

**ATHLETIC IDENTITY AND ITS RELATION TO ATHLETIC
LIFE QUALITY IN PROFESSIONAL CRICKETERS**

Project submitted for partial fulfilment of the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

IN

PSYCHOLOGY



THAPAR INSTITUTE
OF ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY
(Deemed to be University)

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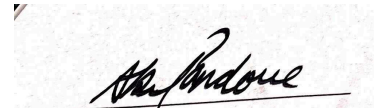
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, ‘Athletic Identity and its relation to Athletic Life Quality in Professional Cricketers’ being submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology, presented in the Thapar School of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, Patiala is a bonafide work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Kriti Vyas, Assistant Professor, Thapar School of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, Patiala, and no part of this project has been submitted for the award of any other degree



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This is to certify that the above statement by the student concerned is correct and accurate to the best of my knowledge.



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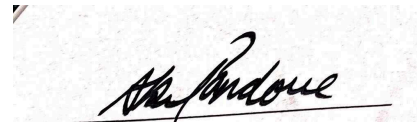
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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I at this moment declare that the work presented in this thesis entitled, 'Athletic Identity And Its Relation To Athletic Life Quality In Professional Cricketers' submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the award of the degree Master of Arts in Psychology, presented in the Thapar School of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, Patiala, is an authentic record of my work carried out under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Kriti Vyas, Assistant Professor, Thapar School of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, Patiala and refers to other researchers' work which is duly listed in the reference section.

The matter embodied in this thesis has not formed the basis for awarding any other degree at this or any other university.

Date- June, 2024



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This is to certify that the above statement by the student concerned is correct, Valid, and accurate to the best of my knowledge.



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ABSTRACT

The present correlational study aimed to explore the relationship between Athletic Identity and Athletic Life Quality. The sample (N= 98) with the age range of M= 22.75, consisted of currently active professional Indian cricketers recruited through snowball sampling. The assessment measures included; the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) Cieslak (2004) and the Athlete Life Quality Scale (ALQS) (Gentner, 2004). Correlational analysis revealed that there is a significant positive relation between athletic identity and athletic life quality. Its sub-components, which are Social Identity, Exclusivity and Negative Affectivity also showed significant relationship with Athletic life quality. Multiple Regression Analysis revealed that Exclusivity accounted for 53.4 % variance in the levels of athletic life quality. This indicates the importance of the social and cognitive identities of the athlete that have a significant impact on their levels of life satisfaction. The findings will facilitate sports psychologists to customize wellness frameworks that may improve psychosocial aspects of quality of life in athletes. Braun & Clark's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data analysis.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the Council of Europe (2001), “Sport means all forms of physical activity which, through casual and organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels. Sports are a multifaceted domain that encompasses not only physical activities but also social, psychological, and developmental dimensions. Beyond the immediate physical benefits like cardiovascular health and improved strength, sports offer a platform for individuals to learn valuable life skills such as teamwork, discipline, resilience, and goal-setting. These skills are transferable to various aspects of life, contributing to holistic personal growth. Moreover, sports have a profound impact on mental well-being. Engaging in regular physical activity has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, promoting overall mental health and a sense of well-being. The camaraderie and social interactions fostered through sports participation also play a crucial role in building social connections and support networks, which are vital for mental and emotional resilience. Morgulec-Adamowicz, et.al. (2011) found that increased participation in sports results in improved quality of life.

1.1 ATHLETIC IDENTITY (AI)

Athletic identity, a facet of self-identity, refers to how deeply one identifies with their role as an athlete. It's a self-concept molded by the information individuals process, shaping both how they perceive themselves and how they engage with information about themselves. Brewer (1993)

defined Athletic identity as the degree with which an individual identifies with the athlete role. The athletic role is an important social dimension of self-concept influencing experiences, relationships with others and pursuit of sport activity (Cornelius, 1995). Past research has indicated that strong athletic identity is linked to a greater importance of athletics in an individual's life (Brewer, 1993)

As per social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), one's identity reflects their connection to specific social groups, like a sports team. Membership in these groups is valued for the benefits it brings, leading individuals to favor and seek validation from these affiliations. Although a person's social environment can assign roles, the extent to which individuals embrace and internalize these roles depends on their acceptance.

For many athletes, their athletic identity forms a significant part of their overall self-concept, influencing their beliefs, behaviors, and aspirations. This identification can be a source of motivation, driving athletes to excel and achieve their goals in their chosen sports.

Hagiwara, G., & Isogai, H. (2014) found a significant correlation between athletic identity and sport commitment in Japanese athletes.

However, an excessively strong athletic identity can also have its challenges. It may lead to an overemphasis on performance, creating pressure and stress that can contribute to burnout and mental health issues. Additionally, an exclusive focus on sports at the expense of other life domains may result in an unbalanced lifestyle and limited personal growth opportunities. Moreover, people with a strong athletic identity find it more difficult to adjust to life after

retirement as shown in a study by Giannone, Z. A. (2016). Results indicated that athletes who had higher athletic identity had elevated depressive symptomology and state anxiety in comparison to athletes with lower athletic identity, after sport retirement.

Understanding the dynamics of athletic identity is crucial for athletes, coaches, parents, and sports psychologists. By promoting a healthy balance between sports involvement and other life pursuits, individuals can cultivate a positive athletic identity that enhances their well-being and performance both on and off the field. Effective strategies for managing athletic identity include fostering diverse interests, setting realistic goals, and prioritizing overall well-being over solely athletic achievements. Studies consistently highlight the positive effects of a robust athletic identity. It correlates with increased emotional attachment to sports, greater participation in physical activity, and enhanced athletic performance. Athletes with a strong sense of identity tend to exhibit higher dedication to training and clearer goal orientation, resulting in improved outcomes and heightened enjoyment of sports. Athletes who strongly identify with their athletic roles tend to demonstrate elevated levels of motivation and dedication, which significantly enhances their performance. This is attributed to their deep emotional investment and passion for their sport, motivating them to train intensively and remain committed as found by Uğraş, S., Mergan, B., Çelik, T. et al. (2024)

Additionally, individuals who highly value their athletic identity are more inclined to engage in physical activity compared to those who don't prioritize this aspect of themselves. A strong sense of athletic identity is associated with improved self-regulation and goal-setting capabilities. Athletes who strongly identify with their sport are more inclined to engage in behaviors that

enhance their performance, such as setting clear performance goals, maintaining concentration, and effectively managing their training routines Chun, Y., Wendling, E., & Sagas, M. (2023). A strong athletic identity also enhances psychological resilience, enabling athletes to handle stress and overcome challenges more effectively. This mental fortitude is vital for sustaining high performance levels, particularly during competitive situations, Uğraş, S., Mergan, B., Çelik, T. et al. (2024). However, it's important to note potential downsides associated with a strong athletic identity. Research by Steinfeldt suggests that elevated athletic identity levels may lead to heightened gender role conflicts and reduced tendencies to seek assistance when needed. Understanding the complexities of athletic identity is crucial for athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists. Striking a balance between embracing one's athletic identity while acknowledging other facets of self-identity can maximize the positive impacts of sports participation while mitigating potential negative consequences. This nuanced approach promotes holistic well-being and performance in sports and life.

1.1.1 Dimensions of Athletic Identity

The three dimensions within the athletic identity quotient—social identity, negative affectivity, and exclusivity—play significant roles in influencing an athlete's quality of life across various aspects.

1. Social identity, as described by Tajfel (2010), pertains to an individual's self-concept derived from their awareness of belonging to a social group, coupled with the emotional value attached to that membership. In the context of sports, team identification or athletic identification with a specific team stems from social identity theory. This sense of

belonging and identification can greatly impact an athlete's well-being, motivation, and overall satisfaction within the sporting environment.

2. Exclusivity within athletic identity refers to the extent to which an individual's self-concept is solely tied to their identity as an athlete, potentially overshadowing other aspects of their identity. This concept, highlighted by Martin, Fogarty, and Albion (2014), underscores the importance of maintaining a balanced self-concept that encompasses various facets of life beyond athletics. Overemphasis on exclusivity may lead to challenges in coping with setbacks or transitions outside the sporting realm.
3. Negative affectivity in athletes refers to a predisposition to experiencing negative emotions like anxiety, fear, or sadness in response to different situations. This dimension of emotional well-being, as noted by Lane (2011), is highly relevant in sports psychology. The ability to manage negative affectivity is crucial for an athlete's performance, resilience, and overall mental health. Strategies focusing on emotional regulation and coping mechanisms can significantly impact an athlete's quality of life.

1.2 ATHLETIC LIFE QUALITY(ALQ)

A person's satisfaction with their life and how content they feel about their circumstances, achievements, beliefs, and understanding of their potential and available resources within their social, cultural, or physical environment are key factors determining their quality of life. According to Cummins, quality of life is a psychological state that encompasses an overall assessment across seven domains: productivity, intimacy, safety, community, material well-being, emotional well-being, and health. The concept of subjective well-being homeostasis, proposed by Cummins and colleagues in 1996, introduces a model comprising cognitive and

emotional components. This model allows for the evaluation of an individual's subjective quality of life.

The measurement of quality of life delves into various aspects of an individual's existence. It considers their level of productivity, which involves their ability to accomplish meaningful tasks and goals. Intimacy refers to the quality of personal relationships and connections with others, while safety pertains to feelings of security and protection within one's environment. Community involvement and belongingness are also crucial components, reflecting a sense of social integration and support. Material well-being encompasses financial stability and access to resources necessary for a comfortable life.

Emotional well-being is central to quality of life, encompassing feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and overall mental wellness. Lastly, health plays a vital role, encompassing physical well-being and access to healthcare services. Cummins' model of subjective well-being homeostasis emphasizes the dynamic interplay between cognitive evaluations and emotional experiences in shaping an individual's overall quality of life. It underscores the importance of both subjective perceptions and objective conditions in determining well-being. Further research and exploration into these domains can provide valuable insights into enhancing quality of life for individuals across diverse contexts. Understanding the multidimensional nature of quality of life allows for tailored interventions and policies aimed at promoting well-being and satisfaction among individuals and communities. Studies have shown a strong correlation between athletes' high quality of life and positive health outcomes, leading to enhanced performance. For example, university athletes typically demonstrate healthier habits like improved sleep routines and

increased physical activity compared to non-athletes, contributing significantly to their overall wellness (Samuels & Tamburello, 2014)

Participating in regular physical activity has been linked to enhanced focus and a higher quality of life. Research supports that athletes generally experience lower levels of depression and enjoy better overall health compared to non-athletes, (Fuller & Sabiston, 2017) The existing literature has addressed the connection between quality of life and significant factors like race, gender, and sexual orientation, yet there has been limited direct focus on evaluating the quality of life among athletes (Wrisberg, 1996).

1.2.1 Factors influencing Athletic Life Quality

The quality of life in athletics encompasses several key elements, including interpersonal relationships with coaches, administrators, and significant others, individual and team performance, health, and the overall enjoyment derived from sports. Let's delve deeper into some of these aspects:

1. Coaches and significant others: Athletes are profoundly influenced by their coaches and parents as they are often the primary figures athletes interact with during their competitive seasons. Positive interactions with these individuals can significantly contribute to an athlete's satisfaction and quality of life. Conversely, excessive parental pressure can have detrimental effects. Research by Scanlan & Lewthwaite (1986) emphasizes the importance of positive adult interactions that are free from undue pressure.

2. Performance: The emphasis placed on winning and the availability of immediate performance feedback can greatly impact athletes' satisfaction and quality of life. When athletes are overly focused on performance outcomes, it can lead to heightened self-consciousness and stress, affecting their overall well-being.
3. Overtraining and recovery: Kellmann (2002) highlights the critical link between overtraining and inadequate recovery periods. Athletes require sufficient time for recovery, especially during intense training phases, to prevent burnout, injuries, and mental fatigue. Neglecting the need for adequate rest and recovery can have adverse effects on an athlete's quality of life and long-term performance.
4. Injury management: Dealing with injuries is a significant aspect of athletic quality of life. Proper injury management, rehabilitation, and support from medical professionals and coaches can contribute to a quicker recovery and a more positive outlook for athletes.
5. Balancing academics and athletics: Many athletes also juggle academic responsibilities alongside their sports commitments. Balancing these aspects of life is crucial for overall well-being and quality of life. Supportive environments that prioritize both academic and athletic success can positively impact an athlete's satisfaction and overall experience.
6. Team dynamics: The camaraderie and support from teammates, along with positive team dynamics, play a vital role in athletic quality of life. A cohesive team environment fosters motivation, enjoyment, and resilience among athletes.

These factors collectively contribute to the multidimensional nature of athletic quality of life, emphasizing the importance of holistic support systems, balanced perspectives on performance, and proactive approaches to health and well-being within the athletic community.

In addition to these, other factors such as coping strategies, social support networks, career transitions, and injury management also influence an athlete's quality of life. Effective support systems, including coaching and psychological resources, play a vital role in promoting well-being and enhancing the overall experience of athletes across different stages of their sporting careers. Understanding and addressing these dimensions within the athletic identity quotient contribute to a comprehensive approach in optimizing an athlete's quality of life, fostering resilience, positive mental health, and sustainable performance outcomes.

1.3 Gender differences in terms of AI and ALQ

Gender differences in sports have been a topic of interest and debate for decades, reflecting broader societal norms and expectations surrounding gender roles. Historically, sports have been seen as predominantly male-dominated, with limited opportunities and support for female athletes. This imbalance has led to disparities in resources, funding, media coverage, and opportunities for participation across various sports disciplines.

One prominent aspect of gender differences in sports is the participation gap between males and females. In many societies, traditional gender norms have often discouraged or limited girls and women from engaging in certain sports or pursuing athletic careers. This has resulted in a lack of representation and visibility of female athletes, particularly in high-profile and mainstream sports. Adolescent girls participated in organized sport at a lower rate than boys, but experienced higher levels of teasing (Amy Slater, Marika Tiggemann, 2011)

Moreover, the cultural perception of sports as inherently masculine or feminine has influenced the types of sports that are encouraged or accessible to individuals based on their gender. For

example, sports like football, basketball, and soccer are often associated with masculinity, while sports like gymnastics, figure skating, and synchronized swimming are seen as more feminine. These stereotypes can influence not only participation rates but also the level of support, recognition, and resources allocated to athletes based on their gender.

Another area of concern is the gender pay gap and disparities in opportunities for professional advancement in sports. Male athletes, especially in popular sports leagues, often receive higher salaries, endorsements, and media attention compared to their female counterparts. This disparity extends to coaching and leadership positions within sports organizations, where women are underrepresented at higher levels of authority and decision-making.

Additionally, gender differences in sports are reflected in the portrayal and representation of athletes in media and advertising. Female athletes are often subjected to objectification, sexualization, and unrealistic beauty standards, which can overshadow their athletic achievements and perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

Despite these challenges, there have been significant strides in recent years towards promoting gender equality and inclusivity in sports. Initiatives focusing on equal opportunities, representation, and recognition for female athletes have gained momentum, leading to increased visibility, support, and opportunities for women and girls in sports.

Overall, addressing gender differences in sports requires a comprehensive approach that challenges traditional norms, promotes diversity and inclusivity, and ensures equal opportunities and recognition for all athletes regardless of gender. Efforts to break down barriers, combat

stereotypes, and promote gender equality in sports are essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable sports landscape.

The literature helps in understanding the relationship between these different life domains of athletes with their overall life satisfaction. Tasiemski, et.al. (2004) studied the relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction in athletes with spinal cord injury (SCI), and their findings suggest that no relationship exists between these two constructs. However, the findings can't be generalized to normal athletes as several other factors play a role. Similarly, Martin, et.al, (2014) found no negative relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction.

In a study by Katie A. Griffith and Kristine A. Johnson showed differences in athletic identity by level of playing, with Division I athletes ranking the athletic life role significantly higher than Division III athletes. The role of athletic identity, social identity and affective identity in the overall wellness of the athletes and their relationship with the life quality levels of the athletes has largely been ignored by the researchers. Gender differences in Athletic Identity and Life Quality are yet to be studied in the context of Indian cricket. As well as differences in both AI and ALQ by virtue of career duration and level of sport participation. Even though there has been research on sports like football, tennis and shooting, there hasn't been much research to examine athletic identity in Professional Cricket players. There hasn't been much research done on an Indian population in this context.

1.4 Rationale

Optimizing sports performance does not rely only on the sports-related aspects of the training, instead, it's an integrated approach that takes into account all aspects of the athletes' life having an impact on their performance and they have been worked upon to augment their

performance (Gardner & Moore 2006). Sports psychology focuses on the psychological position of the athletes, their characteristics, and well-being while working on their skills to enhance the psychological well-being of the athletes at both the competitive level and in overall life (Hardy et al., 2010).

The role of athletic identity, social identity and affective identity in the overall wellness of the athletes and their relationship with the life quality levels of the athletes has largely been ignored by the researchers. This study tried to explore the relationship between athletic identity, its sub-components, and athletic quality of life. Life quality may have favorable or unfavorable associations with these constructs, directly or indirectly and this needs to be explored. The study aims to explore how the different dimensions of athletic identity, including exclusivity, negative affectivity, and social identity, are related to the overall quality of life experienced by athletes. Specifically, it seeks to understand how a strong or exclusive athletic identity, negative affectivity related to the athletic role, and social connections within the sports context impact an athlete's well-being, satisfaction, and overall life quality. The findings will provide insight to sports psychologists and counselors on the role of athletic identity in the overall life satisfaction levels and wellness of athletes.

There remains a noticeable gap in understanding the gender-specific experiences and challenges faced by cricketers. While research on cricket often focuses on male players, there is a growing recognition of the need to explore the unique experiences of female cricketers and to understand the challenges that both male and female cricketers encounter in their sporting careers.

The study aims to address the gender-specific experiences and challenges faced by cricketers. This includes examining how gender norms, societal expectations, access to resources, and support systems influence the development and expression of athletic identity and the subsequent impact on the quality of life for male and female athletes. There is a lack of research done on cricket players as well as on an Indian population.

By exploring these variables and sub-scales, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between athletic identity and life quality, as well as the gender-specific factors that shape athletes' experiences and well-being within the sporting context.

1.5 Objectives

1. To quantitatively study the relation between Athletic Identity and Athletic Life Quality in cricketers.
2. To quantitatively study the relation between the subcomponents of Athletic Identity and Athletic Life Quality in cricketers.
3. To qualitatively study the difference in life experience of Male and Female cricketers.
4. To qualitatively study the different challenges faced by cricketers in general.

1.6 HYPOTHESES

H1: There will be a positive correlation between Athletic identity and Athletic Life Quality.

H2: Social Identity will have a significant relationship with Athletic Life Quality.

H3: Exclusivity will have a significant relationship with Athletic Life Quality.

H4: Negative Affectivity will have a significant relationship with Athletic Life Quality.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Study 1

2.1 Sample

For data collection, 120 participants were approached, out of which 110 people gave their consent to fill out the questionnaire. After careful analysis of the data filled by the participants and removing the outliers, the final analysis was done for 98 participants (All male cricket players) The sample was collected through the means of an online questionnaire through a google form. The data was collected from cricketers across India. The athletes belonged to the age-group between 18-30 years.

Table 1.1 Demographic Details

| Demographic Detail | Range | Percentage |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Age | 18-30 | 100% |
| Gender | Male | 95.4% |
| | Female | 4.6% |
| Years of playing | 2-4 | 17.6% |
| | 5-7 | 17.6% |
| | 8-10 | 21.3% |
| | 11-13 | 13% |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| | 14 and above | 30.6% |
| Type of sports | Cricket | 99.1% |
| | Other | 0.9% |
| Currently Playing at | College/institute level | 32.4% |
| | State level | 33.3% |
| | National level | 33.3% |
| | International level | 1% |

2.2 Design

The snowball design method was used, also known as chain sampling or network sampling, snowball sampling begins with one or more study participants. It then continues on the basis of referrals from those participants. *(Nikolopoulou, K.,2023)*.

2.3 Tools used

2.3.1 Athletic identity measurement scale

The AIMS-plus was created by B.E. Brewer. The athletic Identity Measurement Scale AIMS is a standardized, psychometrically sound measure that can facilitate the testing of athletic identity (AI). A 7-item version of the AIMS was used. The 7 items encompass social (3 items), cognitive (4 items), and affective (4 items) elements of athletic identity. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Agree Somewhat, 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 5 = Disagree Somewhat, 6 = Disagree, 7 = Disagree Strongly). The items evaluated the thoughts and

feelings from athletes' daily experiences. Alpha reliability was found to be between .79-.85 for this study.

2.3.2 Athlete life quality scale

Athlete Life Quality Scale (ALQS). The ALQS (*Gentner, 2004*) is a measure of how satisfied an athlete is with various aspects of his or her life. It is a 15 items scale. Higher scores indicate a greater quality of life. It is scored on a 7 points Likert scale of 1=very dissatisfied to 7=very satisfied. Cronbach alpha reliability of the tool was found to be .90. The general life-satisfaction subscale was used in the current study to assess the levels of life satisfaction of the athletes.

2.4 Procedure

The data for the study was collected through the means of an online questionnaire through google form using a mixture of snowball and convenience sampling. The first section of the form consisted of ethical guidelines. Participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality of their responses. Once the participant gave their consent to be a part of the study, they were asked to fill their respective demographic details. The next section includes the AIMS which consists of 7 questions followed by another section consisting of the ALQS which consists of 15 questions. The last section was attributed to collect the acknowledgement of the participants for the second part of the study, i.e., the interview. The results for quantitative research obtained were put through SPSS for data analysis through which further interpretations of the results were obtained.

Study 2

2.5 SAMPLE

Age Range of the sample is 18 to 30 years.

2.6 Design

Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview explores how female cricketer's life experience differs from male cricketers and what are the different challenges faced by cricketers in general.

2.7 Procedure

Qualitative data was collected and semi-structured interviews were conducted where the differences in life experience of male and female cricketers, and the challenges faced by cricketers in general were evaluated using Braun and Clarke Thematic analysis

2.8 DATA ANALYSIS

The results for qualitative research were analyzed using Braun and Clarke Thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Study 1

To meet the objective of the study, statistical analyses were used to compute the values.

Correlation and Regression was calculated by IBM SPSS software.

Table 1.2 Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------|----------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Social Identity | 98 | 3 | 21 | 16.98 | 4.154 |
| Exclusivity | 98 | 2 | 14 | 11.21 | 2.898 |
| Neg. Affectivity | 98 | 2 | 14 | 10.67 | 2.921 |
| AI Total | 98 | 7 | 49 | 38.87 | 8.779 |
| Total | 98 | 15 | 105 | 82.04 | 18.239 |
| Valid | 98 | | | | |

Table 1.2 reflects the descriptive statistics of scales used in the current study.

Table 1.3 Correlation between Athletic identity, Social Identity, Exclusivity, Negative Affectivity & Athletic Life Quality

| | AI SS-SI | AI SS-E | AI SS-NA | AI TOTAL | ALQ TOTAL |
|-----------|----------|---------|----------|----------|-----------|
| AI SS-SI | 1 | | | | |
| AI SS-E | .797** | 1 | | | |
| AI S-NA | .540** | .576** | 1 | | |
| AI TOTAL | .903** | .909** | .785** | 1 | |
| ALQ TOTAL | .605** | .734** | .464** | .699** | 1 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Table 1.3 shows the Pearson Correlation between Athletic Identity, its sub-components and Athletic Life Quality. Findings show that there is a significant relationship between Social Identity and ALQ, $r = .605$, Exclusivity and ALQ, $r = .734$, Negative Affectivity and ALQ, $r = .464$ and Athletic Identity Total and ALQ, $r = .699$

Table 1.4 Regression analysis for Exclusivity

| Model | Unst. Coefficients | | Stnd. Coefficients | t | sig | Adjusted r square |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------|------------|--------------------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| 1 (constant) | 30.242 | 5.503 | | .5985 | .000 | .534 |
| AI SS-E | 4.619 | .436 | .734 | 10.584 | .000 | |

Table 1.4 shows the results of Multiple Regression Analysis, where the adjusted r square is .534, which means that Exclusivity accounts for 53.4% of the variance in Athletic Life Quality and the B value is 4.619

Study 2

Table 2 Qualitative analysis of data

| THEMES | Sub-Themes |
|---------------|-------------------|
| | |

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Sports Journey of male and female cricketers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Source of inspiration 2. Joining an academy 3. Resources for learning |
| 2. Challenges common among male and female cricketers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constant pressure, hard work/anxiety 2. Hectic Schedule 3. Injuries 4. Financial problems 5. Lack of support 6. Lack of proper infrastructure 7. Biased selection process |
| 3. Challenges unique to male cricketers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tougher competition 2. Political involvement 3. Media scrutiny & pressure |
| 4. Challenges unique to female cricketers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paid less 2. Lack of facilities 3. Lack of female coaches 4. Biological issues 5. Societal pressure and judgment 6. Safety concerns 7. Not enough credit, fame, recognition. |
| 5. Facilitators common | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support system |

| | |
|---|---|
| among male and female cricketers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Financial support 3. Performance enhancing tools 4. Improved infrastructure 5. Increasing awareness about a career in Cricket |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| 6. Facilitators unique to male cricketers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Higher financial compensation 2. Higher incentive to perform |
| 7. Facilitators unique to female cricketers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing opportunities for women, number of women playing 2. Increase in match fees 3. Changing attitude and perception about women playing |
| 8. Impact of challenges | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mental health 2. Dealing with failure |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 9. Areas to improve | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coaching 2. Mental health 3. More clarity on the selection process and criteria 4. Infrastructure |
|----------------------------|---|

Table 2 indicates various themes and sub-themes which were concluded from the interview transcripts. The theme Sports journey of male and female cricketers is further categorized into the sub-themes source of inspiration, joining an academy and resources for learning. The theme Challenges common among male and female cricketers is divided into constant pressure, hard work/anxiety, hectic schedule, injuries, financial problems, lack of support, lack of proper infrastructure and biased selection processes. Challenges unique to male cricketers include tougher competition, political involvement and media scrutiny and pressure. Challenges unique to female cricketers are paid less, lack of facilities, lack of female coaches, biological issues, societal pressure, safety concerns and not getting enough credit, fame, recognition. The next theme is facilitators common among male and female cricketers and this is further divided into support system, financial support, performance enhancing tools, improved infrastructure and increasing awareness about a career in cricket. Facilitators unique to male cricketers include higher financial compensation and higher incentive to perform. Facilitators unique to female cricketers include increasing opportunities for women, increase in number of women playing, increase in match fees, and changing attitude and perception about women playing. Impact of challenges includes mental health, and dealing with failure. While areas to improve include coaching, mental health, more clarity on the selection process and criteria and infrastructure.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Study 1:

The findings of this study provide valuable insight into the relationship between Athletic Identity, its sub-components and Athletic Life Quality. It was hypothesized that Athletic Identity and its sub-domains will likely predict better life quality in athletes. Research findings support the hypothesis, however, previous research has documented mixed results when it comes to the relationship between these two variables. Elasky (2006), in his research, found that no relationship exists between athletic identity and life satisfaction. Similarly, Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner, and Blaikley, (2004) in their study failed to find any significant relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. However, their study involved people with spinal cord injury (SCI), therefore there is a limitation when it comes to the generalization of these findings. The Quantitative Analysis revealed correlation between Athletic Identity and Athletic Life Quality. Findings suggest that there is a relationship between Social Identity and Athletic Life Quality and between Negative Affectivity and Athletic Life Quality. There is a significant positive correlation between Exclusivity and Athletic Life Quality. This is in tandem with the results of a study by Fuller (2014), who found that Exclusive Athletic Identity relates to more confidence and better self-image. Thus, all the four hypotheses were accepted. Athletes' life continuously revolves around physical activity and this life pattern has been linked to greater life satisfaction (Moraes et al.,2009) mainly because this develops the feeling of competence in the athletes and improves their motivation levels in them (Escartí et al. 2004). In line with these arguments, it is safe to state that previous research provides some evidence of the contribution of athletic identity in improving the quality of life of athletes and in turn help in improving their mental health and well-being. Morgulec-Adamowicz, et.al. (2011).

Study 2:

Theme 1: Sports Journey In Male And Female Cricketers

The theme sports journey in male and female cricketers looks at how athletes grow and succeed in cricket. It covers their early influences, the decision to join a cricket academy, and the resources they use to improve. This theme highlights the different paths and challenges faced by both men and women in the sport, showing their dedication and progress from beginners to professional players.

Sub-theme 1.1: Source of inspiration

"Source of Inspiration" refers to the various individuals, events, or experiences that significantly motivate and influence cricketers throughout their sports journey. In this context, source of inspiration highlights the roots of their motivation to start, key role models and pivotal moments that kickstarted their passion for cricket and overall journey as athletes.

In the context of both male and female cricketers, sources of inspiration were found to be- Role Models: Influential people such as family members, coaches, fellow cricketers, or famous athletes who inspire them to achieve excellence.

Participant 1 stated *“Firstly, I used to be very excited seeing Rahul Dravid, that bowlers are running in, running in, and he is just like standing there like a wall. So, I used to see how patient he is. That really engrossed me. And obviously Virat Kohli has been everyone's inspiration.”*

Participant 2 said *“So my role model currently is Ravindra Jadeja as he's been the best all rounder in my eyes and he's done good with ball and bat and he's a fielding inspiration as well. I've looked up to Virat Kohli as a batting example also.” “My favorite player at that time was Harbhajan as I'm an offspinner. So I really looked up to him and like, tried to bowl like him, like, get that spin and rotation, revolution on the ball.”*

Participant 3 reported *“Like firstly Yuvraj Singh, his dedication because you know, he was suffering from cancer and after that he is playing professionally and about MS Dhoni his calmness and mindset is very good, like how the team will perform under pressure.”*

Participant 7 said, *“My main role model is James Anderson. After seeing him, I saw what actually happens in fast bowling. His mindset is very good, even if he is going for runs, he will not give up. He is very confident. And he has a lot of skill”*

Significant Events: Events that were pivotal in the individual taking up the sport. These can be big sporting occasions that inspire a young person, like a World Cup or feats of individual brilliance in the world of athletics like Usain Bolt winning gold in the 100 m race at the Olympics.

Participant 3 stated that *“I started playing cricket when I was 13 after watching the 2011 World Cup final.”*

Participant 6 said *“At that time (Women’s World Cup), in 2017, I think Harry didi scored 171. At that time, Harry didi became very famous. That’s when cricket started. I came to know about women’s cricket”*

Participant 11 reported *“There was a World Cup match. I saw that girls play as well. So I thought that I should play as well. I didn’t have much interest before, but my dad told me to try. I tried and I liked it.”*

Participant 17 said, *“So it all started when I was 7 or 8 years old when I first watched the 2011 World Cup, that started it all for me. It gave me a push to start pursuing cricket as a dream.”*

Support Systems: The encouragement and backing from family, friends, mentors, and the wider community that made them take up the sport. Strong support systems are essential for establishing a successful career in cricket. These systems offer the resources, guidance, and encouragement young athletes require to hone their skills, build confidence, and overcome the early challenges of their sports journey. More importantly, they provide the encouragement to choose sport as a career.

Participant 1 said *“My cousin used to play for our district. So, whenever he used to be at my home or I used to go at his place, he used to teach me cricket. So, it was like a brother bonding session between the both of us. My father also used to play for his university. So, we used to play together.”*

Participant 4 stated *“Actually my father used to really like cricket, so I used to play with him, when I started playing cricket, I really liked it so I started playing it as a professional.”*

Participant 7 said *“My father motivated me a lot. I learned a lot from him, like how to handle every situation. He has also taught me cricket as my first coach.”*

Participant 8 said *“When I was around 10-11 years old. My sister plays cricket. My uncle's daughter plays cricket. She saw me and told me that I have talent. So, I started playing cricket.”*

Participant 11 reported *“Everyone plays at home. My dad is a coach and my brother plays as well. I used to go to the ground with them. I wanted to play. That's how I got interested”*

Sub-Theme 1.2 : Joining an Academy

The decision to join a cricket academy marks a significant milestone in the sports journey of both male and female cricketers. This step is often motivated by a desire to receive professional training, access better facilities, and gain structured guidance from experienced coaches. For many young athletes, academies provide an environment where they can refine their techniques, develop strategic thinking, and build physical fitness. The transition to an academy also introduces them to a community of like-minded peers, fostering a sense of camaraderie and competition. This supportive setting is crucial for developing the discipline and resilience required to succeed in cricket. Additionally, the experience at an academy can help cricketers navigate the path to higher levels of competition, including state and national teams, by providing exposure to scouts and a broader network within the sport.

Participant 1 said, *“And when I was in grade 4th, I think, that's the first time I asked my father that I want to go to an academy. So, like for 3 to 4 years, I used to go to an academy only during the summer breaks and that's how I got into cricket.”*

Participant 2 stated, *“ So there was a cricket academy in my school also. So I started there when I was seven. And I have continued it till 10th. Then I have like, played more corporate cricket also.”*

Participant 10 said, *“So, there was this academy in Delhi, Achievers Cricket Academy under the coaching of Sohail Dhan. So, he was my first coach. He coached me for like 5-6 years from the age of 7 to 13.”*

Sub-Theme 1.3 : Resources for learning

Access to comprehensive resources is essential in the sports journey of male and female cricketers, significantly influencing their development and success. Key among these resources is the guidance provided by coaches, mentors, and sports psychologists. Coaches offer invaluable technical training and tactical advice, helping players refine their skills and understand the strategic aspects of the game. Mentors, often experienced players or former professionals, provide career advice, share personal experiences, and offer encouragement, helping young cricketers navigate the challenges of their athletic careers. Sports psychologists play a critical role by assisting athletes in developing mental resilience, managing stress, and maintaining focus, which are crucial for high performance in competitive settings. These professionals also help athletes build confidence and maintain a positive mindset, both on and off the field. These resources not only enhance the cricketers' physical abilities but also their psychological well-being, ensuring they are well-prepared to achieve their full potential in the sport. Kinnerk et al. (2019) studied the importance of coaches' behavior in practice sessions and its impact on athlete development and performance. Sports psychologists play a critical role in an athlete's life by addressing both performance and mental well-being. Research indicates that the integration of psychological skills training (PST) into an athlete's routine can significantly enhance their performance and mental resilience (Smith & Jones, 2021)

Participant 7 stated, *“My coaches like Vijay sir and Avi sir increased my confidence. They fixed minor mistakes. That's why I improved a lot. They also helped me to improve my fitness and bowl well.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“I did decide to go and seek out a sports psychologist's help. So, I went to Guru Nanak Dev University. I went to the psychology department there. And they had this meter which measures your stress levels. I was not playing, I was sitting in the clinic normally. They measured my stress levels. They were very high and I was not even playing at that time. At that moment, I was with a doctor talking to a doctor. So, they were like, when you are actually playing, just imagine how high your stress levels must be or how anxious you must be when you are actually playing. So, that was an eye-opener for me and my family. I think a sports psychologist is very important. You need to talk about the mental side of things with a competent person. It's important.”*

Participant 11 said she needs a coach to be watching her at all times in order to perform well, *“I feel like I need a person to stand on my head, tell me how it is, tell me what I'm doing right, tell me what I'm doing wrong.”*

Theme 2: Challenges Common Among Male And Female Cricketers

The theme challenges common among male and female cricketers explores the difficulties both genders face in their cricket careers. It includes dealing with constant pressure to perform, managing a hectic schedule with frequent matches and training, and coping with injuries that can

hinder progress. These shared challenges highlight the resilience and determination required by cricketers to succeed in the sport, regardless of gender.

Sub-Theme 2.1: Constant pressure, hard work/anxiety

Cricketers, regardless of gender, face numerous challenges, with common themes including constant pressure, the need for hard work, and pervasive anxiety. Both male and female players experience the relentless demand to perform at high levels, which can lead to significant mental strain. This constant pressure stems from the expectation to consistently deliver peak performances, whether in international matches or domestic leagues. Hard work is an integral part of their daily routine, involving rigorous training sessions, strict fitness regimes, and continuous skill development. Such dedication, while essential for success, often leads to physical and mental exhaustion. Anxiety is another prevalent issue, exacerbated by the fear of failure, public scrutiny, and the competitive nature of the sport. The psychological burden can be immense, impacting their overall well-being and performance. Addressing these challenges through comprehensive support systems, including sports psychologists, is crucial for helping cricketers maintain a balanced and healthy approach to their careers. A systematic review on mental health and well-being in high-performance settings emphasized that high stress levels are associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including depressive symptoms and decreased life satisfaction (Gerber et al., 2013). These findings are consistent across various studies, suggesting that the intense environment of professional cricket significantly impacts athletes' mental health. Moreover, a systematic review and meta-analysis on female student-athletes revealed that stress, anxiety, and depression are prevalent among this group, influenced by the rigorous demands of their sports programs and the pressure to excel academically and

athletically, (British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2023) This underscores the need for tailored psychological interventions to support athletes in handling the unique pressures they face

Participant 3 stated, *“Yes, many times, because you know the, the net pressure and the match pressure is very different. Because when you play match, there is too much nervousness, like any player feels. So yeah, it affects.”*

Participant 9 said, *“The most challenging part of cricket is obviously the performance, because in today's era of competition, even if two matches go then everyone is after you. So that's the pressure mainly.”* And also, *“Thoughts were very negative like I don't want to play that tournament, but my parents had told me at that time that you should take a chance. I was very mentally upset. Because even the coaches were not supporting. And there was pressure. Everyone was saying that you are not scoring. That was the pressure, but one has to come out of it.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“Your mind becomes your enemy in a way that you start overthinking about stuff. You start putting yourself under extra pressure to perform. Cricket in our country, it's more of a... It's not just a game for us. It's a very big thing for us. Our happiness, sorrows, everything is related to cricket. For most of the cricketers. It's not just a game. It creates extra pressure on you. You create extra pressure on yourself. By expecting too much from yourself. When you want to achieve greater things. Whenever you are not able to perform. It does create a lot of mental pressure.”*

Participant 17 has trouble sleeping a night before any important match, *“Yes, of course There are some point of times like any kind of tournament if you are playing the finals or any knockout game your mind is just gonna think man this is the last chance to prove, and I have problems sleeping on a big match night.”*

Sub-Theme 2.2: Hectic Schedule

Cricketers face numerous challenges, with one of the most significant being their hectic schedules. The nature of professional cricket involves a grueling calendar filled with international tours, domestic leagues, and intense training sessions, leaving little time for rest and recovery. This demanding schedule often results in physical and mental fatigue, impacting players' performance and overall well-being. The constant travel can lead to disrupted sleep patterns, further increasing fatigue and reducing the time available for proper rest. Studies have shown that such relentless schedules can lead to increased stress and burnout among athletes, highlighting the need for better management of their time and more structured support systems to help them cope with these pressures (Gerber et al., 2018). Moreover, the pressure to perform consistently in different formats of the game adds to the mental strain, as players must continuously adapt to varying conditions and expectations. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes adequate rest periods, mental health support, and individualized training programs to ensure cricketers can maintain their performance levels without compromising their health (British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2023)

Participant 1 stated, *“Obviously, you know, (you miss) the family get-togethers, the friends, the parties, everything. The normal life, what a teenager goes through. Sometimes, I have to go here*

and there. I was usually going to school, practice, tuitions and that was my day for like 4-5 years. Rather, I would see people of my age, my peers enjoying with each other, randomly going somewhere, randomly going to parties and all.”

Participant 2 said, *“For me, it was more like a strict schedule for me, I was going to school every day, like from 8am to 2pm. Then I'd practice from three to seven daily. And then I was like working on my like homework and studies and etc. And on weekends, I would be playing matches and etc.”* And also, *“I couldn't give my time to like, other people and like, personal gatherings etc. I was not able to attend those things. I was already like, busy playing cricket, or practicing, etc. So yeah, there were some sacrifices.”*

Participant 3 said, *“ Like I'm a non medical student. So firstly morning, I went to like my tuition classes and after that in the evening, after six I went to night sessions for cricket till 12-1am.”*

Participant 4 stated, *“I think the biggest sacrifice we make as cricketers is that we don't have a social life, we socialize really less especially when we are playing cricket consistently, we just keep on traveling and training, off-seasons are even tougher, when we come home, we have to train harder.”*

Participant 8 said, *“I have rarely been staying at home for the last year or so. I come home for just one or two days and then I have to leave again for matches”* and *“Yes, it is mentally tiring. I was playing domestic cricket, then I played a tournament for the junior Indian team, then I got the WPL in between. I have to play another domestic season after that. Sometimes you feel that you need some rest. I need some time at home,”* as well as, *“But they kept it at a time when our*

body needed rest. Our body needed rest. Our mind needed rest. We needed a little pause from the game. So, at that time, we didn't want to play that match.”

Participant 12 said, *“I never attended any birthday parties because we were usually playing matches or maybe going for our practice, which is early morning and then in the evening. So no birthday parties, no trekking, no school trips, no social gatherings, nothing at all,”* and *“Then you're missing out on those, all the festivals. You're always out playing a match, be it New Year, be it Diwali or be it any function. So being away from home, missing all these and then getting up early and toiling hard in the sun or maybe all sorts of weather, we have to go out there and perform. And then if you are not performing, there's an added pressure from yourself only that, yeah, you have to perform now because we've been working hard all this year and now those are the matches where we have to perform. So all these were, but these were the sacrifices.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“ It does get very hectic because of the office thing. After that, I have to manage the gym thing as well. Then I have to go for my practice as well. I coach kids as well. So, I have a lot of work to do. So, it does get very hectic. Sometimes, mentally, you do feel burnt out. When that happens, I do take a few days off. I do try and balance it some way.”*

Sub-Theme 2.3: Injuries

In the demanding world of professional cricket, injuries pose a significant challenge, often jeopardizing careers and impacting team performance. Cricketers are susceptible to a variety of injuries due to the sport's physical demands, including repetitive stress injuries like tendinitis, acute injuries such as fractures from fast deliveries, and muscle strains from the intense running

and abrupt directional changes on the field. A study by Stretch (2003) highlighted that fast bowlers are particularly prone to lumbar spine injuries due to the high stress and twisting motions involved in their delivery actions. Furthermore, Orchard et al. (2002) found that muscle strains, particularly in the hamstrings and groin, are prevalent among batsmen and fielders due to the explosive movements required during play. The high-intensity nature of cricket, with its combination of explosive actions and prolonged periods of play, places immense strain on the body, particularly on joints, muscles, and tendons. Consequently, players must engage in rigorous conditioning and rehabilitation regimes to prevent and recover from injuries, balancing the fine line between maintaining peak performance and avoiding overexertion. The psychological toll of injuries can also be profound, as players grapple with the fear of re-injury and the pressure to return to form swiftly (Reardon, 2016). This constant battle against physical limitations underscores the resilience and fortitude required to sustain a successful cricketing career.

Participant 6 said, *“I think overcoming an injury is the most challenging. Recently I had an injury and it took me a long time to recover. It is mentally and physically challenging to overcome an injury,”* and *“I was scared that I would get injured again. So I had to go to rehab regularly. I wanted to recover soon.”*

Participant 7 said, *“Last to last year I got a back injury. We had practice matches before the senior district, I couldn't bowl because of that. I rested for a month. It was very challenging for me. I didn't warm up properly and started bowling just like that, because I didn't have much knowledge of how to take care of my body. After that I rested for a month and then I started bowling again,”* and *“Yes, I did have negative thoughts like, only I was sitting outside and*

everyone else was playing. I wanted to play too. That why did it have to happen at such an important time.”

Participant 11 stated, *“Last year, during the district matches, my knee was hurt, broke my meniscus. I played 6 matches in the district. So, I had to take painkillers to play matches. And I had to play with 3 kneecaps and a brace. So, that was the most challenging for me.”* She played with an injury because she couldn't miss important matches, *“When one of our family doctor came, I told him that the match is important because it was my last year of u-19. So, I could not take any risk that later there will be a point that because she did not play district, she can't play state. So, then I told him honestly that yes, I have to play. So, he gave me medicines, 3-4 painkillers etc. And I mean, he gave creams to apply and he told me to apply knee cap as much as possible. So, that's it. Okay. Warm up etc. He told me that I have to do standing, not running before the match.”*

Participant 10 said, *“Injury has become a part and parcel of my career and I think it will always be there. All I can do is try to prevent it for as long as I can. Initially, we have to identify what are the weak points in our body. Once we identify it, we start working on them. I started working on them to delay that process of getting injured again. Because I know once you're burnt out after a season, there are going to be a few niggles here and there in your body. You can't really change that. All you can do is focus more on your recovery and the diet plays a crucial role in preventing such injuries. But injuries have always been there. I have missed a few seasons because of my injury. I have always gotten injured at all the wrong times. I have accepted it gracefully now. It was during my under-19 only when I played for Haryana. I debuted for the team in the one-day tournament. When the day's tournament was coming up, I twisted my ankle*

while fielding, I was immediately ruled out. My team was going to be announced and I was in the team. But since I was injured, I was ruled out,” as well as how it made him feel, “I was disappointed at that time. I was very young. I was blaming everyone around me. This has happened because of you. I was just lashing out at everyone.”

Participant 13 reported, “ *Injuries have played a major role in, I guess in every sportsmans career injuries are a very major part and for me I mean I guess all my fingers have been fractured though I managed playing with them but then there were a few other injuries, I mean while playing a Ranji game or something while playing a Ranji game or something I got my thumb injured and after that I wasn't able to play for like three odd months so and working out doing fitness training and everything day in day out for the past six seven months for those matches and just before the match or just playing that match you get injured so that has been very frustrating I would say I've been very frustrated at those times it was the Ranji Trophy one day matches were there and we had to go and play in Ranchi and the wickets were very supportive for the spinners so the head coach had a word with me that I'll make you play all the matches and before that season I was the highest wicket taker for Punjab as well in that format so he was like that you'll play all the eight games and whatever you perform or not perform I am giving you all the matches so that you can just go all out and give your best okay and he made my role clear also that I have to bat at this number and all and we were playing two days before leaving for Ranji we were playing a practice match against UP so I bowled and while attempting a caught and bowled, I got hit on my thumb so I thought it is like it was like normal only but I wasn't able to move my thumb it was all swollen up and everything but still I continued playing that match I somehow managed that game. Next day we had to anyhow leave in the evening so I went for the x-rays and everything so the doctor did the x-ray from two angles so one angle was*

like the normal side of my thumb and the other was from where there was a fracture in my thumb there was a clear gap so I thought that I'll be able to manage playing because I had played with broken fingers before. So the way to heal fingers is you give the support to your finger with your other finger and tie it and then play the match somehow. You manage it somehow, but you can't do it with the thumb. The fact that I am getting to play, even the coaches told me that I'll get recovered and it's a finger injury only, I'll manage so I sent the other angle of thumb to the physio that I am fine and I'll probably be fine and that was like the covid time so I thought that over there also we'll have three or four days off so I'll recover even more better and I'll be able to play so that's how I started that's how I mean I went across with the team to Ranchi but there after two three days it kept getting worse, so the thumb was not getting better at all it wasn't moving and then even my physio told you can't give support to the thumb with any of the fingers because it's separate, so you won't be able to hold the bat or ball so that's when before the match I had to tell the coach that my thumb is injured I mean I had to come back and get a surgery done with the wiring and all and get it sorted it took me around three months from that time, even I missed my red ball season after that all the matches of that season I missed and because of that I was very frustrated and if you see being a sportsman you've been working so hard for this moment and then there was a little thumb injury even of all my body part and everything was fine I mean I could run around I could jog I could do everything but just at the skill which I needed the thumb was very much important in that even for holding the bat and the ball that wasn't fine so I was very much frustrated when I came back I was talking to myself in the mirror that what is wrong I mean I'm all fine but I'm not able to play so that was very frustrating but then somehow two three days I guess these are the things I mean injuries and everything that help you even reflect back on yourself and even think about how to get out of it

and what to do and I mean you slowly once because it's not the first time you get through injuries at different times but obviously the timing matters at times in the off season if you get injured you have that time to recover but I would say I have got through many injuries like this in off seasons I've got through even in other phases also but this was like at the very crucial stage where I had to miss all the tournament which which wasn't the case with me earlier it hasn't happened to me earlier so it was tough but then that's how you come out of it and I mean you tend to give your best and try to do whatever possible things you can in those period.”

Sub-Theme 2.4: Financial Problems

Financial problems remain a significant challenge for many cricketers, particularly those not playing at the international level. Domestic players often struggle with inadequate salaries, which are not commensurate with the rigorous demands and risks of the sport. Limited opportunities for lucrative endorsements and sponsorships further exacerbate this issue, leaving many reliant solely on their match fees and retainers. According to a study by Sam and Kaur (2016), domestic cricketers often face financial instability due to low wages and insufficient financial support from cricket boards. Additionally, the relatively short career span of cricketers, compounded by the risk of career-ending injuries, necessitates prudent financial planning and management. The lack of financial literacy and post-retirement planning support can lead to difficulties in transitioning to life after cricket, resulting in financial instability (Peters & Houghton, 2017). Even among those who reach international acclaim, the disparity in earnings between players from different countries can be stark, influenced by the financial health and administrative policies of their respective cricket boards (Rana, 2018). This economic uncertainty underscores the need for

comprehensive financial education and support systems within the cricketing fraternity to ensure the long-term well-being of players.

Participant 1 said, *“Financial stability is a very important factor in today's world. If you are not financially able, there are going to be a lot of struggles you are going to face.”*

Participant 6 said, *“Yes, of course. The equipment is costly. There are problems.”*

Participant 8 said, *“I mean, I was from a middle-class family from the beginning. So, I never bought gears for myself, like, I never bought equipment, pads, etc. I used my sister's or brother's. They used to give me everything they had. So, they didn't invest so much in me,” and “So, it is difficult at some level. Somewhere, that (Financial problems) holds them back.”*

Participant 9 said, *“Yeah, it's very tough for him to become a cricketer. Because nowadays cricket is very fast. So more equipment is needed. Diet is needed. Fitness is needed. Due to competition everyone is investing. So if one is financially unstable, he will suffer.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“Financial stability is very important. I think most of the cricketers who don't have financial stability, they are under a little extra pressure to perform. Because you are trying to make a career out of cricket and if you don't have financial stability, it does become an added pressure on you. Because at the end of the day, money is very important. So, if you are not performing in cricket, you are not earning and if you are not earning, then how are you going to live? So, most of the cricketers either don't perform well in the space because of that added pressure or they tend to leave the game and start something else so that they can earn money.”*

Sub-Theme 2.5: Lack of support

Lack of support is a profound challenge faced by cricketers, encompassing insufficient backing from cricket boards, inadequate access to mental health resources, and limited encouragement from family members. Many players, particularly those at the domestic level, experience a dearth of organizational support, which can impede their development and well-being. According to a study by Choudhury and Chatterjee (2018), domestic cricketers in several countries report inadequate infrastructure, limited coaching support, and insufficient medical facilities. Additionally, the mental health of cricketers is often neglected, with a study by Rice et al. (2016) highlighting that many players suffer from anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues without adequate mental health resources or counseling services available. These gaps in support systems underscore the necessity for cricketing bodies to invest in comprehensive support structures that address the physical, mental, and post-career needs of cricketers.

Participant 3 stated, *“Yes, like I told you like in my ninth class, I failed in first semester maths. So, after that, they (parents) forced me to not play cricket, just to study study study. So, yes, at that time, they were not supportive.”*

Participant 10 said, *“After getting into the under-23 team, I wasn't really given any matches. So, I used to get just one match per season and no matter whatever I did during that match, I knew that I won't be selected for the next game. So, that was like a very challenging time for me to contemplate everything and move forward with that.”*

Participant 12 said, “Yeah, being a sports person, I guess there are a lot of challenges you have to go through. But then, I mean, at every other step you have to face, I mean, either there are selections or there is something else. But I would say for me, more than challenge, I mean, I represented India in the Junior World Cup for under-19. So, back then, all the players who represented India with me were selected in the Ranji Trophy for their respective teams and all. But when I came back from the World Cup, I didn't get that recognition from the state, I mean, from our state. So, that was very disheartening for me because I was like, that was a very tender age as well, I would say. Because I was 19 and I was looking to do well wherever I get the chance or whatever I do. But I wasn't getting that chance to play for my senior team or Ranji team. Whereas, where I was seeing my teammates, they all were doing well and playing those matches and they were getting those opportunities. A few of them also got selected from that 19 World Cup in the IPL as well. So, at that time, I would say it was very challenging for me because I used to see the other players. I didn't have that sense or maybe you would say that to wait patiently for my time to come or something like that. Because I guess at that age, I was like all the time pushing. Or if I reflect back now, I feel that if I would have been a bit more calmer or I would have been, I mean, better at that time. Thinking about all those things, things would have been different. But yeah, that was a very challenging time for me because at a certain time, I was getting all the fame, all the, I mean, attention was there on me. And suddenly when I came back after the World Cup, everything over here was just normal. Not even normal, I would say below par. Because no one was there to look after me. Even the coaching where I mean, we used to go, there was not proper coaching also. And then suddenly coming from that level to here, I wasn't able to adjust only. And then, I was not getting the opportunity to play for my senior team. So

that's how, that was quite challenging for me because everyone used to see me as that I am playing at a certain level.”

Participant 13 said, “ *Because the coach at that time, he didn't... He was like... I don't think he will be able to perform at the state level. So, I want a different player. So, it has happened to me a couple of times. It happened during the Ranji Trophy time as well. I was with the team for 3 years. You were with me as well. And I got to play 2 games in 3 years. And I sat out for 25-26 games. So, it happens. Happens with everyone.”*

Sub-Theme 2.6: Lack of proper infrastructure

Lack of proper infrastructure is a significant challenge that hampers the development and performance of cricketers, particularly in countries where cricket is still emerging. Inadequate training facilities, poorly maintained pitches, and insufficient access to modern fitness equipment can severely limit a player's ability to train effectively and improve their skills. Many domestic cricket academies in developing countries suffer from substandard facilities, which affects players' preparation and increases the risk of injury. Additionally, the disparity in infrastructure between urban and rural areas further exacerbates this issue, limiting opportunities for talented individuals from less privileged backgrounds.

Participant 1 said, “*The facilities were, I would say, decent enough so that I could say, yeah, I got a good enough opportunity. But not that great enough that there was quite a lack of guidance and quite a lack of equipment. And it was more of a personal effort rather than the board helping us.”*

Participant 12 said, *“I mean, when I'm not getting the practice I want, where earlier I used to get all the practice, bowling, nets, even the bowler, even the sidearms, everything was all sorted. Here there was nothing. I wasn't getting that sort of practice. Then I wasn't enjoying going to the ground also.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“The good cricketing facilities in Punjab, they are available in Chandigarh and Mohali. That is what I feel. Cricketing facilities in Amritsar were very bad. We never got good prepared pitches to practice on. So, we had to practice on unprepared wickets or we had to practice on cemented tracks or astroturf. So, the good facilities in Punjab, they were available only in Chandigarh or Mohali. So, I think good practice facilities are very important and they are mostly available in metro cities. That is what I have seen. Bombay, Pune, Delhi, Chandigarh. You know, these kind of cities, better facilities are available here. And I think they are very important. It is very important to get good facilities while practicing because only then your game will develop well, and you can take yourself to the next level. Otherwise, it is a big struggle.”*

Participant 17 stated, *“ In the year 2024, I think so there are a lot of grounds available, but still there are certain districts where there is a huge amount of talent in the backgrounds of India, I think so they are not getting that much of availability of grounds and the kind of pitches, you know, like if India has to grow they have to play on good level of pitches, a green turf kind of wickets But I think so not at every level you get that kind of wickets and that kind of grounds if you have to succeed.”*

Sub-Theme 2.7: Biased selection process

The biased selection process is a pervasive challenge faced by cricketers, significantly impacting their career trajectories and the overall integrity of the sport. Selection biases, often rooted in regional favoritism, nepotism, and socio-economic disparities, can obstruct talented players from gaining opportunities purely based on their performance. Cricketers from less influential regions or lower socio-economic backgrounds often face systemic biases, resulting in their exclusion from major tournaments and national team selections. This not only demoralizes deserving players but also perpetuates a cycle of inequality within the sport. Addressing these biases requires transparent selection criteria, unbiased evaluation processes, and greater accountability within cricketing bodies to ensure that all players have an equal chance to succeed based on their abilities and performances.

Participant 1 said, *“Political aspect, there was, there have been quite many incidents where I have performed well and I was supposed to be going at the next level but I was sidelined because someone else had a political approach or someone had that exposure or, you know, the connections that are required to, you know,”* and *“I would say I still haven't overcome that, but I have accepted it because we live in a country where this is quite normal. So, you have to accept it and that is the only way you can get over it.”*

Participant 3 said, *“Like I told you in under 19, but like in 2019 there was one match, I took five wickets and nobody took that many wickets, but like next day, they told me like, no, you are not in the team, so, I don't know why.”*

Participant 4 stated, *“Yes, especially in a country like India, where cricket is such a big sport, so obviously there are challenges you face regarding selections, it’s I think a part of the game, every athlete has to face it at some point.”*

Participant 5 said, *“At that time, our district performed the best, I personally did really well too. Scored a 150 not out, an unbeaten 100, an 80 not out, and 5 wickets in a match twice. Still didn’t get selected. The association reassures you that they will support you, but in the end, if they can’t support me when I’ve done well, how will they when I don’t? It’s not possible to perform better than this! I did everything I could, but still didn’t get selected for State. After that disappointment, I performed well in the T20’s as well, and got selected in the T20 team. When I reached there, I saw that there was so much politics within the team. People are playing their own favorites. Kept waiting for my opportunity, and when I got it, I did pretty well, but not well enough. Now, I’m just working hard for next season.”*

Participant 11 said, *“And after that, even after scoring the most runs, I was not selected in the squad. The Patiala team was the champion. I was the captain of the champion team. I had the most runs in Punjab. I had the most wickets. Still, I was not kept in the squad.”*

Participant 12 feels that there should be more transparency and clarity around the selection process, *“ I mean, the time I was telling you about the 19 World Cup, when I came back, I was told and I was informed that I am in the Ranji squad. So I was more than happy. And then it was announced in the newspaper as well. So I was going, I went for the practice session also for the Ranji squad. And then, even the coach came across and talked with me about that you will be playing the match tomorrow. No, the day after tomorrow, there were two days for the match. So*

he came across and told me to be prepared. He made me see the videos of the other teams, bowlers and all that we prepared for you will be playing. And then suddenly the very next day, I get to know that I am not in the squad. I mean, not in the playing 11, not in the 15 member squad. I am being thrown out of the team, and I mean, they didn't give me any clarification about dropping me and all. If you get that, that is also a point. Because as you, I mean, you expect that clarification from the selectors or maybe anyone who drops you out that why I am being dropped out. Because obviously they were looking at me. So they would have thought that I would be adding some value to the team. And then suddenly dropping me without even giving me a game was something very shocking for me. Because at times you get dropped when you are not performing. They would say that we want a different combination or something. But then without playing, without any solid reason, I was dropped. So that was a bit frustrating and a bit shocking as well.”

Participant 13 reported, *“Selection is a very subjective thing. It depends on the coaches. It depends on the selectors. I do feel that the selection criteria is not the same for everyone. That is a fact. And it is there at every level. Right from the district team to the Indian team. If I am a captain or I am a coach and I like someone, it is based on my subjective knowledge of the game. For me, player A has more talent. So, I will be backing him a little more than player B. They might be working equally hard. Or player B might be working more hard than player A. Or he might be performing equally or better than player A, but player A will get more backing because I think he is more talented. So, that thing is there. That is there at every level of cricket and I have faced it as well. I am sure you have faced it as well. That is there. You can't hide. You can't run away from it. That is going to be there. Happens with most of the cricketers.”*

Theme 3: Challenges Unique To Male Cricketers

The theme challenges unique to male cricketers focuses on difficulties that are particularly faced by men in cricket. It includes dealing with tougher competition due to a higher number of male players. Additionally, political involvement in team selections and management can create extra stress and uncertainty. These unique challenges require male cricketers to navigate not only their performance on the field but also the complexities of external influences that can impact their careers.

Sub-Theme 3.1: Tougher competition

Male cricketers often face uniquely intense competition, which is generally tougher than that encountered by their female counterparts, due to the higher levels of participation and investment in men's cricket. This disparity is partly a result of the historical and cultural prominence of men's cricket, leading to more extensive development programs, better training facilities, and higher financial incentives, which collectively attract a larger pool of talent. Addressing this challenge requires a balanced approach that recognizes the pressures unique to male cricketers while advocating for equitable support and opportunities across both genders. A majority of male and female cricketers interviewed were of the opinion that men's cricket has significantly tougher competition compared to women's cricket.

Participant 2 said, *“So, for men there are, as I said earlier, a lot of players in the pool, like lot of fishes in the pool, and only 15-20 are being selected, so for them, it's like a big challenge, playing cricket for so many years and not getting a chance, a single chance in a district or state, so that's a big challenge for them.”*

Participant 3 stated, *“Competition in males is very high, there’s not much competition in females.”*

Participant 6 said, *“There is a lot of competition among boys. This is the biggest challenge for boys. There is a lot of responsibility for boys, especially if the boy is an adult. They have to help their family financially.”*

Participant 8 stated, *“Now, there are trials in our district. For Boys and girls. We had 40 girls. That was also difficult but there were 100-150 people in the boys to give the trial. Our(girls) trials ended in 2 hours. Their(boys) trials took the whole day.”*

Participant 9 said, *“It’s the number of people, I would say. In men’s there are more numbers, so naturally more competition will be there. In women’s cricket, the numbers are less, so less competition.”*

Participant 11 observed, *“Boys have a lot of competition. If there is 1 lakh in girls, then there is 1 crore in boys. It can reach 10 crore even. The amount we struggle to play for the state, they struggle that much to play for the district. They have to do a lot. Sometimes there are no fitness tests for us. But they are compulsory for boys. They have to see fitness, weight, body, everything.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“I still think the standard of male cricketers is still higher than what females get. So, see there is a lot much more money in male cricket as compared to female cricket. So, because of that money as well, the competition in male cricket is much more than what is prevalent in females, in female cricket at the moment. So, that competition is a lot more*

and it is a bit more pressurizing. That is what I personally feel for the male cricketers. And the standard of cricket is higher as well.”

Participant 17 said, *“I think so the level of competition I think so there is a huge gap level of competition. Think so it sums up all okay.”*

Sub-Theme 3.2: Political Involvement

Political involvement presents a significant and unique challenge for male cricketers, often affecting team dynamics, selection processes, and the overall integrity of the sport. The politicization of cricket, particularly in countries where the sport holds substantial cultural and economic importance, can lead to interference from governmental and cricket board officials in team selection and management decisions. Political influence often dictates the composition of teams, with selections sometimes based on political affiliations rather than merit, leading to discontent and a lack of cohesion among players. This undue interference not only undermines the fairness and transparency of the selection process but also places additional pressure on players who may feel obligated to align with certain political entities to secure or maintain their positions. This environment can foster a culture of uncertainty and stress, detracting from players' performance and development. To mitigate these challenges, there is a need for stringent regulations that ensure cricket administration remains autonomous and insulated from political pressures.

Participant 1 stated, *“Challenging moments would be obviously injuries and the lack of opportunities or, you know, political sidelining that happens during the life of any sportsperson. And overcoming that, I think with age, I started to accept that, yeah, this is going to be a part of*

my life. And if I am to continue on this path, this is something that I have to face. It was more of accepting it rather than overcoming it. So, I kind of made peace with it.”

Participant 9 observed, *“Politics, it's mostly politics. In women's cricket there is some, but very less. In men's cricket, politics is the main issue nowadays. Because every parent wants their child to play, so they use every power to help them play.”*

Sub-Theme 3.3: Media scrutiny and pressure

Media scrutiny and pressure represent significant challenges unique to male cricketers, often leading to heightened stress and impacting their mental health and performance. The pervasive nature of media coverage in men's cricket, driven by the sport's popularity and commercial value, subjects players to constant public and media attention. This scrutiny can amplify the pressure to perform, as every aspect of a cricketer's career and personal life is dissected and debated. Male cricketers often experience intense media criticism and unrealistic expectations, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem. The relentless spotlight means that poor performances or personal issues are not just sports news but often headline stories, exacerbating the psychological toll on players. This constant pressure from media scrutiny necessitates robust mental health support systems within cricket organizations to help players manage the psychological challenges posed by the media landscape.

Participant 12 stated, *“The difference would be that earlier men's cricket was followed religiously, even now it's followed religiously, you have that extra bit of pressure on you. If you look at someone like Virat Kohli, he has been performing consistently for 15 years or 17 years, still there is the same amount of pressure on him to perform, if he doesn't perform in like 5-6 matches, they start coming after him, press reporters, media everyone. That pressure is a little*

lighter in women's cricket. Even if you take the example of Yuvraj Singh, even after helping India win two world cups, his house was pelted with stones when he didn't do well in a certain world cup. Here they make people god figures, and this is good and bad both. Women's cricket has to face this comparatively less because the amount of matches is less, even the media is not that harsh but rest everything in the game of cricket is almost the same."

Participant 13 reported, *"I think they are more under the scrutiny. The male cricketers are more regularly under the pump in the public eye and more under scrutiny from different people on different platforms if you compare female cricketers. So, yeah, I think these are the differences."*

Theme 4: Challenges Unique To Female Cricketers

The theme challenges unique to female cricketers highlights the specific difficulties women face in cricket. These include receiving less pay compared to their male counterparts, having fewer facilities and resources, dealing with biological challenges that can affect performance, and facing societal pressure and stereotypes about women in sports. These unique challenges require female cricketers to overcome additional barriers beyond their athletic abilities, emphasizing their resilience and determination to succeed in a traditionally male-dominated sport.

Sub-Theme 4.1: Paid less

One of the most pressing challenges unique to female cricketers is the significant pay disparity compared to their male counterparts, which reflects broader issues of gender inequality within the sport. Despite similar levels of commitment, training, and competition, female cricketers often receive substantially lower salaries, fewer sponsorship opportunities, and smaller prize money. The average earnings for female cricketers are only a fraction of what male cricketers

earn, even at the highest levels of competition. This pay gap not only affects the financial stability and career sustainability of female cricketers but also undermines their motivation and recognition. Moreover, financial insecurity can force many talented female players to juggle multiple jobs or even leave the sport prematurely. Addressing this inequity requires concerted efforts from cricket boards, sponsors, and media to ensure fair compensation, greater visibility, and equal opportunities for female cricketers, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable sporting environment.

Participant 11 observed, *“I think it is the match fees. Everything else is fine. We (women) work as hard as they do, there shouldn't be any difference in how much we get paid. There is a lot of difference between men's and women's cricket in terms of money. I think we should get as much as they get. We are also making the same effort. We are giving the same time on the ground as they are. It has become the same at the international level, but not on the domestic level. I think it is very easy to play at the international level, because you are getting that recognition. It is very difficult to go from the bottom to the top. It takes a lot of effort. Once you go up, it gets easier.”*

Participant 12 stated, *“I would say monetary wise, earlier I had a few friends of mine who were playing for the state and all, so they were facing a lot of monetary challenges because their match fees was very less and once you have chosen sports as your career, you are playing cricket day in and day out, and after all that you are not getting much money then it becomes tough to continue with the sport. So for girls there was an age barrier, like as you see in India, 25-28 is mostly the time where the girl has to decide about getting married or something and if you're not that highly paid then your family would want you to quit the game and all.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“Females, they don't get paid equally as male cricketers. I think that is the biggest challenge. The facilities, the recognition, you know, the fame, everything else is not anywhere close to what the males get. Yeah. So, the pros and cons are there, yeah. That is the flip side.”*

Sub-Theme 4.2: Lack of facilities

Female cricketers often face the challenge of inadequate facilities, which significantly hampers their training and development compared to their male counterparts. Despite the increasing popularity of women's cricket, the disparity in access to quality facilities remains pronounced. Female cricketers frequently have to use inferior training grounds, equipment, and support services, which are often shared with multiple sports or lower-priority male teams. This lack of dedicated, high-quality facilities can lead to suboptimal training conditions, increased risk of injuries, and hindered performance progression. Moreover, research by Clarke and Wheeler (2019) reveals that female players often receive less access to professional coaching, physiotherapy, and performance analysis tools, further widening the gap in development opportunities between genders. This inequity is not only demoralizing but also perpetuates a cycle where female cricketers struggle to achieve the same level of professional success and recognition as their male counterparts. Addressing this challenge requires substantial investment in women's cricket infrastructure, ensuring that female cricketers have equal access to the facilities and resources necessary to compete at the highest levels.

Participant 2 said, *“In cricketing field like in a less managed district or less managed state, there are a lot less facilities for women or less women coaches, there are a lot of men compared to women.”*

Participant 10 said, *“Well, the facilities firstly. We get great facilities. But unfortunately they don't. Even when they are travelling, from whatever I have heard or seen, I don't think that people are taking good care of women cricketers whenever they are travelling. They are on their own. Mostly they are travelling in trains. Earlier they used to travel in trains. Sometimes they used to get a confirmed ticket or sometimes they used to just sit outside the compartment and then travel. I don't think any men's team would have faced something like this.”*

Sub-Theme 4.3: Lack of female coaches

One of the significant challenges unique to female cricketers is the lack of female coaches, which can impede their development and perpetuate gender biases within the sport. The presence of female coaches is crucial not only for providing role models but also for understanding and addressing the specific needs of female athletes. A study by Burton and Leberman (2017) found that female athletes benefit from having female coaches who can relate to their experiences and challenges, fostering a more supportive and effective coaching environment. Despite these benefits, female cricketers often have limited access to female coaches due to the underrepresentation of women in coaching roles at all levels of the sport. This shortage can discourage young women from pursuing coaching careers, creating a cyclical problem of underrepresentation. Moreover, research by Norman (2018) indicates that the scarcity of female coaches in cricket can lead to a lack of mentorship and career advancement opportunities for female players, as well as reinforcing existing gender stereotypes within the sport. Addressing this issue requires targeted initiatives to recruit, train, and support more female coaches, ensuring that female cricketers receive the guidance and mentorship necessary to thrive.

Participant 2 said, *“In cricketing field like in a less managed district or less managed state, there are a lot less facilities for women or less women coaches, there are a lot of men compared to women.”*

Participant 9 said, *“I couldn't say that. Yeah, I can say that coaching is less in women's cricket. And women are a little bit insecure also in coaching. Because women coaches are very less.”*

Sub-Theme 4.4: Biological issues

Female cricketers face unique biological challenges that can significantly impact their performance and career longevity. One major issue is the menstrual cycle, which can cause physical discomfort, fatigue, and fluctuating hormone levels, affecting training and match performance. A study by Bruinvels et al. (2016) highlights that many female athletes experience menstrual-related symptoms that hinder their athletic performance, yet there is often a lack of tailored support and understanding within sports organizations.

Participant 5 said, *“One thing I can think of is women have problems while playing during their periods, it's a struggle sometimes, we have to even take medicines to play sometimes. It's painful to play, especially during the summers it's really uncomfortable. If you can't concentrate because of the pain, your performance will suffer. Only during that phase, you have to take extra care and make sure you don't get irritated,”* and *“You can't do anything if the match happens during your periods, you have no choice, you have to play and do your best, but it can get really hard to concentrate.”*

Participant 11 stated, *“Mostly I would say those days of the month. It is very difficult at that time. There is a lot of weakness. Sometimes it happens that at that time, we have very important matches. At that time, it is a challenge to play. Some are better at handling it than others.”*

Sub-Theme 4.5: Societal pressure and judgment

Female cricketers often contend with significant societal pressure and judgment, which can profoundly impact their mental health and career progression. Unlike their male counterparts, female athletes frequently face heightened scrutiny over their appearance, behavior, and performance, driven by deep-rooted gender stereotypes and cultural expectations. A study by Knight and Giuliano (2017) found that female athletes are often judged more harshly than males, with a greater emphasis placed on their looks and femininity rather than their athletic abilities. This societal pressure can lead to increased stress, body image issues, and reduced self-confidence, negatively affecting their performance on the field.

Participant 3 said, *“I think females face more than men because too much pressure of their parents, because of Indian mentality,”* and *“Firstly the pressure of their parents because, you know, Indian mentality parents don’t send females to the ground and everything. And after that, there are society problems also,”* and *“Like the relatives, they ask the parents why they are sending their daughters to play cricket, that they should be doing something else, like studies.”*

Participant 11 stated, *“Girls are told that they will get married soon. They have a lot of burden. That I have to settle down in my career soon.. Boys have a little more freedom.”*

Sub-Theme 4.6: Safety concerns

Female cricketers often face unique safety challenges related to travel for matches and tournaments, affecting their participation and performance. Concerns about personal safety, including the risk of harassment and inadequate security measures, are prevalent among female athletes. Anxiety about traveling, particularly to regions with higher levels of gender-based violence or less robust infrastructure to support women's safety is also present. This anxiety is further compounded by logistical issues such as poor accommodation arrangements and lack of safe transport options.

Participant 6 stated, *“It is about safety. Sometimes it is not safe for parents to leave their children. We can't trust anyone so soon. There are safety concerns. We can tell the boys that it is okay, but before leaving the girls, you have to think once. No matter how much the society grows, the thing will always remain. So there are safety concerns.”*

Participant 9 said, “ Men are often a little bit, there are some men that are not treating women very good. So their (girls)parents are afraid, that's the main thing. Parents are afraid to send them out to play.”

Sub-Theme 4.7: Not enough credit, fame, recognition

Female cricketers face significant challenges related to receiving adequate credit, fame, and recognition, which impacts their career development and the growth of women's cricket. Studies have shown that despite comparable skill levels and dedication, female cricketers receive significantly less media coverage and sponsorship compared to their male counterparts. Research by Cooky, Messner, and Musto (2015) demonstrates that the underrepresentation of female athletes in media perpetuates societal biases, leading to less recognition and support from fans and sports organizations. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate efforts to promote

women's cricket through equal media coverage, increased sponsorship opportunities, and institutional support aimed at elevating the status of female cricketers.

Participant 13 reported, *“I think that is the biggest challenge. The facilities, the recognition, you know, the fame, everything else is not anywhere close to what the males get. Yeah. So, the pros and cons are there, yeah. That is the flip side.”*

Theme 5: Facilitators Common Among Male And Female Cricketers

In the world of cricket, both male and female players often navigate similar pathways facilitated by crucial elements. A fundamental theme that binds them is the indispensable role of a robust support system. Whether it be family, friends, or coaches, the unwavering encouragement and guidance provided create a fertile ground for growth and success. Moreover, financial support emerges as a pivotal subtheme, ensuring equitable opportunities for players to pursue their passion without undue financial burden. The theme also extends to the realm of improved infrastructure, where investments in training facilities, equipment, and grassroots programs bolster the development of talent across genders, fostering a more inclusive and competitive landscape in cricket.

Sub-Theme 5.1: Support system

Support systems play a crucial role in the development and success of both male and female cricketers, offering emotional, financial, and logistical backing that is essential for high-level performance. Research indicates that strong family support is a common facilitator for cricketers of both genders. According to a study by Harwood and Knight (2015), parental support, including emotional encouragement and financial investment, significantly influences young

athletes' commitment and progress in sports. Similarly, a study by Fransen et al. (2019) highlights the importance of social support from coaches and peers, which fosters a positive training environment and enhances performance. This support system helps athletes cope with the pressures of competitive sports, providing motivation and resilience.

Participant 4 said, “Yes, I think without the support of family, we can’t do sport professionally, family support is really important.”

Participant 12 said, *“But then I had pretty good support from my family. Till date I have good support from my family. They have been there as a pillar of strength and support for me since day one.”*

Sub-Theme 5.2: Financial support

Financial support is a critical facilitator for the success of both male and female cricketers, providing the necessary resources to access training, equipment, and competitive opportunities. As noted by Swann, Moran, and Piggott (2015), financial stability also contributes to an athlete's mental well-being, reducing stress and allowing for better concentration and performance. Thus, financial support serves as a vital enabler for cricketers, irrespective of gender, ensuring they have the means to pursue their sporting aspirations fully.

Participant 10 stated, *“Because I’m 25 right now and like for other people who are playing with me, now they are doing like some sort of a business or some job or anything but because they couldn't afford to continue with the sport but that's the privilege that I have. I can still continue with the sport and see where it takes me because of the financial stability my family has provided me,”* and on sponsorship deals, *“Nowadays, it provides a very big stability in every cricketer's*

career because like someone who's coming from a middle class background or a lower middle class background, it would be very difficult for them to buy equipment every now and then. But now that the sponsorships have taken over and all the sponsors and the endorsements have been very active, it has helped them a lot.”

Participant 13 reported, *“Sponsorship deals are very important. Equipment wise, you do need a good company to sponsor you because equipment is very costly. Equipment has become very costly. 10-15 thousand you don't get a good bat if you are a batsman. You need at least 4-5 bats in a year. If you have to buy everything on your own I don't think many people can afford to become cricketers. Equipment has become very costly. This is where a good company sponsoring you is very important.”*

Sub-Theme 5.3: Performance enhancing tools

Performance enhancement in cricket, for both male and female athletes, has increasingly relied on a multifaceted approach that includes technology, meditation, and breathwork. Advanced technologies, such as wearable sensors and video analysis, have been pivotal in providing real-time feedback and data-driven insights to refine techniques and strategies (Gabbett et al., 2017). Meditation and mindfulness practices have also gained prominence, with studies indicating that these methods significantly improve concentration and reduce anxiety, leading to better on-field performance (Baltzell, 2016).

Participant 8 stated, *“Recently I have also gotten a lot of help from video analysts. I have seen videos with my bowling coach. Where we can improve. So that thing has helped me a lot. I send them my videos when I am going to a tournament, and in 15 minutes I get a message that I have to fix this. If I fix this, then this thing will be fixed. So that thing has helped me a lot.”*

Participant 10 said, *“I love to meditate and visualize before a match. How I want it to go like, I give myself 10-15 minutes. I do some breathing. I close my eyes and I feel. I see what all I want to do today. What feelings do I want to feel today. I just keep on visualizing it. I keep on repeating it in my own head. Till the point I actually start feeling like it.”*

Sub-Theme 5.4: Improved infrastructure

Improved infrastructure has emerged as a critical facilitator of performance enhancement for both male and female cricketers, contributing to better training conditions and overall athlete development. The availability of high-quality facilities, including modern training grounds, gyms, and rehabilitation centers, plays a significant role in supporting athletes' physical and technical growth (Petersen et al., 2009). Research indicates that access to well-maintained pitches and state-of-the-art equipment can lead to significant improvements in skill acquisition and injury prevention (Orchard et al., 2015). These advancements collectively ensure that cricketers, regardless of gender, have the necessary resources to reach their full potential.

Participant 5 said, *“Now, we have a lot of things that we didn't have earlier. We didn't even get good quality nets or wickets back then. Today we had an open net practice in the main stadium, where we weren't even allowed to play unless there was a match. This is close to being an international ground, so we got such good facilities. Now I'm happy that yes we're getting good facilities, earlier we used to play on rough and unprepared pitches or didn't get open net practice. Now this has improved.”* Participant 9 said, *“Very big change I have seen in the facilities. Many academies have opened. Many coaches have come. Even financially, many expenditures have increased. Game has become very fast. Many changes I have seen from past 7 years.”*

Sub-Theme 5.5: Increasing awareness about a career in cricket

Increasing awareness about a career in cricket is facilitated by several common factors among both male and female cricketers. Early exposure to the sport through structured training programs and grassroots initiatives plays a critical role in shaping career aspirations and skill development. Programs aimed at young children help in instilling a passion for the sport from a young age, thereby increasing the likelihood of pursuing cricket professionally. The presence of role models and mentors is another significant factor, as the visibility of successful athletes can inspire and motivate young individuals to pursue careers in cricket. Additionally, the rise of professional leagues, such as the Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) and the Indian Premier League (IPL), has enhanced the visibility and financial viability of cricket as a career option for both genders. These leagues provide professional opportunities and platforms for young cricketers to aspire to, contributing to a supportive environment that nurtures and sustains career ambitions in cricket for both male and female athletes.

Participant 5 stated, *“Now people aren’t hesitating in letting their daughters play cricket. Even financially, it is getting better, women are getting more support,”* and *“There’s been a lot of improvement already, the WPL started, and because of WPL so many girls are getting opportunities to play.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“And people see cricket as a career now. And they see it as a good career for girls as well. Their parents are sending their girls to play cricket as well. Which is a good thing.”*

Theme 6: Facilitators Unique To Male Cricketers

The theme of higher financial compensation becomes obvious, with sponsorship and endorsement deals offering greater financial stability and resources, empowering male players to focus more on their game. Additionally, there exists a notable incentive to perform at a higher

level, driven by the competitive nature of the sport and the opportunities for recognition and rewards that come with it. This combination of financial backing, and performance incentives creates a conducive environment for male cricketers to thrive and excel in their careers.

Sub-Theme 6.1: Higher financial compensation

Higher financial compensation serves as a significant facilitator unique to male cricketers, markedly enhancing their professional and personal development. This allows cricketers to invest in top-tier training, recovery programs, and advanced sports technologies, which are crucial for maintaining peak performance levels and extending their playing careers (Késenne, 2014). Financial stability reduces economic stress, allowing players to focus solely on their performance, thus enhancing their consistency and effectiveness on the field (Keane & Wolpin, 2001). Moreover, these financial rewards provide the resources for personalized coaching and fitness regimes that further improve preparation and in-game execution.

Participant 13 reported that males get paid more than females and get more fame and recognition, *“Females, they don't get paid equally as male cricketers. I think that is the biggest challenge. The facilities, the recognition, you know, the fame, everything else is not anywhere close to what the males get. Yeah. So, the pros and cons are there, yeah. That is the flip side.”*

Participant 9 said, *“Cricket is an expensive game. But also it earns you a lot when you play state levels. They provide us money.”*

Sub-Theme 6.2: Higher incentive to perform

Higher financial incentives can significantly enhance the performance of male cricketers by providing strong motivation to excel.

Participant 13 reported that males get paid more than females and get more fame and recognition, *“Females, they don't get paid equally as male cricketers. I think that is the biggest*

challenge. The facilities, the recognition, you know, the fame, everything else is not anywhere close to what the males get. Yeah. So, the pros and cons are there, yeah. That is the flip side.”

Participant 9 said, *“Cricket is an expensive game. But also it earns you a lot when you play state levels. They provide us money.”*

Theme 7: Facilitators Unique To Female Cricketers

In the domain of female cricket, distinct facilitators pave the path for success, catering to the specific needs and challenges faced by female players. One prominent theme is the increasing availability of opportunities, including more tournaments, leagues, and international fixtures, which provide female cricketers with platforms to showcase their skills and advance their careers. Additionally, the theme of enhanced resources emerges, with investments in training facilities, equipment, and coaching staff dedicated to supporting female players and nurturing their talent. Furthermore, there is a growing focus on financial support, with sponsorships, endorsements, and improved pay structures providing female cricketers with greater financial stability and resources to pursue their passion without constraints. These facilitators, encompassing increased opportunities, resources, and financial backing, contribute to the empowerment and success of female cricketers, creating a more inclusive and competitive landscape in the sport.

Sub-Theme 7.1: Increasing opportunities for women, number of women playing

Opportunities are increasing for women in the world of cricket. With the advent of the WBBL(Australia) and the WPL in India, there has been a drastic increase in the number of women taking up the sport, as the number of opportunities and resources increases.

Participant 2 stated, *“So earlier, in earlier days, there were way less women cricketers, in academies there used to just be 1-2 girls, now a whole team of women cricketers is there in my*

academy, now there are 12-13 women cricketers in which 2 have played state and have played nationals etc. So a lot of women cricketers have emerged and are being supported in a way in which women cricket can grow.”

Participant 10 said, *“Well, when I started playing there used to be like one in a hundred. But now there are many young girls who are like 13-14 who are just very keen on taking up this sport. Which was very unlikely even 5 years ago. So this is like a major growth.”*

Participant 12 said, *“ I guess there's been a drastic change in women's cricket, I mean I remember when I started playing I never used to even watch women's cricket and we hardly knew the name of the 15 members squad of the girls except Mithali Raj and Jhulan Goswami. I don't think so I knew any of the names because those were the people performing all the time and those were the names coming across in the newspaper or TV channels and that's how we knew all those names but now you see the women's cricket has evolved a lot, it has grown firstly with the women's premier league happening you get to see a lot of players playing the women's premier league and then there's even so much salary hikes, I mean the match fees hikes in the senior cricket teams Indian women's and Indian men's team are getting similar salaries from the BCCI or match fees from the BCCI so that is a big big bonus for the women's cricket team and women's cricket has grown a lot.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“I literally never saw a girl in Gandhi ground. That is where I used to practice in Amritsar. I never saw a girl practicing or playing cricket in Gandhi ground. I used to practice at a college cricket ground in Amritsar. But never at the place where I practiced. But now, things are different. In academies in Pune, I see a lot of girls practicing.”*

Sub-Theme 7.2: Increase in match fees

The BCCI took a historic step by increasing the match fees of International Women cricketers, bringing their compensation on par with the International men's team.

Participant 8 stated, “ *Our seniors team match fee, became the same, compared to men's, so, that thing, is helping a lot, that, how we can, be more fit, and, develop ourselves, as a player.* ”

Participant 10 said, “They have already started doing things, the pay raise that has come in women’s cricket, that was the first step. Like if they aren’t given a good amount of money to play, what’s the motivation for them to play? So like with the cash coming in and with all the endorsements and all the exposure, Indian women cricketers are getting this will encourage more youngsters to take up the sport, not just as a hobby in the summer vacation, but to actually take it up as a profession, even from metropolitan cities and not just from small cities.”

Participant 12 said, “*there's even so much salary hikes, I mean the match fees hikes in the senior cricket teams Indian women's and Indian men's team are getting similar salaries from the BCCI or match fees from the BCCI so that is a big big bonus for the women's cricket team and women's cricket has grown a lot.*”

Participant 13 reported, “*This change has happened because the BCCI is investing in women's cricket as well. And that has brought in much more money as compared to earlier days for women as well. So, if you are good at it, you can make a good earning as a women's cricketer by playing the game. So, I think that is how the change has happened. Earlier, women's cricket didn't have so much money.*”

Sub-Theme 7.3: Changing attitude and perception about women playing cricket

Participant 6 stated, “*And girls are becoming aware that yes, there is a lot of scope in cricket. A lot of girls have started playing, a lot of girls have come up, young players.*”

Participant 13 reported, “*This change has happened because the BCCI is investing in women's cricket as well. And that has brought in much more money as compared to earlier days for women as well. So, if you are good at it, you can make a good earning as a women's cricketer by*

playing the game. So, I think that is how the change has happened. Earlier, women's cricket didn't have so much money.”

Theme 8: Impact Of Challenges

The impact of challenges on cricketers, irrespective of gender, is profound and multifaceted, with mental health and coping with failure standing out as significant subthemes. One crucial aspect is the toll that the intense pressure and scrutiny inherent in professional cricket can take on players' mental well-being. Dealing with expectations, performance anxiety, and the constant demand for success can lead to stress and mental health issues among cricketers. Moreover, the theme of coping with failure looms large, as setbacks and disappointments are inevitable in such a competitive sport. Learning to bounce back from defeats, handle criticism constructively, and maintain confidence amid adversity are vital skills that cricketers must cultivate. The impact of these challenges can be profound, shaping not only players' performance on the field but also their overall well-being and resilience off the pitch. Thus, addressing mental health concerns and providing support mechanisms for dealing with failure are essential aspects of nurturing a healthy and sustainable cricketing culture.

Sub-Theme 8.1: Mental health

Mental health challenges significantly impact cricketers, affecting both their performance and overall well-being. Mental health issues are often linked to career dissatisfaction and adverse life events, underscoring the need for targeted mental health support within the sport.

Participant 4 said, *“Yes, it often happens, I think it happens with every athlete, that at a certain point, thoughts come in your mind that you are not good enough, and why you are not performing well, when you have the capability to do well.”*

Participant 10 said, *“I was disappointed at that time. I was very young. I was blaming everyone around me. This has happened because of you. I was just lashing out at everyone. After a few days, I realized that it's fine. These things will happen. These things are going to happen in the future as well. It's better that we should accept it and move on and focus more on recovery after that.”*

Participant 12 stated, *“What I was doing was I wasn't happy with the other things and it was affecting my present matches and everything because I was all the time playing and thinking of why I'm not playing there why I mean my teammates are playing there why am I not playing for my state and all that whereas the path to getting selected was all those matches which I was playing and I wasn't able to give my best because my mind was constantly or my energy was constantly involved there.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“Starting from scratch again, waiting for the next year to come and the whole process. And it became so pressurizing. It became very pressurizing for me. Everyone is waiting for you to fail so that they can throw you out and get the next guy in. And sometimes, I was able to handle it. Sometimes, I was not able to handle it. And I feel that I couldn't give my best or couldn't bring the best out of me at the state level due to that reason. I had no one to talk to me about the mental side of the game and about the mental side of things.”*

Participant 17 said, *“Sometimes it's frustrating and you know that you have put in the hours and not getting the result in the in your matches, but You have to think that this is not just Cakewalk playing cricket is not just a cakewalk So you have to put in hours and hours into your practice sessions to make yourself perfect.”*

Sub-Theme 8.2: Dealing with failure

Cricketers face significant psychological challenges, particularly when dealing with failure, which can profoundly impact their mental health and performance. Studies show that coping

with failure in high-pressure sports environments, such as cricket, can lead to severe stress and mental health issues. According to Sarkar and Fletcher (2014), elite cricketers often experience immense pressure to perform, which, when coupled with failure, can result in anxiety and depression. This pressure is exacerbated by the public and media scrutiny that cricketers face, leading to a heightened sense of failure when performance expectations are not met.

Moreover, research by Swann et al. (2016) indicates that the fear of failure can lead to maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance and self-blame, which further deteriorate mental health. Cricketers who perceive failure as a threat rather than a learning opportunity are more likely to suffer from negative psychological outcomes. In contrast, those who adopt a growth mindset and view failures as opportunities for learning and improvement tend to exhibit greater resilience and better overall mental health (Howells & Fletcher, 2015).

To mitigate these effects, it is essential for sports psychologists and coaches to implement strategies that foster a supportive environment. Encouraging a culture that views failure as a natural part of the learning process can help cricketers develop healthier coping mechanisms, thereby improving their mental well-being and performance on the field.

Participant 9 said, *“Mainly, I should leave the sport. And should not play like that, I am not good enough. These were the things coming to mind,”* and *“ Sometimes I am very sad and lay down, not moving. I didn't want to do anything,”* as well as, *“ As I said, it was just one day, I was very disappointed. I wanted to leave after two matches. But other than that, I am just like why I am not performing. Little bit thinking about what went wrong”*

Participant 13 reported, *“Like, what is the point? Why am I doing this? Why am I constantly giving myself a struggle or torture? When, you know, they are not going to select me. Even if they do select me, they are not going to play me. So, in between, there was a period of one, one and a half year where I didn't play. I literally didn't touch the bat,”* and *“I was very bad. Earlier, I was very bad at handling failure. It used to make me sad, made me feel depressed. I used to cry as*

well. Whenever I got out early, I used to cry a lot. And it felt like the whole world had crashed. My world has finished.”

Participant 17 stated, *“The first thought I think(after failure) so always comes I should stop playing the game.”*

Theme 9: Areas To Improve

Improving various aspects of cricket includes a range of themes, including coaching, mental health focus, infrastructure, and clarity in selection processes. Firstly, investing in high-quality coaching programs tailored to the specific needs of players at all levels is crucial for skill development and tactical understanding. Additionally, there is a growing recognition of the importance of mental health in cricket, highlighting the need for dedicated support systems and resources to address psychological challenges faced by players. Furthermore, enhancing infrastructure, such as training facilities and playing surfaces, ensures optimal conditions for player development and performance. Lastly, establishing clearer selection processes, based on merit and transparency, fosters trust and fairness within the cricketing community, ultimately promoting inclusivity and accountability. By addressing these areas for improvement, cricket can evolve into a more sustainable and rewarding sport for players at every level.

Sub-Theme 9.1: Coaching

Effective coaching in cricket is essential for developing a player's technical skills, strategic understanding, and mental resilience. By providing tailored feedback, personalized training regimens, and continuous mentorship, coaches can help players refine their techniques, improve their decision-making abilities, and enhance their game awareness. This not only bridges the gap between current performance and potential excellence but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement within the team. Moreover, a well-structured coaching framework can boost players' confidence, teamwork, and overall morale, contributing to a more cohesive and

successful team. Therefore, investing in advanced coaching practices is vital for elevating individual performance and achieving collective success in the competitive arena of cricket.

Participant 3 stated, *“He was good, but he couldn’t give a lot of time to every person because there were a lot of people in our academy, if the coach has less players to focus on, he can give more time to everyone.”*

Participants 4 said, *“I think there can be a better coaching staff in every center of the state, so players should not be misguided,”* and *“Coaching concept is like as players evolve with time, coaches should also evolve. They should understand how the game is nowadays.”*

Participant 9 said, *“Seminars should be conducted at regular levels every month. Every coach should be educated. If he has played or not. He should be consulted. And they should know that players are under too much pressure nowadays due to competition,”* and *“They should talk to the players. And there should be a form for the players, a review form after the tournament. About the performance of the coaches also. That should be given. The name should not be there. For further improvement.”*

Sub-theme 9.2: Mental Health

In the world of cricket, one critical theme area for improvement is player well-being, with a significant subtheme being mental health. Research has increasingly highlighted the psychological pressures faced by cricketers, including the stress of performance, travel demands, and public scrutiny. For example, a study by Gulliver et al. (2015) published in *BMC Sports Science, Medicine and Rehabilitation* examined mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviors among elite athletes, including cricketers, revealing significant barriers to accessing mental health support. Implementing mental health programs, providing access to sports psychologists, and fostering an environment where mental well-being is prioritized can significantly enhance a player's overall performance and longevity in the sport.

Participant 4 said, *“I think there should be mental coaches as well in the sport, they really help athletes, especially in this time of pressure.”*

Participant 11 stated, *“I feel like after a match, coaches tell you that you are doing this wrong, play like this instead etc. At least they should ask the players once what they were thinking when they were playing inside, what they were feeling at that time? What were you trying to do? What were you thinking before you played the ball? I mean a little bit like this.”*

Participant 13 reported, *“And nobody talks about the mental side of things. What the player is going through mentally or what kind of issues is he facing, What is he thinking when he is actually playing in a match etc. So, I think that needs to be talked about as well. Nobody talks about the mental side of the game. Even at the first class level, I don't think many teams have a psychologist or a person to talk to the player about the mental side of things. I think that is very important. After a certain point of time, it's your mind. It can be your friend, it can be your foe but it is your mind. Nobody talks about that.”*

Sub-Theme 9.3: More clarity on the selection process and criteria

Improving transparency in the cricket selection process is a crucial area for enhancing the sport's integrity and trust. The Hyderabad Cricket Association has committed to making its selection process more transparent by reintroducing zonal tournaments and ensuring decisions are made following clear, publicly communicated criteria (Siasat Daily, 2023). In India, the National Cricket Academy (NCA) employs a comprehensive selection process, starting from district-level camps and advancing through state and national levels, which ensures systematic identification and nurturing of the best talent (CollegeSearch, 2024). These efforts highlight the importance of clear and transparent selection mechanisms in building a competitive and trustworthy cricketing environment.

Participant 11 said, *“It happened last time also. I deserved to be selected in T20’s. I feel that the selectors should tell their proper reasons. So that the players know where they are lacking. So that they work on it and come back. They say that no you are good. But they still don’t select you. How will they know where they are lacking? They should tell their reasons. So that players can work on it.”*

Participant 12 stated, *“ I mean, they didn't give me any clarification about dropping me and all. If you get that, that is also a point. Because as you, I mean, you expect that clarification from the selectors or maybe anyone who drops you out that why I am being dropped out. Because obviously they were looking at me. So they would have thought that I would be adding some value to the team. And then suddenly dropping me without even giving me a game was something very shocking for me. Because at times you get dropped when you are not performing. They would say that we want a different combination or something. But then without playing, without any solid reason, I was dropped. So that was a bit frustrating and a bit shocking as well”*

Participant 13 reported, *“Selection is a very subjective thing. It depends on the coaches. It depends on the selectors. I do feel that the selection criteria is not the same for everyone. That is a fact. And it is there at every level. Right from the district team to the Indian team.”*

Sub-Theme 9.4: Infrastructure

Improving cricket infrastructure is a critical area for the development and enhancement of the sport. Effective infrastructure directly impacts the accessibility and quality of cricket training and competitions. In India, the growth of cricket infrastructure has been pivotal in the sport's rise. The introduction of initiatives like the Indian Premier League (IPL) has led to substantial investments in stadiums and training facilities, contributing to the sport's popularity and accessibility at the grassroots level. Addressing infrastructure needs ensures that cricket can be played and enjoyed by more people, regardless of their location. This includes the creation of synthetic wickets and training facilities in schools, which makes the sport more accessible to

young players, helping to identify and nurture talent from a young age (Journal of Sports, 2019) These efforts highlight the importance of continuous investment and strategic planning in cricket infrastructure to support the sport's growth and development globally.

Participant 3 said, *“Like, I think there's so many academies, but like children are coming, doing nets and going to home, but I think if they like do gym. They do training like after nets or something, I think the Academy should provide everything like gym, that will be good.”*

Participant 6 said, *“ I think the indoor system will help players in the rainy season.”*

Participant 9 stated, *“I think there should be government academies that should provide free coaching and government should appoint coaches that will teach children for free. Otherwise, it is very tough for financially less stable people to play cricket nowadays.”*

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Conclusion

The study was conducted to know the relationship between Athletic Identity and its subcomponents and Athletic Life Quality in professional Indian cricket players. It was found that Athletic Identity in total is positively correlated with Athletic Life Quality, and exclusivity has a highly significant relationship with Athletic Life Quality. Social identity was also moderately correlated with Athletic Life Quality, whereas Negative Affectivity has a slight correlation with Athletic Life Quality. The findings indicate the importance of the social, cognitive, and affective identities of an athlete as they directly affect the life quality of athletes. Among all sub-domains, Exclusivity accounted for the maximum variance in the levels of life quality in professional Indian cricketers. The present research study shed important light on the journey of cricketers both male and female. The investigative qualitative analysis revealed themes such as the sports journey of cricketers, challenges faced by males and females both mutually and specifically, factors that facilitate a career in cricket, impact of facing challenges and the areas which can be improved. Gender differences were found in areas such as pay gap, availability of facilities, societal pressure and judgment, safety concerns and media scrutiny

5.2 Implications

Findings from the first study will help sports psychologists devise a wellness framework incorporating all the essential domains and fields of athletic identity that an athlete identifies with. This study is focused and will eventually help the athletes in maximizing their overall

functioning and performance during competition and games. The findings hold great value for sports personnel and psychologists, strategies to enhance their overall quality of life and functioning, which will eventually reflect in the improved performance of the athletes at both national and international levels.

The second study helped us better understand the life experiences of both male and female cricketers and the findings can be used by cricket administrators to bring about positive changes in the areas of coaching, infrastructure, logistics, financial compensation and selection processes. The study has also brought to light the mental burdens and challenges faced by cricketers and will be of interest to psychologists, who can use the findings to develop efficient strategies to help the players cope and thrive in a highly competitive environment.

5.3 Limitations

1. The sample was collected using convenience sampling.
2. The language used in the survey being English, could have led those less proficient in it to misunderstand the questions.
3. The sample consists of players competing at different levels of cricket, ranging from the collegiate level and state level to the national and international level.
4. The quantitative sample consists of only male cricketers. There is no data on female athletes.

5.4 Scope for future research

1. A longitudinal study can get us closer to the generalization of the findings across athletes of all age groups.

2. Research involving retired athletes will give an overview of the impact of athletic identity on quality of life in later stages of life.

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Appendices

Appendix-A

Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)

Read each statement and choose the option that best reflects your current level of satisfaction with your athletic life. There are no right and wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement.

1. Strongly Dissatisfied
2. Moderately Dissatisfied
3. Slightly Dissatisfied
4. Neutral
5. Slightly Satisfied
6. Moderately Satisfied
7. Strongly Satisfied

1. I consider myself an athlete
2. I have many goals related to sport
3. Most of my friends are athletes
4. Sport is the most important part of my life
5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else
6. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport
7. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.

Appendix-B

Athletic Life Quality Scale

Read each statement and choose the option that best reflects your current level of satisfaction with your athletic life. There are no right and wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement.

1. Strongly Dissatisfied
2. Moderately Dissatisfied
3. Slightly Dissatisfied
4. Neutral
5. Slightly Satisfied
6. Moderately Satisfied
7. Strongly Satisfied

1. Your own physical health
2. The amount of free/recovery time you have away from your sport
3. Your relationship with family members
4. Your relationship with friends
5. Your social life
6. Your relationships with your coaches
7. Your relationships with your teammates
8. Your level of physical condition
9. Your athletic performance
10. Your role on your team
11. Your financial situation
12. Your spiritual health
13. Your mental health
14. Your relationship with boyfriend/girlfriend
15. Your life as a whole

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Process of Interview Conduction:

Greeting the participant - *“Hello, How are you doing? Are you feeling comfortable? I hope you have read the instructions. However, I will still repeat it for you -”*

“We will be asking you a series of questions regarding your experiences as a cricketer. Please feel comfortable answering. Try to give your honest answers. Please share your life experiences in detail. This interview will be audio-recorded and will take 30-40 minutes. You can be assured of the confidentiality and privacy of the recordings. Only the research team will have access to it. Your identity will not be revealed at any point in time. Please let us know if you feel uncomfortable at any point. We will be conducting this interview in English. Please answer in the same language. If it is not easy for you, you may switch to Hindi.” (We need to give the same instructions to every participant.)

Shall we start?

Warm-up Questions:

1. Tell me something about yourself.
2. How & when did you start playing cricket? (level, years)
3. Who were your role models or cricketing idols growing up, and how did they impact your game?

Interview Questions:

1. What were some of the most challenging moments you faced in your cricketing journey, and how did you overcome them?
 - a. How do you manage the balance between your personal life and the demanding schedule of a professional cricketer?
 - b. What sacrifices or compromises have you had to make for your cricketing career?
 - c. Have you faced challenges related to team selection, and how did you navigate through them?

2. How have India's available cricketing facilities and infrastructure influenced your training and performance?
 - a. What changes have you observed regarding infrastructure, support, and opportunities for young cricketers in India?
 - b. In your opinion, what improvements are needed in cricket infrastructure to support aspiring cricketers?
3. Can you share examples where your family was crucial in supporting your career in cricket? How have they been a facilitator or barrier in your playing journey?
4. How has the quality of coaching and mentoring you received impacted your development as a cricketer? What improvements would you wish to make your performance better?
5. To what extent has financial stability played a role in your cricketing career?
6. How important are sponsorship and endorsement deals in providing stability and resources for your training?
7. How have injuries affected your career, and what measures have you taken to overcome them?
8. **Have there been instances where your performance has suffered due to performance pressure/anxiety or personal expectations?**
9. **How do you handle failure and success? Please share some life instances.**
10. How do you address stereotypes or biases related to cricket, especially being a part of the Indian cricketing scene?
11. How does gender play a role in your cricketing career? Did you face further biases or challenges being male/female?
12. Looking ahead, what are your aspirations for the future, both in and outside of cricket?

Ending the interview:

So, we have reached the end of the interview stage. Would you like to share how are feeling now?

Any last thoughts?

Thank you for participating in this interview. We appreciate your time and input in this research study.

