



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unveiling Bonds: How Perceived Prejudice Shapes Pro Social Behaviors and Team Cohesion

Sumeira Rajab^{1,2}, Dr. Nur Haziyanti¹, Prof. Dr. Abdul Rahim¹, Dr Zeshan Ahmad³

¹Department of Sports Science, Faculty of Sports Sciences and Coaching, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris-Malaysia

²Department of Health and Physical Education, Government College Women University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

³Department of Business Management, South Star Management Institute (SMI), Duy Tan University, Da Nang, Vietnam

| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| Received: Oct 15, 2024 | The purpose of this study is to examine the moderating mechanism of perceived prejudice between the pro social behaviors and team cohesion of female football players. Primary data was collected from 373 university-level female football players using purposive sampling. PLS-SEM was used through PLS-SEM. The results reveal that agreeableness and friendship quality behaviors improve team cohesion, but the empathic concern does not. In addition, female football player's prejudiced perception decreases agreeableness and diminishes team cohesion. While perceived prejudice does not moderate the relationship of friendship quality and empathic concern with team cohesion. This study revealed how the team cohesion of female football players can be improved by emphasizing pro social behaviors. In addition, it assists policymakers and coaches in taking initiatives to reduce prejudice to improve team cohesion. By focusing on pro social behaviors that improve female football player cohesion, this study adds to knowledge. This study uses social learning theory to show that perceived prejudice affects pro social behaviors and team cohesion. |
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| *Corresponding Author: nur.haziyanti@fsskj.upsi.edu.my | |

INTRODUCTION

Team cohesion is a crucial factor in the success of ball sports teams, particularly football [1]. Poor team cohesion leads to ineffective communication, lack of trust among team members, inability to work collaboratively towards common goals, and poor performance [2]. A survey revealed that, on average, 70% of a team's success is attributed to team cohesion [3]. Mose [4] revealed that strong football teams may lose competition due to a lack of cohesion among the players. Investigation of team cohesion has attained importance, especially in the context of female football players who belong to Muslim countries because, [5]revealed that Muslim women engaged less in sports and veiled Muslim women reported higher turn over from sports than Christian and atheist women. More specifically, 48.1% of women and 32.7% of men in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are reluctant to participate in ball games like football[6], and dropout rates are higher among Muslim female athletes which results in poor team cohesion. Therefore, female Muslim's cohesion in sports is low when they are compared to non-Muslim women[7].

Morgan [8]revealed that playing football can provide unique benefits for women's interaction with each other compared to other sports activities. Geraghty [9]argued that women can play good football than men because they have a greater balance on the ground, change direction quickly, evade defenders, have flexible joints, and are better at multitasking. Therefore, we can derive that, women footballers can perform well than men, and their participation can be a good source of revenue for

developing countries like Pakistan. A football player's performance is directly linked to the level of team cohesion[10]. Despite the importance of female football player's team cohesion, previous studies have focused on football player's performance [11], resilience, and other aspects [12] but little research has focused on female football player's cohesion in a team. In addition, the literature emphasizes investigating the factors which improve team cohesion among female football players.

Literature indicates that team cohesion is influenced by a variety of behavioral factors. Strong cohesion is generally thought to be the outcome of social behaviors [13]. A player is afraid of losing his position or of being judged adversely by the team or viewers[14]. Therefore, extreme-level social behavior may negatively influence collectivism among group members and their performance [15]. While a moderate level of social behavior flourishes in a collective working environment. The sports-related scholarships are confused to decide which social behavior should be promulgated or caped to improve the cohesion among female football players and reduce the negativity. Literature indicates that social behaviors are less predictive and inconsistent to increase team cohesion[16]. However, prosaically behavior, are more advanced, and updated phenomenon in terms of benefits provided to team members which may result in consistency and the team's high cohesion predictability[17].

Crisp [18]highlighted the importance of pro-social behaviors and revealed that coaches might be biased against a few players in their team in terms of benefits provision, but team members are less likely to be against each other. So, this study focused on the pro social behaviors of women football players toward team cohesion. The literature is silent about the effect of pro social behaviors on the team cohesion of female football players. So based on the research gap between female football players' pro-social behavior and team cohesion: The first research question is: *Which pro social behavior of female football players has a relationship with team cohesion?*

Prejudice level among females is manifold than male[19]. Similarly, female players have prejudice towards their fellow team members [20] Therefore, it can be deduced that female players' prejudice may influence team cohesion negatively. However, female players' prejudice levels might differ due to different pro social behaviors [21]. Prejudice is perceived to have a detrimental impact on the cohesion of the female team due to dispersed social liking and lower shared commitment to group responsibilities [22]. It is difficult to overcome one's prejudices about everyone else. A female player who has faith in her teammate's abilities improves her confidence in their abilities which increases team cohesion. Contrarily a coach's belief about his player's poor performance is less likely to change despite his good performance on some occasions. Such prejudice becomes firmer during tough competition [23]. The prejudice of female players against their fellow players may influence team cohesion. Yang, Xin [24]argued that pro social behaviors positively shape future beliefs. A positive belief due to pro social behavior may increase team cohesion and result in high performance. But how a female player's prejudice influences pro-social behavior and subsequently team cohesion is unanswered. Various researchers have underestimated the role of prejudice among female football players. Therefore, more research is necessary by proposing the second research question; *Does perceived prejudice of female football players moderate the relationship between pro-social behavior and team cohesion?*

To attain the answer to research questions, primary data was collected from 375 university-level female football players by using a purposive sampling technique. The answers to the proposed questions will help the coach and policymakers by nurturing such pro-social behaviors which may increase the cohesion in female football games. The answers will help them to maintain the level of prejudice among female football players in accordance with their pro social behaviors and maintain team cohesion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The social learning theory is a [learning](#) and behavior-related theory that proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others[25]. This theory states that [learning](#) is a [cognitive process](#) that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement[26]. Learning also occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments. Similarly, female players as part of a team learn continuously from their peers, mentors, coaches, team management, and their fans. Female players are more likely to persist towards their social behavior, as they think, they will be rewarded in terms of monetary benefits or respected due to the high performance of their team [27]. Therefore, based on their learning they strengthen ties with their teammates (team cohesion) and try to perform well.

The lens of social learning theory helps to explain that, almost all female football players have to compete with a strong team (environmental factor) during their career. In a football team, high performance is attained through team cohesion. Through their previous experience and observation of different matches, they will imitate how they have to behave in order to increase their team cohesion. Thus, they develop a model, in which pro social behaviors can improve their team cohesion in order to win the competition. Female football players induce pro social behaviors (agreeableness, friendship quality, and empathetic concerns) during their competition and pay attention to increase cohesion, which may result in high performance.

Social learning theory also supports that personal factors (perceived prejudice) also play their role in attaining rewards/success. Personal factors may influence players to change their behavior with their team members. A change in the behavior of players with their team members due to personal factors (perceived prejudice) may increase or decrease the team cohesion and, subsequently, their performance drastically. For instance, a female football team player perceiving high prejudice may anticipate negatively about his relationship with his team members. Negative thoughts about a fast friend turn a strong friendship into a poor-quality relationship. Thus, a change in prosocial behavior (relationship quality) due to high prejudice may decrease team cohesion.

Hypothesis Development

Direct Relationship between Agreeableness and Team Cohesion

Agreeable team members are helpful, friendly, trusting, and tolerant. The quintessence of agreeableness is cooperation. High agreeableness of individuals increases the tendency to work together[28]. Such a tendency increases interpersonal relations within the team. Agreeable individuals strengthen social ties within a team through cooperation[29]. Team members who are person-oriented or high on personal warmth toward others tend to enhance interpersonal (social) cohesiveness[30]. Together these findings suggested that individuals high in agreeableness hold a more positive view of social affairs and teamwork. Thus, the literature indicates a link between agreeableness and team cohesion. But, how the agreeableness of female football players increases team cohesion is still needed to be investigated.

The lens of social learning theory reveals that female football players who exhibit high levels of agreeableness tend to have more favorable relationships with their teammates and coaches, as well as demonstrate better team cohesion and cooperation. The theory suggests that this may be due to the observation and modeling of cooperative behaviors among teammates, which are then reinforced through positive social feedback. Furthermore, competitive and cooperative behaviors can create motivation for football players to achieve high levels of development of social relationships and task cohesion within the team. Thus it is hypothesized that individual agreeableness will relate positively to the team cohesion of female football players.

(H1): Agreeableness has a positive relationship with team cohesion.

Direct relationship between friendship quality and team cohesion

Friendship is a dyadic, affective bond shared by two peers and is thought to be essential for assisting people in shifting from a more egocentric to an other-oriented perspective[31]. People have different expectations for friendships depending on their level of achievement. Friendships have been proven to have positive characteristics, such as the existence of sharing, cohesion, and collective growth[32]. Literature indicates a need to explain the link of players' friendship quality with performance, resilience, and team cohesion. Young teen female footballers were interviewed by[33], who discovered that fostering cohesion among team members is based on the frequency and quality of interaction. deBeaudrap, Dunn [34]interviewed college-level female athletes and found that the performance (e.g., playing time) of the team is achieved by developing strategies to strengthen relationship quality and cohesion among team members. Expectations for strong friendships among players vary by age and attractive personal qualities. Having a best friend or feeling accepted by your peers is a protective factor that strengthens cohesion[35]. Allen, Greenlees [36] examined peer social system variables (i.e., peer support, peer relationships, peer hassles, peer acceptance) in a sample of athletes and found that those with more positive peer relationship profiles experienced greater cohesion and affection.

The lens of social learning theory provides a useful explanation for understanding the relationship between friendship quality and team cohesion of female football players. Cooperative or competitive relationships can take many different forms but ultimately form the social cooperation system within which players participate. The lens of theory further explains that football teams player can generate social closeness irrespective of the assigned role played by a player within the team. Therefore, it can be inferred that cultivating strong and positive relationships among female football players is critical in promoting team cohesion. So, we can derive that, a strong friendship quality among the female players enhances the cohesion in the team. The proposed hypothesis is:

(H2): Friendship quality has a relationship with team cohesion.

Direct Relationship between Empathic Concern and Team Cohesion

Individuals are more comfortable with and better able to relate to one another [37]. In cohesive environments, individuals understand each other's feelings and view the group as a unified entity. Individual understands each other's problems and collectively work toward the same goals. Bissell, Billings [38]argued that empathy comes from a place of nurturance, where one strives to care for others regardless of who it is. This research would then support the idea that acting empathically toward each other could potentially be a catalyst that creates strong cohesion between team members. Sympathy-concerned individuals have reported taking responsibility for others' mistakes [39], and dealing with the challenges more effectively[40]. These qualities highlight that those high in empathic concerns can manage their issues and actions more efficiently. This could be crucial for team functioning, where athletes will inevitably make mistakes and have to deal with the consequences. A team where individuals take ownership may lead to high group cohesion.

In Neff and Beretvas [41] study, high empathic concerns were associated with being able to talk about problems, as well as both expressing and accepting differing opinions of each other. Moreover, empathic, concerned individuals are less sensitive to rejection[42], high in optimism[43], and more willing to help others[44]. This research suggests empathic concerns may be quite valuable for creating positive social interactions that may facilitate increased team cohesion among athletes.

In the context of female football teams, social learning theory suggests that team members may learn and adopt behaviors related to empathic concern from observing and mimicking their teammates. Higher levels of empathic concern ignite players who observe their social and ethical values and behaviors being reinforced by their peers and this is how they know to behave in a way that promotes

team cohesion. Therefore, the following hypothesis was outlined for empathic concerns and team cohesion:

(H3): Empathic concern has a relationship with team cohesion.

Direct Relationship between Perceived Prejudice and Team Cohesion

Existing studies offer some theoretical insights into perceived prejudice and team cohesion relationships. Lima, Denerel [45] revealed that players who experienced fears of losing their position or fear of being judged adversely in the team were more likely to have lower levels of coordination and cooperation with their teammates. Another study by [46] highlighted that perceived prejudice can negatively affect collectivism among group members and their performance. Furthermore, Appelbaum, Lockeman [47] showed that negative social behavior influences team cohesion. In contrast, Bell, Ruddock [48] found that coaches may exhibit bias towards certain players in terms of benefits provision and that this bias may result in negative attitudes among team members towards each other. The literature indicates limited research on the relationship between perceived prejudice and team cohesion particularly in the context of female football players. So, the proposed hypothesis is;

(H4): Perceived prejudice has a relationship with team cohesion.

Moderating Effect of Prejudice on Agreeableness and Team Cohesion

People who are agreeable are decent, dependable, and cooperative [49]. These people tend to make teams because they can readily collaborate with others to build team cohesion and are willing to discuss ideas with their teammates [50]. Members having agreeableness traits have a significant effect on the cohesiveness of the team and overall effectiveness [51]. Morrison-Smith and Ruiz [52] found that individuals having agreeableness are less likely to coordinate and build relationships when it's a matter of unfair dealing. Hence, the literature indicates an inconsistent relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion. Chen and Bao [53] agreeableness players exhibit less prejudice and are good at addressing problems easily. As a result, they strengthen the cohesion of their members. High degrees of agreeableness may not be advantageous for teams that are prejudiced against information sharing. So, prejudice could replace the widespread sense of information sharing with team members and result in poor coordination [54]. Individuals with prejudice, on the other hand, tend to be inflexible and unconcerned with the needs of others. So, such a situation negatively relates to team cohesion, and it may limit the role of team cohesion.

The social learning theory helps to explain that cohesiveness is shaped by how group members act, feel, coordinate, and think. In situations where there is a perception of division or exclusion based on characteristics such as race or gender, agreeable individuals may struggle to maintain positive relationships with all members of their team. Individuals who perceive prejudice in their team are less likely to feel cohesive with others, regardless of their degree of agreeableness. Thus, individuals who perceive prejudice in their team may become less willing to engage with other team members and may even lower their overall level of agreeableness as a result. We can deduce that, agreeableness female football players play a role in increasing team cohesion but the prejudice prevalence may decrease the cohesion prevailing among the team members. So, the proposed hypothesis is

(H5): Perceived prejudice moderates the relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion.

Moderating Effect of Perceived Prejudice on Friendship Quality and Team Cohesion

Relationship quality among team members is linked with the frequency of task accomplishments collectively. Costa, Fulmer [55] propose that team members need to share the willingness to work together. Friendship among group members strengthens their commitment to achieving similar goals and completing a task together, with positive sentiments of cohesion [56]. A non-prejudice attitude in a team results in the acceptance and commitment of all team members to work together.

Transparency in decision-making enhances friendship quality, affection, trust, and coordination among members. Sajid, Khan [57] investigated the relevance of friendship quality by interviewing soccer coaches and their players, revealing that the higher the level of friendship between the players, the stronger the team cohesion. However, the existence of prejudice among the team members may decrease affection and weaken the relationship, which may result in less cohesion among members. However, the literature is deficient, in how the prejudice of female football players influences friendship quality and team cohesion.

According to social learning theory, individuals acquire attitudes and beliefs through observing and imitating the behavior of those around them within their social context. This could explain why players who perceive higher levels of prejudice within their team may be less motivated to imitate positive behaviors, such as developing strong friendships with their teammates, and therefore experience weakened team cohesion as a result. Relying on the social learning theory and literature the proposed hypothesis is:

(H6): Perceived prejudice moderates the relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion.

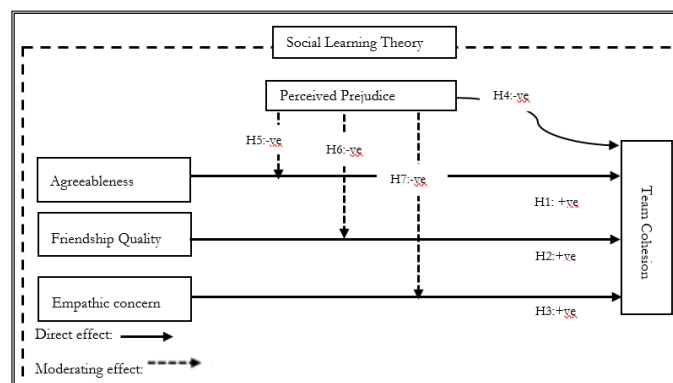
Moderating effect of perceived prejudice on empathic concern and team cohesion

Empathies of team members towards their fellow players instigate collective activities and such activities reinforce cohesion between players[58]. Team members who feel empathy for their colleagues motivate themselves to move forward and are not only committed to the task but also willing to work and assist one another in challenging conditions[59]. However, prejudiced feeling toward team members reduces the empathic feelings of the individuals and result in less team cohesion. So, it can be deduced that perceived prejudice influences the empathic concern of players and subsequently team cohesion.

The lens of social learning theory helps to explain that individuals develop empathy through positive reinforcement from peers or family members. This positive reinforcement instigates socially desirable behaviors needed for building strong relationships and promoting team cohesion. The development of empathic concern within teams promotes not only building relationships among members but also helps in forming strong social networks. However, the prejudiced perception of female football players, which arose due to their social experience, may diminish the empathic behaviour towards their fellow teammates and may reduce the team cohesion. Thus, relying on the literature and social learning theory. We can deduce that female football players who are empathic towards their fellow players work for the well-being of their team, and it increases the cohesion among the team members. However, the prevalence of prejudice among female football players decreases their concerns for their fellow players, and it may result in less team cohesion. So, the deduced hypothesis is:

(H7): Perceived prejudice moderates the relationship between empathic concern and team cohesion.

Conceptual Framework



MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study used a cross-sectional design to collect the primary data from female football players at public universities in Punjab, Pakistan. Punjab is the biggest province out of the four provinces, and it has a more developed sports infrastructure than the rest of the provinces of Pakistan. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants. The target sample was female football players registered for at least 2 years as football players, as it's an adequate period to participate in various competitions and confront sufficient situations to understand the cohesion phenomenon. There was no discrimination based on assigned positions in the football team. The list of female football players was obtained from the authorities of HEC-recognized public universities in Punjab, Pakistan, which manage university-level sports activities. The list of female football players was sorted out for data collection purposes. Enlisted female players were contacted through a phone call to brief the reason for the contact about the survey, and the availability of the required respondent was verified.

After the briefing, a request was made for participation in this study. Upon acceptance of the request, the convenience of filling out the questionnaire was asked. Any of the convenient methods to the respondents among three I. Face to face, II. E-mail, or III. Google form was used. Every questionnaire was passed through the scrutiny phase after the responses were provided by the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: demographic and inferential. The demographic part discloses information about the respondent's age, academic year, university affiliation, number of years in sports, and previous professional experience. The inferential part assessed pro social behaviors (agreeableness, friendship quality, empathic concern), perceived prejudice, and team cohesion. We distributed 857 closed-ended questionnaires to female football players and received 549 responses. The response rate was 89%. We discarded 176 questionnaires due to being incomplete, inappropriate, and had 373 valid questionnaires.

To overcome the common method biases, this study used three techniques: avoiding leading questions, including a cover letter with a study description, and dividing the research instrument into two parts [60]. This study used Smart-PLS software for three reasons: to overcome multi-collinearity issues, freedom to use a nomological approach to decide whether constructs are formative or reflective [61]. This study implemented the PLS algorithm to test the validity and reliability, while a complete bootstrapping approach was used to analyze the relationship between the constructs [62].

Agreeableness

The agreeableness trait was adopted from the well-cited Big Five personality trait scale [63, 64]. This item consisted of 9 items. This construct has been used and validated to check the athletic performance of football players [65], and the Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.924. This scale was recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for better reliability and validity results. The sample question of this construct is, 'I see myself cooperating with others.' Agreeableness has widely been used as a reflective measure. So, this study treated the agreeableness construct as a reflective measurement construct.

Empathic Concern

The construct 'empathic concern' was adopted from [66]. This scale was validated [67] in the sports context and found the Cronbach alpha value to be 0.862. This construct consisted of twenty items. Each item of this construct was measured by using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We treated this construct as a reflective measure. The sample item of this construct is 'I am caught up in feeling.'

Friendship quality

Friendship quality was adopted from[68]. The Cronbach's alpha value of this scale was 0.839. This scale was further validated by[69]. This construct consisted of 22 items. The sample item is, 'We spend free time together'. This scale was recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This construct has been used as a reflective measure.

Perceived Prejudice

The perceived prejudice construct was adopted, which was developed and validated by[70]. Hausmann and Ryan [71] validated this scale by investigating the prejudice of athletes and found the Cronbach alpha value = 0.832. This construct consisted of 6 items. This scale was recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Perceived prejudice was used as a reflective measure by[71]. The sample item of this construct is, 'I express thoughts regardless of controversy'

Team Cohesion

Team cohesion is the athletes' perceptions of a small group[72]. This scale consisted of 6 items. They found the Cronbach alpha value of the team cohesion construct was 0.839 Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This scale has shown good scale reliability with adolescent athlete samples. The sample items of this construct are 'I feel that I belong to this team.'

RESULTS

Reliability and Validity

Exogenous and Endogenous Constructs

The conceptual model of this study consisted of three exogenous (agreeableness, friendship quality, empathic concern), one moderating construct (perceived prejudice, and one endogenous construct (team cohesion. Each construct was treated as a reflective measurement construct and the reliability and validity of constructs were calculated accordingly. The Cronbach alpha value of constructs was above 0.7 [73] and AVE (average variance extracted), exceeding 0.5[74]. The factor loading of reflective constructs was above 0.6 and the p-value ($p < 0.000$)[73]. This means that all constructs have found their commonality. So, the used scales have attained their reliability and validity threshold [73].

Table 1: Reliability and Validity

| Constructs | Items | Factor Loading | P-value | CR | AVE | α | |
|------------------|-------|----------------|---------|-------|--------|----------|--|
| Agreeableness | AG.1 | 0.739 | 0.000 | 0.730 | 0.4998 | 0.6788 | |
| | AG.2 | 0.813 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | AG.3 | 0.903 | 0.015 | | | | |
| | AG.4 | 0.763 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | AG.5 | 0.791 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | AG.6 | 0.823 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | AG.7 | --- | --- | | | | |
| | AG.8 | 0.901 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | AG.9 | -- | -- | | | | |
| Empathic Concern | EM.1 | --- | --- | 0.824 | 0.502 | 0.803 | |
| | EM.2 | 0.827 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.3 | 0.892 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.4 | 0.719 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.5 | 0.721 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.6 | 0.689 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.7 | --- | --- | | | | |
| | EM.8 | --- | --- | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--|
| | EM.9 | 0.723 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.10 | 0.893 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.11 | 0.737 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.12 | 0.683 | 0.023 | | | | |
| | EM.13 | 0.793 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.14 | 0.825 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.15 | 0.905 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.16 | 0.842 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.17 | 0.792 | 0.018 | | | | |
| | EM.18 | 0.732 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.19 | 0.733 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | EM.20 | 0.903 | 0.037 | | | | |
| Friendship Quality | FQ.1 | --- | --- | 0.871 | 0.588 | 0.871 | |
| | FQ.2 | 0.703 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.3 | 0.832 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.4 | 0.877 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.5 | 0.723 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.6 | 0.729 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.7 | 0.823 | 0.071 | | | | |
| | FQ.8 | 0.714 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.9 | 0.891 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.10 | --- | --- | | | | |
| | FQ.11 | --- | --- | | | | |
| | FQ.12 | 0.872 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.13 | 0.931 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.14 | 0.782 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.15 | 0.752 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.16 | 0.682 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.17 | 0.772 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.18 | 0.879 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.19 | 0.724 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.20 | 0.791 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.21 | 0.861 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | FQ.22 | --- | --- | | | | |
| Perceived Prejudice | PP.1 | 0.701 | 0.000 | 0.881 | 0.509 | 0.860 | |
| | PP.2 | 0.828 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.3 | 0.681 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.4 | 0.891 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.5 | 0.788 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.6 | 0.761 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.7 | 0.885 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.8 | 0.874 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.9 | 0.836 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.10 | 0.912 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.11 | 0.842 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.12 | 0.715 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.13 | 0.798 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.14 | 0.901 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.15 | 0.862 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.16 | 0.799 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | PP.17 | 0.711 | 0.000 | | | | |
| Team Cohesion | TC.1 | 0.732 | 0.000 | 0.847 | 0.566 | 0.886 | |
| | TC.2 | 0.823 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | TC.3 | 0.685 | 0.000 | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|------|-------|-------|--|--|--|--|
| | TC.4 | 0.817 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | TC.5 | 0.853 | 0.000 | | | | |
| | TC.6 | 0.897 | 0.000 | | | | |
| <i>Author's own calculation</i> | | | | | | | |

Discriminant Validity

All HTMT values in Table 2 fall below the cutoff value of 0.85. Hence, the measurement model's discriminant validity was successfully established.

Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Test (HTMT)

| Variables | Agreeableness | Friendship Quality | Perceived Prejudice | Team Cohesion | Empathic Concern |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Agreeableness | | | | | |
| Friendship Quality | 0.663 | | | | |
| Perceived Prejudice | 0.600 | 0.370 | | | |
| Team Cohesion | 0.713 | 0.536 | 0.567 | | |
| Empathic Concern | 0.691 | 0.845 | 0.508 | 0.502 | |
| <i>Author's own calculation</i> | | | | | |

Predictive Relevance

Table 3 provides the predictive relevance of the model. The values of predictive relevance Q² is above the value of 0 thresholds. While the R² value is 0.428, which indicates that the model contains good predictive relevance.

Table 3: Predictive Relevance of Study

| Total | RMSE | MAE | R ² | Q ² |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| Team Cohesion | 0.492 | 0.389 | 0.428 | 0.337 |
| <i>Author's own calculation</i> | | | | |

Table 4 lists the results of the structural model derived from the PLS-SEM output. Football player's agreeableness (H1: $\beta = 0.256$, $p=0.001$ and $t = 3.870$), friendship quality (H2: $\beta = 0.213$, $p=0.004$ and $t = 3.550$) have a positive significant, empathic concern (H3: $\beta = 0.096$, $p=0.150$ and $t = 1.441$) have non-significant, while perceived prejudice (H4: $\beta = -0.334$, $p=0.000$ and $t = 7.418$) have negative significant association with team cohesion of football.

Table 4: Direct Path Bootstrapping

| Hypotheses | Paths | Original sample | Sample mean | St. Deviation | T values | P Values | Results |
|---|---------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|----------|----------|---------|
| H1 | AG-->TC | 0.256 | 0.249 | 0.066 | 3.870 | 0.001 | Sig |
| H2 | FQ-->TC | 0.213 | 0.210 | 0.060 | 3.550 | 0.004 | Sig |
| H3 | EM-->TC | 0.096 | 0.119 | 0.066 | 1.441 | 0.1501 | Not-Sig |
| H4 | PP-->TC | -0.334 | -0.331 | 0.045 | 7.418 | 0.000 | Sig |
| AG: Agreeableness, FQ: Friendship Quality, EM: Empathic concern, PP: Perceived Prejudice, TC; Team Cohesion | | | | | | | |
| <i>Author's own calculation</i> | | | | | | | |

The results in Table 5 show the moderating effect of prejudice against female football players on the relationship between exogenous constructs (agreeableness, friendship quality, empathic concern) and endogenous construct team cohesion. Perceived prejudice moderates the relationship between agreeableness (H5: $\beta = -0.112$, $p=0.011$ and $t = 2.528$) and team cohesion. While perceived prejudice does not moderate between exogenous constructs, friendship quality (H6: $\beta = 0.014$, $p=0.841$ and $t = 0.199$), empathic concern (H7: $\beta = 0.063$, $p=0.294$ and $t = 1.084$), and team cohesion of football. The R^2 values for the endogenous constructs revealed that the theoretical model explains 50.4 percent of the variance in team cohesion, demonstrating strong model predictability.

Table 5: Moderating Path Bootstrapping

| Hypotheses | Paths | Original sample | Sample mean | St. Deviation | T values | P Values | Results |
|------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|----------|----------|---------|
| H5 | AG*PP-->TC | -0.112 | -0.108 | 0.044 | 2.528 | 0.011 | Sig |
| H6 | FQ*PP-->TC | 0.0142 | 0.009 | 0.071 | 0.199 | 0.841 | Not-Sig |
| H7 | EM*PP-->TC | 0.0663 | 0.061 | 0.063 | 1.048 | 0.294 | Not-Sig |

AG: Agreeableness, RQ: Friendship Quality, EM: Empathic concern, PP: Perceived Prejudice, TC: Team Cohesion
 Author's own calculation

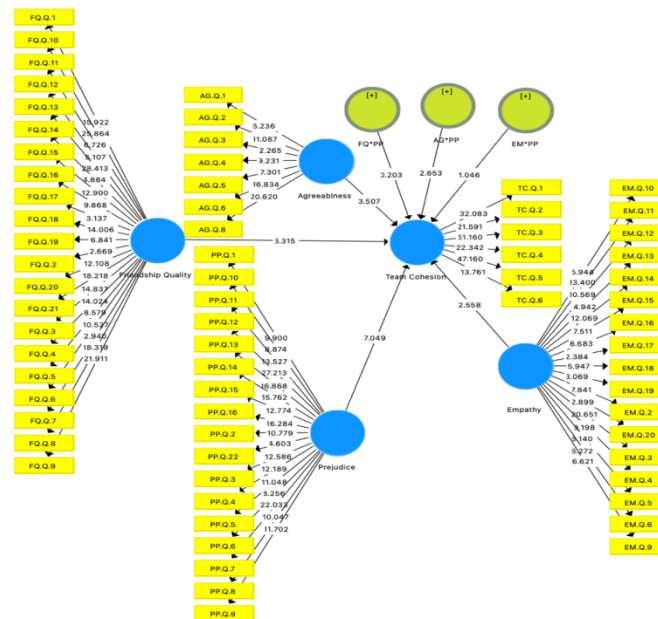


Figure 1. Moderating path bootstrapping

DISCUSSION

The results of the direct relationship between pro social behavior (agreeableness, friendship quality, and empathic concern), perceived prejudice, and team cohesion reveal that agreeableness and friendship quality have a positive relationship, and perceived prejudice has a negative relationship with team cohesion. While empathic concern has no relationship with team cohesion. The results of the moderating mechanism show that perceived prejudice moderates the relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion negatively, while it does not moderate the relationship between pro social behavior (friendship quality, empathic concern) and team cohesion.

The result of H1 reveals that agreeableness has a positive relationship with the cohesion of female football players. (H1 = Accepted). The result of H1 is also supported by [75]. Acton, Braun [75] revealed that team members who are person-oriented or high on personal warmth toward others tend to enhance interpersonal (social) cohesiveness. Relying on the lens of social learning theory, we can deduce that female football players learn through their observation that being helpful, friendly, trusting, and tolerant towards their teammates can contribute to a more cohesive team environment. The agreeableness of female football players not only promotes positive interactions and harmonious relationships within the team but also fosters a sense of unity and cohesiveness.

The findings of H2 show that friendship quality has a positive relationship with team cohesion. (H2= Accepted). This finding is consistent with previous research [76]. They revealed that fostering cohesion among team members is based on the frequency and quality of interaction. The lens of social learning theory explains that positive interactions and supportive friendships between female football players contribute to a sense of unity and cohesiveness within a team. Moreover, the social support and trust that develop within friendships can enhance the overall cohesiveness of the female football team.

The results of H3 indicate that empathic concern does not have a significant relationship with team cohesion among female football players. (H3 rejected). This finding is contrary to the expectations and previous research, which revealed that empathic, concerned individuals are less sensitive to rejection [42], high in optimism, and more willing to help others [44]. However, it is important to note that female football players' empathic concerns still play a role in other aspects of team dynamics and player relationships, even if they are not directly related to team cohesion.

The findings of H4 reveal that perceived prejudice has a negative relationship with team cohesion. (H4 accepted). The result of H4 is aligned with previous research, which reveals that perceived prejudice can lead to decreased trust and cooperation among team members [77]. Social learning theory helps to explain that perceiving prejudice within the team of female football players creates divisions and undermines the sense of unity and cohesion. So, perceived prejudice within the team should be addressed and eliminated in order to promote a more cohesive and harmonious environment for female football players.

The results of H5 show that perceived prejudice negatively moderates the relationship between agreeableness and team cohesion among female football players. (H5= accepted). The finding of H5 is supported by [78, 79]. Chiu, Lin [78] revealed that high degrees of agreeableness may not be advantageous for teams that are prejudiced against information sharing among team members. So, prejudice can replace the sense of information sharing among team members and their coordination. The social learning theory helps to explain that the negative impact of perceived prejudice of female football players on team cohesion is particularly pronounced for players who are high in agreeableness. These female football players are sensitive to conflicts and divisions within the team, and the presence of perceived prejudice may amplify these negative experiences, ultimately hindering the development of team cohesion.

The findings of H6 reveal that perceived prejudice does not moderate the relationship between friendship quality and team cohesion. (H6 = rejected). This finding is in contrast to the study by [80], which revealed that the existence of prejudice among the team members may decrease affection and weaken the relationship, which may result in less cohesion among members. Through the lens of social learning theory, we can explain that female football players who observe their social circle and learn that they should be less prejudiced toward their fellow teammates to maintain the friendship quality. Thus, their less prejudice not only increases their trust among their teammates but also increases their friendship and subsequently team cohesion.

Moreover, H7 showed that perceived prejudice does not moderate the relationship between empathic concern and team cohesion. (H7 Rejected). The findings of [81] are contradictory to the findings of this study. Bartram, Cooper [81] found that team members who feel empathy for their

colleagues motivate themselves to move forward and are not only committed to the task but also willing to work and assist one another in challenging conditions. The lens of social learning theory suggests that female football players who perceive prejudice may be less likely to develop empathic concern for their teammates, leading to lower levels of team cohesion. However, prejudice among female football players arises in conflicts, doubts, and poor coordination, which hamper empathic concern and result in poor team cohesion.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, this study revealed that team cohesion can be increased by promoting pro-social behavior among team members. Furthermore, perceived prejudice has a negative impact on the cohesion of the female footballers' team. This negative impact can be mitigated by promoting pro-social behaviors and fostering a positive team atmosphere.

This study has induced practical implications to help out coaches and policymakers. Coaches should spend time establishing an encouraging and supporting culture in a team that discourages prejudice. Coaches should take the initiative to foster strong social ties among female football players, as such initiatives are key components of team cohesion. It is imperative that team managers and administrators create policies and programs that encourage diversity and inclusion within the team. This can include providing diversity training for both players and coaches, establishing clear guidelines for respectful behavior, and addressing any instances of prejudice or discrimination promptly and effectively to maintain a positive team atmosphere.

The findings of this literature review have several theoretical implications. First, this study adds to the existing literature by highlighting the potential impact of pro-social behaviors (agreeableness, friendship quality, empathic concern) on team cohesion. Second, this study induced a moderating mechanism of perceived prejudice on the relationship between pro-social behavior and team cohesion. This suggests that the presence of perceived prejudice may weaken the positive effects of pro social behaviors on team cohesion. Furthermore, this study contributes to the social learning theory by explaining the direct link between pro-social behavior and team cohesion through the moderating mechanisms of perceived prejudice.

This study has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this study focused on female football teams. Future research should explore the same variables in different sports or team settings to determine if similar patterns emerge. Second, this study focused on female players in Punjab, Pakistan, in a developing country context, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions and countries. Future research should aim to replicate these findings with diverse samples in different cultural and developed countries' contexts. This study used cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to establish causality. A longitudinal study design would be beneficial to examine the causal relationship between perceived prejudice, pro-social behavior, and team cohesion over time.

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