute in the competitive business spheres such as law and finance where the image as a professional comes into the limelight. This creates a paradox since the employees are suffering in silence to keep the image of hardness but the silence only keeps on torturing them.

It is what proves that organizations should not go beyond wellness programs that are merely superficial and practicing the actual cultures of openness. Even well-intended interventions will still be sabotaged by stigma unless structural change is implemented.

Coping Style: Adaptive and Maladaptive Processes

The study revealed that there existed diverse coping mechanisms. Adaptive strategies: exercise,

mindfulness, social support helped the participants to feel that they had their agency again. These actions align with Hobfoll et al. (2018) conservation of resources theory that explains that individuals desire to protect and repair resources in the stressful environment. Corresponding outcomes are reported by Avey et al. (2017) who also came to the conclusion that exhaustion is mitigated by psychological resources (hope, optimism, resilience).

In the meantime, the existence of maladaptive strategies was noted. Other respondents reported to be addicted to alcohol, stimulant or withdrawing. Similar tendencies are mentioned by Cranford et al. (2018), and it was noted that substance use can help to improve the situation in high-demand professions but deteriorates over the long-term. These findings suggest that coping is not protective in itself, but that quality of coping mediates between the alleviation of distress or augmentation of distress.

This kind of duality brings to the fore the importance of organizational support in leading the employees into adaptive coping. The structural support deficiency may trigger lapse of the employees into avoidance behaviors to perpetuate the harmful practices.

Theoretical Implications
There are three major hypotheses in which the results are involved. First, they broaden the job demands-resources (JD-R) model as they show how the pressures of business overload demands and overwhelm them, and empty personal and organizational resources. The disbalanced narrative as narrated by participants is a drastic case of JD-R dynamic.

Second, the results indicate the permeability of the border between burnout and depression. Despite the penchant of the literature to separate these constructs, the experiences of lived life as outlined herein reveal that there is a continuum to lives of exhaustion to depressive. This holds arguments of Leiter et al. (2021) to re-write the concept of burnout as a clinical and occupational phenomenon.

Thirdly, the study contributes to the literature research on the identity theory in the organizations. The findings suggest that it is not only work tasks that are influenced by commercialism but the self-concept is also infiltrated. The vulnerability in terms of psychological aspects is increased when identity is anchored on commercial proceeds. Such an attitude is a mixture of sociological arguments against commercialism (Hochschild, 2012; Fleming, 2014) and psychological assumptions of stress.

Practical Implications
The outcomes in the case of organizations show instant reforms. HR departments must know that there is a dark side to the performance-based cultures the exhaustion and depressions. Practical measures include:

Workload management: Online access and explicit delimitation of the working hours can reduce fatigue. Cultural change: Leadership ought to be a superb role model in terms of mental health by being open with it, by removing perceived stigma and acknowledging disclosure as a right.

Support Systems: The organization structures need to include counseling and peer-support groups and wellness programs.

It is important to note that the concept of individual resilience is not to be the only area of intervention but structural forces behind commercialism should be also considered. Structural pressures: Wellness interventions that defy structural pressures face the risk of turning out to be a band-aid solution where the burden is handed over on to the employees, as Fleming (2014) warns.

Cultural and Global Dimensions
The commercialism has a cross-cultural implication. In collectivist cultures, like in India and China, overwork is usually glorified as devotion to the community, whereas in individualist cultures, like the United States, overwork is presented as a goal to achieve (Kawakami et al., 2020). But in both instances, there is exhaustion and depression of employees. This implies that the cultural frames will vary, but the psychological results will be similar.

The results of the study also echo with the effort-reward imbalance model by Siegrist and Wahrendorf (2016). All the employees in sectors mentioned imbalanced labour where they had a lot of work and minimal rewards, a situation commonly witnessed in the world. Nevertheless, in emerging markets, commercialism can be enhanced by the presence of weaker regulation which means that people can have fewer ways to be shielded against exploitation.

Limitations and Future Directions
Whereas the outcomes are satisfactory, certain shortcomings must be pointed out. The limitation in the extent of generalizability is the size of the sample (25 participants) though this was a qualitative study and depth was more imperative than breadth. The sampled subjects were limited to certain industries and this may not be the case in every business scenario. In addition, there are possibilities of a recall bias or social desirability in self-reported data.

Future research should take into consideration these themes in greater size and more heterogeneous samples including quantitative measures to validate the exhaustion-depression continuum. The cross-cultural comparisons would also shed some light on how the cultural settings are influenced by the experience of the commercialism. Finally, longitudinal designs would be in a position to track the mental health trends with respect to commercial interests over time.

Implications

The implications of the results of this research are immense on theory, organization practice and policy. The study that illustrates the experience of individuals operating under high-stress and commercialized work environments shows the effect of the trading interests on emotional fatigue and depressive functioning.

Theoretical Implications

The study will be helpful in the existing debates on the organizational psychology and mental health research. First, it expounds Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model by showing how commercialism perverts its job demands and depletes its recovery resources by means of autonomy and work-life balance. Second, it illuminates the spectrum of burnout and depression, proving that burnout is no risk factor but a contributing factor to the clinical cases. Finally, but not least, the paper is a contribution to the identity theory in an organizational context, as the business interests permeate the self-concept by attaching the individual value to the performance outcomes. The contributions encourage the researcher to devise holistic models that bring together structural commercial forces and mental wellness.

Practical Implications

The outcomes are the conspicuous burden to organizations with regard to business success. Performance cultures where targets and well-being are not prioritized offer an excellent basis to fatigue and depression. Practical measures include:

Workload control and restrictions: Chronic fatigue can be reduced by establishing healthy boundaries and work schedule and access to digital devices.

Transparency on mental health: The leadership should ensure that it is normal to talk, discuss and minimize stigma on mental distress, which encourages its legitimization.

Support Systems: Peer-support groups, professional counseling and the Employee Assistance Programs should be institutionalized.

Resilience training structural reform: mindfulness and resilience training could be useful but must be accompanied by structural changes in workload and expectations.

The practical implication is that well-being ought to be integrated in organizational culture, rather than a fringe program.

Policy Implications

At a policy level, the study shows that tougher regulatory mechanisms should be in place to guard the mental health of the workers. Governments and industry bodies should prepare standards that:

Physical safety audit Promote use of mental health risk assessment in the work places.

Guard the time that labor and deterrent overtime. Provide incentives to the businesses that adopt sustainable behaviours in the workplace that are conscious of productivity and well-being.

These measures are particularly important in the developing economies where the regulation systems have not been quite strong, and the business pressure is worsened by job insecurity. The policy makers are able to minimize the structural aspects of exhaustion and depression by institutionalizing mental health in occupational safety regulations.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the overlap of commercialism, emotional depletion and depression in business life-paced settings using a qualitative inquiry. Through andragogy with the lived experiences of finance, law, IT and sales professionals, the study found that commercial imperatives strongly inform the workplace culture and staff well-being. The analysis resulted in five themes: the internalisation of the commercial goals as identity, the loss of work-life balance, transformation of exhaustion into depressive conditions, the widespread stigma of disclosure and diverse coping strategies of employees.

These results emphasize the role of commercialism in both increasing the work pressure and transforming self-concept, leaving the employee vulnerable to failure when the performance targets are not achieved. Emotional exhaustion often turned into a clinical depression and stigma also formed a culture of silence that did not allow to be acknowledged or act. Even though there are those who used adaptive coping skills, others used maladaptive abilities that strengthened distress.

The research adds to the body of knowledge through the relationship of burnout and depression as intersecting variables and adds to the organizational identity body of research through the placement of commercialism as a core stressor. In practice, it requires organizations and policymakers to put mental health on a par with profitability. According to the findings, sustainable business success is impossible without ensuring that the emotional state of the workforce is secure.

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