

# BEHIND THE BAT AND BALL: A STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG PAKISTANI CRICKETERS

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**Abstract:** This study is a qualitative work on mental health experience of the Pakistan national cricket players using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of in-depth interviews with eight male first-class cricketers. Based on an interpretivist approach, this is a study that examines the complex interaction between psychological issues and pressures that influence the psychological well-being of players. Analysis indicated five superordinate themes that included twelve themes and thirty codes in which superordinate themes included Mental Health Challenges, Stigma and Barriers, External Pressures, Substance abuse and Cultural Context. Within these, Prominent mental health challenges were mentioned, including: performance anxiety, aggression, emotional regulation challenges and fear of injury, all coupled with the strong national and cultural expectations that are placed on players. Stigma and barriers to mental health care became major barriers; with cultural taboos and a lack of access to psychological care leading to a lack of help-seeking. It is also said that outside forces such as the media attention, financial shortcomings, and the expectations of the public added to the stress at a psychological level. It is the cultural situated context, especially family influence and rural-urban differences in resource access, which also conditioned the experience of players. The findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive mental health interventions, integration of psychological support within cricket organizations and system-wide changes to address the issues of stigma and external stressors. This study adds new understandings to the mental health advocacy for elite cricket players in Pakistan and the importance of holistic approaches that focus on individual, social and cultural determinants to foster mental well-being and sustainability of performance in professional sports.

**Keywords:** Mental health, Cricket, Performance Anxiety, Stigma, Pakistan.

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of mental health in top sports has attracted increased global attention with the recognition that psychological well-being is as important as physical fitness in achieving athletic performance and a sustained career (Gorczyński et al., 2021; Rice et al., 2016). It was historically termed as the absence of mental diseases, however, in modern perspectives, mental health is being stated as a dynamic and variable condition which embraces the entire spectrum of human emotions (Galderisi et al., 2015). According to Gorczyński et al. (2019), mental health, like physical health, is a resource that assists the individual to function, perform and also deal with stress as well as to accomplish their goals. A definition of mental health is "the state of dynamic equilibrium of the individual's inner balance, which enables the performance of skills in accordance with the universal values of the society" (Galderisi et al., 2015).

According to a growing corpus of research on mental health in professional sports, there is no greater tendency for professional cricket players to experience mental health issues when compared to the general population, with an increased risk for those who get injured, retire or performance inadequacy (e.g., Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2016). In sports, the definitions and examinations of mental health concerns include psychiatric disorders as well as manifestations of psychological discomfort that can have a major impact on the quality of life of the players (Åkesdotter et al., 2020). Studies involving teams across a range of sports including rugby, football and cricket show that mental health symptoms and disorders affect between 5% and 35% of top sportspeople every year with anxiety, depression, sleep problems, alcohol misuse and eating disorders being the most common (Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2019). Moreover, literature has indicated presence of several stresses (up to 640) such as selection, injuries, money and transitions and performances that can possibly affect both athlete mental health and sports performance (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012).

Professional cricket provides a specific group that could benefit from the study and interventions that are centred around well-being. Anecdotally, professional counselors have frankly admitted to having personal problems with various aspects of mental health in several high-profile situations (Korrane, 2023). Schuring et al. (2017) conducted a study into mental health across the South African cricketers and found that 38% of current professional cricketers

experienced discomfort, 38% shared sleep problems, and 37% showed signs of anxiety or depression. In addition, 26% participated in negative alcohol use. Moreover, Hendricks et al. (2024), using data collected from the same group two years later, found evidence of a deterioration in the mental health of professional cricketers, including an increase in the incidence of people showing symptoms of sadness and anxiety. In addition to these quantitative investigations, subsequent investigations have taken a qualitative approach to the investigation of mental health amongst professional cricketers. They suggested that stigma related to mental health remains and the current infrastructure is reactionary rather than proactive (Pankow et al., 2025).

Cricket as a sport having high pressure and visibility rate comes with certain mental issues unique to sportsmen, particularly in countries where it has a great socio-cultural significance. In Pakistan, cricket is a more than just game, which turns into a common passion and a source of national identity (Shafiq, 2020). The association of sport with socio-political symbolism exposes a subject of profound scrutiny and considerable strain on the sport persons, perhaps escalating the mental health vulnerabilities of the Pakistani cricketers. Playing professional cricket in the Pakistan has its risks and difficulties to the player's mental health. But little is known at this time regarding the experiences of players with regard to their mental health and the best ways to support and care for them. Consequently, Researchers must produce great empirical evidence among diverse samples to promote the comprehension of mental health in the sporting environment, thus facilitating the practical application, adaptation, or evaluation of interventions and optimizing the impact of research on practical applications (Vella et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the psychological experience of cricketers from Pakistan is scarce, more specifically, qualitative research on detailed investigation of actual experiences. The objective of our current study is to add to the existing knowledge on mental health in sports by dealing with the mental health experiences of male professional cricketers in the Pakistan.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how people perceive their lived experience with a focus on the mental health of eight smokers who play cricket nationally in Pakistan. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) based on the epistemology of interpretivism enables a thorough idiographic examination of the meaning for the participant in the research setting by emphasizing the dynamic relationship between researcher and participant (Smith et al., 2009). Participants were aged 20 to 34 years and selected on the basis of criteria that included active involvement with first class national cricket within the preceding 12 months. A semi-structured interview guide was developed from the first author's own experiences, a detailed analysis of relevant literature in the areas of sports psychology and mental health, and the framework put forth by Kallio et al. (2016) for the organization of semi-structured interviews. Data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews conducted in person, via Zoom and over the phone, which ensures flexibility of the automobiles and their comfort. Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 min and were transcribed in verbatim. The data analysis followed the steps of IPA's iterative, non-linear methodology, familiarization with the data, inductive coding, theme development and refinement, which secured a nuanced understanding of mental health experiences participants. The researcher was always reflexive to ensure the accuracy of the depiction of the participants. This research provided deep contextual understanding of mental health issues faced by the elite Pakistani Cricketers by understanding ways to cope and how socio-cultural norms are a factor in their experiences.

## RESULTS

**Table 1** Demographic characteristics of the national cricket players (The Core)

Participant ID	Age	Playing Role	Playing Experience in Years	Education
1.	23	Bowler	5	Matriculation
2.	29	Batsman	8	Bachelors
3.	31	All Rounder	10	Masters
4.	24	Bowler	6	Matriculation
5.	27	Bowler	7	Bachelors
6.	33	Batsman	12	Bachelors
7.	26	All Rounder	5	Bachelors
8.	30	All Rounder	9	Bachelors

Note: Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of eight national cricket players, aged between 23 and 33 years at an average age of 28 years. The group consists of bowlers (3), batsmen (2) and all-rounders (3) with playing experience from 5-12 years. Educational backgrounds range from Matriculation to a Master's degree with most players obtaining a Bachelor's degree. This diversity in age, role, experience and education provides a rich picture of how varied factors may affect the players experience of mental health.

**Table 2** Superordinate themes, themes and codes of male cricket players

Superordinate Themes	Themes	Codes
<b>Mental Health Challenges</b>	Performance Anxiety	- Fear of failure - Pressure to perform - Self-doubt
	Aggression	-Aggression under pressure, -conflict resolution
	Emotional Regulation	- Managing frustration - Coping with disappointment - Mood swings
	Fear of Injury	- Physical safety concerns - Career uncertainty
<b>Stigma and Barriers</b>	Stigma Around Mental Health	- Fear of judgment - Lack of awareness - Cultural taboos
	Lack of Mental Health Resources	- Limited access to professionals - Inadequate support systems
<b>External Pressures</b>	Public and media Scrutiny	- Media scrutiny - Fan pressure - National pride
	Financial Concerns	- Income stability - Dependence on cricket - Sponsorship pressures
<b>Substance Abuse</b>	Doping and Performance	- Use of performance-enhancing drugs - Pressure to excel
	Drug as a Coping tool	- Substance use as a coping strategy - Lack of awareness
<b>Cultural Context</b>	Family Influence	- Parental expectations - Family pressure - Cultural norms
	Socioeconomic Disparities	- Access to resources - Socioeconomic disparities

Note: Table 2 summarizes there were 5 superordinate themes with 12 themes and 30 unique codes the essence of intricate mental health experiences of the Pakistani cricket stars. These overarching topics become comprised of a wide range of psychological challenges, societal stresses, and cultural issues impacting the mental health and athletic performance of players.

### **Mental Health Challenges**

The grand superordinate subject is the different mental health problems faced by Pakistani cricketers in environments where they are under high pressure in professional cricket. This category includes those themes and codes which represent psychological issues that are faced by players such as performance anxiety, anger, emotional regulation, and fear of injury.

**Performance anxiety:** The main subtheme that was identified in the mental health challenges faced by the Pakistani cricket players is performance anxiety. Performance anxiety is a major mental health issue faced by Pakistani cricketers. Cricketers often suffer from the pressure of national expectations and press scrutiny. According to a participant,

"I am under a huge amount of pressure to perform, especially when the entire nation is watching."

The fear of failure is great, as athletes are keenly aware of the fact that their performance is thoroughly scrutinized by the media, fans, and the public. This pressure of doing this could lead to negative feelings of self-doubt and anxiety before and during competing. Cricketers don't think they play only for themselves but for the whole nation and thus they are afraid that they will disappoint people who are following them and there will be anger among them. This anxiousness can negatively affect their mental concentration, performance and self-esteem as it inhibits their ability to excel.

Another bowler, expressed his sentiments of self-doubt thus,

At times, I doubt my abilities; this affects my performance.

In Pakistan, where cricket is part of national pride, the players face immense pressure to perform according to the millions of expectations. Each match can feel like a turning point, adding to the fear of losing and it can be very

stressful on the mind. The cricketers interviewed suggested that this nervousness often means that they overthink their performance and focus too much on possible failure rather than the game itself.

**Aggression:** The second subtheme under the domain of mental health concerns is aggression. Cricket is a high-pressure sport where the players do come across conflict, on and off the field like one batsman put it, "I find it difficult to control my aggression through things that don't happen as I hope."

Anger may be a normal response to stress; however, athletes have learned to using this anger to boost their performance rather than having this anger distract their concentration. Regulating the aggressiveness is key to maintaining control and not letting the emotions control the games.

One player remarked,

"Sledging can affect you, but I concentrate on my performance....Pressure may induce aggression; but, I have learnt to channel that energy into enhancing my performance."

Aggression, in this context, denotes the emotional and behavioral responses that players display when subjected to frustration, stress or pressure. Cricketers in Pakistan are often involved in high-pressure situations when they are playing a match, they may go against each other at times on the field, including verbal confrontation (Sledging), or even have a violent confrontation. Aggression under pressure is a problem, since cricketers may experience frustration when circumstances are unfavorable, such as during poor performances or heated periods in a match.

**Emotional Regulation:** Cricket players need to be able to control their emotions, especially when things aren't going well. A poor performance could lead to frustration and this hampers mental clarity. Players can be emotionally unstable, and it is hard to remain composed under pressure. Mastering the regulation of these emotions is very important to maintain one's concentration as one of the batsmen has mentioned:

"When I get out early, I kind of feel frustrated and disappointed with myself so it's a struggle to rid myself of those feelings and stay focused."

The need to maintain calmness is amplified in Pakistan as there is a large amount of public attention focused on cricket. When results are unsatisfactory, there is not only dissatisfaction but also fear of public censure. Mastering the regulation of these emotions is of key importance, when sustaining concentration and maintaining optimism even in the face of challenges. Players who lack the ability to control their emotions may struggle to recover from mistakes during a match, which will negatively impact their performance.

Managing displeasure is particularly difficult for cricketers who feel that they have let down their teammates, coaches, or fans as described by one of the all-rounders:

"I try to stay composed but sometimes this pressure gets to me."

The cultural expectations of Pakistan for athletes to maintain composure and not show any signs of vulnerability makes it more difficult to regulate one's emotions.

**Fear of Injury:** In cricket, injuries are an inherent risk and to a number of players the fear of injury is an ongoing factor of concern. The physical stress brought about by the sport on the body of players whether from quick bowling, sprinting or fielding of the game may cause both acute and chronic ailments. Injuries are particularly worrying in Pakistan where cricket often acts as the main source of income for the players, and these careers-ending injuries can have devastating consequences, as explained by one of the bowlers.

Injuries are my biggest fear they can ruin everything, "I constantly fear getting injured as it can end my career."

In Pakistan, where the national cricket team represents the national pride, cricket players face even more pressure to continue playing well despite the dangers. For this reason, the fear of injury, as well as job instability, adds another layer of stress to an already difficult profession.

### **Stigma and Barriers**

Stigma and Barriers superordinate theme explores the cultural and structural barriers faced by the Pakistani cricketers in addressing their mental health issues. This area discusses some of the many obstacles there are for people who want help with the psychological distress they may be experiencing. The two primary secondary subtopics of this subject area are stigma toward mental illness, and a lack of resources available for addressing mental illness. Both of these areas have relevance within the context of Pakistani Cricket, where as many other professional sports, the need for support with mental illness is frequently ignored, along with the presence of numerous cultural and structural barriers to accessing adequate services.

**Stigma Around Mental Health:** The stigma around mental health is a deeply embedded cultural issue throughout much of the world including Pakistan. A fear of being judged negatively, or identified as less competent, inhibits cricketers from sharing their psychological issues. The fear of criticism is a significant obstacle for those who are in a well-known position such as professional cricket, which is a sport that is expected of its participants to be perceived as strong and resilient at all times. According to an all-rounder,

"In many cultures, the acknowledgment of mental health issues can often be seen as a sign of weakness, which is also a culturally negative stigma, especially in male dominated areas of society like sports"

The stigma is worsened by a general ignorance of mental health in Pakistan. Many athletes and their support groups (family, coaches, and teammates) might not recognize the signs of mental issues or the signs could be seen as a lack of discipline or mental resilience. Mental health is often seen as a lesser priority while human concentration and energy

may be dominated by often physical demands of the task at hand. A lack of knowledge makes players less likely to seek help as they do not fully understand the importance of mental health treatment.

On the other hand, another player (batsman) stressed that

"In our culture, mental health is not something that's openly talked about."

Cultural taboos surrounding mental health make it a career inhibitor. The topic of mental health is also socially taboo (or stigmatised) and normally ignored in the private sphere, and rarely discussed publicly in Pakistani society. The cultural belief that this is so, adds another layer of stress on cricketers as it demands that cricketers conform to societal norms that emphasize physical fitness over mental well-being. It may be perceived that individuals who discuss their challenges with mental health will harm their image or jeopardize their jobs and therefore many will choose to emotionally suppress the issue as opposed to receive needed treatment for their challenge.

Cricket in Pakistan has become virtually a national religion; cricketers do not merely represent their country as athletes; they are symbols of national pride. Thus, the extreme scrutiny associated with representing your nation creates substantial barriers that can appear insurmountable to some; however, due to the social stigma surrounding mental health issues; the barriers created by such high expectations can be greatly increased. As a result of societal pressures and expectations, cricketers are expected to portray and personify stereotypes of physical strength and mental fortitude; therefore, cricketers have extremely limited room to display weakness or express emotion, which provides a monumental barrier to discussions of mental health.

**Lack of Mental Health Resource:** One of the most significant barriers to dealing with mental health within the context of Pakistan's cricket system is the lack of access to available mental health care services. The player mentioned that

"We have to stand for ourselves; we do not have any psychologists in our group to help us"

The amount of pressure placed upon the players creates an environment in which there is little or no access to mental health professionals (psychologists, counselors) who are integrated into the cricket framework. As such, cricketers face a situation whereby they do not have access to professional assistance in dealing with their mental health, thus creating a need for self-treatment of their mental health problems.

The lack of mental health professionals within the teams and cricket boards means that players do not get immediate or structured assistance in dealing with psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, or problems with emotional control. Although significant attention is paid to the physical injuries while playing professional sports, it appears that mental health is often neglected and the players must find coping mechanisms on their own. The lack of resources is also compounded by the lack of support mechanisms in place as documented by a bowler.

"I want to see more done in terms of mental health in cricket."

Cricket teams or organizations may not have defined mechanisms for dealing with mental health issues and even if protocols are in place, players may be hesitant to avail themselves of these due to the stigma that surrounds mental health. Without a systematic system to standardize the discourse and management of mental health issues, it is unlikely that athletes will seek any help they may need.

### **External Pressures**

The overarching theme of external Pressures can be described as the wide-ranging, sometimes overwhelming influence that comes from people other than members of their immediate team or personal environment. These pressures come predominantly from the people's expectations, from the media, from money concerns, and from the socio-political significance of cricket in Pakistan. Together, they impose quite a psychological burden on the mental health of the players, how they cope with it, and performance results.

**Public and Media Scrutiny:** Expectations are high owing to Pakistani public's fierce passion of Cricket. A player stated:

"The media regularly criticizes us which makes us lack confidence..."Fans expect us to win every game.... that is a lot of pressure."

This scrutiny can increase anxiety and self-doubt and perhaps lead to burnout. The Pakistani cricket team has a noteworthy position in the national identity and in the pride of the different ethnic groups. Since they are in the limelight in the sport, the cricketing stars become the prey of great expectations from both the fans and the public which at times forces them to ask for wins and excellent performances as their right. Constant media attention and passionate fans also amplify the pressure on the players psychologically so that they are often in a situation of high anxiety and fear of not being able to deliver in their performances. The demand for public and nationalistic expectations to be met takes on a special significance in the Pakistani context where cricket is very much connected with socio-political issues thereby creating a specific mechanism for pressure. As a result, such factors could lead to the increased levels of performance anxiety, self-doubt and fear of public criticism, which might eventually cause the athletes' mental health to deteriorate.

**Financial Concerns:** Cricket is often the main source of income for the players, and this makes it distinct from other sporting disciplines where the importance of earnings on the players is not always obvious. This financial dimension has led to the cricket becoming a major industry that generated a significant amount of money through the development of the teams and the high revenue created by the tournaments and the international tours. In contrast to individual sports such as tennis, where athletes are more or less working as individual contractors, relying solely on prize money,



cricketers in the professional game are typically employees, receiving regular pay from national governing bodies or franchise organizations. Narratives like

"Cricket is my only ministry for life, and I am anxious about my future"

reflect the stress of economic insecurity and sponsorship remotely. Economic dependence upon performance aggravates susceptibilities in mental illness. Financial problems lead to worries for career sustainability, contract stability as well as sponsorship continuity. The economic volatility increases the stress and potentially diverts the mental resources away from performance concentration and instead toward financial survival. This financial dependency may cause increased susceptibility to exploitation, increase anxiety and increase the likelihood of engaging in risk taking behavior, such as doping or substance abuse.

#### **Substance Abuse**

The problem of substance abuse arises as a complicated but important issue which affects the mental health and integrity of the players of Pakistani national cricket team. This is not a problem discussed as much as others, but it does encompass both the use of performance-enhancing drugs (doping) and use of drugs for recreation or to cope with stress. This shows the problems athletes go through and even lack of mental health care.

**Doping and Performance:** The pressure to become a successful cricketer and maintain their competitive edge can lead some cricketers to use banned drugs. The menace of doping imperils the health of the player and the ethical integrity of sport. Several players knew that doping pressures were in existence as one of the players exclaimed;

"I know that people have been using substances to boost performance, but I don't use them."

Pakistani cricket officials take proactive steps in dealing with doping through education and awareness and strict doping testing procedures. Nonetheless, there is inconsistency in player's knowledge of the dangers of doping and the high stress environment combined with the lack of psychological support may tempt certain individuals into using performance enhancing substances.

**Drug as coping tool:** Some players may use certain substances such as alcohol or other drugs as maladaptive coping mechanisms to cope with stress, anxiety and emotional stress associated with sports at a professional level. The use of drugs to reduce stress was viewed and stigmatized:

"Certain players are using substances to deal with the stress, but it's not the right way to deal with the stress."

There is a need for greater awareness about the dangers of taking drugs. This exposes a widespread problem of mental health stigma and lack of institutionalized support structure in the cricket infrastructure of Pakistan. In the absence of easily attainable counseling or psychiatric help, some athletes may seek to use substances as a means to self-medication for psychological distress conditions, increasing the risks of addiction and developing health problems.

#### **Cultural Context**

The Cultural Context theme includes the profound impact of societal, family and socio-economics on the experiences, beliefs, concerning mental health among the Pakistani national cricket players. Understanding these cultural factors is crucial to the effective treatment of the psychological well-being of athletes.

**Family Influence:** In Pakistani society, the role of family in shaping the identity, beliefs and life decisions of individuals is very important. Cricket players often come under a lot of pressure to perform because of the family expectation since playing cricket is considered to be a good job and a way to enhance social standing. The family plays a powerful role where parental expectations often put pressure on the family as one player put it.

"In our culture, cricket is seen as the only way to attain success....My parents expect me to be a champion in cricket and this makes the pressure greater."

Players may have familial honor that makes them feel the need to maintain it, so making success and failure have even greater repercussions outside of personal desires. This dynamic involves the ways players approach mental health, which is usually seen in the way to be strong and tough and never to show vulnerability or seek help for fear of disapproval from family.

**Socioeconomic Disparities:** Training facilities, resources, and mental health care are unevenly distributed across Pakistan with urban entities often having better infrastructure and professional support than their rural counterparts. Athletes from rural areas have to overcome several hurdles, including limited or no access to training and mental health services which adversely affect their careers and psychological well-being. A player from a far-off area said, "Urban players have superior support and facilities than us, and it is different for us in rural areas.... we are not provided with the same training and mental health resources."

The contrast between the rural and urban scenarios gives rise to different opportunities for the athletes' development and a different psychological support system. The athletes in rural areas have sometimes no option but to confront social and economic hardships that exacerbate the already high requirement of aspiring to elite competition, and these hardships include lack of mental health counseling, medical and career guidance.

## **DISCUSSION**

This qualitative study examines the mental health problems the Pakistani national cricket team members have. A detailed analytical approach is employed to find common patterns that explain the complicated ways psychological, social, cultural, and situational factors play a role in these athletes' lives.

The study found that players often face serious mental health problems. These include worries about how they perform, trouble managing their emotions, anger, and great worry about getting hurt. The cricket-focused nature of Pakistani society makes players' worries even worse. They have a very strong fear of failing because they feel pressured by national expectations and constant media coverage. These results match studies that show athletes in high-pressure situations often feel very stressed and worried, which can hurt how they play (Arnold, & Fletcher, 2012). Cricket is very important in Pakistan, where players show the hopes of the whole country, which makes the mental pressure even greater (Ali et al., 2021). Challenges around emotional regulation and aggressive comportment are characteristic of the competitive environment of elite sport but also of culturally mediated ideas of masculinity in Pakistan, where affective stoicism is valorized and uncontrolled aggression promises negative outcomes (Chaudhry & Amis, 2021; Qayyum et al., 2025). An extra dimension of anxiety arises from concerns of injury which seems especially acute in environments where there is limited financial protection for players who are injured and so this fuels fears linked with career protection (Keefer, & Kniesner, 2023).

In the Pakistani society, shame is all around mental health and this makes the existing problems more severe. Mental health problems are often seen as a person's own fault or even a moral failing, which prevents open conversation and the ability to seek professional help (Daraz et al., 2025). This cultural stigma is not limited to Pakistan but exists in all collectivist societies where family honor and social image are of the utmost importance (Abbas et al., 2025; Thompson & Saleem, 2025). The lack of mental health professionals in the cricket institutions and a lack of psychological literacy among coaches and administrators, add to these problems. Consequently, many athletes have to deal on their own with their problems or use informal support mechanisms (Purcell et al., 2019). The intersection of stigma and resource scarcity exposes a systemic lack in the sporting infrastructure in Pakistan, which is similar to other low and middle-income countries (Anderson & Petrie, 2017). Addressing these barriers through culturally sensitive anti-stigma interventions and specific training for sports personnel is important to enable early intervention and sustained support. Media attention and scrutiny, fan expectations and socio-political symbolism place a significant amount of psychological stress on individuals. Pakistani cricket is one of the pillars of national pride, hence attracts more attention and sets very high expectations (Ali & Ali, 2020). Athletes have cited how the harsh media criticism has undermined their confidence, supporting the previous research work about the negative impact of media on athlete mental health (Rice et al., 2016). Financial pressure due to uncertain contracts and sponsorship adds further pressure to mental wellbeing issues, particularly when cricket is the only income (Cresswell & Eklund, 2021). This economic instability makes it difficult to concentrate and worsens the effects of anxiety, making the need for strong financial safety nets and comprehensive career support systems of utmost importance.

Substance abuse is a major issue that impacts people who suffer from mental health disorders, though its prevalence may not be equal in prevalence. The understanding of the pressures to undertake doping and the use of pharmacological substances as a solution to a coping mechanism is consistent with global concerns on athletes who have undergone significant psychological stress and use illicit substances and doping (Backhouse et al., 2011; Lundqvist & Andersson, 2021). In Pakistan, it is harder to identify and support people who use drugs because of the societal stigma, according to Hassan et al. (2023). To solve this, we need preventive programs that join anti-doping education with easy mental health care.

Cultural background greatly shapes the mental health of Pakistani athletes. Family expectations can motivate success but also create pressure due to a collectivist focus on family honor (Tharani et al., 2024). The difference between rural and urban areas shows that people of different socioeconomic classes don't have the same access to support and mental health, which raises the stress levels for players in rural areas (Zondo et al., 2023). Cultural taboos stop people from talking openly about their problems and seeking the right treatment (Purcell et al., 2023). Cricket's national importance adds to psychological stress, as players feel they carry the hopes of the nation, raising the stakes in terms of performance and mental health.

These themes show that different actions are needed based on Pakistan's culture and structure. Putting mental health experts in cricket groups, running acceptance campaigns to fight stigma, making training plans for psychological skills, and setting up clear career rules can all help people feel better. Media knowledge programs, money safety nets, and helpful laws may also lower the effect of outside stress, which lowers system pressure. Because substance abuse and psychological health are linked, it is vital to control one while helping the other. All over the world, people are starting to see that athlete psychological health needs a complete approach that understands the culture. In Pakistan, cricket is a key part of society and a symbol of the country. Fixing psychological health problems means working with families, teams, leaders, and the news to make a setting that helps both psychological health and sports success. To grow a generation of Pakistani cricketers who do well both on and off the field, it will take long-term money and time.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study confirms that a culturally aware mental health system is important within the structure of Pakistani cricket. The complex mix of pressure to perform, cultural norms, money issues, and organizational problems make mental health a particularly challenging area. Pakistani cricketers show they are tough and can deal with tough situations, but their struggles point to deeper problems that need many solutions. To support their overall well-being,

it's important to fight stigma, provide access to mental health services and training, and ensure job and financial stability. Making mental health as important as performance needs teamwork from families, teams, sports organizations, and the media, all based on cultural understanding. These combined efforts will fix problems and keep Pakistani cricketers mentally strong and able to compete internationally.

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