

Perceived Social Support and Psychological Resilience among Pakistani Women Cricketers

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ABSTRACT

Women cricketers in Pakistan frequently compete under demanding conditions characterized by limited resources and social challenges. Drawing on Conservation of Resources Theory, this study examined the association between perceived social support and psychological resilience among Pakistani women cricketers. Using a cross-sectional comparative design, 114 women cricketers (national-level, $n = 57$, club-level, $n = 57$) completed the Perceived Available Support in Sport Questionnaire (PASS-Q) and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive association between perceived social support and psychological resilience ($r = .797, p < .001$). Tangible support showed the strongest association with resilience ($r = .791, p < .001$). National-level players reported significantly higher levels of perceived social support ($d = 0.875$) and psychological resilience ($d = 1.064$) than club-level players. One-way ANOVA showed significant differences in perceived social support across age and playing experience groups; however, psychological resilience did not differ significantly across these demographic groups. These results highlight the importance of social support, particularly its tangible dimension, as a critical psychological resource for women cricketers and suggest practical directions for athlete development and welfare programs.

Keywords: *perceived social support, psychological resilience, women cricketers, Pakistan, Conservation of Resources Theory*

INTRODUCTION

Cricket occupies a central position in Pakistan's sporting culture and remains one of the most widely followed and participated sports in the country. In recent years, women's cricket has gained increasing recognition through greater participation, international exposure, and improved competitive performances. Despite these advances, women cricketers in Pakistan continue to navigate a sporting environment characterized by limited resources, inconsistent institutional support, and sociocultural challenges that can affect both participation and performance (Laar et al., 2025; Mushtaq & Qurban, 2025). Within such contexts, understanding the psychological resources that help athletes cope with challenges and sustain performance becomes especially important.

Perceived social support has consistently emerged as an important contributor to resilience and effective adaptation in sport. Sustained exposure to competitive pressure, performance expectations, injury risk, and uncertainty regarding selection can challenge athletes' psychological well-being. Consequently, identifying the resources that help athletes adapt positively to these stressors has become a central focus in contemporary sport psychology.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, introduced by Hobfoll (1989), proposes that psychological stress arises when individuals experience an actual or threatened loss of valued resources, including personal characteristics, social conditions, and external support. According to COR Theory, well-being is maintained when valued resources are preserved, replenished, and accumulated over time. In sports, COR theory has been used to explain how athletes manage stress, build resilience, and benefit from social support systems (Deaner & Hobfoll, 2017). A central proposition of the theory is that social support functions as a critical external resource that helps individuals protect their psychological resources, including resilience, when they face adversity. For Pakistani women cricketers, whose formal institutional support is often limited, social support from coaches, family members, and teammates may represent one of the most consistent resources available to sustain psychological resilience throughout the competitive season.

Psychological resilience, defined as the capacity to maintain or recover performance and well-being in the face of adversity is widely recognized as a critical resource for elite athletic performance (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Social support, measured across emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible dimensions (Freeman, Coffee, & Rees, 2011), is consistently identified as a protective factor that helps build and sustain resilience in athletes (Mhiri et al., 2025; Mira et al., 2023). However, despite the theoretical and practical relevance of both constructs to the Pakistani cricket context, no published study has examined perceived social support and psychological resilience among Pakistani women cricketers through the lens of the COR framework. Furthermore, no research has compared these psychological resources across playing levels, age groups, and experience categories within this population.

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between perceived social support and psychological resilience among Pakistani women cricketers and to compare these variables across playing level, age, and playing experience categories. Based on COR Theory and previous empirical evidence, it was hypothesized that perceived social support would be positively associated with psychological resilience and that national-level players would report higher levels of both constructs than club-level players.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women cricketers are exposed to competitive, physical, and psychological demands that challenge their psychological well-being. In addition to performance pressure and injury risk, women athletes in developing countries frequently encounter gender-specific barriers including limited resources, social restrictions, and reduced institutional support (Laar et al., 2025). These challenges are particularly evident in Pakistan, where opportunities for women in sport remain constrained despite recent growth in cricket participation.

Within such demanding environments, psychological resilience has emerged as an important factor supporting athletes' ability to adapt positively to adversity. Resilience refers to the capacity to maintain or regain psychological functioning following stress, setbacks, or challenging events (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). In sport settings, resilience has been associated with enhanced coping, sustained performance, and improved mental well-being. Because resilience develops within social contexts, researchers have increasingly examined the social and environmental resources that help athletes maintain resilience under pressure.

Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides a useful framework for understanding resilience in sport. The theory proposes that psychological stress arises when individuals face the actual or threatened loss of resources they value, defined broadly as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that individuals seek to retain and build (Hobfoll, 1989). A key principle of the theory is that resource loss carries greater psychological weight than equivalent resource gain. Once resources are depleted, individuals become increasingly vulnerable to further losses. Conversely, resource-rich individuals are better positioned to acquire additional resources and resist adversity (Hobfoll, 2011). Applied to athletes, COR theory suggests that those with greater psychological and social resources are better able to manage competitive stressors, whereas those with fewer resources become progressively more vulnerable under pressure.

Among the resources identified within COR theory, social support occupies a central role. Within sports psychology, perceived social support is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible support (Freeman et al., 2011). These forms of support function as valuable external resources that help individuals preserve existing resources and acquire new ones when facing adversity (Deaner & Hobfoll, 2017).

Freeman et al. (2011) demonstrated that higher levels of perceived social support across these dimensions were associated with lower burnout, greater confidence, and more effective stress management among competitive athletes. Similarly, research consistently indicates that athletes who perceive stronger social support exhibit greater resilience and psychological well-being (Mhiri et al., 2025; Mira et al., 2023; Monteiro et al., 2021). Within cricket specifically, interpersonal relationships and support systems have been identified as important contributors to athlete well-being (Ely et al., 2026), while social support and resilience have emerged as key protective factors for mental health among elite cricketers (Kurtis et al., 2024).

Age and playing experience are also associated with the accumulation of psychological and social resources in sport. Garrido-Muñoz et al. (2024) found that more experienced judokas demonstrated significantly greater psychological resilience than less experienced peers, consistent with COR Theory's proposition that resources accumulate over time. Similarly, resilience has been found to correlate positively with years of sports practice, as prolonged competitive engagement requires athletes to develop endurance, persistence, and self-regulatory capacity (Ivanova et al., 2025). Evidence further suggests that building supportive relationships in the sport setting and developing athletes' competence during the early phase of their careers are important for sustaining mental health and well-being across the athletic career (Pilkington et al., 2024).

In sport settings, access to multiple forms of support has been associated with improved coping, reduced psychological distress, greater confidence, and enhanced resilience when facing adversity (Mhiri et al., 2025; Mira et al., 2023). Consequently, examining the availability of these support dimensions may provide important insights into the psychological resources that sustain resilience among women cricketers competing in challenging environments.

Although previous studies consistently demonstrate a positive association between social support and resilience, evidence remains limited within women's cricket. Most existing research has focused on Western settings or mixed-sport populations, leaving Pakistani women cricketers largely unrepresented. Given the unique social and sporting challenges faced by women athletes in Pakistan, examining these relationships within this context is both timely and necessary. This study therefore addresses an important gap in the literature and may contribute athlete welfare and development initiatives in Pakistan.

OBJECTIVES

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To profile the levels of perceived social support and psychological resilience among Pakistani women cricketers.
2. To examine the association between perceived social support and psychological resilience among Pakistani women cricketers.
3. To compare perceived social support and psychological resilience across playing levels among Pakistani women cricketers.
4. To examine whether perceived social support and psychological resilience differ across age groups among Pakistani women cricketers.
5. To examine whether perceived social support and psychological resilience differ across playing experience among Pakistani women cricketers.

HYPOTHESES

H₁. Perceived social support will be significantly and positively associated with psychological resilience among women cricketers in Pakistan.

H₂. There will be significant differences in perceived social support between national and club-level players.

H₃. There will be significant differences in psychological resilience between national and club-level players

H₄. Perceived social support and psychological resilience will differ significantly across age groups among Pakistani women cricketers.

H₅. Perceived social support and psychological resilience will differ significantly across playing experience groups among Pakistani women cricketers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design with a descriptive comparative approach. Rather than focusing on prediction, the study examined the current status of perceived social support and psychological resilience among women cricketers and compared these resources across player categories, age groups, and playing experience groups.

Participants

The target population comprised women cricketers drawn from two distinct playing levels: national-level players registered with Pakistan Cricket Board and club-level players competing outside the official structure of Pakistan Cricket Board. During the 2025-2026 season, five teams competed in the national

women's cricket structure, each consisting of 16 players, yielding a total population of 80 national-level cricketers. To determine an appropriate sample size from this population, Yamane's (1967) formula was applied, which produced a sample size of 57 national-level players.

To enable meaningful comparison between playing levels, an equal number of club-level players ($n = 57$) was recruited. Club-level players were identified by approaching women cricket clubs across Pakistan and recruiting players who did not compete in official events of Pakistan Cricket Board but had been actively playing club-level cricket for at least one year. This yielded a total sample of 114 cricket players (national-level = 57, club-level = 57).

The inclusion criteria required participants to have a minimum of one year of playing experience, be aged 16 to 35 years, and able to read and respond to survey items. Because access to elite athletes was limited, a purposive sampling approach was considered appropriate as the primary sampling technique for both groups, given that the study targeted a specific and clearly defined population of national and club-level women cricketers.

Instruments

Psychological resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) developed by Smith et al. (2008). The BRS consists of six items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale measures an individual's ability to bounce back from stress and adversity, with higher scores indicating greater resilience.

Social support was measured using the Perceived Available Support in Sports Questionnaire (PASS-Q) developed by Freeman, Coffee, and Rees (2011). The PASS-Q consists of 16 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (definitely). The scale assesses four dimensions: emotional support, esteem support, informational support, and tangible support, with four items per scale. Higher scores indicate greater perceived availability of support.

The demographic section collected information on age, education level, years of playing experience, and playing category.

Procedure

Data were collected during the season 2025-2026 using a self-administered online questionnaire. All participants were provided with a written information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they accessed the questionnaire. The estimated completion time was 10-12 minutes.

Statistical Analysis

All data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23.0). The internal consistency of all instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics were computed to profile participants and summarize the scale scores. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to examine relationships between key variables. Independent samples t-tests compared perceived social support and resilience scores between national and club-level players. One-way ANOVA with Tukey HSD post-hoc tests examined differences in social support and resilience across age groups and playing experience categories. Effect sizes were reported as

eta-squared (η^2), interpreted as small (.01), medium (.06), and large (.14). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

Prior to hypothesis testing, the internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The PASS-Q demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .872$), whereas the BRS also showed satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .812$). Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated approximate normality for all variables ($p > .05$), supporting the use of parametric statistical procedures.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=114)

Demographic Variable	Category	National-level (n= 57) f (%)	Club-level (n = 57) f (%)	Total (N=114) f (%)
Age	16-19 years	7 (12%)	36 (63%)	43 (38%)
	20-23 Years	16 (28%)	14 (24%)	30(26%)
	24-27 Years	21 (37%)	7 (13%)	28(25%)
	28 Years and above	13 (23%)		13(11%)
Education	Matriculation	16 (28%)	38 (67%)	54(47%)
	Intermediate	25 (44%)	16 (28%)	41(36%)
	Graduation	11 (20%)	3 (5%)	14(12%)
	Post-Graduation	5 (8%)		5(4%)
Playing experience	1-3 Years	10 (17%)	38 (67%)	48(42%)
	4-6 Years	18 (32%)	19 (33%)	37(33%)
	7-9 Years	29 (51%)		29(25%)

Note. f= frequency; % = percentage

The demographic profile of the sample showed clear differences between national and club-level players. National-level players were generally older and more experienced than club-level players. Most national players were aged 24-27 years and had 7-9 years of playing experience, whereas the majority of club-level players were 16-19 years old and had 1-3 years of playing experience. In terms of education, the largest proportion of national-level players had completed intermediate education, while most club-level players had matriculation-level education.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for social support subscales and psychological resilience

Variable	No. of Items	National Level (n=57)		Club Level (n=57)		Total Sample (N=114)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Emotional Support	04	2.60	0.692	2.34	0.647	2.47	0.679
Esteem Support	04	3.13	0.847	2.17	1.161	2.65	1.117
Informational Support	04	2.42	0.579	2.51	0.512	2.47	0.546
Tangible Support	04	2.89	0.670	2.28	0.912	2.58	0.850
Social Support	16	2.76	0.524	2.28	0.703	2.52	0.663

Psychological Resilience	06	2.96	0.714	2.26	0.986	2.61	0.927
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Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

The descriptive statistics indicate that national-level players reported higher emotional, esteem, tangible, and overall perceived social support than club-level players. Club-level players reported slightly higher informational support than national-level players. Overall perceived social support was higher among national level players ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.524$) than club-level players ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.703$). National-level players also reported higher psychological resilience ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.714$) than club-level players ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.986$).

Table 3: Correlations between social support subscales and psychological resilience ($N = 114$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Social Support (Total)	1					
2. Psychological Resilience	.797**	1				
3. Emotional Support	.745**	.628**	1			
4. Esteem Support	.755**	.778**	.637**	1		
5. Informational Support	.502**	.625**	.507**	.516**	1	
6. Tangible Support	.736**	.791**	.601**	.655**	.612**	1

Note. Values are Pearson correlation coefficients. $p < .01$

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and psychological resilience ($r = .797$, $p < .001$). Among the social support subscales, tangible support showed the strongest association with resilience ($r = .791$, $p < .001$), followed by esteem support ($r = .778$, $p < .001$), emotional support ($r = .628$, $p < .001$), and informational support ($r = .625$, $p < .001$). The inter-subscale correlations ranged from $r = .507$ to $r = .655$, indicating that the four dimensions of social support are moderately interrelated while remaining sufficiently distinct as separate constructs.

Table 4: Independent samples *t*-test comparing social support and psychological resilience by playing level

Variables	National ($n=57$)		Club Level ($n=57$)		<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean difference	95% CI	Cohen' <i>s d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>						
Social Support	2.76	0.524	2.28	0.703	-4.14	103.58	< .001	-.481	[-.712, .251]	0.875
Psychological Resilience	2.96	0.714	2.26	0.986	-4.33	102.02	< .001	-.699	[-1.019, .379]	1.064

Note. Welch's *t*-test was used because variances were unequal.

Levene's test indicated unequal variances for both variables; therefore, Welch's t-test results are reported. National-level players had significantly higher social support than club-level players, $t(103.58) = -4.14$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.875$, indicating a large effect. Likewise, national-level players had higher psychological resilience than club-level players, $t(102.02) = -4.33$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.064$, also reflecting a large effect size.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for perceived social support and psychological resilience across age groups

		Social Support		Psychological Resilience	
Age Group	n	M	SD	M	SD
16-19 years	43	2.32	0.69	2.34	0.95
20-23 years	30	2.37	0.64	2.36	0.92
24-27 years	28	2.77	0.54	2.38	0.91
28 years and above	13	2.96	0.50	2.66	0.73

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

Table 6: One-way ANOVA for perceived social support and psychological resilience across age groups

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Social Support	Between Groups	6.686	3	2.229	5.69	.001	.134
	Within Groups	43.050	110	0.391			
	Total	49.735	113				
Psychological Resilience	Between Groups	1.464	3	0.488	1.062	.368	.028
	Within Groups	50.547	110	0.460			
	Total	52.012	113				

Note. SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square; η^2 = eta squared

A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived social support across age groups, $F(3, 110) = 5.69$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .134$. Players aged 24-27 years and 28 years and above reported higher perceived social support than players aged 16-19 years, and players aged 28 years and above reported higher perceived social support than players aged 20-23 years. Psychological resilience did not differ significantly across age groups, $F(3, 110) = 1.06$, $p = .368$, $\eta^2 = .028$.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for perceived social support and psychological resilience across playing experience

		Perceived Social Support		Psychological Resilience	
Playing Experience	n	M	SD	M	SD
1-3 Years	48	2.25	0.653	2.23	0.895
4-6 Years	37	2.69	0.66	2.82	0.913
7-9 Years	29	2.75	0.532	2.95	0.788

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

Table 8: One-way ANOVA for perceived social support and psychological resilience across playing experience

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Social Support	Between Groups	5.925	2	2.963	7.506	.001	.119
	Within Groups	43.810	111	0.395			
	Total	49.735	113				
Psychological Resilience	Between Groups	1.039	2	0.519	1.131	.326	.020
	Within Groups	50.973	111	0.459			
	Total	52.012	113				

Note. SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square; η^2 = eta squared

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in perceived social support across playing experience groups, $F(2, 111) = 7.506, p = .001, \eta^2 = .119$. In contrast, psychological resilience did not differ significantly across playing experience groups, $F(2, 111) = 1.13, p = .326, \eta^2 = .020$.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined perceived social support and psychological resilience among women cricketers in Pakistan within the framework of Conservation of Resources Theory. Overall, the findings partially supported the study's proposed hypotheses. Perceived social support was strongly associated with psychological resilience, and playing level was associated with differences in both variables. In contrast, age and playing experience were associated with differences in perceived social support but not for psychological resilience. Together, these findings suggest that social support is an important psychological resource for women cricketers, particularly in a competitive and socially demanding sporting context.

One of the most notable findings of this study was the strong relationship between perceived social support and psychological resilience. Women cricketers who felt supported by coaches, teammates, and family members were more likely to demonstrate resilience when facing sporting challenges. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the protective role of social support in athlete well-being and adaptation (Mhiri et al., 2025; Mira et al., 2023; Wang & Liu, 2025). It is also consistent with Conservation of Resources Theory, which proposes that individuals are better able to cope with stress when they possess or have access to valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989). For women cricketers in Pakistan, who may encounter financial constraints, limited opportunities, and sociocultural barriers, supportive relationships appear to provide a valuable foundation for coping with adversity.

Among the dimensions of social support, tangible support emerged as the strongest correlate of psychological resilience. This finding is particularly meaningful within the Pakistani sporting context, where access to resources such as training facilities, equipment, transportation, and financial assistance is often limited. Practical support may directly reduce everyday challenges faced by athletes, allowing them to focus more effectively on training and competition. In environments where resources are scarce, material assistance may carry greater significance because it addresses immediate needs while also reducing uncertainty and stress (Geukes et al., 2024; Wicker & Downward, 2023). Esteem support also showed a strong association with psychological resilience. Encouragement, recognition, and expressions of confidence from coaches, teammates, and significant others may reinforce athletes' self-belief and capacity to persist during adversity. Such support can strengthen perceptions of competence and worth, particularly during the phase of poor performance, injury, or competitive setbacks. Within the framework of Conservation of Resources Theory, esteem support may be viewed as a valuable psychological

resource that helps individuals maintain psychological strength and adapt effectively when facing stress and performance-related challenges.

The findings related to playing level further highlight the role of resource availability in athlete development. National-level players reported significantly higher levels of both perceived social support and psychological resilience than club level cricketers. The difference likely reflects greater access to coaching expertise, organizational support, competitive exposure, and professional networks available at higher levels of participation. Such resources not only enhance athletic development but may also strengthen athletes' confidence and ability to cope with setbacks. Similar patterns have been reported among elite athletes, where higher competitive levels are associated with stronger psychological functioning and greater resilience.

In contrast, age and playing experience were associated with differences in perceived social support but not psychological resilience. Older and more experienced athletes reported greater perceived social support, suggesting that supportive networks may strengthen over time as players remain involved in the sport. Through continued participation, athletes may develop stronger relationships with teammates, coaches, mentors, and support staff, increasing their perception that help is available when needed. However, psychological resilience did not differ significantly across age or experience groups. This suggests that resilience may be influenced by a broader combination of factors, including personality characteristics, coping strategies, life experiences, and environmental conditions, rather than simply increasing with age or years of participation (Garrido-Muñoz et al., 2024).

Overall, these findings contribute to the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of social resources in sport. They also extend the application of Conservation of Resources Theory to a population that has received limited attention in the literature. By focusing on Pakistani women cricketers, the study provides valuable insight into how social support functions within a unique sporting and cultural context and highlights the importance of creating environments that foster both psychological well-being and athletic development.

LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation. Second, the use of self-report measures may have introduced response bias. Third, the sample size was relatively small and drawn through purposive sampling, which limits generalizability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Cricket organizations should provide formal psychological support for women cricketers, including access to sports psychologists, mental health counsellors, and peer support networks.
2. Practical support such as fair remuneration, travel, accommodation, equipment, and facilities should be improved.
3. Mentorship and structured support programs should be offered to younger players through experienced teammates.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future studies should use longitudinal designs to examine causality.

1. Future research should examine contract status as a moderating variable between social support and resilience.
2. Qualitative interviews with players would provide contextual depth that complements quantitative findings and offer richer insights into how Pakistani women cricketers experience and utilize social support resources within their sports environment.
3. Future research should examine whether resilience mediates the link between social support and performance outcomes.
4. Larger and more diverse samples are needed to improve generalizability and capture variation across women's cricket in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that perceived social support is an important predictor of psychological resilience among Pakistani women cricketers. Consistent with Conservation of Resources Theory, greater support was associated with higher resilience, especially through tangible support. The findings further showed that national-level players and more experienced athletes perceive greater support, while resilience remains relatively stable across age and experience groups. Overall, the study highlights social support as a key resource for athlete well-being, coping, and long-term development in women's cricket in Pakistan.

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