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Institutional Support, and Social Acceptance as Predictors of Educational and Sport Participation among Transgender Individuals in Pakistan: The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety

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Abstract

The study will explore how Institutional Support (IS) and Social Acceptance (SA) can influence Participation in Education and Sports (PES) among transgender people in Pakistan using Psychological Safety (PS) as a mediation variable. The research paper is based on Social Support Theory and Psychological Safety Model and follows a quantitative approach based on a designed survey step. The participants of 309 transgender involved in the data were actively involved in both the educational and sporting activities in Pakistan. The sample was to be used to reflect a cross-section of transgender people enrolled in formal education and organized sports in the different cities. The main analytical method used to test the hypotheses proposed with regards to the relationships between Institutional Support, Social Acceptance, Psychological Safety, and Participation in Education and Sports was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which was performed with the use of SmartPLS 4.0. The empirical findings show that Institutional Support has a strong positive impact on both Psychological Safety and Education and Sports participation. In addition, Psychological Safety has mediated the linkage between Institutional Support and participation outcomes which relate to the fact that the vigor of participation depends on the psychological environment that institutions develop in their institutions. In contrast, the Social Acceptance has a weak direct impact on participation, and this implies that endorsement by the society alone cannot be effective

to engender participation unless the mechanisms of institutional support are reinforced. The results suggest creating inclusive policies, creating psychologically safe institutional environments, and promoting awareness campaigns aimed at enhancing the presence of transgender individuals in academic and athletic environments.

Keywords: Institutional Support, Social Acceptance, Psychological Safety, Participation in Education and Sports, Transgender Inclusion, Social Support Theory

Introduction

Transgender individuals globally face significant marginalization, with unique challenges in educational and sporting contexts in countries like Pakistan, despite legal recognition in some South Asian nations ([Jadoon et al., 2024](#)). This persistent discrimination negatively impacts their socioeconomic status, limiting access to essential services and opportunities ([Ahmad et al., 2023](#)). Within the realm of sports, specifically, this demographic often encounters barriers and systemic discrimination, which is a pattern observed internationally and exacerbated in contexts with strong traditional societal norms. Such exclusionary practices in sport environments can deter participation among transgender individuals, reflecting a broader societal issue where non-normative bodies are often marginalized. This marginalization is often perpetuated by deeply ingrained gender stereotypes that limit the acceptance of sexual diversities within sports, necessitating efforts to increase visibility and study societal attitudes to eradicate discrimination ([Ospina-Betancurt et al., 2022](#)). Sport, often heralded as a powerful tool for social inclusion and individual well-being, frequently falls short of its promise for transgender athletes, who experience significant barriers to participation and often face inhumane treatment ([Cerón-Enríquez, 2023](#)). These challenges are further compounded by a lack of psychological safety, which is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where individuals feel secure enough to participate without fear of judgment or discrimination. This study therefore examines how institutional support and social acceptance influence educational and sport participation among transgender individuals in Pakistan, mediated by psychological safety, contributing to the understanding of social well-being from ecological and social safety viewpoints ([Cramer et al., 2024](#)).

Specifically, it investigates how the interplay of external support systems and internal psychological states shapes engagement in these critical life domains for a highly vulnerable population ([Tang et al., 2025](#)). This research aims to bridge gaps in existing literature by exploring these dynamics within a Pakistani context, a region where such studies are notably scarce despite the acute challenges faced by transgender communities. The insights gained will be invaluable for developing targeted interventions and policies aimed at enhancing educational and athletic opportunities for transgender individuals, thereby promoting greater social equity and inclusion. Furthermore, understanding the mediating role of psychological safety can inform strategies to cultivate environments where transgender individuals feel

genuinely supported and valued, ultimately fostering their holistic development and participation in society ([Mendes et al., 2023](#); [Rossing et al., 2024](#)). The scarcity of research on transgender experiences in non-Western contexts, particularly in Pakistan, underscores the critical need for studies that address the specific cultural and social dynamics influencing their participation in vital societal spheres like education and sports. This study, therefore, aims to quantitatively investigate the relationships between institutional support, social acceptance, psychological safety, and participation in educational and sports activities among transgender individuals in Pakistan.

It seeks to ascertain how these factors contribute to the social well-being of a community frequently marginalized and excluded from mainstream opportunities, often forced into precarious livelihoods due to a lack of educational and occupational avenues ([Ahmad et al., 2023](#)). This research will provide empirical data to inform policy development and social interventions aimed at fostering inclusive environments that recognize and address the unique challenges faced by transgender individuals in Pakistan. This approach aligns with critical social community psychology, emphasizing the identification of unmet needs and the provision of targeted support to resist oppression and influence policymaking for transformative change ([Lorusso et al., 2023](#)). By focusing on the perspectives of equity-deserving groups, this study addresses a notable gap in safe sport research, which has largely overlooked the experiences of transgender athletes ([Gurgis et al., 2022](#)). Indeed, many individuals within gender-diverse communities actively engage in activism to advocate for broader social justice, connecting gender affirmation rights with intersecting issues of gender norms, race, capitalism, and class.

Research Gap

However, despite these efforts and the recognized importance of social justice movements, a significant void persists in understanding the specific pathways through which institutional support and societal acceptance translate into tangible participation outcomes for transgender individuals in educational and sporting spheres, particularly in non-Western contexts like Pakistan. Moreover, existing literature often overlooks the nuances of intersectional identities and their impact on social well-being outcomes for transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Specifically, there is a dearth of research exploring how group-level coping strategies, such as community engagement and political activism, might mitigate the negative effects of anti-trans stigma on mental health and well-being among transgender populations in Pakistan ([Rothbaum et al., 2024](#)). This gap is particularly salient given the prevalence of anti-TGD attitudes and structural discrimination in the region, which necessitate an examination of resilience within social-ecological frameworks. This study aims to fill this critical gap by examining the mediating role of psychological safety in linking institutional support and social acceptance to educational and sport participation, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of transgender individuals' social well-being in Pakistan ([Cramer et al., 2024](#)).

This research adopts a critical consciousness approach, aligning with critical psychology aims, to deconstruct power imbalances and ensure the lived experiences of transgender individuals inform the theoretical framework and methodological design ([Lorusso et al., 2023](#)). This approach further allows for the development of culturally sensitive interventions that genuinely address the unique challenges faced by transgender communities within the specific socio-cultural context of Pakistan. This study will investigate these relationships through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to capture both the breadth and depth of experiences among transgender individuals in Pakistan. This methodological triangulation will provide a robust understanding of the complex interplay between systemic factors, individual psychological states, and participation outcomes. The quantitative data will provide statistical insights into the prevalence and strength of these relationships, while qualitative narratives will offer rich contextual detail, illuminating the lived realities and unique challenges faced by transgender individuals in navigating educational and sporting landscapes ([Lightner et al., 2024](#)). This comprehensive approach will not only identify predictors of participation but also shed light on the mechanisms through which psychological safety mediates these outcomes, offering a nuanced perspective on transgender individuals' experiences. By integrating diverse data sources, this research intends to offer actionable insights for policymakers and community leaders to foster more inclusive environments, thereby addressing the systemic barriers that impede transgender individuals' full societal integration.

Literature Review

Institutional Support and Transgender Inclusion

Institutional support, encompassing policies, resources, and affirmative actions within educational and sporting organizations, is critical for fostering an inclusive environment for transgender individuals. Such support can significantly mitigate the pervasive impact of societal rejection and discrimination on the mental health and well-being of transgender individuals, particularly within non-Western contexts where stigma is often deeply entrenched ([Suleman et al., 2023](#)). Indeed, explicit institutional backing can counteract systemic biases and facilitate equitable access to opportunities, thereby directly influencing psychological safety and participation outcomes ([Ahuja et al., 2023](#)). This proactive stance by institutions can help to dismantle discriminatory practices and attitudes, paving the way for transgender individuals to engage more fully in educational and athletic pursuits ([Ahmad et al., 2023](#)). Moreover, the presence of visible, supportive institutional policies can serve as a powerful deterrent against transphobia and discrimination, creating spaces where transgender individuals feel acknowledged and respected. This validation can, in turn, foster a sense of belonging and reduce the psychological burden often associated with navigating unsupportive environments. Furthermore, inclusive institutional policies and practices have been shown to directly impact mental health outcomes for transgender athletes by creating environments where they feel accepted and supported, thereby encouraging greater

participation ([Anderson et al., 2025](#); [Chan et al., 2024](#)). Beyond policy, the practical implementation of gender-affirming facilities and the training of staff on transgender inclusion further solidify an institution's commitment, directly impacting the lived experiences and sense of security among transgender participants.

Moreover, legislative actions that restrict the rights of transgender youth, such as limitations on sports participation consistent with their gender identity or access to gender-affirming healthcare, have demonstrably negative impacts on their mental health and overall well-being ([Poteat & Simmons, 2022](#)). Such restrictive policies not only foster psychological distress but also impede academic and social development, creating significant barriers to their full participation in society ([Kinney et al., 2022](#)). Conversely, supportive policies, such as those protecting against discrimination or ensuring access to gender-affirming care, are associated with improved mental health outcomes and increased social well-being for transgender and gender-diverse individuals ([Cluesman et al., 2024](#); [Cramer et al., 2024](#)). These supportive institutional frameworks are therefore crucial in creating environments where transgender individuals can thrive, free from the constant threat of discrimination and marginalization. The presence of inclusive policies not only mitigates prejudice but also enhances transgender knowledge among the general populace, thereby fostering broader societal acceptance and reducing the likelihood of discriminatory practices ([Zell & Burnett, 2024](#)). This underscores the critical role of institutional policy in shaping not only direct access and safety but also the broader societal perceptions and acceptance of transgender individuals.

Specifically, comprehensive anti-harassment policies within educational settings have been shown to reduce negative remarks about gender expression and transgender people, increasing the likelihood of reporting incidents and staff intervention ([Kinney et al., 2022](#)). Such explicit policies are essential for creating environments where transgender students feel secure and supported, ultimately fostering their participation in school activities. The perceived readiness of school administrators and staff to implement supportive policies, even if their awareness is still developing, suggests a potential for positive change within educational institutions ([Green et al., 2018](#)). These findings underscore the critical need for robust, organization-level policies and stigma reduction interventions that extend beyond mere anti-discrimination statements to include explicit protections and educational initiatives. These initiatives are vital for cultivating an atmosphere where transgender individuals can engage in educational and sporting activities without fear of discrimination, thereby enhancing their psychological safety and fostering greater participation ([Kinney et al., 2022](#); [Moran et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, policies that demonstrate symbolic and tangible support, such as those related to police training and civil action statutes, correlate with enhanced social comfort and disclosure among transgender individuals, suggesting their protective role in fostering positive social experiences ([Cramer et al., 2024](#)). These measures, including explicit anti-discrimination policies, not only bolster the

safety and protection of transgender individuals but also facilitate their integration into various societal spheres, including the labor market ([Baptista et al., 2024](#)).

Social Acceptance and its Role in Transgender Empowerment

Social acceptance, defined as the degree to which transgender individuals are embraced and valued by their communities, plays a pivotal role in shaping their overall well-being and willingness to participate in educational and athletic endeavors. This acceptance extends beyond mere tolerance to include affirmation and validation of their identities, which significantly impacts their psychological safety and sense of belonging. Indeed, the presence of strong social support networks, including family, friends, and community groups, can buffer the negative effects of societal stigma, fostering resilience and encouraging active participation ([Frost & Castro, 2024](#)). Conversely, a lack of social acceptance can lead to increased psychological distress, social isolation, and decreased engagement in public life, including educational and sporting activities. Moreover, societal acceptance, when translated into inclusive practices and affirmative attitudes, directly contributes to the psychological safety of transgender individuals, thereby promoting their engagement in scholastic and athletic spheres. This collective societal affirmation can mitigate the detrimental effects of transphobia, fostering an environment where transgender individuals feel secure enough to express their authentic selves and pursue their interests without fear of reprisal or discrimination ([Huslage, 2025](#)). Research indicates that environments characterized by consistent social consideration, support, and protection are crucial for the optimal well-being of transgender individuals, as inconsistencies can lead to heightened vigilance and adverse biopsychosocial outcomes. Such supportive social ecologies, encompassing both formal legal protections and informal community acceptance, are vital for enhancing the social well-being of transgender individuals and mitigating the negative impacts of anti-transgender attitudes.

This includes the ongoing challenge for transgender people in athletics, where restrictive policies or lack of support often limit their full involvement ([Mendes et al., 2023](#)). Athlete-centered and gender-affirming healthcare strategies, coupled with role-tailored education on biases and misperceptions, are crucial for supporting the well-being and inclusion of transgender and gender non-conforming athletes ([Kroshus et al., 2023](#)). These interventions can dismantle systemic barriers and foster environments conducive to their participation, ultimately enhancing their psychological safety and overall engagement in sports. The integration of gender-affirming care within athletic programs, for instance, can significantly reduce experiences of discrimination and promote a more inclusive environment for transgender athletes, thereby fostering greater participation. Further, the implementation of comprehensive anti-discrimination policies and the repeal of anti-transgender laws are essential to create a truly equitable landscape, allowing transgender individuals to fully engage in all aspects of public life without fear of exclusion or harm. These measures are critical for fostering social well-being, as inconsistencies in social safety cues can lead to persistent vigilance and a cascade of

detrimental biopsychosocial responses, including social avoidance and increased inflammatory markers ([Cramer et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, social well-being, encompassing aspects of belongingness and social connection, is directly linked to positive mental and physical health outcomes among transgender and gender-diverse populations.

The sociopolitical climate, characterized by prevailing attitudes and legislative frameworks concerning gender identity, significantly influences the social well-being of transgender individuals, as hostile environments can exacerbate feelings of marginalization and insecurity ([Rothbaum et al., 2024](#)). Indeed, the presence of robust hate crime statutes and anti-discrimination policies has been shown to correlate with improved social well-being, suggesting that legal protections can mitigate the adverse effects of societal prejudice. Conversely, communities with negative anti-transgender attitudes and an absence of protective policies often experience higher rates of social distress among transgender individuals, underscoring the critical role of institutional support in fostering inclusive environments. This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive legal reforms and cultural shifts to create an equitable welfare system that acknowledges and supports transgender identities, including non-binary individuals ([Lorusso et al., 2023](#)). Moreover, the adoption of inclusive policies that affirm diverse gender identities is paramount for advancing social well-being and mitigating the adverse health outcomes often experienced by transgender and non-binary individuals due to systemic discrimination ([Kinney & Cosgrove, 2022](#)).

Psychological Safety as a Mediating Mechanism

Psychological safety, in this context, refers to the perception that an individual can express their authentic self without fear of negative consequences, and it serves as a critical mediator between external factors such as institutional support and social acceptance, and the engagement of transgender individuals in educational and sport participation. This sense of security is fundamental for transgender individuals to thrive, as it directly impacts their willingness to take risks, voice opinions, and fully immerse themselves in academic and athletic environments. Specifically, when transgender individuals perceive strong institutional support and societal acceptance, their psychological safety is enhanced, which in turn facilitates their active and sustained participation in educational pursuits and sporting activities ([Chan et al., 2024](#)). Conversely, the absence of these external supports diminishes psychological safety, leading to withdrawal and disengagement due to the fear of discrimination or rejection, which can manifest as heightened vigilance and adverse social well-being outcomes ([Hernandez & Darling-Hammond, 2022](#)). Therefore, fostering environments where transgender individuals feel psychologically safe is paramount for promoting their overall well-being and encouraging their full integration into academic and athletic settings. This is particularly salient given that internalized transphobia, often exacerbated by a lack of social support, can lead to increased loneliness and negative psychological well-being, thus underscoring the vital role of an affirming social environment in countering these effects ([Garro et al., 2022](#)).

Furthermore, a lack of psychological safety can precipitate significant mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, thereby impeding both academic performance and athletic engagement ([Chan et al., 2024](#)). Indeed, research consistently demonstrates that societal discrimination and a lack of inclusive policies directly contribute to mental health issues among transgender athletes, highlighting the critical need for systemic changes to promote equality and safeguard their rights.

The presence of clear, confidential pathways to mental health support and destigmatization efforts within sports organizations are also crucial for cultivating a psychologically safe environment. This involves not only addressing overt discrimination but also fostering an atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable being themselves and seeking help without fear of judgment or repercussions. Such an environment, characterized by acceptance, equality, and inclusiveness, is critical for promoting psychological safety in sports, thereby fostering improved mental health and overall well-being ([Rossing et al., 2024](#)). Specifically, when environments normalize diverse experiences of mental health and encourage help-seeking behaviors, athletes are more likely to express vulnerabilities and access necessary support, leading to enhanced mental health outcomes ([Ojio et al., 2024](#); [Walton et al., 2023](#)). This is particularly important in high-pressure sports environments where a "win-at-all-costs" mentality can exacerbate psychological harms and create an atmosphere where athletes feel unable to disclose mental health concerns. Furthermore, the consistent communication of anti-discrimination policies and the establishment of accessible reporting mechanisms are vital for reinforcing psychological safety among transgender athletes, ensuring they perceive a genuine commitment to their protection and inclusion. This framework directly impacts the participation of transgender individuals, as a psychologically unsafe environment can lead to significant psychological harms, including humiliation, rejection, and various forms of discrimination. This can result in transgender athletes experiencing heightened mental health concerns, including anxiety, depression, and eating disorders, at rates comparable to or exceeding those of the general population ([Colangelo et al., 2023](#)). Conversely, a supportive organizational climate that prioritizes psychological safety and reduces risks of harm is strongly associated with better mental health outcomes and increased help-seeking among athletes. This aligns with contemporary theoretical models which posit that psychological safety directly influences an individual's willingness to engage in help-seeking behaviors and contributes to overall mental toughness, thereby fostering improved psychological distress and enhanced mental health. Therefore, the cultivation of an environment where transgender individuals feel secure in their identity and expression is not merely beneficial but essential for their comprehensive engagement and flourishing in educational and athletic domains.

Participation in Education and Sports: A Path to Empowerment

For transgender individuals, engagement in these spheres offers crucial avenues for identity affirmation, social integration, and the development of resilience, counteracting the pervasive effects of societal marginalization. These activities

provide structured opportunities for skill development, teamwork, and leadership, which are vital for personal growth and academic achievement. Beyond individual benefits, sports and education can also serve as powerful platforms for advocating for transgender rights and fostering greater understanding and acceptance within broader society. Moreover, inclusive sports policies and educational frameworks are instrumental in challenging discriminatory norms and fostering an equitable environment where transgender individuals can thrive without fear of marginalization or exclusion ([Buzuvis, 2011; Chan et al., 2024](#)). Such frameworks not only dismantle barriers to participation but also actively cultivate spaces where transgender individuals can experience belonging and achieve their full potential. By participating in these activities, transgender individuals can develop a stronger sense of self-worth and challenge stereotypes, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and accepting society. This emphasis on empowerment and inclusivity underscores the transformative potential of sports and education in mitigating the pervasive negative impacts of societal prejudice and fostering an environment conducive to holistic well-being and social equity for transgender individuals. This study therefore investigates the predictive roles of institutional support and social acceptance on educational and sport participation among transgender individuals in Pakistan, specifically examining the mediating role of psychological safety. This research aims to shed light on how supportive institutional policies and societal attitudes can foster an environment where transgender individuals feel safe enough to engage fully in academic and athletic pursuits, particularly within the Pakistani context.

For instance, recent anti-trans legislation, particularly concerning sports participation, has demonstrably exacerbated minority stress and adverse mental health outcomes, including higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among transgender youth, underscoring the urgent need for protective and inclusive measures ([Khonina & Salway, 2024](#)). Such legislative actions often contribute to systemic discrimination, which, in turn, can severely impact the mental well-being of transgender individuals, highlighting the critical role of social support in mitigating these negative effects ([Trujillo et al., 2016](#)). Conversely, supportive policies and affirming social environments have been shown to significantly reduce these negative impacts, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting overall well-being among transgender individuals. This highlights the critical importance of a supportive social environment and inclusive policies in fostering resilience and promoting positive mental health outcomes within this population. Therefore, understanding the interplay between institutional support, social acceptance, and psychological safety becomes paramount in facilitating full and equitable participation for transgender individuals in both educational and sporting contexts ([Holder et al., 2022](#)). This research aims to explore these complex relationships by investigating how institutional support and social acceptance predict educational and sport participation, with psychological safety acting as a mediating variable. Specifically, this study will investigate how the presence of institutional policies that affirm transgender identities and promote

inclusivity, alongside broader societal acceptance, can enhance an individual's sense of psychological safety, thereby facilitating greater engagement in educational and athletic pursuits. Furthermore, this study will delve into the specific mechanisms through which psychological safety translates these external supports into internal feelings of security, ultimately influencing participation rates ([Garro et al., 2022](#)).

Linking Institutional Support, Social Acceptance, and Psychological Safety to Participation

The absence of such supportive frameworks often correlates with heightened risks of suicidal ideation and other mental health challenges among sexual and gender minorities, further underscoring the necessity of comprehensive protective measures ([McQuillan et al., 2024](#)). This underscores the critical role of institutional support and social acceptance in fostering an environment conducive to psychological safety, which is essential for transgender individuals' educational and sports participation. Indeed, family support and dyadic adjustment also play a crucial role in promoting overall well-being, acting as a protective factor against negative psychological outcomes ([Lampis et al., 2023](#)). Moreover, these interpersonal supports, alongside broader social acceptance, contribute significantly to an individual's sense of belonging and connectedness, directly enhancing psychological well-being and reducing the impact of minority stress ([Puckett et al., 2019](#)). Consequently, a robust understanding of how these factors interrelate can inform targeted interventions and policy development aimed at fostering inclusive environments that promote the full participation and well-being of transgender individuals ([Cramer et al., 2024](#); [McQuillan et al., 2024](#)). This study therefore seeks to operationalize these constructs by examining the direct and indirect pathways through which institutional backing and societal affirmation influence participation rates, mediated by the perception of psychological safety. This approach aligns with socio-ecological models, which posit that individual well-being and engagement are profoundly shaped by the intersection of sociocultural contexts and individual agency ([Rothbaum et al., 2024](#)).

Specifically, it will explore how explicit and implicit institutional policies, such as non-discrimination clauses or gender-affirming facilities, contribute to a sense of security and belonging among transgender individuals ([Liss et al., 2024](#)). Concurrently, the study will investigate how broader social acceptance, manifested through positive attitudes and reduced prejudice, reinforces this psychological safety, thereby empowering transgender individuals to engage actively in educational and athletic domains. These interconnected factors collectively influence the degree to which transgender individuals feel secure enough to pursue their academic and athletic aspirations without fear of discrimination or marginalization. Such an ecological framework is crucial for understanding how various systemic levels, from individual to macrosystem, interact to influence the well-being and developmental trajectories of transgender individuals ([Lorusso et al., 2023](#)). This multifaceted approach acknowledges that both individual-level resilience and community-level attitudes profoundly influence social well-being among transgender individuals.

Specifically, social well-being encompasses an individual's evaluation of their social support networks and functional capacity, including feelings of belongingness and interconnectedness. This perspective emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between an individual's personal experiences and the broader social and institutional environments they navigate. This holistic understanding is vital for developing effective interventions and policies that promote inclusivity and support the flourishing of transgender individuals in all facets of life. The absence of such comprehensive support systems can exacerbate feelings of isolation and impede personal development, thereby limiting opportunities for educational and athletic engagement.

Indeed, an ecological framework underscores how individual identity, community support, and institutional policies collectively shape social well-being, highlighting the need for systemic interventions that extend beyond individual-level factors. This perspective aligns with the social-ecological model, which recognizes that stigmatizing experiences can manifest and be reinforced across structural, community, and individual levels, impacting the well-being of transgender and gender-diverse individuals ([Matsick et al., 2024](#)). Conversely, the active advocacy by transgender individuals against injustice and pathologization can foster a self-determined path that prioritizes pride and euphoria, moving beyond transformative views. This emphasizes that the "gender-affirming path" extends beyond merely medical perspectives, encompassing social and psychological dimensions that are crucial for comprehensive well-being. Furthermore, internal self-affirmation, characterized by an individual's acceptance of their gender identity, alongside external affirmation from significant others and societal recognition, are integral components of this affirmation process. These multifaceted forms of affirmation internal, interpersonal, and societal collectively contribute to the psychological safety necessary for transgender individuals to thrive and participate fully in all aspects of life. Understanding the interplay between these affirming factors and the challenges posed by societal prejudice is thus paramount for developing robust frameworks that support transgender individuals' participation in educational and athletic settings. This comprehensive approach not only acknowledges the unique challenges faced by transgender individuals but also seeks to identify the protective factors that can mitigate adverse outcomes and promote holistic development.

Theoretical Framework & Hypothesis

H1: Institutional Support (IS) has a positive effect on Psychological Safety (PS).

H2: Social Acceptance (SA) has a positive effect on Psychological Safety (PS).

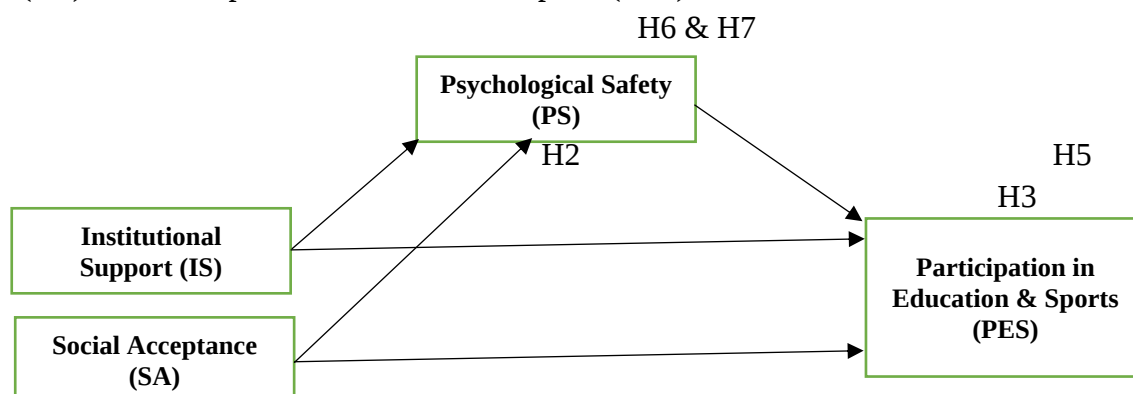
H3: Institutional Support (IS) has a positive effect on Participation in Education & Sports (PES).

H4: Social Acceptance (SA) has a positive effect on Participation in Education & Sports (PES).

H5: Psychological Safety (PS) has a positive effect on Participation in Education & Sports (PES).

H6: Psychological Safety (PS) mediates the relationship between Institutional Support (IS) and Participation in Education & Sports (PES).

H7: Psychological Safety (PS) mediates the relationship between Social Acceptance (SA) and Participation in Education & Sports (PES).



Methodology

This research adopted quantitative cross-sectional survey research to determine how Institutional Support (IS) and Social Acceptance (SA) affects Participation in Education and Sports (PES) among transgender and transfeminine individuals in Pakistan, and Psychological Safety (PS) is used as an intermediary measure. The rationale used to adopt the quantitative method is its ability to measure and statistically test relationships among constructs of a wide population and hence its compatibility with previous research which has examined social and institutional predictors of inclusion and participation among marginalized groups. The sample was made of transgender and transfeminism students and athletes attending educational institutions and sports programmed in the major urban centers of Pakistan, i.e. Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, Faisalabad, and Peshawar. The reason why this population was selected is the fact that it consists of people that were directly influenced by the inclusion policies of institutions and the attitude that the society currently has towards gender diversity in the country.

As there is neither an official transgender registry in Pakistan, non-probability purposive sampling method was applied and supplemented by snowball method with the help of non-governmental organizations and community groups operating in Pakistan. The total population size allocated to the issue was 350 questionnaires (175 paper and 175 electronic). The total number of responses obtained was 309 and it was considered valid after it was properly screened as complete and consistent. The modified sample size of 309 respondents is sufficient enough to meet the requirement of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) which requires a minimum of ten times the maximum number of structural paths to any latent construct. A well-planned questionnaire was created on the basis of the validated scales in the existing literature. Everything was rated using a five-point Likert scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Institutional Support (IS): the scale was assessed using four items, which were modified based on the Eisenberger et al. (1986) studies and other related research on the same topic on inclusion policy. Sample question: “There are policies that safeguard transgender at my institution against discrimination. Social Acceptance (SA): a five-item scale based on the Herek (2009) and the further community-based research. Sample question: “Individuals in my society tolerate transgender people as equals. Psychological Safety (PS): a five-item scale based on the adaptation of Edmondson (1999) and validated based on including-based psychological safety scales. Sample question: I am comfortable with being out about my gender in my institution. Engagement and participation Education and Sports (PES): measured using five item scale items based on engagement and participation literature (Rees and Hardy, 2000; Chowdhury and Shahid, 2023). Sample question: I do not fear engaging in educational and sport-related activities because I am not afraid of prejudice and marginalization. The data was collected in the period between January and June 2025. The respondents were recruited through local organizations, inclusion offices at the universities and online transgender communities. To be understood, the survey was available in English and Urdu. Participation was done voluntarily and anonymity was ensured, and informed consent was given by the respondents before they would complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The demographic information included in Table 1 shows that most of the respondents identified as transgender women 60.5%, and transfeminine and gender-diverse individuals represented 39.5% of the sample. In terms of age, a large percentage of the participants 70.9% were between the ages of 18 -35 years, thus representing the cohort of the most active people in both academic and sporting activities. Educational level showed that 44.3% of the respondents were in undergraduate programmed and 36.0% had postgraduate qualifications and the educational achievement among the sample was quite high. Almost half of the respondents (45.6%) mainly identified themselves as students, with 27.8% identifying themselves as athletes and 18.8% claiming engagement in both academia and sports. Geographically, the province of Punjab provided 42.4% of the answers, Sindh 25.2% and Khyber 17.5% which is in line with the metropolitan educational and sports institution predomination in these areas. With regard to institutional affiliation, 70.9% of the sampled mentioned that they had more than one year experience in their respective institutions, which means that they have adequate exposure to institutional support systems and environments with social relevance relevant to this research.

Table 1: Demographics of the Data

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender Identity	Transgender Women	187	60.5
	Transfeminine / Gender Diverse	122	39.5

[377]

Age (Years)	18–25	98	31.7
	26–35	121	39.2
	36–45	67	21.7
	Above 45	23	7.4
Educational Level	Secondary / Higher Secondary	61	19.7
	Undergraduate (Bachelor's)	137	44.3
	Postgraduate (Master's or above)	111	36.0
Occupational Status	Student	141	45.6
	Athlete (Club / Professional)	86	27.8
	Both Student & Athlete	58	18.8
	Other (Community / NGO Participant)	24	7.8
Region / Province	Punjab	131	42.4
	Sindh	78	25.2
	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)	54	17.5
	Islamabad / Capital Region	30	9.7
	Balochistan & Others	16	5.2
Years of Institutional Affiliation	Less than 1 Year	39	12.6
	1–3 Years	104	33.7
	4–6 Years	115	37.2
	Above 6 Years	51	16.5

Reliability & Convergent Validity

The results of reliability and convergent validity tests of all constructs used in the research including Institutional Support (IS), Social Acceptance (SA), Psychological Safety (PS), and Participation in Education and Sports (PES) are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability & Convergent Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Institutional Support (IS)	0.865	0.876	0.598
Participation in Education & Sports (PES)	0.735	0.748	0.562
Psychological Safety (PS)	0.830	0.840	0.665
Social Acceptance	0.816	0.841	0.641

(SA)			
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The findings reveal that all the constructs meet the minimum internal consistency and convergent validity levels. All constructs have Cronbach alpha coefficients of between 0.735 and 0.865; they are higher than the traditional 0.70, thus, showing reasonable reliability. The Composite Reliability (CR) ranges between 0.748 and 0.876 with no doubt that there is strong internal consistency among the items observed. The values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are 0.562-0.665, and they are all greater than the recommended 0.50 level (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This shows that both latent constructs explain over fifty percent of the variance in the indicators of the two constructs, thus showing convergent validity. Overall, the data helps to believe that the measurement model includes credible and valid constructs, which consequently helps to proceed with the further analysis of the hypothesized structural relationships between Institutional Support, Social Acceptance, Psychological Safety, and Participation in Education and Sports.

4.2 Discriminant Validity

Table 3 represents the findings of the Fornell-Larcker criterion that is used to measure the discriminant validity between the constructs include the results of the Institutional Support (IS), Social Acceptance (SA), Psychological Safety (PS), and Participation in Education and Sports (PES).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

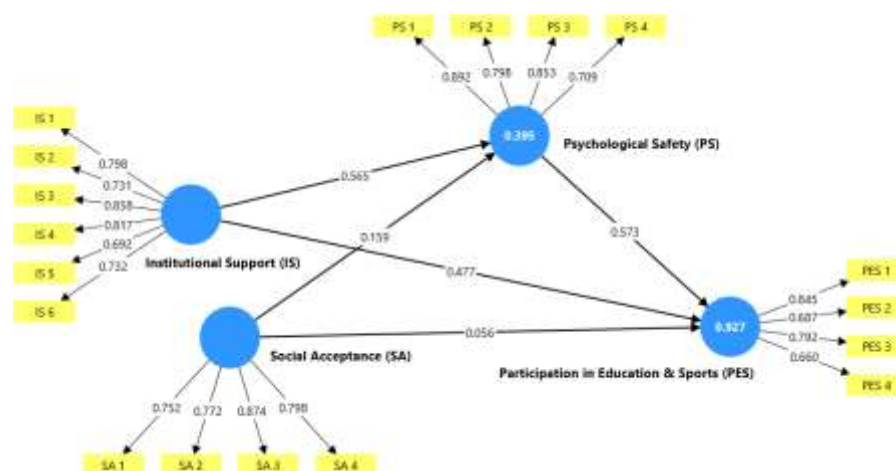
Constructs	Institutional Support (IS)	Participation in Education & Sports (PES)	Psychological Safety (PS)	Social Acceptance (SA)
Institutional Support (IS)	0.773			
Participation in Education & Sports (PES)	0.742	0.750		
Psychological Safety (PS)	0.610	0.681	0.816	
Social Acceptance (SA)	0.283	0.373	0.319	0.800

The diagonal values, further indicated by bold are the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of individual constructs, and the off-diagonal values are the inter-construct correlations. Fornell and Larcker (1981) indicate that the square root of the AVE of every construct has to be higher than the correlations with other constructs to establish the discriminant validity. The diagonal values that are between 0.750 and 0.816 are consistently high in this study than the inter-construct correlations, thus suggesting good discriminant validity. As a result, each construct has its conceptual difference, and all the constructs (Institutional Support, Social Acceptance,

Psychological Safety, and Participation in Education and Sports) are a measure of a distinct dimension of the model. The measurement model therefore, has convergent and discriminant validity that indicates that the constructs used are valid and reliable to test the structural model.

4.3 Structural Model Assessment

The hypothesis of the relationships between the Institutional Support (IS), Social Acceptance (SA), Psychological Safety (PS), and Participation in Education and Sports (PES) is evaluated in the structural model in Figure 2. The model explains a significant proportion of the variance in Psychological Safety ($R^2 = 0.395$) and 92.7 per cent of the variance in Participation in Education and Sports ($R^2 = 0.927$) confirming that the model is a very strong account. Findings also reveal that the positive effect of Institutional Support on Psychological Safety is strong (0.565), which implies that a helpful and welcoming organizational climate can stimulate the feeling of psychological safety among individuals. At the same time, the Psychological Safety is positively related to the Participation in Education & Sports (0.573), meaning that those who feel emotionally and socially safe tend to participate in educational and sports activities. Moreover, the factor of Institutional Support has a direct positive impact on Participation in Education and Sports (0.477), which also accommodates a high level of participation. Social Acceptance, on the other hand, has weak and statistically insignificant relationship with Participation in Education and Sports (0.056), which means that social acceptance would not be as effective to promote the latter without institutional and psychological support mechanisms. Such results support the mediating effect of Psychological Safety that in part conveys the influence of Institutional Support and Social Acceptance on Participation in Education & Sports. As a result, both institutional and social efforts ought to contribute to the improvement of psychological safety in an effort to achieve a holistic inclusion and involvement of the marginalized populations, including transgender, in educational and sporting settings.



Discussion

The findings have highlighted the critical role of institutional processes and enabling conditions in promoting involvement of transgender people in education and sports activities in Pakistan. In line with the Social Support Theory and the Psychological Safety Model, institutional support has a significant positive effect on the degree of psychological safety and the extent of participation in line with the past studies which indicated that inclusive institutional structures and overt anti-discrimination policies have a positive influence on the well-being and active participation. Despite its conceptual importance, the direct influence of social acceptance on the participation is relatively small, which indicates that a simple recognition of the society is not enough without structural reinforcement and a psychologically secure environment. Psychological safety comes out as an important mechanism that transforms institutional efforts into practice and support the suggestion that people would be more engaged when they feel safe, respected, and valued. These findings are consistent with the recent literature on inclusion in the fields of education and sports that highlight the role of psychological safety as a mediating factor between policy and participation outcomes.

1. Conclusion

The findings of this work can be regarded as empirical proof that the presence of Institutional Support and Psychological Safety are essential forces that stimulate the participation of transgender individuals in the educational and sports setting. Those institutions which take proactive steps to encourage inclusivity, prohibit non-discrimination and offer safe ambient environments encourage more involvement and engagement. The results also underscore the fact that Psychological Safety is a key process that connects supportive structures with outcomes of participation. In spite of this, Social Acceptance though good in its substance does not suffice to initiate active participation unless it is supported with institutional preparedness and assurances of safety. On the whole, the study contributes to the development of the knowledge of the role of organizational and social processes in empowering marginalized communities, which, in turn, helps to enhance equity and inclusivity in the education and sport systems of Pakistan.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The research expands the Social Support Theory by adding the Psychological Safety as an intermediary process between institutional structures and social environments and behavioral outcomes including participation. It is also complementary to Self-Determination Theory, which presupposes that a sense of belonging and emotional security enhances intrinsic motivation of people to participate in educational and sports fields. Furthermore, the results add to the literature on inclusion and equity since they are empirically proven to confirm the role of institutional structures in influencing the behaviors of participation among the marginalized groups.

6.2 Practical Implications

In practical terms, the findings underscore the need to have institutional interventions and inclusive policies based on the priority of psychological safety of transgender and other underrepresented groups. To promote inclusivity, educational and sports agencies are encouraged to invest in awareness initiatives, anti-bullying systems, gender-sensitive facilities, and administrator and coach education. Also, social campaigns can be used as a supplement to the institutional means, to develop empathy, acceptance, and respect in the larger communities. These strategies will significantly boost the level of participation and enhance the general well-being of transgender people.

6.3 Future Research & Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided in this study, there are some limitations that should be considered. To start with, cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and the future study must adopt longitudinal research designs so as to elucidate changes in behavior with time. Second, self-reported surveys were used to collect data and this can lead to social desirability bias. It may be enhanced by using mixed methods, e.g. qualitative interviews or focus groups to provide a better understanding of context. Third, the study evaluated transgender people in Pakistani urban centers, specifically people involved in educational or sporting activities; it would be better to sample rural or international populations so that the results are more generalizable. Future research may focus on the moderating variables of cultural attitudes, leader support, level of policy enforcement, etc. to clarify the boundary conditions influencing participation. Inclusion of intersectionality frameworks would also be incorporated to gain more insight into the interaction of different identity aspects to define inclusion outcomes.

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