



Impact of Financial Barriers and Support Mechanisms on the Career Aspirations of Aspiring Young Cricketers in India: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

The game of cricket is the most popular game in India and now more and more people believe that a career in cricket is possible. However, the road to professional cricket is an expensive one, and the cost of fees for the academies, training and equipment all have to be borne by the parents.

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design using primary data collected using a structured Likert scale questionnaire from 150 respondents selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The respondents were classified into three categories based on their responses; namely respondents who continue playing cricket, respondents who stopped playing cricket, and respondents who wished to continue playing cricket but could not due to financial issues. The family income, cricket related expenses were the independent variables and financial barriers while the family support, sponsorship, government support and scholarships were the independent variables and support systems.

The findings indicate that Family Support and Sponsorship are important positive factors influencing Career in Cricket, while Family Income also contributes positively. In contrast, Cricket-related Expenses act as a financial barrier to pursuing cricket, while Government Support does not show a significant influence. Scholarships also show a negative relationship that requires further investigation. Perceived ROI positively influences Career in Cricket and partially mediates the relationships between Family Support,

Sponsorship and Career in Cricket.

Keywords

Career in Cricket, Financial Barriers, Support Mechanisms, Perceived ROI.



INTRODUCTION

The game of cricket occupies a distinctive place in the culture of India. It is the most popular sport in India, and, during the last twenty years, it has been developing as a massive business enterprise as well. In the fiscal year of 2024-25, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) registered a yearly turnover of Rs 11,055 crore, while the IPL is its main revenue generator (BCCI, 2026).

However, getting from the neighbourhood grounds to professional contracts is costly. Future cricketers require coaching from an academy, decent equipment, transport for both training and match-playing, fees for participating in tournaments, and, in most cases, moving to a city with better training facilities. This cost is incurred every year until income is generated, and its ability to cover by a considerable extent depends on family income levels. There are numerous international examples to support the above arguments: Hyde et al. (2020) note that while 79.9% of children from 6-9 years old who came from wealthy families were engaged in playing sports in the US, only 32.7% from poor families were doing the same thing; Kuhn et al. (2021) state that high-income households take part about two times more than low-income households; and Espedalen and Seippel (2024) say that children from poor families leave organised sport due to its increasing cost.

However, financial limitations are not all there is to consider. Family, coaching, and peer support has been found to be related to the motivation and perseverance of athletes (Kovács & Szakál, 2024; Walton et al., 2024), while financial assistance and adequate facilities improve motivation and satisfaction (Nugroho et al., 2023). However, since careers in sport are limited and unpredictable (Moolman, 2023), family members and young cricketers may also factor in the expected return relative to the cost. It is referred to in this paper as the perceived “return on investment (ROI)” of investing money, time and opportunities into cricketing activities.

Title: “Impact of Financial Barriers and Support Mechanisms on the Career Aspirations of Aspiring Young Cricketers in India: An Empirical Study.” It was chosen because the literature offers little integrated evidence for India, studies usually examine barriers and supports separately, and perceived ROI has barely been examined as a mediator. This research examines financial barriers and support mechanisms together in relation to Career in Cricket, defined as a young person’s desire to build a future in cricket together with the willingness to stay in the sport, and tests perceived ROI as the mediating variable.

Primary data, structured questionnaire, descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, EFA & CFA, Pearson correlation, multiple regression and PLS-SEM (bootstrapping) will be used for the research. The expected findings of the research are an identification of those factors that matter for the aspiring young cricketers, confirmation of the importance of ROI and necessary information for the families, sponsors, cricket academies, policy makers and researchers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is an important component of research since it aids in identifying the knowledge already available on the research problem, the methodology adopted by others, and the research gap. In the present study, the review has been done on the connection between household income and engagement in sports activities, the cost of sports and dropping out, the measures which make athletes stay on, and the monetary aspects of being a professional athlete.

Regarding financial barriers, Hyde et al. (2020) highlighted the existence of an income gradient associated with youth sport participation in America, whereas Kuhn et al. (2021) suggested that such barriers are common and emanate from various barriers, including financial barriers. Pandya (2021) noted that the shift from community sports to club sports has elevated the cost of entry and has led to exclusion of poor families from participation. Staurowsky et al. (2020) indicated that inequality in financial resources hinders both participation and progression in girls’ and women’s sport. Financial barriers have implications in retention, as indicated by Zarrett et al. (2020), who found in a national study involving 3,041 youth athletes that cost and transportation are barriers to retention of girls in sport, whereas Espedalen and Seippel (2024), surveying 2,355 young athletes in Norway, noted that poor youths have stopped participating in organised sport due to rising costs.

Concerning the support system, Kovács and Szakál (2024) in a systematic study keeping 21 articles out of 512 stated that motivation, resilience, and support by the family, coaches, and friends were vital for sustaining the process, but it



was evident that socio-economic and institutional aspects need more research. Walton et al. (2024) suggested that a supportive environment positively affects the performance of young elite athletes. Moreover, according to Nugroho et al. (2023), financial support and good quality facilities contributed to an increase in motivation and satisfaction of the athletes. Additionally, financial aid and facility access positively affected the participation of marginalized communities, according to Karstensen et al. (2024).

There is no evidence specifically related to cricket and India. In 27 interviews and ten follow-up interviews conducted with South African rugby and cricket players by Moolman (2023), it was found that short and uncertain careers make financial literacy necessary since this is the only study related to cricket. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB, 2023) recognizes equity and access as issues in the game. For India, while the institutional and economic evidence collected is the revenues of BCCI (2026) and earnings of the nation (MoSPI, 2025), no study from any peer-reviewed journal exists on this topic.

Table 1: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Study	Focus	Key relevance to present study
Hyde et al. (2020)	Disparities in youth sport, USA	32.7% vs 79.9% participation for low- vs high-income children; benchmark for the income gap.
Staurowsky et al. (2020)	Equity in funding for girls and women	Funding inequity limits participation; barriers compound.
Zarrett et al. (2020)	Girls' participation and dropout	Cost and transport reduce retention; parental support is critical.
Kuhn et al. (2021)	Disparities in youth sport	High-income households participate about twice as much; fee gap.
Pandya (2021)	Club and travel-team barriers	A higher financial floor excludes low-income families; relates to cricket-related expenses.
Moolman (2023)	Financial literacy of rugby and cricket players	Short careers require financial literacy; basis for perceived ROI.
Nugroho et al. (2023)	Financial support and training quality	Financial support raises motivation and satisfaction; relates to sponsorship and government support.
ECB (2023)	Inclusion in cricket	Equity and access are recognised concerns; institutional context.
Espedalen & Seippel (2024)	Dropout by socio-economic status	Low-income youths quit as sport became too expensive.
Karstensen et al. (2024)	Sport and social inclusion	Financial support raises participation; relates to government support and scholarships.
Kovács & Szakál (2024)	Persistence in sport	Family, coach and peer support drive persistence; socio-economic gap remains.
Walton et al. (2024)	Mental health of elite youth athletes	Supportive environments aid well-being; relates to family and institutional support.

Three major trends can be discerned from the literature. First, research studies like Hyde et al. (2020), Kuhn et al. (2021), and Espedalen and Seippel (2024) indicate that low household income and high cost have the effect of reducing participation and increasing dropout. Second, research studies such as Kovács and Szakál (2024), Walton et al. (2024), Nugroho et al. (2023), and Karstensen et al. (2024) show that family support, financial support, and institutional support



contribute to the perseverance of athletes. Third, Moolman (2023) shows that perceived financial benefit is important in the case of sporting career but this has never been studied as a mechanism of support for perseverance.

This indicates that there is a gap in research. There is a lack of integration of literature on financial barriers on Career in Cricket; family support, sponsorship, government support, and scholarship are considered independently; there is little empirical research involving young cricketers of India; and few studies focus on the mediating role of Perceived ROI. This paper attempts to link these variables through factor analysis, regression analysis, and PLS-SEM.

Overall, the reviewed literature provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for examining how financial barriers and support mechanisms shape Career in Cricket among aspiring young cricketers in India. However, existing studies have largely examined financial constraints, family support, sponsorship and institutional support separately, with limited empirical evidence integrating these factors within a single framework. More importantly, the role of perceived Return on Investment (ROI) as a mechanism linking these factors to Career in Cricket has received limited attention. This gap motivates the present study, which first establishes the measurement quality of the constructs, then examines their individual relationships and combined influence on Career in Cricket, and finally investigates whether perceived ROI explains part of the relationship between support mechanisms and Career in Cricket.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the key financial barriers and support mechanisms that influence Career in Cricket among young cricketers in India.
2. To examine the influence of perceived Return on Investment (ROI) on Career in Cricket among young cricketers in India.
3. To examine the mediating role of perceived ROI in the relationship between financial barriers, support mechanisms and Career in Cricket among young cricketers in India.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Framework and Type of Research

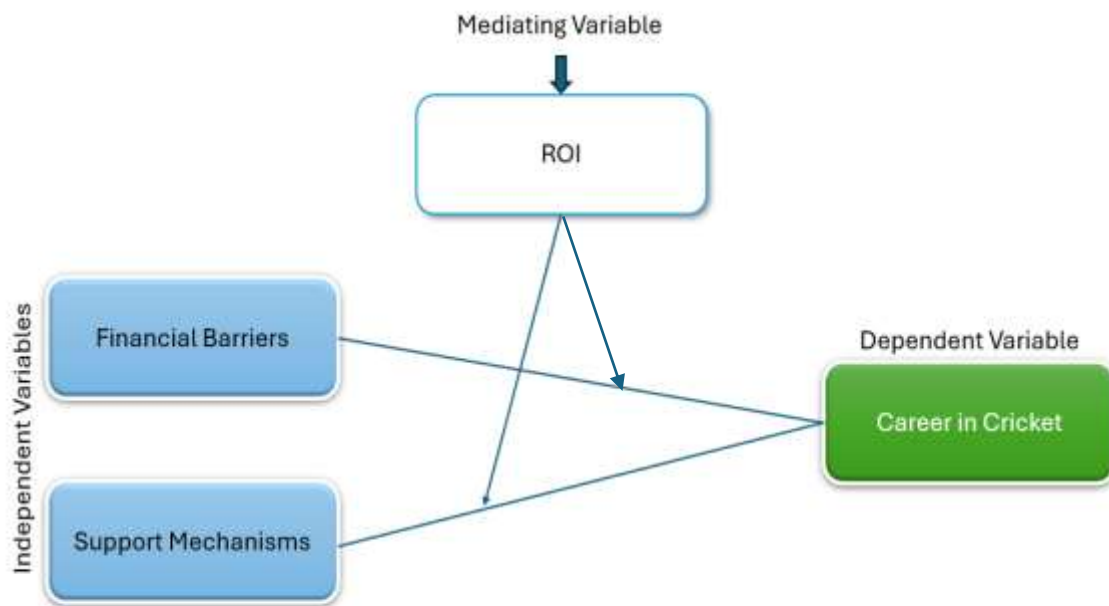
The choice of methodology to carry out the research is Quantitative, Cross-Sectional and Empirical Approach as the method to analyse the impact of financial barriers and support mechanism on Career in Cricket. Data is collected through a questionnaire based on the three objectives set to be achieved. The first objective involves analysis of impact of financial barriers and support mechanism on Career in Cricket through Correlation and Multiple Regression. Secondly, analysis of impact of Perceived ROI on Career in Cricket through PLS-SEM. Thirdly, mediation of Perceived ROI through Bootstrapped Indirect Effects.

The sequence for the research is: Financial barriers and support mechanisms → Perceived ROI → Career in Cricket (direct and indirect effects).

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework. Two financial barriers (Family Income and Cricket-related Expenses) and four support mechanisms (Family Support, Sponsorship,

Government Support and Scholarships) are the independent variables, Career in Cricket is the dependent variable, and perceived ROI is the mediating variable.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



(Authors independent creation)

Data Source

Primary data collected through a structured questionnaire is used in this research. The questionnaire began with a profile section covering cricket continuation status, gender, age group, highest qualification, highest level of cricket played, cricket experience, monthly family income and association with a cricket academy. It then measured eight constructs using 31 indicators, rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Table 2)

The questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the study criteria, followed by snowball sampling to reach additional respondents through existing participant contacts. Data were collected during the study period, and a total of 150 usable responses were obtained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were not required to provide identifying information in the manuscript.

Table 2: Constructs and Number of Indicators

Construct	Role in the model	Items	Measurement focus
Family Income (FI)	Independent – financial barrier	4	Sufficiency of family income for coaching and tournaments
Cricket-related Expenses (CE)	Independent – financial barrier	4	Burden of fees, equipment, travel, nutrition and fitness costs
Family Support (FS)	Independent – support mechanism	4	Encouragement, financial and moral support from family
Sponsorship (SP)	Independent – support mechanism	4	Availability of sponsorship and cost reduction
Government Support (GS)	Independent – support mechanism	4	Awareness of schemes, access to facilities



Construct	Role in the model	Items	Measurement focus
Scholarships (SCH)	Independent – support mechanism	4	Awareness of scholarships and cost reduction
Perceived ROI	Mediating variable	3	Benefits outweigh costs; better future opportunities
Career in Cricket (CA)	Dependent variable	3	Long-term aspiration, determination, continued effort

Sample Selection

The target population for this study consisted of aspiring young cricketers in India. As there is no comprehensive database of this population, purposive sampling and snowball sampling were employed. Purposive sampling ensured that respondents belonged to one of the relevant cricket-continuation categories, while snowball sampling was used to reach additional eligible respondents through existing participants. A total of 150 usable responses were obtained.

Sample size was also considered using the commonly applied 5:1 respondent-to-item rule of thumb. With 30 questionnaire items used for measuring the study constructs, a minimum of 150 responses was targeted (30×5). Therefore, the final sample of 150 respondents met this rule-of-thumb requirement. The sample was subsequently used for factor analysis, multiple regression and PLS-SEM.

Table 3: Profile of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	97	64.7%
	Female	53	35.3%
Age group	Below 18	5	3.3%
	18–20	23	15.3%
	21–23	60	40.0%
	24–26	41	27.3%
	27–30	14	9.3%
	Above 30	7	4.7%
Cricket continuation	Currently pursuing cricket	32	21.3%
	Previously pursued but discontinued	35	23.3%
	Wanted to pursue but could not due to financial constraints	83	55.3%



Methods and Statistical Technique Used for Data Analysis

Table 4: Methods and Statistical Technique

Objective	Method / Variable	Definition / Decision rule	Technique / Software
Objective 1: Financial barriers and support mechanisms	Suitability and measurement quality	KMO > 0.60; significant Bartlett's test; loadings > 0.50; alpha > 0.70	KMO, Bartlett's test, EFA, CFA, Cronbach's alpha
	Descriptive analysis	Mean score of each construct	Descriptive statistics
	Relationship with Career in Cricket	Six predictors; dependent variable = Career in Cricket	Pearson correlation; multiple linear regression
Objective 2: Perceived ROI	Direct effect of ROI	Path coefficient ROI → Career in Cricket	PLS-SEM (SmartPLS)
Objective 3: Mediation	Specific indirect effects	Predictor → ROI → Career in Cricket; 95% CI excludes zero	PLS-SEM with bootstrapping

A hypothesis is accepted when $p < .05$ and the sign of the coefficient is consistent with the expected direction.

Research Hypotheses

Table 5: Research Hypotheses and Statements

Objective	Hypothesis	Statement
Objective 1	H1	Family Income significantly influences Career in Cricket.
	H2	Cricket-related Expenses significantly influence Career in Cricket.
	H3	Family Support significantly influences Career in Cricket.
	H4	Sponsorship significantly influences Career in Cricket.
	H5	Government Support significantly influences Career in Cricket.
	H6	Scholarships significantly influence Career in Cricket.
Objective 2	H7	Perceived ROI significantly influences Career in Cricket among young cricketers in India.
Objective 3	H8	Perceived ROI significantly mediates the relationship between financial barriers and support mechanisms and Career in Cricket.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

The study was done using the information gathered from 150 budding cricketers. The most distinctive characteristic about the profile (Table 3) is that almost 55.3% of the respondents want to engage in cricket but are not able to do so due to financial limitations; 23.3% of the respondents have already engaged in cricket but stopped, and only 21.3% were still engaging in cricket. Therefore, 78.7% of the respondents had either dropped out of cricket or were not able to join



cricket in the first place.

Cricket-related Expenses was the highest mean (3.28) among all the variables, which shows that the respondents find the expense on cricket as one of the main financial considerations. Family Support (3.14) and Scholarships (3.11) were relatively high, while Sponsorship (2.92) and Government Support (2.78) were considered low, which shows that external support is less available compared to internal family support. Family Income was found to be the lowest mean (2.66).

Table 6: Mean Scores of the Study Constructs

Construct	Mean score
Family Income	2.66
Cricket-related Expenses	3.28
Family Support	3.14
Sponsorship	2.92
Government Support	2.78
Scholarships	3.11
Career in Cricket	3.05

The descriptive results provide an initial picture of the financial environment surrounding the respondents' cricket aspirations. Cricket-related Expenses recorded the highest mean, indicating that the cost of pursuing cricket is a prominent concern among respondents. Family Support and Scholarships showed comparatively higher levels, whereas Sponsorship and Government Support were relatively lower, suggesting that external support mechanisms may be less accessible than support received from families. Family Income recorded the lowest mean, further indicating the financial constraints faced by some respondents. These findings provide the descriptive context for examining whether these financial and support-related factors are statistically associated with Career in Cricket. Therefore, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted next.

Reliability and Measurement Validity

The data were appropriate for factor analysis; KMO measure was 0.818 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(465)=3229.118$, $p < .0001$). The Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed that all items were well loaded greater than 0.50 on their target construct. The results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis indicated moderate but acceptable model fit; chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio was 2.00, which was less than 3, CFI and TLI were slightly lower than 0.90 threshold and RMSEA (0.082) was near the upper boundary of acceptability. All eight constructs were above the desirable level of Cronbach's alpha, varying from 0.742 (Scholarships) to 0.906 (Career in Cricket).

Table 7: Factor Loadings and Reliability of Constructs

Construct	EFA loading range	Cronbach's α	Remark
Family Income	0.778–0.826	0.899	Good
Cricket-related Expenses	0.664–0.895	0.904	Excellent
Family Support	0.688–0.867	0.903	Excellent
Sponsorship	0.532–0.756	0.802	Good
Government Support	0.530–0.702	0.795	Acceptable



Construct	EFA loading range	Cronbach's α	Remark
Scholarships	0.545–0.678	0.742	Acceptable
Perceived ROI	0.595–0.834	0.878	Good
Career in Cricket	0.603–0.918	0.906	Excellent

Factors Influencing Career in Cricket

Pearson correlation showed that Family Support had the strongest positive correlation with Career in Cricket ($r = .465$, $p < .001$), followed by Sponsorship ($r = .379$), Family Income ($r = .357$) and Government Support ($r = .334$), all at $p < .001$. Cricket-related Expenses ($r = -.046$, $p = .580$) and Scholarships ($r = .159$, $p = .052$) were not significantly correlated.

Table 8: Pearson Correlation of Predictors With Career in Cricket

Predictor	r	p-value	Interpretation
Family Income	.357	< .001	Significant, positive
Cricket-related Expenses	-.046	.580	Not significant
Family Support	.465	< .001	Significant, positive
Sponsorship	.379	< .001	Significant, positive
Government Support	.334	< .001	Significant, positive
Scholarships	.159	.052	Not significant

Family Support showed the strongest positive relationship with Career in Cricket, indicating that respondents who reported greater family support also tended to report stronger career aspirations. Sponsorship and Family Income also showed positive relationships, suggesting that both external financial support and household financial capacity are associated with stronger aspirations. Government Support was positively related at the bivariate level, although this relationship needs to be examined alongside the other predictors. In contrast, Cricket-related Expenses and Scholarships did not show statistically significant bivariate relationships with Career in Cricket. These results establish the initial relationships between the variables; however, correlation does not determine the unique contribution of each predictor when the other factors are considered simultaneously. Therefore, multiple regression was conducted.

Multiple Regression Analysis (H1–H6)

The six predictors were entered together in a multiple linear regression. The model was statistically significant ($R = .633$, $R^2 = .401$, $F(6, 143) = 15.969$, $p < .001$), so the predictors together explain 40.1% of the variance in Career in Cricket. Family Support was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .470$, $p < .001$), followed by Sponsorship ($\beta = .363$, $p < .001$) and Family Income ($\beta = .200$, $p = .006$). Cricket-related Expenses ($\beta = -.162$, $p = .026$) and Scholarships ($\beta = -.193$, $p = .028$) had significant negative coefficients, while Government Support had no significant effect ($\beta = -.010$, $p = .921$). Five of the six hypotheses were therefore supported and H5 was not.

Table 9: Regression Coefficients (Dependent Variable: Career in Cricket)

Predictor	β	p-value	Decision
H1: Family Income	.200	.006	Supported (positive)
H2: Cricket-related Expenses	-.162	.026	Supported (negative)
H3: Family Support	.470	< .001	Supported (positive)
H4: Sponsorship	.363	< .001	Supported (positive)
H5: Government Support	-.010	.921	Not supported



Predictor	β	p-value	Decision
H6: Scholarships	-.193	.028	Supported (negative)

The overall regression model was statistically significant, indicating that the set of predictors collectively provides meaningful explanatory power for Career in Cricket. The model explained approximately 40% of the variation in Career in Cricket, suggesting that financial conditions and support mechanisms constitute an important part of the factors associated with young cricketers' career aspirations.

Among the individual predictors, Family Support emerged as the strongest positive predictor, followed by Sponsorship and Family Income. This indicates that encouragement and support from family, access to sponsorship and greater household financial capacity are associated with stronger Career in Cricket aspirations. Cricket-related Expenses showed a significant negative relationship, suggesting that greater financial burden can constrain the pursuit of cricket. Government Support did not make a significant independent contribution after the other predictors were controlled for. Scholarships also showed a negative relationship in the regression model, although this finding should be interpreted cautiously because its bivariate relationship was not significant and its effect was not significant in the subsequent PLS-SEM analysis. Overall, the regression results indicate that direct support from families and sponsors, together with financial capacity, are particularly important, while the cost burden of cricket can act as a constraint.

Perceived ROI and Career in Cricket (H7)

The PLS-SEM model (Figure 2) explained 49.5% of the variance in Career in Cricket ($R^2 = .495$) and 32.5% of the variance in perceived ROI ($R^2 = .325$). Perceived ROI had a significant positive influence on Career in Cricket ($\beta = .372$, $t = 3.457$, $p = .001$), so H7 is supported. Family Support ($\beta = .411$, $p = .001$) and Sponsorship ($\beta = .327$, $p < .001$) had strong significant paths to perceived ROI. The direct effects agreed with the regression results, except that the negative effect of Scholarships was only marginal in PLS-SEM ($p = .063$). ROI. The direct effects agreed with the regression results, except that the negative effect of Scholarships was only marginal in PLS-SEM ($p = .063$).

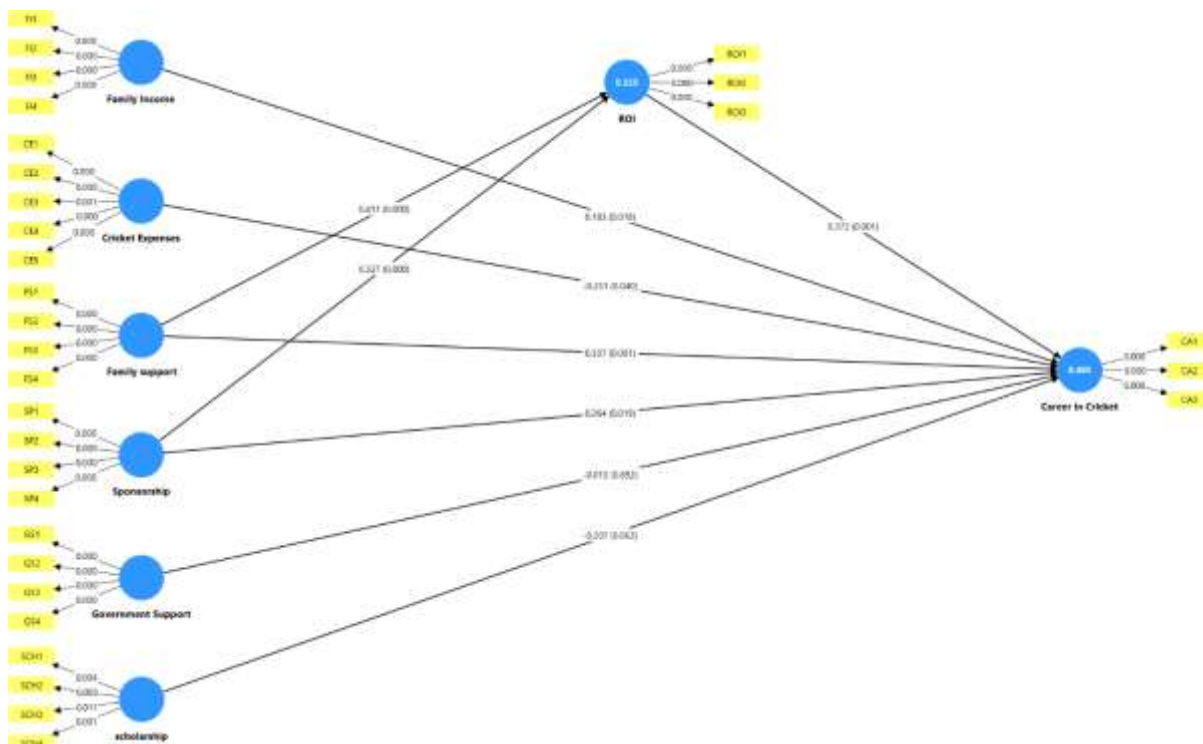




Table 10: PLS-SEM Structural Model – Direct Effects

Path	β	p-value	Result
Family Income $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	.183	.018	Significant
Cricket-related Expenses $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	-.251	.040	Significant
Family Support $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	.337	.001	Significant
Sponsorship $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	.264	.019	Significant
Government Support $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	-.013	.892	Not significant
Scholarships $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	-.207	.063	Not significant
Perceived ROI $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	.372	.001	Significant
Family Support $\rightarrow$ Perceived ROI	.411	< .001	Significant
Sponsorship $\rightarrow$ Perceived ROI	.327	< .001	Significant

Mediating Role of Perceived ROI (H8)

Bootstrapped indirect effects show that perceived ROI significantly mediates the relationship between Family Support and Career in Cricket ($\beta = .153$, $p = .001$) and between Sponsorship and Career in Cricket ($\beta = .122$, $p = .005$); the 95% confidence intervals exclude zero. Because the direct effects of both variables also remain significant, the mediation is partial. No significant mediation was found for the other four predictors, so H8 is partially supported.

Table 11: Mediation Analysis – Specific Indirect Effects

Mediation relationship	β	p-value	95% CI	Result
Family Support $\rightarrow$ ROI $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	.153	.001	[0.051, 0.242]	Significant
Sponsorship $\rightarrow$ ROI $\rightarrow$ Career in Cricket	.122	.005	[0.034, 0.204]	Significant

Table 12: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Decision
H1	Family Income influences Career in Cricket	Supported (positive)
H2	Cricket-related Expenses influence Career in Cricket	Supported (negative)
H3	Family Support influences Career in Cricket	Supported (positive)
H4	Sponsorship influences Career in Cricket	Supported (positive)
H5	Government Support influences Career in Cricket	Not supported
H6	Scholarships influence Career in Cricket	Supported (negative)
H7	Perceived ROI influences Career in Cricket	Supported (positive)
H8	Perceived ROI mediates the relationship between predictors and Career in Cricket	Partially supported (Family Support and Sponsorship)



Discussion

These findings clearly indicate that support the young cricketers get from the family, among other things, plays a crucial role in the continuation of the dream of playing cricket. Family Support was the most significant predictor, as it is supported by the findings that family support has been found to be a significant motivator for continued pursuit (Kovács & Szakál, 2024; Walton et al., 2024; Zarrett et al., 2020) in sports but this study is even focused on cricket. Sponsorship was the second most significant predictor, as the studies have reported the significance of financial support to increase athletes' motivation and satisfaction (Nugroho et al., 2023). The positive impact of Family Income and negative impact of Cricket-related Expenses also reflect on the existing evidence (Espedalen & Seippel, 2024; Kuhn et al., 2021; Pandya, 2021).

Government Support did not have any impact after controlling for other variables, despite being positively correlated. One of the probable reasons is the lack of awareness about government programs, which is shown in its low mean score. A negative coefficient for Scholarships was not anticipated and should be handled with caution: the correlation was positive but insignificant, and its influence was marginal in PLS-SEM. It might indicate some overlapping between the variables, or it could mean that only those players who struggle with money receive scholarships.

Perceived Return on Investment (ROI) had a significant impact on Career in Cricket and partially mediated the relationships between Career in Cricket and Family Support, as well as Sponsorship. This confirms that since careers in sports are temporary and uncertain (Moolman, 2023), people take expected gains into account when making their decision alongside cost factors. Perceived ROI increased the variance in Career in Cricket by 9.4 percentage points.

FINDINGS

From the result, it is clear that there is a relationship between the barrier and support factors as well as Career in Cricket. The six predictors accounted for 40.1% of the variance in Career in Cricket. Family Support ($\beta = .470$) and Sponsorship ($\beta = .363$) are the two most effective positive predictors while Family Income ($\beta = .200$) is another predictor, but Cricket related Expense ($\beta = -.162$) is a significant negative predictor. Government Support is not significant ($\beta = -.010$, $p = .921$) while Scholarship has an unexpected negative impact ($\beta = -.193$), but is marginal in PLS-SEM ($p = .063$).

Perceived ROI is positively related to Career in Cricket ($\beta = .372$, $p = .001$) while Family Support ($\beta = .153$) and Sponsorship ($\beta = .122$) have partially mediated effects on Career in Cricket through Perceived ROI. The PLS-SEM model has 49.5% of the variance in Career in Cricket explained. About 55.3% of respondents want to play cricket for income but could not because of financial difficulties, and 78.7% have abandoned cricket or could not afford playing it.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations that have been identified in relation to the study include: one, the design of the study is cross-sectional, thus making it difficult to evaluate changes in aspirations over time. Data used in the study is based on self-reports, thus, subject to response biases. The study examines the young cricketers in India and findings cannot be generalized to athletes in other sports or locations. The study only focused on financial barriers and facilitators; issues related to psychology, social, coaching and performance were not considered. Purposeful and snowball samples belong to the category of non-probability sampling and the sample size used in the study (150 respondents) is small compared to the constructs. The fit indices obtained from CFA (CFI = 0.867, TLI = 0.848) are slightly below accepted standards.

FUTURE RESEARCH

FUTURE RESEARCH Future research could employ sample sizes and sample locations that are greater in number and also longitudinal in design in order to track the effects of financial constraints and support networks on career development in cricket.

Also, future research in the qualitative area related to the level of awareness and the actual delivery of government assistance and scholarships would help elucidate the low effect of government support and negative effect of scholarships, as well as the inclusion of other possible variables such as psychological and coaching factors.



CONCLUSION

This research has looked into the effects of financial factors and support systems on the career aspirations of potential Indian cricketers and the importance of perceived return on investment based on the results provided by 150 respondents through the use of correlation, regression and PLS-SEM analyses. It has been found that Family Support and Sponsorship have the greatest positive impact, Family Income provides assistance, Cricket Expenses create a major financial barrier, Government Support does not provide any significant impact, and Scholarships have a negative effect that requires further investigation. The perceived ROI impacts the Career in Cricket and partly mediates the impact of Family Support and Sponsorship. Overall, it can be concluded that players will be more successful in sustaining their aspirations if they have means for doing so and perceive them as valuable.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Implications of the findings from the perspective of the families include the importance of family support and the need to budget for the cost of cricket over a few years to maintain the development of the young cricketer. Implication of the findings from the perspective of the sponsors includes that the second highest predictor of success is sponsorships, and the effectiveness is enhanced by increased visibility.

Implication of the findings from the perspective of academies, associations, and policy makers includes the importance of mitigating the impact of the expenses incurred during playing cricket by providing fee waivers, using equipment pools, and minimizing travel costs. This would allow the players and their families to envisage a realistic pathway and its gains.

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