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Editorial

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Abstract

Racism is not an uncommon phenomenon in sports, with cricket being no exception to it. Cricket is played in many countries, with its dominance in South East Asia, Europe, Australia, and Africa. Racist remarks in cricket hit media headlines and ignite agitations among the cricket fans. This article discusses the psychological impact of racism associated with cricket and possible remedial measures.

Racism is an act of discrimination that disrupts social harmony. It has a significant psychological impact on the victim, perpetrator and the common mass. Sports is a profession that stands on individual integrity and group cohesiveness that allows participation of individuals who have a keen interest in it, capable of performing personally and professionally, irrespective of race and ethnicity.¹ Sports are always meant for the country's prestige, pride for the flag and the entertainment of the viewers, and hence occupy a significant public or social platform. Sadly, racism prevails in different games even in this modern era.^{1–3}

Cricket is a popular game played in South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, which became an integral part of life due to the emotion of the common mass. Moreover, cricket is unique due to the longer duration of play in the field (ranging from 1 day to 5 days continuously), as a result of which the audience comes in contact with the teams for the longest time in the stadium and through the television mode.

Racial behavior in the field negatively affects the psychological well-being of cricket lovers. Racism is born out of intolerance. When an individual from a different race and ethnicity cannot tolerate his defeat in the hand of an individual of a different race and ethnicity, it results in significant distress and anger (Figure 1). A result of which is bullying the opponent with racist remarks. Racist remarks can be related to the individual's skin color (white or black), religion, race, and country of origin. It results in an individual dispute, team dispute, national dispute, and cultural dispute, which adversely affect the sports spirit and cultural harmony. It also facilitates the spread of hatredness in society. It may also contribute to the development of revenge behavior in the opponent team. When the cricketer, who passed racist remarks, visits the opponent team's country in future cricket tours, he/she may have to endure a similar kind of racial abuse. There have been several incidents related to racism in cricket (spat between Indian and Australian cricketers in 2008 and 2021, Sri Lankan and Australian cricketers in 1996 and 2003, Pakistan and England teams in 1980–90, and South African and Pakistani cricketers in 2019, to highlight a few), that tarnished the spirit of the gentleman's game.^{4–6} Media often highlights racism and portrays it in a dramatizing fashion triggering debates in various forums. There is a need for responsible media reporting of racism-related news to avoid traumatizing the public psyche. Countries developed and implemented antibullying laws; however, the benefits of such policies and laws at the ground level have been modest.⁷

Do aggression and impulsivity have something to do with racism?

Cricket, like any other sport, may trigger aggression among its players. Cricketers with aggressive performance are famous and have a wide fan following. Therefore, individuals who combine consistent performances with aggressive temperament are likely to get selected in the team. However, with aggression may come impulsivity. When an individual with an aggressive temperament fails to perform on the field, their frustrations may get channelized toward bullying the opponent with racist overtures. Subtle racial microaggressions may also be used in place of overt retaliation, mainly when there is low motivation to conceal prejudice.

Psychiatric disorders may present with aggressive behavior and impulsivity, and cricketers are not immune to it. Performance pressure, constant injury risk, and the intense public glare render them susceptible to stress and vulnerable to psychiatric disorders. The presence of psychiatric disorders may be associated with bullying and racist remarks. This may, in turn,

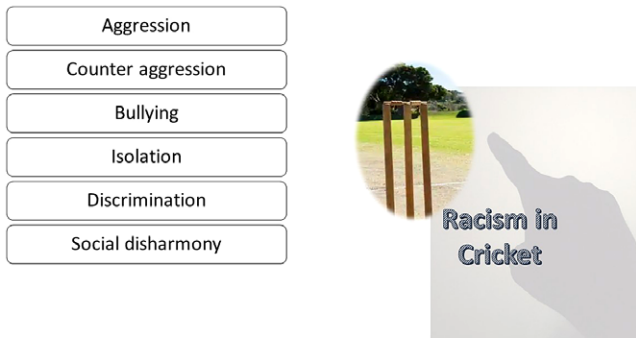


Figure 1. Psychological impact of racism in cricket.

adversely influence their performance on the field.⁸ Hence, a psychological evaluation of the individual, who used racist remarks and bullying, should be done along with the victim to assess its impact and plan appropriate interventions. Similarly, accepting cultural differences and respecting the uniqueness of each culture will help in maintaining sports harmony. Regulating the media reporting of racism in a nonsensational manner will mitigate the spread of hatred in society.

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