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INFLUENCE OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS,
MINDFULNESS AND PERCEIVED PREJUDICE
ON TEAM COHESION AMONG WOMEN
UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL PLAYERS
IN PUNJAB PAKISTAN



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SUMEIRA RAJAB

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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PREJUDICE ON TEAM COHESION AMONG WOMEN UNIVERSITY
FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN PUNJAB PAKISTAN

SUMEIRA RAJAB



THESIS SUBMITTED FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENT FOR THE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF SPORTS SCIENCES AND COACHING
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2025





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TIMBALAN DEKAN (AKADEMIK DAN ANTARABANGSA)
FAKULTI SAINS SUKAN DAN KEJURULATIHAN
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS
35900 TANJONG MALIM, PERAK



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how various prosocial behaviors of women football players impact team cohesion and to investigate the moderating effects of perceived prejudice and mindfulness on these relationships. Specifically, this study examines how various prosocial behaviors of women football players, such as friendship quality, agreeableness, self-transcendence, empathic concern, and aggression, impact on team cohesion at the university level. It also investigates the moderating effects of perceived prejudice and mindfulness on the relationship between prosocial behaviors and team cohesion. The study utilizes social learning theory to explain these relationships and used purposive sampling to collect data from 373 active players at public universities in Punjab, Pakistan. The data analysis was conducted using *Smart-PLS* software. The results indicate that agreeableness, self-transcendence, empathic concern, mindfulness, and aggression positively impact team cohesion. At the same time, the quality of friendship and perceived prejudice do not directly correlate with team cohesion. It was found that mindfulness positively moderates the relationship between prosocial behaviors such as agreeableness, empathic concern, aggression, and team cohesion. However, a negative moderating effect exists on the relationship between friendship quality and team cohesion. Perceived prejudice positively moderates the relationships between agreeableness, aggression, and team cohesion but negatively moderates the relationship between friendship quality and team cohesion. However, perceived prejudice does not moderate the relationship between self-transcendence, empathic concern, and team cohesion. This study adds to the existing literature by exploring the direct relationship between prosocial behaviors and team cohesion and further expands on social learning theory. It also emphasizes the importance of coach-led training programs to improve players' communication skills, conflict-resolution strategies, and empathy-building exercises. Additionally, the study suggests implementing mindfulness practices and anti-discrimination policies to foster positive interpersonal relationships and address instances of prejudice in sports teams.



PENGARUH TINGKAH LAKU PROSOSIAL, KESEDARAN MINDA, DAN SANGKAAN PREJUDIS TERHADAP KESEPADUAN PASUKAN DALAM KALANGAN PEMAIN BOLA SEPAK UNIVERSITI WANITA DI PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti hubungan antara tingkah laku prososial dengan kesepaduan pasukan dalam kalangan pemain bola sepak wanita, serta mengkaji kesan moderasi kesedaran minda dan sangkaan prejudis ke atas hubungan tersebut. Tingkah laku prososial seperti kualiti persahabatan, sifat mudah mesra, transendensi diri, keprihatinan empati, dan keagresifan, dilihat sebagai peramal kesepaduan pasukan di peringkat universiti. Berpandukan teori pembelajaran sosial, persampelan bertujuan digunakan untuk mengumpul data daripada 373 orang pemain bola sepak wanita di universiti awam Punjab, Pakistan. Analisis data telah dijalankan menggunakan perisian Smart-PLS. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa sifat mudah mesra, transendensi diri, keprihatinan empati, kesedaran minda, dan keagresifan mempunyai kesan positif yang signifikan terhadap kesepaduan pasukan, manakala kualiti persahabatan dan sangkaan prejudis tidak menunjukkan hubungan langsung. Walaupun kesedaran minda memoderasi hubungan antara sifat mudah mesra, keprihatinan empati, keagresifan dan kesepaduan pasukan secara positif, namun ia didapati memoderasi hubungan antara kualiti persahabatan dan kesepaduan pasukan secara negatif. Sangkaan prejudis pula memoderasi hubungan antara sifat mudah mesra, keagresifan, dan kesepaduan pasukan secara positif, dan memoderasikan hubungan antara kualiti persahabatan dan kesepaduan pasukan secara negatif. Walau bagaimanapun, tiada kesan moderasi sangkaan prejudis ke atas hubungan antara transendensi diri, keprihatinan empati dan kesepaduan pasukan. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada literatur dengan memperjelaskan bagaimana tingkah laku prososial mempengaruhi kesepaduan pasukan dalam kalangan pemain bola sepak wanita, di samping menekankan peranan kesedaran minda dan sangkaan prejudis. Implikasi praktikal menegaskan kepentingan program latihan yang dikendalikan jurulatih untuk mengukuhkan kemahiran komunikasi, empati, dan strategi penyelesaian konflik pemain, serta pelaksanaan amalan kesedaran minda dan dasar anti-diskriminasi bagi memupuk persekitaran pasukan yang inklusif dan kohesif.





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- C1 Approval of Human Research Ethics
C2 Informed Consent Form
C3 Survey Questionnaire
C4 Approval from Expert Research Instrument Validation forms

D Published Article

- D1 RIMC Approval for Publication Article Notification
- D2 UPSI Turninit Thesis Report
- D3 Sumeira Rajab^{1, 2}, Dr. Nur Haziyaniti, Prof. Dr. Abdul Rahim (2024). Unveiling Bonds: Perceived Prejudice Shapes Prosocial Behavior and Team Cohesion. Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences <https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.2.001765>
- D4 Sumeira Rajab, Dr. Nur Haziyaniti Binti Mohammad Khalid (2025). Building Stronger Teams: How Mindfulness Moderates the Link between Prosocial Behaviors and Team Cohesion in Women's University Football Players in Punjab, Pakistan. GUMAN, 8(4), 89–105. Retrieved from <https://guman.com.pk/index.php/GUMAN/article/view/994>
- D5 Sumeira Rajab, Dr. Nur Haziyaniti Binti Mohammad Khalid (2025). Influence of Prosocial Behaviors, Mindfulness, and Perceived Prejudice on Team Cohesion among Women University Football Players in Punjab, Pakistan. Pakistan Social Sciences Review, 9(4), 49–68. <https://ojs.pssr.org.pk/journal/article/view/1125>



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Agreeableness
AGG	Aggression
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CR	Composite Reliability
EC	Empathic Concern
FL	Factor Loading
FQ	Friendship Quality
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait
MF	Mindfulness
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
PP	Perceived Prejudice
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
ST	Self-Transcendence
TC	Team Cohesion



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study



Many social psychology fields like military psychology, sports psychology, and educational psychology have been influenced by the concept of group cohesion. However, the most obvious and practical use of group cohesion to date has been in the context of the possibility that it might be used to predict group performance (Braun, Kozlowski, Brown, & Deshon, 2020). This anticipation has been articulated several times throughout history. For instance, the well-known expression United we stand, divided we fall was coined by Aesop in 550 B.C. and underlined the significance of the cohesiveness of a community. Even in today's modern military and political organizations, which are always striving to boost the morale of their followers and foster a sense of team spirit, it is essential to have strong team cohesiveness (Fonseca, Lukosch, & Brazier, 2019). Within the realm of competitive athletics, the concept of





team cohesion has garnered a great deal of focus and consideration over the course of the previous four decades.

Cohesion of a team is a measure of how successfully a group works together and how intensely its members are engaged to the group. In addition, maintaining group cohesiveness is essential if you want to retain members of that group. Researchers and professionals in the field have been interested in this question for a long time now, and they want to know what elements contribute to the success of teams. It has been determined that building a successful team cohesiveness is vital in order to do so (Khan, 2018). The literature has a significant amount of research that focuses on examining the link between cohesiveness and successful performance. The association has been the source of a significant amount of theoretical debate as well as an emergence in the number of empirical studies. Previous studies on team cohesiveness in sports have mostly concentrated on male players between the ages of 18 and 33 (Gu & Xue, 2022). At the top or professional level, however, women players have been virtually disregarded. The results of studies have demonstrated that male and women players have distinct perspectives on the importance of being a member of a team and on their reasons for engaging in sports (Edwards, Wood, Chard, & Potwarka, 2019).

However, despite the fact that it is the public belief that men and women interact differently in social settings, relatively little study has been done to explore how women players visualize the cohesiveness of their teams (Halbrook, Blom, Hurley, Bell, & Holden, 2012). The vast majority of research has focused solely on the perspectives of male players about team cohesiveness, with only a few studies examining the perspectives of women players (Milne, Coffee, & Lavalley, 2021). Roberts, Ferguson, and Mosewich (2018) suggested that there were no variations based on gender in the





findings of the research on cohesiveness. Previous studies reveal that women may describe themselves in connection to the people in their lives and the social ties that bind them, whereas males tend to define themselves in terms of the behavior that are unique to them as individuals (Erikstad, Martin, Haugen, & Høigaard, 2018). Previous studies reveal that women may describe themselves in connection to the people in their lives and the social ties that bind them. In contrast, males tend to define themselves in terms of the behavior that are unique to them as individuals (Roberts et al., 2018). Based on this evidence, it might be predicted that cohesiveness is a feature more commonly seen or demonstrated by women teams than by male teams. Women's strengthen cohesion through social behaviors. So, this study selected the women player's prosocial behavior to improve team cohesion.



1.2 Background of Muslim Women Participation

Women are always discouraged from taking part in any physical activity in Pakistan, either traditional or mainstream. There is systematic discouragement for women, people say you are wasting your time, your body will change, you will become more masculine, and you will become black. Existing research indicates that the exclusion of Muslim women from sporting venues is caused by a variety of socio cultural pressures, such as conventional norms, Islamic doctrine, European sports, and Islamophobia (Ratna & Samie, 2017). Having said that, it is important to recognize that neither Muslim women nor the Muslim world constitutes a unified entity (Samie, 2017). For instance, Muslim women living in countries on the Indian subcontinent, such as Pakistan, confront a distinct set of issues than Muslim women living in Middle Eastern





countries. However, most international and local development groups use an essentialist strategy (Hussain & Cunningham, 2021) while promoting sporting activities in the Muslim world. In addition, many sports promoted in emerging nations have roots in Western culture (Biyawila, 2018) which can prevent Muslim women from participating in sports.

Similarly, Toffoletti and Palmer (2017) emphasized that Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiatives in parts of the globe other than the West strengthen the Western sporting paradigm, ultimately resulting in historically oppressed populations being excluded from athletic venues. This notion is consistent with Lenneis and Pfister (2017) the argument is that the sporting paradigm is only a device that protects those born into privileged social classes. For instance, (Hussain & Cunningham, 2021a) emphasized that European invaders had been in charge of world sports and that they had limited sporting activities in various cultures to advance their athletic agenda. In addition to this, the prestige of males is elevated in a great number of Muslim countries (Joly & Wadia, 2017) as well as the Western sporting paradigm, with its origins in colonial masculinity (Salhany, 2021), might strengthen men's control over women's. As a result, the Western athletic paradigm could systematically limit the amount of time that women's spend participating in sports in the Global South. Biyawila (2018) notably in a variety of nations characterized by patriarchal norms, such as Pakistan.

This study has highlighted that Pakistani women are systematically marginalized by various social forces, such as post-colonial structures and men's power over certain institutions (Hussain & Cunningham, 2021). Nevertheless, there remains a paucity of research regarding how masculine hegemony is produced across generations in the Pakistani sporting environment, especially in the traditional sports context.





Despite facing systematic marginalization, there is some evidence that women in the Indian subcontinent is motivated to take part in traditional sports rooted in local culture Hussain and Cunningham (2021) thus defying socio cultural norms and expectations.

1.3 Brief History of Women Football

It is crucial to examine the history of women football and the difficulties the game has experienced in order to understand the current concerns surrounding the sport, such as the lack of representation compared to men's football. There is no question that the past has impacted how the game is played in the twenty first century, and it is crucial to recognize the current modifications. The Football Association is one of the most important governing bodies around the world (Webb, 2021). They have regulated the majority of football related activities in the United Kingdom throughout its history and continue to do so in the present day. The English Football Association was created in 1863, while the Scottish Football Association was established in 1873. This is crucial because, in the early part of the 20th century, the Football Associations (FA) in England and Scotland played a big role in the elimination of women's football (Williams, 2017).

Women football faced discrimination against men football for the first time. In addition, it is an early indication of the dominance of patriarchy in women football, in this case, the dominance of males inside the Football Association of England and Scotland, which ultimately decides the trajectory that women football will keep taking. Even though 1921 appeared to be the year in which the women's game would come to an end, this was also the year when the game began to attract economic attention from





businesspeople, who recognized that the women's game had commercial potential (Skillen, Byrne, Carrier, & James, 2022). This is notable because it was the first time that women football was officially acknowledged and the first time that women players were considered to be professionals (Taylor, 2013). One can observe that 1921 seemed to be a year of contradiction for women football. On the one hand, the sport had to contend with separation. However, on the other hand, it also gained commercial popularity from business executives, which indicated that businessmen saw potential within the game. Once the ban on women's playing football was lifted in 1961, there was a significant increase in the number of women participating in the game during the 1960s (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). She makes it abundantly clear that the advancements for women football in other regions, such as Germany, the United States of America, and the Nordic countries, substantially outweigh the advancements for women football that have up until 1997, when her book was released, been achieved in the United Kingdom (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009).

The London Olympic Games of 2012 also saw a record audience attendance of nearly 660,000, making that year more notable for women football (Fanning Madden & Ruther, 2011). In England, there were 2.6 million women and girls who played football as of September 2014. Compared to the 40,181 fans who attended the last wembley friendly with England's men, more than 55,000 tickets were sold for the November encounter between England's women and Germany. Sport England has made a commitment to invest £30 million in grassroots football by 2017, with a particular emphasis on attracting and retaining girls and women on the field.





1.4 Problem Statement

Women involved in outdoor sports are mentally and physically stronger than those engaged in household duties (Wegner, Jordan, Funk, & Clark, 2016). Women sports participation, particularly in football, remains low compared to men (Toffoletti, 2017). In Pakistan, 48.1% of women and 32.7% of men are inactive. Despite women composing 48% of Pakistan's population, only 10 have competed in the Summer Olympics since 1947 (Laar, Shi, & Ashraf, 2019). Long term, if such trends continue, women's sports participation may decline further in Pakistan. That's why this study focused on women Muslim players in developing countries like Pakistan despite focusing on males in emerging economies like Malaysia. Research on Women football has largely emphasized individual performance (Valenti, Peng & Rocha, 2021) and resilience in sports (Merriweather, 2013). However, an essential yet underexplored aspect of women football performance is team cohesion.

While existing studies recognize the importance of cohesion in fostering teamwork and overall success, little research has been conducted on how women football players develop, sustain, and leverage cohesion for competitive advantage. This gap is particularly critical given that women players, especially in Muslim communities, often require strong family and peer support to participate in outdoor sports. Similarly, within a team setting, women football players rely on collective support from teammates to perform effectively. Yet, studies suggest that team cohesion among women players is often weak (Asamoah & Grobbelaar, 2017), which raises concerns about how this deficiency affects individual and collective performance.





A lack of team cohesion can lead to poor cooperation among women players (Eys et al., 2015), heightened stress levels, and overall performance decline (Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2015). Research also suggests that women players have a stronger psychological need for belongingness than their male counterparts to reach peak performance (Slaten, Ferguson, Hughes, & Scalise, 2020). However, cohesion challenges often result in weaker team orientation among women players, making it more difficult for them to synchronize efforts on the field (Pensgaard, Ivarsson, Nilstad, Solstad, & Steffen, 2018). A critical issue that remains unaddressed is why women players tend to join and leave teams more frequently, leading to fluctuations in team composition and competitiveness (Stier, 2018). This instability affects team chemistry, disrupts performance consistency, and creates difficulties for coaches and sports management officials, who struggle to understand why a highly competitive team one year may underperform the next. Despite having talented players, some women teams fail to succeed in international competitions, whereas teams with average talent manage to secure national titles. The role of team cohesion in explaining these performance inconsistencies remains insufficiently examined (Stier, 2018).

So, these issues pointed out the need to investigate the underlying causes of weak team cohesion and how team cohesion can be improved to attain competitive outcomes and ensure greater stability and success for women football teams at both national and international levels. However, Cuadrado and Tabernero (2015) pointed out that prosocial behaviors are more critical than other factors because they directly enhance team trust, cooperation, and collective motivation. Unlike leadership styles or structural interventions, prosocial behaviors create intrinsic team bonds, reducing conflicts and social loafing, which are common in women sports teams (Jin, Kim, Love,





Jin, & Zhao, 2022). Research indicates that prosocial interactions mitigate the negative effects of competitiveness, fostering a supportive environment that enhances long-term team stability (Kavussanu & Stanger, 2017). General prosocial behaviors such as autonomous motivation, coach sportsmanship behaviors, prosocial teammate behaviors, social identity and moral reasoning (Kavussanu & Al-Yaaribi, 2021), promote only positive social interactions. But, they do not necessarily translate into stronger team cohesion in high-performance settings.

However, prosocial factors like; agreeableness, friendship quality, self-transcendence, empathy, and aggression directly impact intra-team relationships, cooperation, and collective performance. Agreeableness fosters trust and cooperation, friendship quality strengthens emotional bonds, and self-transcendence encourages a shared team identity. Empathy enhances mutual understanding, while controlled aggression fuels competitiveness and resilience. These behaviors are particularly relevant in women football teams, where relational dynamics play a more significant role than in male teams, influencing overall team effectiveness and success. Despite the importance of social behaviors in shaping team dynamics, sports scholars remain uncertain about which behaviors should be encouraged or regulated to optimize cohesion among women football players and minimize negative effects. This leads to the first research question:

RQ 1: What is the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players?

Mindfulness refers to an individual's ability to remain aware of their present actions while anticipating and rationalizing future outcomes. In competitive sports,





mindfulness becomes particularly significant when players face pressure, uncertainty, or threats to their self-esteem (Cohen & McKay, 2020). In such contexts, mindfulness helps players remain composed, evaluate their team's strengths and weaknesses, and make strategic decisions that promote collective performance. A highly mindful women player not only anticipates challenges but also encourages her team members to respond cohesively, fostering a stronger sense of unity and cooperation. Mindfulness, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping team cohesion by influencing how players perceive and react to various social and competitive scenarios (Golubickis et al., 2020).

However, mindfulness manifests differently across players with varying levels of cognitive awareness. This discrepancy highlights why mindfulness should be considered a key factor in determining the effectiveness of prosocial behaviors in promoting team cohesion. While prosocial behaviors agreeableness, friendship quality, empathy, self-transcendence, aggression are fundamental to building strong teams, their impact is contingent on how mindful players are in utilizing them. A mindful player not only engages in prosocial behaviors but also understands the nuances of team dynamics, ensuring that such behaviors translate into meaningful cohesion. On the other hand, a less mindful player may engage in prosocial actions superficially, without fully integrating them into the team's collective functioning (Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020).

Mindfulness can have both positive and negative effects on team cohesion, depending on the extent of prosocial behaviors exhibited by players. While highly mindful players can amplify the benefits of prosocial behaviors by fostering trust and cooperation, those with lower mindfulness may struggle to harness the full potential of these behaviors, leading to inconsistencies in team cohesion. Since women football teams heavily rely on cohesion for optimal performance, it is imperative to explore how





mindfulness interacts with prosocial behaviors to determine its impact on team dynamics. This leads to the second research question:

RQ 2: Does mindfulness moderate the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players?

Prejudice among women players is significantly higher than among their male counterparts, as women often face more social and structural biases in competitive environments (Hoyt, Morgenroth, & Burnette, 2019). Within women football teams, players may hold prejudiced attitudes toward their fellow teammates, potentially disrupting the player's trust on each other and overall performance (Martin & Good, 2015). Given the crucial role of cohesion in team success, understanding how prejudice affects intra-team dynamics is essential. However, the extent to which prejudice influences team cohesion may not be uniform; it may vary depending on the presence of prosocial behaviors among players (Webber & Donahue, 2001). While prosocial behaviors such as agreeableness, friendship quality, empathy, self-transcendence, aggression are known to enhance social bonds, the effectiveness of such behaviors may be undermined when prejudice is prevalent. In women football teams, differences in prosocial behaviors can either mitigate or exacerbate the negative effects of prejudice, thereby influencing overall cohesion (González-García, Martinent, & Nicolas, 2021). Prejudice may create social divisions, reduce mutual trust, and lower the shared commitment to collective goals. When prejudice is present, some players may feel excluded or undervalued, leading to a fragmented team dynamic and decreased cooperation. Unlike other interpersonal challenges, prejudice is often deeply ingrained and resistant to change. A player who trusts her teammates' abilities is likely to exhibit greater confidence and contribute positively to team dynamics. However, when a coach





or teammates hold preconceived notions about a player's capabilities, these biases can persist even in the face of strong individual performances, especially during high stakes competitions (Van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). This suggests that prejudice may override the potential benefits of prosocial behaviors, reinforcing social hierarchies and limit the performance of team.

While research has shown that social behaviors play a vital role in shaping positive team beliefs (Yang, Xin, & Zhao, 2021), the extent to which these behaviors are influenced by prejudice remains unexplored. So, there arises a need to investigate, whether strong or weak prejudice may enhance the cohesion or fail due to underlying biases. Literature is unable to answer, how the low or high prejudice may influence the prosocial behaviors and subsequently, fostering trust and cooperation. This unexplored dynamic presents a significant gap in sports research, particularly in the context of women football teams. Given the underestimated role of prejudice in team sports, this study leads to the third research question;

RQ 3: Does perceived prejudice moderate the relationship between prosocial behaviors and team cohesion among women football players?

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by investigating the complex interplay between prosocial behavior, mindfulness, and prejudice in shaping team cohesion among women football players. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights into how prosocial behaviors such as friendship quality, agreeableness, self-transcendence, empathic concern, aggression can enhance team cohesion and overall performance. Furthermore, the study aims to examine how mindfulness moderates the relationship between prosocial behaviors and team





cohesion, offering a deeper understanding of the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying team dynamics. Additionally, the study will explore the influence of prejudice on intra team relationships, shedding light on how social biases may disrupt cohesion and undermine performance.

1.5 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study was to determine the relationship between prosocial behaviors; friendship quality, agreeableness, self-transcendence, empathic concern and aggression with team cohesion. Also to examine the moderating effect of mindfulness and perceived prejudice on the relationship between prosocial behaviors and team cohesion among university women football players. This provides an overview of the research objectives of this study. These are:

- RO1: To determine the relationship between prosocial behaviors and team Cohesion among women football players.
- RO2: To investigate the moderation effect of mindfulness on the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players.
- RO3: To investigate the moderation effect of perceived prejudice on the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players.



1.6 Research Questions

The research questions which are needed to achieve this study is, what is the relationship between prosocial behaviors; friendship quality, agreeableness, self-transcendence, empathic concern and aggression with team cohesion and how the moderating effect of mindfulness and perceived prejudice on the relationship of prosocial behaviors and team cohesion? This provides an overview of the research questions that have been identified as crucial for achieving the research objectives. The research questions are following:

RQ 1: What is the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players?

RQ 2: Does mindfulness moderate the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players?

RQ 3: Does perceived prejudice moderate the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players?

1.7 Research Hypothesis

This study uses the Alternative hypothesis (H_1). The following is a list of the research alternative hypotheses.

H1a: There is a significant positive association between quality of friendship and team cohesion.



- H2b: There is a significant positive relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion.
- H3c: Self-transcendence has a significant positive association with team cohesion.
- H4d: Empathic concern influence team cohesion positively.
- H5e: There is a significant negative association between aggression and team cohesion.
- H6: Mindfulness has a positive relationship with team cohesion.
- H7: Perceived prejudice has a negative relationship with team cohesion.
- H1b: Player's mindfulness moderate the relationship between quality of friendship and team cohesion.
- H2b: Player's mindfulness as a moderator strengthen the relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion.
- H3b: The relationship between Player's mindfulness and team cohesion moderated by Self-transcendence.
- H4b: The Player's mindfulness moderate the relationship between empathic concern and team cohesion.
- H5b: The Player's mindfulness as a moderator strengthen the relationship between aggression and team cohesion.
- H1c: Perceived prejudice moderate the relationship between the quality of friendship and team cohesion.
- H2c: Perceived prejudice as a moderator strengthen the relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion.
- H3c: The relationship between self-transcendence and team cohesion moderated by perceived prejudice.





H4c: Perceived prejudice moderate the relationship between empathic concern and team cohesion.

H5c: Perceived prejudice as a moderator weaken the relationship between aggression and team cohesion.

1.8 Importance of the Study

The importance of this study is twofold, it contributes to the literature and theory as well. This study contributes to the literature on three aspects. Firstly, it determines the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players. Women believe in strong social ties close social coordination improves synergy and, subsequently, performance. Similarly, the prosocial behavior of women players improves coordination within the team and results in high achievement. Despite the importance of prosocial behaviors, which may improve team cohesion, no study has investigated the link between prosocial behavior and team cohesion (Bisagno et al., 2024). This study signifies the consideration of prosocial behaviors for improving team cohesion, not only the performance of women football in developed countries but also the performance of players in developing countries like Pakistan.

Literature indicates that mindfulness plays an important role in a player's performance. Mindfulness reduces the probability of injuries and psychological support and improves cohesion among the group members (Piasecki, Loughhead, Paradis, & Munroe-Chandler, 2021). However, the literature is silent on the women player's mindfulness, which improves team cohesion. So, this study filled a research gap by





investigating the moderating effect of mindfulness on the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players. This study revealed that prosocial behavior that has a negative effect on team cohesion can be turned into a positive or increased team cohesion through mindfulness (Majeed, Irshad, Khan, & Saeed, 2023). In other words, this study answered that a weak influence of prosocial behaviors on team cohesion can be improved through the mindfulness of women football players.

Prejudice is a negative attitude and feeling toward an individual based solely on one's membership in a particular social group. This study filled another gap in the literature by investigating the moderating effect of perceived prejudice on the relationship between prosocial behavior and team cohesion among women football players. This study answered that a positive and significant effect of prosocial behavior on team cohesion can be negatively affected due to women football players' prejudice. More interestingly, this study also investigated that prejudice, which is a negative psychological state of a player, can increase/decrease the positive influence of prosocial behavior on team cohesion (Devilly, Brown, Pickert, & O'Donohue, 2017). In addition, this study tested the proposed model in the developing country's context. Secondly, this study contributed to social learning theory by explaining the conceptual model of this study in the context of women football players. Social learning theory states that we learn social behaviors by observing and following the behavior of others.

Similarly, this study explains through the social learning theory that, women football players who practice any or all the prosocial behaviors like; maintaining a quality friendship, agreeableness, self-transcendence, empathic or aggression would like to have strong ties with the player practicing similar prosocial behaviors such as





they use to practice. So, women football players practicing prosocial behaviors want to coordinate, learn, and help each other and it may result in an increase in cohesion among those players. social learning theory explains that learning must result in permanent behavior change. Bandura proposed that permanent behavior change occurs when the four conditions are met (Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018). These four conditions are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Relying on the lens of social learning theory, this study explained that university-level women football players pay attention to the behaviors and performance of their teammates and opponent team. Women football players' greater attention increases prejudice or mindfulness when the prosocial behaviors of fellow players are more striking, different, prestigious, or similar to ourselves (Gilbert & Basran, 2019). If the prosocial behavior of a fellow team member is striking or different from her own, then a women football player's prejudice increases. Higher prejudice against fellow women football players lowers team cohesion. If the striking or different prosocial behavior of fellow women football players remains the prejudice increases and keeps on rehearsing if the same prosocial behavior reproduces. Thus, it increases the demotivation of women football players and results in lower team cohesion.

This study produces one more concept by using the social learning theory. It explains that, if the women football player finds the prosocial behavior of fellow players prestigious or similar to her then her mindfulness increases (Bruner, Boardley, & Côté, 2014). Thus, they start finding ways to support each other. They pass through various competitions and occasions when they help each other. They always learn how to support each other in different situations. Such retention and reproduction of support make up their minds to increase the cohesion among them (Bawa, 2016). The





motivation of women football players increases when they confront a defeat or achieve success. With each success or failure, they use their mindfulness and reassess the prosocial behaviors that cause success or failure. This cycle improves team cohesion and the team achieves ultimate performance. Conclusively, relying on the author's best knowledge, this is the first study to analyze the links between prosocial behavior, perceived prejudice, mindfulness, and team cohesion among university-level women football players. Moreover, it is the first study to investigate the links mentioned above through the lens of social learning theory.

1.9 Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework is grounded in social learning theory, which serves as the overarching theoretical lens for understanding how prosocial behaviors influence team cohesion among women football players. social learning theory posits that individuals learn and develop behaviors through observation, imitation, and social interaction within their environment. In the context of women football teams, players observe and model behaviors from teammates, coaches, and the broader team culture, which subsequently shapes their own prosocial behaviors and contributes to overall team cohesion. The framework proposes six direct relationships between prosocial behaviors and team cohesion. Friendship quality (H1a: +ve) is hypothesized to positively influence team cohesion as stronger interpersonal bonds foster trust and mutual support among teammates. Agreeableness (H2a: +ve) is expected to enhance team cohesion through cooperative and harmonious interactions that reduce conflicts and promote collective unity. Self-transcendence (H3a: +ve) positively impacts cohesion by



encouraging players to prioritize team goals over individual interests, creating a shared sense of purpose. Empathic concern (H4a: +ve) strengthens team bonds through emotional understanding and compassionate responses to teammates' needs and feelings. Interestingly, the framework proposes a negative relationship between aggression and team cohesion (H5a: -ve), suggesting that aggressive behaviors may disrupt team harmony and create interpersonal tensions that undermine collective unity. Additionally, mindfulness is hypothesized to have a direct positive effect on team cohesion (H6: +ve), as mindful players maintain present-moment awareness and emotional regulation that contribute to stable team dynamics.

Conversely, perceived prejudice is expected to directly and negatively impact team cohesion (H7: -ve), as discriminatory attitudes create divisions and reduce trust among team members. Mindfulness serves as a moderating variable that influences the strength of relationships between prosocial behaviors and team cohesion. It positively moderates relationships with friendship quality (H1b: +ve), agreeableness (H2b: +ve), and empathic concern (H4b: +ve), suggesting mindful players better leverage positive behaviors. However, mindfulness negatively moderates self-transcendence (H3b: +ve) and aggression relationships (H5b: -ve). Perceived prejudice also moderates these relationships with complex effects. It positively moderates friendship quality (H1c: +ve), agreeableness (H2c: +ve), and aggression (H5c: -ve) relationships, suggesting that when prejudice exists, positive behaviors become more critical while aggressive behaviors become more damaging. Conversely, it negatively moderates self-transcendence (H3c: -ve) and empathic concern (H4c: +ve) relationships. This framework recognizes that prosocial behaviors operate within complex team dynamics influenced by cognitive mindfulness and social-psychological perceived prejudice

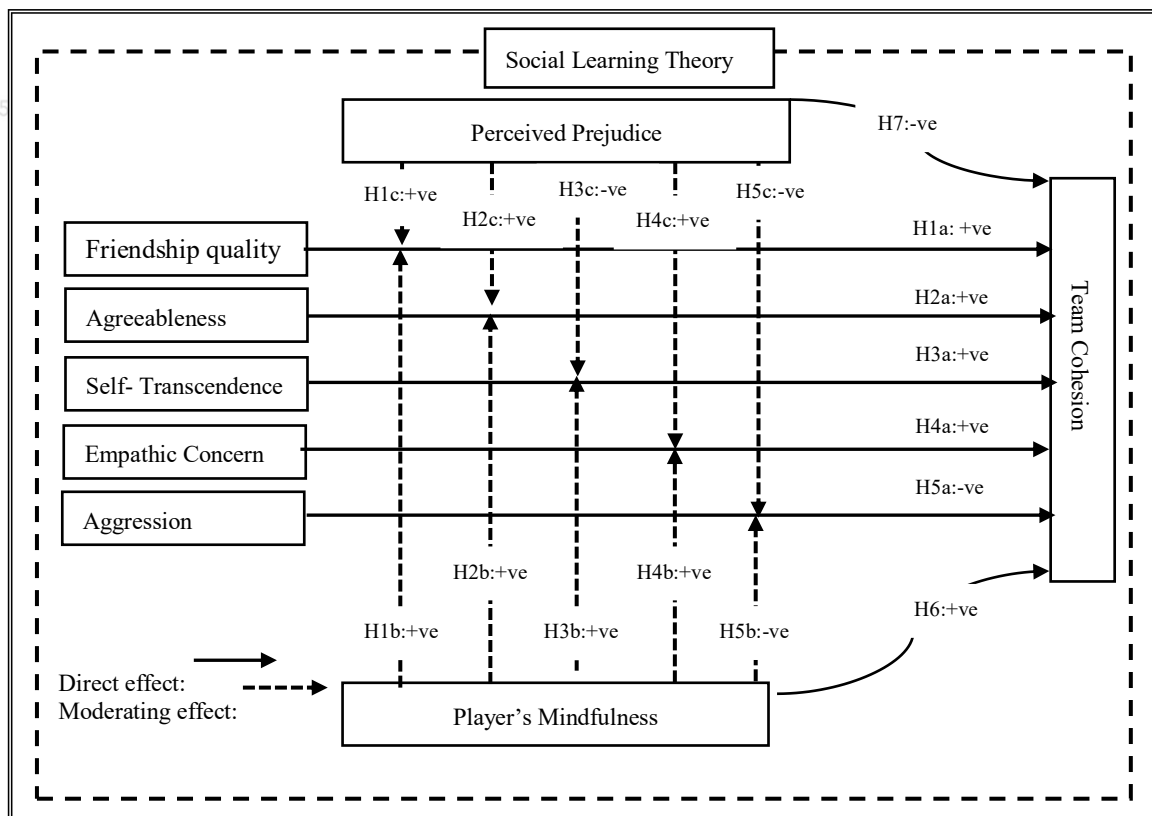


factors. The model provides a nuanced understanding of how women football teams develop cohesion through the interplay between individual behaviors and contextual factors, offering multiple intervention points for enhancing team performance in competitive sports environments.

This research conceptual framework is visually depicted in Figure 1.1, which presents a graphical representation of the theoretical underpinnings and key constructs that guide the investigation.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework





1.10 Scope of Study

This study is strategically scoped to public universities within Punjab province, Pakistan, representing the country's most educationally developed region with the highest concentration of higher education institutions. Punjab encompasses major urban centers including Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and Multan, hosting over 40 public universities with established women football programs. The selection of public universities ensures standardized Higher Education Commission (HEC) guidelines, consistent organizational structures, and comparable sports policies across institutions. The focus on Punjab universities addresses a critical gap in sports psychology research within South Asian contexts, particularly concerning women muslim players. This geographical scope provides an authentic cultural backdrop where women football players navigate traditional Islamic values alongside modern educational aspirations. Unlike Western research settings, Punjab's women players face unique challenges including limited family support and social stigma, intensifying the importance of team cohesion for sustained participation.

This study represents the first investigation analyzing links between prosocial behavior, perceived prejudice, mindfulness, and team cohesion among university-level women football players through social learning theory. The research fills three significant gaps: determining prosocial behavior-team cohesion relationships among women who value strong social ties investigating mindfulness as a moderator that can transform negative prosocial effects into positive team outcomes and examining how perceived prejudice moderates prosocial behavior effectiveness in team settings. The study extends social learning theory by explaining how women football players observe



and model teammate’s prosocial behaviors, leading to permanent behavior changes through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation processes. When players find teammates prosocial behaviors prestigious or similar mindfulness increases, fostering mutual support and enhanced cohesion. Conversely, striking or different behaviors may increase prejudice, reducing team unity. This scope enables practical insights for sports administrators and policymakers working within similar institutional and cultural contexts throughout Pakistan and broader South Asia.

1.11 Operational Definitions

The Operational definition of the variables used in this study is provided as follows;

1.11.1 Prosocial Behaviors

Prosocial behaviors are operationally defined as the composite score derived from five dimensions measured on 5-point likert scales: friendship quality, agreeableness, self-transcendence, empathic concern, and aggression, where higher scores indicate greater voluntary actions that promote teamwork, cooperation, and mutual support among women football players

1.11.2 Friendship Quality

Friendship quality refers to the strength of social bonds between teammates, characterized by trust, support, mutual respect, and shared experiences (Berndt, 2002). Friendship quality consisted of 22-item scale. This, friendship quality scale (Weiss & Smith, 1999) measured on a 5-point frequency scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree), assessing the strength of social bonds between teammates through dimensions of trust, support, mutual respect, and shared experiences, with higher scores indicating stronger friendship quality.

1.11.3 Agreeableness

Agreeableness is an player’s tendency to be cooperative, empathetic, and team-oriented which foster positive interactions and reduce conflicts within a team (Reizer, Harel, & Ben-Shalom, 2023). Agreeableness is defined on 9-item. It was subscale from the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree), where higher scores indicate greater cooperative, empathetic, and team-oriented tendencies that foster positive interactions and reduce conflicts.

1.11.4 Self-transcendence

Self-transcendence is a player's ability to look beyond personal interests and prioritize the collective goals of the team (Guo, Wang, Zhang, & Li, 2023). Self-transcendence is operationally defined as scores on the 15-item. Self-Transcendence Scale Schwartz et al. (2001) measured on a 5-point agreement scale (1=Not at all to 5=Strongly Always), where higher scores indicate greater ability to look beyond personal interests and prioritize collective team goals.

1.11.5 Empathic Concern

Empathic concern in an players ability to recognize, understand, and respond to a teammate's emotions with compassion, kindness, softheartedness and support (Eke, Adam, Kowalski, & Ferguson, 2020). Empathic concern is defined as scores on the 9-item Empathic Concern Scale (Carré et al., 2013) measured on a 5-point frequency scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree), where higher scores indicate greater ability to recognize, understand, and respond to teammates' emotions with compassion and support.

1.11.6 Aggression

Aggression refers to goal-directed, intense behavior of players which can be either constructive or destructive, depending on intent and execution (Foley & Baz, 2021).



Aggression is measure on the 9-item Aggression Scale Orpinas and Frankowski, (2001) measured on a 5-point frequency scale (1=Not at all to 5=Always), where higher scores indicate more frequent goal-directed, intense behaviors that can be either constructive or destructive in team contexts.

1.11.7 Perceived Prejudice

Perceived prejudice is a player's awareness or experience of bias, discrimination, or negative judgments based on factors such as gender, race, or skill level. It can create psychological barriers and impact performance by fostering distrust and social divisions among teammates (Brown, 2010). Perceived prejudice is measured on 17 items, and a five-point Likert scale was used. Higher scores indicate greater awareness or experience of bias, discrimination, or negative judgments that create psychological barriers and impact team dynamics.

1.11.8 Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a player's ability to maintain present moment awareness with focus, clarity, and non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts and emotions. It enhance the concentration, emotional regulation, and resilience of players and allow the players to be adaptive towards pressure, improve decision-making, and performance (Longshore & McAlarnen, 2021). Mindfulness was measured on 12 items and measured on 5-point likert scale ranging from (1=Not at all to 5=Always). It consisted of elements; greater





present-moment awareness, focus, clarity, and non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts and emotions during sports activities.

1.11.9 Team Cohesion

Team cohesion refers to the strength of bonds between team members, the feeling of attraction between team members and the degree to which members concentrate their efforts to achieve collective goals (Grossman, Nolan, Rosch, Mazer, & Salas, 2022). It consisted of six elements: stronger bonds between team members, greater attraction to the team, and higher concentration of efforts toward achieving collective goals. It was measured ranging from (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).



1.12 Summary

This chapter presented a detailed description of the overview, study background, research problem, study objectives, research hypothesis, theoretical underpinnings, study significance, and construct definition. Finally, the study's structure is explained, with a brief explanation of each chapter. The second chapter examines the available literature in order to build a clear and accurate grasp of the proposed variables.

