

## A comparative study of the psychological traits and group cohesion traits among the playing lines of young football players under (20) years of age

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### Abstract

This study investigates the differences in psychological climate and group cohesion across different playing lines (defense, midfield, attack, and goalkeepers) among youth football players under 20 years of age in the Iraqi Premier League. Recognizing the critical role psychological factors play in athletic performance, the researchers aimed to determine how these variables vary based on players' field positions.

A descriptive comparative approach was employed, involving a purposive sample of 148 players (representing 75.51% of the research population). Two validated scales were used: the Psychological Climate Scale (Al-Hayali, 2011) and the Group Cohesion Scale (Alawi, 1984). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, and the LSD test for post hoc comparisons.

Findings revealed statistically significant differences in psychological climate among playing lines, particularly between midfielders and both defenders ( $p = 0.011$ ) and attackers ( $p < 0.001$ ), favoring attackers. No significant differences were found in group cohesion across the playing lines ( $p > 0.05$ ). These results suggest that midfielders experience distinct psychological pressures due to their pivotal role in connecting defense and attack, potentially affecting their perception of the team environment.

The study underscores the importance of tailored psychological training and leadership strategies that consider positional roles. Enhancing psychological climate—especially among midfielders—may contribute to improved performance and team synergy. Coaches are encouraged to promote balanced cohesion and address psychological disparities to foster a unified and mentally resilient team.

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## Introduction

Football is a team game that requires individuals to perform different skills and plans agreed upon by the coach to achieve the best level and win matches. This does not

come easily unless there are many scientific studies that identify the methods, physical and motor abilities, and psychological characteristics that contribute to the development of the game

Since football consists of different playing lines and playing positions, and despite the modern and comprehensive gameplay during the implementation of plans during matches, determining the technical duties of each specific playing position and line is necessary. (Mondil et al., 2023)

Since sports psychology has an impact on achieving the best levels, it consists of many characteristics, one of which is the psychological climate. Researchers consider the psychological climate to be an integral part of the social climate Al-Shaibani believes that the psychological climate overlaps with the social climate to form an integrated discourse, represented by the feelings, sensations, attitudes, and ideas that dominate the general atmosphere. This represents the external psychological atmosphere, while the internal aspect is represented by the player's view of the surrounding elements and components of the external environment and his responses to those elements and components. Any individual interprets what is happening in the surrounding external world within the framework of what is exciting and effective in him in terms of feelings, desires, attitudes, etc., because he is influenced by his internal psychological components. You find him selective in his perception of the surrounding environment (Shiban 1988, 165)

The psychological climate and group cohesion are considered among the basic factors that affect the performance of sports teams. Many studies have confirmed the importance of these factors in enhancing athletic performance and developing the team spirit among players in this context (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998). A football team needs this psychological trait, and many scientific studies and scientists have shown that an athlete's technical level is affected by the psychological climate, positively or negatively. (Shukr, 2024)

Alawi (1998) defines the psychological climate or atmosphere of a sports team as the cohesion and interaction of the players within the team, in addition to its impact on the degree of the player's emotion and the extent of his understanding of exciting situations. This varies according to his level of evaluation, his psychological makeup, and the difference in the group environment.

Al-Assaf (2011) (49) stated that a climate that encourages psychological growth depends on

**the availability of three conditions:**

( authenticity / acceptance and empathy). Players need people who help and encourage them in performing their technical tasks and accept them when performing their behaviors during training or matches, whether winning or losing, as well as not rushing to make decisions about them

The components of the psychological climate, according to Al-Badi (1979), still need to understand the nature of the psychosocial climate and interpret its components. Attempts have been few, as research has focused more on the organizational climate. The psychosocial climate is affected by two aspects: external to the environment and internal to the environment.

Understanding the nature of the psychosocial climate can be achieved in light of the views of scholars, including Brown and Liyf, that perceptions of the organizational environment constitute important aspects of the psychological climate, and that the diversity in perceptions and techniques that constitute the psychological climate can arise from individual differences and differences in situations, in addition to the interaction between the person and the situation. (Brown 1996) 358-368

The psychological climate reflects the psychological environment felt by players within the team, such as emotional support, trust, and mutual respect. A psychological environment

positive can lead to increased self-confidence and self-motivation among players, which enhances individual and group performance. A negative psychological climate can lead to tension and divisions among players, which negatively affects group performance.

Group cohesion is one of the psychological characteristics that has a high correlation in team formation. M. Alawi (1992) indicated, on the authority of David Prince and Donald Young (1992), that a sports team is not just a group of players wearing a uniform, but rather it goes beyond that. A sports team is a group of individuals who are committed to achieving specific goals in an interactive manner and will enjoy doing so by delivering high-value results

Muhammad Hassan Alawi (1998) defines it as a group of individuals linked by mutual relationships. Every athlete feels the need to belong to a social group. Their interaction is a positive, integrated interaction with the rest of the members of the sports group (sports team). Group cohesion among the players on a team results from their cohesion and remaining united within the group (team). The team is a social unit, and cohesion is the main means used to demonstrate the strength of the social bond between them.

Group cohesion reflects the extent of connection and belonging among team members and the extent of their cooperation to achieve common goals. A study conducted by Evans and Dion (1991) showed that teams with strong group cohesion achieve better results in the long term

The coach is primarily responsible for achieving this trait by changing his training methods and providing psychological and educational guidance. He needs to select some players to facilitate this task so that they influence the rest of the players. Psychological training programs and activities that enhance group cohesion can be effective tools for achieving this.

Improving the psychological climate and group cohesion can lead to better results in match performance, and increasing the chances of winning can lead to improved overall team performance. Training activities that enhance these factors can be effective tools for achieving this.

Smith, Arthur, Hardy, Callow, & Williams, 2013.

The importance of the research lies in providing instructions and leadership to the most acceptable players, educating coaches and team officials in this category about studies related to sports psychology, and emphasizing the connection between most psychological traits in order to provide guidance programs that will benefit them in the future.

This research aims to discuss a comparison of the psychological climate and group cohesion among players of different playing lines in sports clubs in Baghdad

### **Methods and Tools:**

The researchers used the descriptive approach with a comparative approach, as it is the best method for solving the research problem. The research sample was players from clubs in Baghdad Governorate

For the Premier League for youth under 20 years, the research community and sample were chosen intentionally, as their number was 148 players out of 196, and the sample represented 75.51% of the research community. The researchers used the psychological climate scale prepared by (Al-Hayali 2011), consisting of 7 domains, a total of 58 items, and five alternatives.

The group cohesion scale was by Diao Rahman, prepared by (Muhammad Hassan Alawi 1984), consisting of 34 items and five alternatives.

The two scales were distributed to the research sample according to the days agreed upon with each club. The scales were then received and transcribed into an Excel system, with each playing line assigned a separate sheet. The results were then processed using statistical methods, including percentages, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, median, skewness coefficient, independent sample tests, and the significant difference test (LSD).

### Presentation of results, discussion, and conclusions

The researchers filled out the two scale forms and obtained the sample results. The results were processed using appropriate statistical methods.

Table (1) shows the descriptive statistics for the research sample in the variables of psychological climate and group cohesion

Variable	Plalng llnas	Npar Of players	Arithmetic mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness coefficent
Climate Ps	Midfield	46	192.1957	16.25849	65.0
		57	200.2105	17.56492	0.73
	Offensive line	24	206.6250	14.12618	0.96
	Goalkeepers	21	199.8095	10.07283	0.85
Cohesion Group	Midfield	46	84.8478	12.16912	0.45
	Defense line	57	84.0877	12.28571	0.53
	Offensive line	24	84.5833	13.50657	0.32
	Goalkeepers	21	84.2857	11.95049	0.63

The table (2) presents the values of the analysis of variance (F) test, significance values, and their types among players in gameplay lines regarding the variables of psychological climate and group cohesion

T	Vari ables	Source ofVariables	SumS quares	Degree Calculatede	Mean Squares	Calcul ated Degree	Error Rate	signific ant
1	Clim ate	Groups	3609.34 3	3	1203.11 4	4.840	0.003	signific ant
		Within Groups	35791.5 76	144	248.553			
2	cohe sion	Groups	15.709	3	5.236	.034	.992	Not Signific ant
		Groups	22168.6 15	144	153.949			
Below the significance level (0.05)								

Table (3) illustrates the significance values of the differences (LSD) along with their significance levels and types.

ت	Playing lines	LSD value	Indicative value	Type of significance
1	Midfield_ Defensive line	-8.01487*	.011	
2	Midfield – attacking Line	-14.42935*	.000	<b>Significant</b>
3	Midfield _goalkeepers	-7.61387	.069	<b>Not Significant</b>
4	Defensive _offensive Line	-6.41447	.097	<b>Not Significant</b>
5	Defense line- goalkeepers	.40100	.921	<b>Not Significant</b>
6	Offensive line_ guards	6.81548	.150	Insignificant

## Discussion

The previous tables revealed significant differences between midfield players and players in the defensive and attacking lines, while the remaining lines showed non-significant results in the variable of psychological climate. Researchers attribute the significance of these differences to the fact that the average score of midfield players was lower than that of other lines. Midfield players are characterized by different cognitive abilities and behaviors compared to other players, and they are considered the key players during matches. There may be variations in psychological climate and group cohesion among different playing lines (such as defense, midfield, and attack) based on the nature of the tasks and responsibilities assigned to each line.(Kadhim, 2024)

Moreover, midfield players face considerable psychological pressure, especially when they make frequent mistakes during training or matches, as they serve as the link between defense and attack. Additionally, midfield players are generally well-accepted by other players due to their execution of strategies during play, and they tend to have balanced personalities. The traits of the psychological climate among midfield players increase with greater cognitive and social experiences, necessitating specialized training and ongoing varied guidance during daily practice.(Kazim et al., 2019)



This assertion is supported by Brown and Hewstone (2005), who noted that an individual's psychological climate is influenced by multiple complex factors, such as personality, past experiences, social support, and psychological pressures. This complexity makes it challenging to establish a direct relationship between group cohesion and psychological climate. Similarly, Cohen and Wills (1985) emphasize that external factors, such as life events, social pressures, or environmental changes, can play a significant role in shaping the psychological climate. (Salman et al., 2022)

Tajfel and Turner (1986) further confirm that the psychological climate of individuals can change over time due to internal or external alterations, whereas group cohesion may remain relatively stable, complicating the identification of a consistent correlation between the two. There may indeed be differences in psychological climate and group cohesion among different playing lines, such as defense, midfield, and attack (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). A study conducted by Eys et al. (2009) found that defenders require a higher level of trust and coordination, while attackers rely more on creativity and adaptability. (Kadhim & Mousa, 2024)

As for the previous tables, they showed no significant differences between midfield players and those in defensive and attacking lines regarding the variable of group cohesion. Researchers attribute this to the fact that the average score of midfield players was higher than that of other lines, with many of them being team leaders (captains) who are entrusted with leading and managing the team. This is supported by Nehari (2015), who stated that as the traits of a sports leader increase, the level of cohesion in the sports team also rises. (Kadhim, 2023)

Moreover, most coaches develop or divide the team into small groups to implement tactical elements regarding understanding, cooperation, and organization within a single line. Simultaneously, coaches need to allocate more time during practices among playing lines or small groups to ensure a high, non-significant level of cohesion among the lines, so as not to affect team cohesion adversely. This finding aligns with Turman (2003), who emphasized that coaches prioritize fostering team cohesion in small groups by promoting cooperation, friendships, motivation, and other psychological traits that benefit the group. (HalalahAtiyah et al., 2024)

The results of this research are consistent with Jaber (2008), who indicated the role of the duration of players' presence in training units and matches in enhancing their cohesion.

This view also aligns with Alawi (1998), who emphasized the importance of satisfying individuals' needs within the sports team, the role of effective leadership, strong social relationships among players, and continuous communication through participation in training and competitions.

This is further supported by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), who noted that group cohesion can take on various forms (such as cooperation, communication, and understanding), each of which may influence the psychological climate in different ways, leading to a lack of a consistent correlation.(Khedir, 2018)

Most club coaches exert their utmost efforts to bridge differing viewpoints and diversify tactical training while rotating players among themselves to prevent the formation of player groups engaged in certain activities to gain incentives or attention from the coach. This is supported by Qwais (1997), who cautioned that any sports team coach must be vigilant against the formation of small groups, known as factions, that can negatively impact team cohesion when they follow their own path or execute plans that are not agreed upon in training.(Mondher & Khalaf, 2023)

## **Conclusions**

- The researchers concluded the following
  - There is a significant difference in the psychological climate variable between midfielders and defenders
  - There is a significant difference in the psychological climate variable between the midfielders and the linebackers Attack
  - There are no significant differences in the group cohesion variable among the players in the playing lines (defense, midfield, attack, and goalkeepers
- Lack of support for activities that serve the psychological climate in terms of tests and guidance exercises, and the absence of a specialist in this regard



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