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The Impact of Emotional Intelligence, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress on the Overall Performance of Football Players in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT
Due to the mental strain that sports can cause, athletes are more susceptible to psychological problems including depression and burnout. It is believed that one of the key factors influencing whether these difficulties are lessened or made worse is emotional intelligence (EI), or the ability to confront and control emotions. In this study, an assortment of professional and amateur soccer players in Pakistan were used to examine the connections between EI, psychological health issues (such as stress, anxiety, and depression), and athlete performance. The study employed a cross-sectional research design, and comprised 105 professional and semi-professional football players in Pakistan who participated in the study. Convenient sampling was used for the collection of data via the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21), Emotional Intelligence (EI) scale (the Trait Meta-Mood Scale-TMMS), and Athlete Performance Questionnaire (ASQ). Analyses included Pearson's correlation and regression. The study's results showed that psychological distress factors including depression, anxiety, and stress were highly and positively correlated with each other, confirming they often occur together. Importantly, these specific measures of distress were found to be only weakly related to Emotional Intelligence (EI). Conversely, EI demonstrated a moderate to strong association with athlete performance. Furthermore, a regression analysis established EI as a significant positive predictor of athlete performance, explaining 26% of its variance (R^2 =.26), where a one-unit increase in EI was associated with a 1.76-unit increase in performance (β =.51, p <.001). These findings underscore the importance of emotional intelligence as a key factor in enhancing football players' performance by mitigating the adverse effects of psychological distress.

Keywords. *Emotional Intelligence, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Football Player Performance.*

Introduction

Football is globally popular but is intellectually and physically challenging, requiring significant psychological resilience alongside physical training (Reilly & Williams, 2003). The high-pressure environment, combined with factors like performance requirements, team obligations, job instability, risk of injury, and social isolation, makes players vulnerable to mental health issues, including burnout and depression (Gouttebarge et al., 2015). Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined as the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's own and others' emotions is a crucial psychological tool (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). In competitive sports, high EI enables players to maintain composure under pressure, make effective tactical decisions, and

leverage positive emotions, thus reducing emotional overwhelm and mental health issues (Laborde, Dosseville, & Allen, 2016). Conversely, depression, anxiety, and stress manifest as significant barriers, leading to reduced performance, loss of interest in the game, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating (García-Naveira & Ruiz-Barquín, 2018). Nevertheless, the connection between EI, these psychological stressors, and the overall performance in non-Western culture such as Pakistan is an under-researched area (Khan et al., 2020). Thus, the proposed research will help fill this gap by studying the interaction of these variables. The overall aim is to determine the connection between emotional intelligence, depression, anxiety, and stress with the performance of football players.

Literature review

The ability to effectively manage and use emotions in particular in sports is familiar.

Emotional intelligence (EI) as emotional intelligence. Emotional players are more apt to handle the emotional when they are high EI.

according to researches, demands the competitive sporting activities such as football. Good leadership qualities, cohesive work teams, and better decision-making ability are all elements of high EI athletes, which result in elevated rates of job performance (Rice et al., 2016). In a meta-analysis of 21 studies, carried out by Kopp and Jekauc (2018), the performance of competitive sports and emotional intelligence (EI) is slightly correlated but significant. The research found that there were no apparent implications on EI of conceptualization, type of publication, number of citations and date of publication. It means that despite the mixed research findings, EI can be a potential predictor of athletic performance (Kopp & Jekauc, 2018).

According to Wolanin et al. (2015) the prevalence of depression is higher in young and older adults, affecting 6.7% of the adult population. Athletes are not exempt from depression; this includes 5-7 million high school athletes and 400,000 student athletes in the national collegiate athletic association. Due to stigma and a society that promotes toughness, depression is a widespread problem among professional sports, especially football players, yet it is frequently underreported. Due mostly to job instability, injuries, and performance pressure, up to 39% of professional athletes suffer symptoms (rice et al., 2016).

Another study conducted by Gabryś & Wontorczyk (2023) sought to determine the

factors that predict an athlete's sensitivity to the actions of their supporters, whether positive or negative, and how these factors relate to stress and anxiety. There were 171 professional athletes involved. Three factors coachability, confidence, accomplishment motivation, and low worry were found to be predictive of sensitivity. Low concern and dread of a bad appraisal were revealed to be indicators of negative sensitivity. Midfielders were particularly vulnerable to stress and used techniques like concentration and peaking under duress (Gabryś & Wontorczyk, 2023). Athletes frequently struggle with anxiety, particularly in popular sports like football. It may show up as anxiety before a competition or as a persistent illness that eventually causes serious mental health problems. Self-doubt, overanalyzing, and a drop in on-field performance are all consequences of performance anxiety. High emotional intelligence athletes are better able to control their performance anxiety, which helps them stay more satisfied with their jobs. Burnout, emotional tiredness, decreased motivation, and a drop-in performance are all consequences of chronic anxiety (Rice et al., 2016).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Emotional intelligence has a significant positive impact on football player performance.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional intelligence, depression, anxiety, and stress collectively predict football player performance.

Methodology

A cross-sectional correlational study was employed to examine the relationships between emotionality, depression, anxiety, stress, and football player satisfaction. Data was collected using a convenience sample of football players who completed a supervised questionnaire. Players were especially selected from football teams, social networks, via mailings addressed to sport associations and leagues, and through contacting football clubs. The participants received the study through a secure web link through which they were taken to the informed consent section where they provided information on the purpose of the study, procedures involved and participant's rights including the right to withdraw from the study at will. Following consent, subjects filled out a brief demographic questionnaire. Each survey included approximately 20-30 minutes and participants' answers were directly inputted into an encrypted database to maintain anonymity and data reliability.

Sample

The study sample consisted of 105 professional and semi-professional football players in Pakistan, recruited using a convenience sampling method through football clubs, sports organizations, and social media platforms. The sample was predominantly male (69.5%), single (81%), held a bachelor's degree (75.2%), and competed at the collegiate level (49.5%).

Instruments

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21)

In order to measure the emotional states of stress, anxiety, and depression, Peter Lovibond developed the scale for anxiety, depression, and stress (DASS-21), one of the more widely used self-report tools. The 21 items in this condensed version of the original DASS-42 are divided into three subscales, each with seven items: stress, anxiety, and depression. Each item is given a score based on the events that occurred within a week. The scores are on a Likert scale of four, with 0 denoting that it wasn't occur to me at all, 1 denoting that it occurred to me once, 2 denoting that i happened to me twice, and 3 denoting that it happened to me multiple times. Low self-esteem, melancholy, and lack of interest are among the symptoms measured by the depression subscale. Panic, terror, and physiological arousal are measured by the anxiety subscale. Tension, irritation, and a lack of relaxation are subscales of stress. To align the scale to the initial DSS 42 scoring system, each subscale is included and multiplied by two. The DASS-21 gauges the severity of these emotional disorders in both clinical and non-clinical populations, but it is not a diagnostic tool. Because of its brief duration and ease of administration, it can be used for practice and research in a variety of contexts.

Emotional intelligence

The emotional intelligence (EI) scale is a self-report scale that was developed by Peter Salovey and associates to determine the perceptual, understanding, controlling, and using skills of emotions effectively. The scale concentrates on three important aspects, which are emotional clarity (perceiving and naming emotions), emotional repair (controlling negative emotions and well-being), and emotional attention (awareness and focus on emotional experiences). The respondents will evaluate their agreement with the items in a Likert scale with a larger number of points showing the level of emotional intelligence. This scale shows the significance of emotional intelligence in relationship management, decision-making, and psychological well being and is extensively applied in research and practice to determine its influences on personal and social functioning.

Athlete satisfaction questionnaire (ASQ)

A psychometric instrument that is used to determine the level of satisfaction of athletes in relation to sport is the athlete satisfaction questionnaire (ASQ) created by Packianathan

Chelladurai and his team. The ASQ measures numerous levels of athlete satisfaction such as satisfaction in personal performance, team performance, leadership, team cohesion, and support services. The respondents use Likert scale to assess how much they are satisfied with various aspects of their sport experience. The ASQ offers a versatile evaluation of the variables that affect the well-being and motivation of the athletes, which is why it can be deemed as an effective tool in the hands of coaches, sporting organizations, and researchers who aim at comprehending and transforming the experiences of athletes in both competitive and non-competitive environments. The scales will be all online so that the instructions are clear and the interfaces friendly.

Statistical plan

SPSS was used to carry out the study's statistical analyses. The degree of link shared by sentimentality, anxiety, and depression, stress, and athlete happiness was ascertained by correlation analysis. The direction and intensity of the association between the variables will be ascertained using Pearson's correlation coefficients. The predictive power of emotional intelligence, stress, anxiety, and depression (variables that on the performance of athletes (dependent variable) was assessed using multiple linear regression.

Results

Table 1: *Demographic characteristics of the participants (n = 105)*

Characteristics	*F (%)*	Mean (S D)
Age		
18-20	14(13.3)	
20-25	63(60.0)	
25-30	18(17.1)	
30-35	9(8.6)	
35-40	1(1.0)	
More than 40	0(0)	
Gender		
Male	73 (69.5)	
Female	32 (30.5)	
Marital status		
Single	85 (81)	
Married	18 (17.1)	
Other	2 (1.9)	
Education level		
Below matric	1(1)	
Matric	3(2.9)	
Intermediate	9 (8.6)	
Bachelors	79 (75.2)	
Masters	13 (12.4)	

Above	0 (0)	
Sport type		
Individual sport	28 (26.7)	
Team sport	77 (73.3)	
Level of competition		
Amateur	31(29.5)	
Collegiate	52(49.5)	
Professional	22(21)	
Experience		31.46 (223.9)
Footballer		
Yes	65(61.9)	
Others	40(38.1)	
Training		
5-10 hours	77(73.3)	
10-15 hours	18(17.1)	
15-20 hours	8(7.6)	
More than 20 hours	2(1.9)	
Injury history		
Yes	50(47.6)	
No	55(52.4)	5.21 (6.65)

F = frequency, % = percentage, SD = standard deviation

Table 1 shows the participants' demographics. The sample consists predominantly of young individuals aged 20-30 years (77.1%), with a majority being male (69.5%), single (81%), and well-educated, as 75.2% hold a bachelor's degree. Most participants are involved in team sports (73.3%), particularly football (61.9%), and compete at the collegiate level (49.5%). Training hours are moderate, with 73.3% training 5-10 hours per week, while injury history is reported by 47.6% of participants, with a mean of 5.21 injuries (Sd = 6.65). The group reflects a young, active, semi-professional athlete population with a focus on team-based sports and diverse levels of experience.

Table 2: *Psychometric properties of the study variables (n=105)*

Scales	Items	*M*	*SD*	Range	*α*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Dass-21	21				.937		
Depression	7	15.81	10.04	0-38	.843	.086	-.709
Anxiety	7	18.86	10.11	0-42	.831	-.003	-.747
Stress	7	16.46	9.61	0-42	.836	.293	-.276
Emotional intelligence	48	146.20	20.53	99 - 207	.830	.166	.209
Clarity	15	46.06	6.54	31-64	.121	.184	-.123
Repair	12	36.31	6.26	20-52	.579	-.272	.495
Attention	21	63.83	10.41	43-91	.712	.171	-.168
Athlete Performance Questionnaire	5	241.66	70.49	56-392	0.981	-.279	.381

M = mean, SD = standard deviation

Table 2 shows the psychometric properties for the scales used in this study. The dass-21 scale, with a high internal consistency (*α* = .937), assesses depression, anxiety, and stress. The subscales show varying mean scores: depression (*M* = 15.81, *SD* = 10.04), anxiety (*M* = 18.86, *SD*= 10.11), and stress (*M* = 16.46, *SD* = 9.61), with low skewness and kurtosis values indicating a relatively normal distribution. The emotional intelligence (EI) scale (*α* = .830) has a mean score of 146.20 (*SD* = 20.53), with subscales for clarity (*M* = 46.06), repair (*M* = 36.31), and attention (*M* = 63.83), showing acceptable distributional properties. The athlete performance questionnaire (ASQ) demonstrates excellent reliability (*α* = .981) and reports a high mean score of 241.66 (*SD* = 70.49). Overall, the scales show strong reliability, and the scores reflect a consistent and well-distributed dataset across psychological and performance measures.

Table 3 *Correlation matrix of study variables (n=105)*

No. Variables	I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	VI.	VII.	VIII.
I. Depression	1							
II. Anxiety	.779**	1						
III. Stress	.845**	.821**	1					
IV. Emotional intelligence	.182	.224*	.172	1				
V. Clarity	.107	.161	.097	.826**	1			
VI. Repair	.122	.201*	.160	.862**	.590**	1		
VII. Attention	.218*	.220*	.181	.935**	.646**	.729**	1	
VIII. Athlete performance	.098	.160	.147	.514**	.603**	.358**	.419**	1

**p<0.05, **p<0.01*

Table 3 shows the correlation matrix for the study variables, depression, anxiety, stress, emotional intelligence (and its components: clarity, repair, and attention), and athlete performance in a sample of 105 participants. Significant positive correlations are evident among depression, anxiety, and stress (ranging from .779 to .845, *p*<.01), indicating these variables are strongly interrelated. Emotional intelligence is weakly related to depression, anxiety, and stress, with only a modest significant correlation with anxiety (*r*=.224, *p*<.05). Within emotional intelligence components, clarity, repair, and attention are highly interrelated, with correlations ranging from .590 to .935 (*p*<.01), suggesting they collectively measure the construct effectively. Athlete performance is moderately and positively associated with clarity (*r*=.603), repair (*r*=.358), and attention (*r*=.419), and significantly related to overall emotional intelligence (*r*=.514, *p*<.01),

highlighting the potential influence of emotional intelligence on performance. Overall, emotional intelligence and its components show stronger links to athlete performance than to depression, anxiety, or stress.

Table 4 *Regression analysis on athlete performance by emotional intelligence (n=105)*

						95% ci	
Variables	*B*	*Se b*	*B*	*T*	*P*	*Ll*	*Ul*
Constant	**-16.19**	**42.84**		-.38	.706	-101.17	68.77
Emotional intelligence	**1.76**	**.29**	.51	6.08	<.001	1.19	2.34
***R* = .51, r^2= .26, δr^2= .26 (*f* = 36.93**)**							

***p<.001*

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis that examines the influence of emotional intelligence on athlete performance among 105 participants. Emotional intelligence significantly predicts athlete performance (b = 1.76, $se\ b$ = .29, β = .51, t = 6.08, p < .001), accounting for 26% of the variance in athlete performance (r^2 = .26, δr^2 = .26, f = 36.93, p < .001). The 95% confidence interval for the unstandardized coefficient (b) ranges from 1.19 to 2.34, indicating that for every one-unit increase in emotional intelligence, athlete performance increases by 1.76 units on average. The strong, positive standardized beta coefficient (β = .51) suggests that emotional intelligence is a substantial predictor of athlete performance. These findings underscore the significant role of emotional intelligence in shaping athletes' performance.

Discussion

The strong findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in fostering positive outcomes for football players, particularly confirming the hypothesis that EI has a significant positive impact on athlete satisfaction/performance (β=.51, R2=.26, p<.001). This is consistent with a meta-analysis by Kopp and Jekauc (2018), which found a noteworthy correlation between competitive sports performance and emotional intelligence (EI). Our finding aligns with existing literature positioning EI as a crucial psychological resource, enabling players to manage the intense emotional demands inherent in semi-professional sports. High EI, particularly through its components of Clarity and Repair, equips athletes to accurately perceive their emotional states and effectively regulate them, which is vital for maintaining motivation and professional satisfaction (Rice et al., 2016).

The second hypothesis, that Emotional intelligence, depression, anxiety, and stress collectively predict athlete performance, is supported by the overall variance explained (R^2=.26). However, the correlation matrix offers critical nuance: the weak and mostly non-significant relationship between EI and the distress measures (depression, anxiety, and stress) suggests that EI's primary function is not to prevent the common onset of psychological distress in high-pressure sports (Rice et al., 2016), but rather to serve as a protective buffer (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Emotionally intelligent players are more capable of employing adaptive coping strategies, thereby mitigating the negative impact of existing stress and anxiety, preventing these issues from significantly eroding their overall satisfaction and performance. This is relevant given that up to 39% of professional athletes suffer from depression symptoms due to factors like job instability, injuries, and performance pressure (Rice et al., 2016), and that anxiety is a frequent struggle for football players (Gabryś & Wontorczyk, 2023).

The strong, positive standardized beta coefficient (β=.51) from the regression analysis suggests that Emotional Intelligence is a substantial predictor of athlete performance. The finding that a one-unit increase in EI was associated with a 1.76-unit increase in performance on average

further underscores this importance. The individual correlation analysis clearly indicates that the direct, strong link is between Emotional Intelligence and performance (r=.514, p<.01), while the links to the distress variables are weak. Components of EI, specifically Clarity (r=.603), Repair (r=.358), and Attention (r=.419), also demonstrated a moderate and positive association with athlete performance. This dual role as a direct enhancer of satisfaction and an indirect mitigator of distress impact highlights EI as a key variable for interventions aimed at improving the well-being and career longevity of football players in this region.

Conclusion

The study identified the potential impact of anxiety, depression, emotionality, and stress on athletic performance. Emotional intelligence and performance characteristics, including strategy, training, and team integration, strongly affect performance outcomes. By enhancing emotional intelligence, sports organizations can empower athletes to better cope with the chronic stress, anxiety, and depression inherent in competitive sports, thereby promoting psychological well-being and peak athletic performance.

Limitation and Suggestion

The study's limitations include a cross-sectional design, unexplained variance in regression, and limited sample generalizability, which may affect the generalizability of findings to other athletic groups or levels, and the need for longitudinal studies to assess these relationships over time. The study's cross-sectional design, small sample, and lack of explanation for regression models limit its ability to establish causal relationships. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, expand to diverse athletic groups, and account for cultural, environmental, and physiological factors.

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