

Research Paper

## Personality and Mental Health of Professional Cricketers: A Comparative Study

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### ABSTRACT

*Background:* Sports science research focuses on the study of the psychological basis, processes and effects of sport. Certain fundamental psychological constructs such as mental health, mood state, personality, motivation, stress and other such factors are considered predominantly significant in this sub-discipline. *Objectives:* The aim of the present study was to compare the personality traits, depression, anxiety, stress, psychological flexibility and self-esteem between professional cricketers and non-sportspersons. *Methods:* The sample of 40 male individuals (20 professional cricketers and 20 non-sportspersons) aged between 20-22 years was selected through purposive sampling technique. The sample was assessed using Neo Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2), Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES), Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-42). Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the groups. *Results:* Results from the present study indicated significant differences between two groups along various personality traits. The non-sportspersons scored higher in anxiety and stress. Professional cricketers tended to be more flexible psychologically and to have better self-esteem. *Conclusion:* The present study has implications in understanding how psychological factors affect performance and how participation in sports affects psychological and physical factors. This would also aid in designing appropriate interventions to enhance performance of professional sportspersons.

**Keywords:** Sports Psychology, Professional Cricketers, Self-Esteem, Stress, Psychological Flexibility, Anxiety, Personality

Sport psychology has emerged as a field with a research tradition that provides a foundation for direct application with athletes. As the role played by psychological factors in the performance and overall well-being of athletes has become better understood, interventions have been designed to favorably affect athlete behavior throughout their involvement in sport and beyond. Sport psychology researchers have been particularly interested in how athletes' psychological characteristics influence performance. From this point, it is clear that psychological characteristics differ between sportspersons and non-sportspersons. Certain fundamental psychological constructs — such as mental health, mood state, personality, motivation, stress, and other such factors — will continue to dominate

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sport psychology and sports science research, as these are basic psychological requirements for optimal performance and sustained success in sports. Moreover, the ability to mentally prepare is considered a key component of such differences. The optimal level of skills in championship performance depends on three factors: physical preparation, technical skill, and mental preparation. It seems that champions' performance significantly depends on mental preparation.

Over the last decade researches on sports psychology has emphasized mostly on the personality characteristics and types of sports persons. The researches have been mostly with athletes, teams and individual games but professional cricketers have not been researched extensively though cricket is one of the world's most popular games and in India it is similar to that of a religion. In recent years cricket as game has changed rapidly in terms of methods, formats, rules, regulations and financial commitments. The huge financial involvements have made it fiercely competitive in every aspect and has inversely also increased the demand for consistent and good performances worth both the money and expectations of the viewers. Last few years have we have witnessed, that even world's best cricketing stars have taken breaks from their careers due to depression, mental fatigue, interpersonal issues and substance use. Professional cricketers need both physical stamina as well as psychological preparedness to handle the pressure in matches and also keep their consistency to perform intact as there's a lot of competition for getting into a team. Previous researches have pointed out that the athletes differ in terms of neuroticism, extraversion and several other personality dimensions from the non-athletes.<sup>2</sup> Some studies have even highlighted that there's prominence of certain antisocial, narcissistic and sadistic personality pattern in some contact sports athletes.<sup>3</sup> There have been researches showing that the athletes differ in assertiveness, anxiety, dominance etc. but none of the studies as per literature has focused on personality, negative emotionality, self-esteem and psychological flexibility together among professional cricketers and non-professional cricketers in recent years. So, the variables under investigation for the current study are:

- **Negative emotionality:** The construct of negative emotionality or affectivity arose from the research literature on emotion, and has been described generally as "*a stable, heritable trait tendency to experience a broad range of negative feelings such as worry, anxiety, self-criticisms, and a negative self-view*".<sup>4</sup> Mineka et al,<sup>5</sup> defined negative affect as a temperamental sensitivity to negative stimuli resulting in feelings of fear, anxiety, depression, guilt and self-dissatisfaction. Put more simply, people who are seen as higher in Negative Affectivity tend to experience negative emotions more frequently than do people who are lower in Negative Affectivity. Negative emotionality is a robust predictor of numerous problematic life outcomes, including poorer physical and mental health, lower quality of life, less satisfaction in romantic relationships, and reduced longevity.<sup>6-7</sup> In addition to its role as a predictor of individuals' problematic outcomes, negative emotionality may also be a precursor to problems across generations. Depression, anxiety, drug misuse, nicotine dependence and self-harm are commonly associated with negative emotionality.
- **Self-esteem:** Self-esteem is an important component of psychological health. Self-esteem is generally referred to as a singular or global construct which reflects a person's sense of his or her own worthiness.<sup>8</sup> Yet, evidence suggest that overall self-esteem is a synthesis of a number of components of self- independent of facts which correspond to specific domains of life experiences. These different components may covertly systematically between different types of person and may respond differential to change in life experience.<sup>9</sup> For instance, global sense of self- esteem involves appraisals of the extent to which persons feel they are lovable, competent,

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morally valuable and able to affect their own lives. Self-esteem can be defined as —The sense of contentment and self-acceptance that stems from a person's appraisal of his own worth, significance, attractiveness competence and ability to satisfy his aspirations.<sup>10</sup>

- **Psychological flexibility:** It can be defined as one's ability to recognize and adapt to various situational demands, and shift mindsets or behavioral repertoires when these strategies compromise personal or social functioning. This flexibility is cultivated primarily by undermining inflexible, often rule-governed, verbal behaviour that interferes with persons' ability to lead meaningful lives.<sup>11</sup>
- **Personality:** Personality is the totality of an individual's faculties, inclinations, qualities, and temperament that characterize a person. Personality traits are the relatively consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that reflect an individual's tendency to respond in certain ways under specific circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Personality either predicts or is related to various important outcomes, including performance, motivation,<sup>13</sup> leadership,<sup>14</sup> and job performance.<sup>15</sup> Researchers have studied personality across diverse domains, ranging from workplace settings to athletics. Personality traits appear to have significant consequences for individuals across a range of life domains because they offer insights into how different people and groups characteristically self-regulate—that is, how they control their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.<sup>16</sup>

From the above discussion it is evident that the need to study aspects of professional cricketers is becoming relevant, encompassing various biological, psychological and social-contextual variables.

The specific objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To assess and compare between professional cricketers and non-sportsperson along the dimensions of personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness).
- To assess and compare between professional cricketers and non-sportspersons along the dimensions of negative emotionality (depression, anxiety and stress).
- To assess and compare between professional cricketers and non-sportspersons in terms of their psychological flexibility.
- To assess and compare between professional cricketers and non-sportspersons in terms of their self-esteem.

## METHODS

### *Research design:*

The study followed cross-sectional study design using purposive sampling method.

The variables under investigation were- Personality, Depression, Anxiety and Stress, Psychological Flexibility and Self-esteem.

### *Sample characteristics:*

The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of 20 professional cricketers and 20 non-sportspersons. The professional cricketers were selected from a renowned cricket club playing professional cricket in Kolkata. All the professional cricketers played for first division clubs and has had represented the district level and state level teams in the domestic sector professionally. The sample consisted of only male participants. The non-sportspersons were matched according to their age and years of education. The non-sportspersons were not actively or professionally engaged in any sports. And all of them were employed. The sample was aged between 18-23 years, hailed from

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urban background and was from middle socioeconomic status. The mean educations of both the groups were  $12 \pm 3$  years. The mean formal years of training in cricket was  $11.63 \pm 2.35$  for the professional cricketers.

### *Description of tools:*

- **Semi-structured socio-demographic datasheet:** This was used to collect the background information about the participants such as the name, address, age, sex, educational qualification, marital status, occupation, family type and family income.
- **NEO Five Factor Inventory:** It is a 60-item version of Form S of the Revised NEO Personality Inventory that provides a brief, comprehensive measure of the five domains of personality, namely, Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C). It consists of five 12-item scales that measure each domain on a five-point scale- 'Strongly disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', 'Strongly agree'. Higher the score higher would be the orientation in respective dimensions. The reliability coefficients across domains range between 0.79 and 0.83.<sup>17</sup>
- **Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale:** This scale is developed by Rosenberg<sup>18</sup> and it has 10 self-report items dealing with a person general belief about him. Each item is answered on a four-point scale from strongly agree (3) to strongly disagree (0). Five items are reverse scored-from strongly disagree (3) to strongly agree (0). High score shows high self-esteem. The scale, originally validated in a large sample of high school students and thereafter used in non-psychiatric adults, has high reliability. Test-retest correlation is typically in the range of 0.82 to 0.88 and Cronbach's alpha for various samples is in the range of 0.77 to 0.88.
- **Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ – II):** The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ) is a 10-item questionnaire with items being rated on a 7-point Likert type scale from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). High scores on the AAQ-2 are reflective of greater experiential avoidance and immobility, while low scores reflect greater acceptance and action. The AAQ-2 has adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and test-retest reliability ( $r = .64$ ), and has demonstrated relationships with other psychopathology.<sup>19, 36</sup>
- **Depression and Anxiety Stress Scale-42 (DASS-42):** It assesses depression, anxiety and stress using a dimensional approach and is used for population- For adolescents and adults. DASS is a 42 item self-report measures. Item falls into three scales Depression (D), Anxiety (A) and Stress (S) with 14 items per scale. Scales are further divided into subscales of two to five similar items each. Each item is scored from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 applied to me very much or most of the times in terms of how much the item applied within past week. The manual lists cut off scores for each scale in terms of raw scores, Z scores and Percentiles. For Depression 0-9 is normal, 10-13 Mild, 14-20 Moderate, 21-27 Severe and above 28 Extremely Severe. Reliability and validity of the test is well established. The reliability scores of the scales in terms of Cronbach's alpha scores rate the Depression scale at 0.91, the Anxiety scale at 0.84 and the Stress scale at 0.90 in the normative sample.<sup>20</sup>

### *Procedure*

Participants meeting inclusion criteria were first interviewed and were informed about the research purpose, followed by taking informed consent from them. Maintenance of confidentiality of information was assured.

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The socio-demographic details of the individuals were then collected using socio-demographic datasheet. Assessment of both groups was done using NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-42), Acceptance and Action Questionnaire- 2 (AAQ-2) and Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (RSES).

### Statistical Analyses

Statistical analyses were done using IBM SPSS version 20.0. Normality of the distribution was assessed using Kolmogorov- Smirnov test. Distribution did not follow normality. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics mean and standard deviations. Comparison between the two groups in terms of different variables was done using Mann Whitney U test.

## RESULTS

**Table - 1 Showing Comparison Between Professional Cricketers and Non-Sportspersons Among Depression, Anxiety and Stress**

Variable	Professional Cricketers		Non-Sportspersons		Mann – Whitney U	P
	Mean ± SD	Mean rank	Mean ± SD	Mean rank		
Depression	13.16 ± 3.98	29.52	10.80 ± 4.35	21.48	162.50	<0.000***
Anxiety	7.36 ± 2.70	29.80	5.80 ± 2.06	21.20	117.50	0.036*
Stress	14.48 ± 4.03	30.54	11.60 ± 3.65	20.46	155.24	0.014**

\*\*\* indicates  $p > 0.001$  \*\*indicates  $p > 0.01$  \*indicates  $p > 0.05$

Table-1 Shows the comparison between the professional cricketers and non-sportsperson among depression, anxiety and stress. Results indicate that the professional cricketers scored significantly higher in depression, anxiety and stress than the non-sportspersons.

**Table - 2 Showing Comparison Between Professional Cricketers and Non-Sportspersons in Self Esteem**

Variable	Professional Cricketers		Non-Sportspersons		Mann – Whitney U	P
	Mean ± SD	Mean rank	Mean ± SD	Mean rank		
Rosenberg Self Esteem	25.45±1.25	55.86	21.65±2.81	25.14	185.50	<0.000***

\*\*\* indicates  $p > 0.001$

Table-2 Shows the comparison between the professional cricketers and Non-professional cricketers in self-esteem. Results indicate that the professional cricketers had significantly higher self-esteem than the non-sportspersons.

**Table - 3 Showing Comparison Between Professional Cricketers and Non-Sportspersons in Psychological Flexibility**

Variable	Groups					
	Professional Cricketers		Non-Sportspersons		Mann – Whitney U	P
	Mean ± SD	Mean rank	Mean ± SD	Mean rank		
Acceptance And Action Questionnaire	37.5 ± 6.724	37.63	24.866 ± 5.029	31.24	172.60	<0.000***

\*\*\* indicates  $p > 0.001$

Table-3 Shows the comparison between the professional cricketers and non-sportspersons in psychological flexibility. Results indicate that the professional cricketers were more psychologically flexible than the non-sportspersons.

**Table - 4 Showing Comparison Between Professional Cricketers and Non-Sportspersons in the Different Personality Traits**

Variable	Group					
	Professional Cricketers		Non-Sportspersons		Mann – Whitney U	P
	Mean ± SD	Mean rank	Mean ± SD	Mean rank		
Neuroticism	11.64 ± 4.97	35.76	14.4 ± 3.57	50.22	183.46	<0.000***
Extraversion	24.12 ± 6.79	42.16	19.8 ± 4.09	27.12	159.558	0.008**
Openness	16.60 ± 1.55	39.36	13.5 ± 2.90	20.90	169.105	<0.000***
Conscientiousness	3.76 ± 1.12	30.22	4.72 ± 1.17	47.54	8.884	0.12
Agreeableness	20.12 ± 4.53	40.62	18.5 ± 3.38	32.60	2.339	0.310

\*\*\* indicates  $p > 0.001$

\*\*indicates  $p > 0.01$

Table-4 Shows the comparison between the professional cricketers and non-sportspersons among the different personality tests. Results indicate that the professional cricketers scored significantly higher in extraversion and openness than the non-sportspersons. It further indicates that the non-sportspersons were significantly higher in the neuroticism dimension. There was no difference in the conscientiousness and agreeableness for the two groups.

## DISCUSSION

According to the objectives of the present study, statistical analysis of the data attempted to probe into the fact whether there exists any significant difference between professional cricketers and non-professional cricketers in selected variables of the study. Some findings of the study have brought out certain basic differences.

### *Negative Emotionality and Professional Cricketers*

The results show that there's a significantly higher depression, anxiety and stress among professional cricketers as compared to non-sportspersons. This might be due to the fact that though there are presences of daily life stresses for both the groups, there are some added

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pressures among the professional cricketers which are ability to maintain fitness, avoid injury, giving consistent good performances. Each and every match brings to them a new challenge and they have to face it. Sports psychologists have studied athletes and have mentioned that intercollegiate professional cricketers are prone to greater problems of stress, anxiety and depression which often lead to alcohol and drug abuse.<sup>21</sup> They are also prone to greater psychopathology. The negative emotionality often leads to dropouts and other mental health related issues.<sup>22-23</sup> The current professional cricketers as well as non-sportspersons sample consisted of mainly college going individuals so as per literature, presence of higher amounts of depression, anxiety and stress can be explained. The present findings also indicate that there is a definite need for interventions regarding tackling negative emotionality among sportspersons to improve their performances and reduce psychiatric morbidity.

### ***Self Esteem and Professional Cricketers***

Findings of the current study indicate that professional cricketers have better Self-esteem as compared to the non-sportspersons. Literature suggests that professional cricketers are always told to focus on their performance by their trainers and as per coaches they are always taught to focus on their strengths.<sup>24</sup> Though cricket is a team game, every individual player has their unique style of playing and they are known for that, this also helps them to ignore the unnecessary comparisons they face on and off the field. Moreover, study on athletes have discussed that there are various factors which affect sportspersons' self-esteem viz. body image, physical strength, ability to cope with changing climates etc.<sup>25</sup> This also justifies the need for trainers and coaches to practice their players to distance them from the criticisms and comparisons which will help them to boost their self-esteem further. This when comes to the non-sportspersons as they do not get formal training or motivators regularly cannot distance them from the constant criticism which leads to lower self-esteem.

### ***Psychological Flexibility and Professional Cricketers***

As per results of the current study the professional cricketers are more psychologically flexible as compared to non-sportspersons. Often professional cricketers have to travel to different places, climatic conditions and different pitch conditions and they have to be very open to situations. Psychological flexibility is a construct which focuses on context rather than internal states.<sup>26</sup> So as the professional cricketers have to frequently travel and adjust to different condition, their task- focus attention is more than internal state focused attention. This leads to better performance. Acceptance of the negative or problematic internal state and focusing on task-oriented conditions have shown to improve the performance of chess players,<sup>27</sup> golf players<sup>28</sup> and college hockey and soccer players.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the current findings seem to be consistent with the existing literature that better psychological flexibility is associated with better performance, be it sports or any other condition.

### ***Personality and Professional Cricketers***

Result of the present study shows that the professional cricketers are low on neuroticism as compared to non-sportspersons. As discussed before that the professional cricketers have to face every match in a different way and control their negative emotionality. They have to accept the loss or defeat and again prepare for a new beginning. Neuroticism refers to a set of personality traits which suggest that high on it makes them worry prone, anxious and have problems in dealing with emotional stimulus and take greater time get back to baseline.<sup>30</sup> As previously discussed, that coaches teach their players to tackle negative emotionality and become only context- focus task oriented. Previous studies have also reported similar patterns in personality make- ups of athletes using same tool.

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Results further indicate that professional cricketers were high on extraversion and openness as compared to non-sportspersons. Garousi<sup>31</sup> believed that extraverted individuals love people, prefer large assembled groups and are courageous, strong, active, talkative, with high power and paratelic.<sup>32</sup> Being open to new experiences has been shown to positively impact performance, meaning that athletes with open-mindedness tend to perform better. This could be because these athletes can handle the pressure of new environments more effectively. Their open-minded nature helps them manage competition-related stress by making them more adaptable, creative, and intellectually focused, allowing them to excel even in unfamiliar settings. Therefore, this study suggests that openness to experience is a crucial trait that significantly boosts performance in athletes. Additionally, extroversion is another key trait that positively affects performance.<sup>33-34</sup>

According to NEO five-factor, people, high on openness are purposeful, strong-willed, accurate, punctual, dutiful.<sup>3</sup> They tend to accept new ideas and experience, positive and negative excitements.<sup>32</sup> According to NEO five-factor, we can see some extraversion traits such as excitement and warmhearted are visible in openness people. Extraverted individuals are generally open and they love stimulus, so it can be concluded that professional cricketers are more extraverted and open to experiences than non-professional cricketers.<sup>32</sup> And extroversion has been shown to improve athletic performance too. Extroverted athletes bring more motivation and effort to their training and competitions. Their outgoing nature and excitement means better results as they love being in social situations and will push themselves and their team to win.<sup>35</sup> The results are highly consistent with existing literature. Personality has been extensively researched in sports psychology and it determines and predicts individuals' performance, so adequate knowledge about ones' personality would help coaches and trainers to develop different strategies to achieve better performance from their players.

The Findings show that cricketers with higher psychological flexibility have better mental health and overall, well-being. Also, positive traits in the Big Five personality dimensions – openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness are associated with higher well-being and self-esteem. And reduced neuroticism is associated with better mental health outcomes. So, cultivating psychological flexibility and fostering positive personality traits is important for the mental health, well-being and self-esteem of professional cricketers. In conclusion the present study gives a scope for larger studies in the same area. Results of the present study implies that assessment of psychological profile of professional cricketers who will be professional players or who are already, will help in identifying the areas of strength and weakness of the player. So, the scope of improvement will always be objective.

However, the study is not free of limitations. The sample size was modest and only male professional cricketers constituted the sample, where women cricket has become quite popular now. Larger sample size would be more justified to explain the results. Moreover, if different sports profession would have been taken as comparative groups, we would have got a wider picture of the sub-discipline of sports psychology.

Acknowledging the limitations, the findings of the present study underscore the need for psychological assessment of the professional cricketers and modifying training programmes accordingly. These would aid in personal and professional improvement of the professional players.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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