

MAKERERE



UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF NATURAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF BIOSCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF EXERCISE AND SPORTS SCIENCE

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL
HEALTH OF SOCCER FANS IN KAMPALA**

UGANDA

BY

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**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
EXERCISE AND SPORTS SCIENCE IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DEGREE
OF BACHELOR OF SPORTS SCIENCE OF
MAKERERE UNIVERSITY**

DECEMBER, 2025

DECLARATION

I, **Elisa Tukasingura**, declare that this research report entitled “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Psychological Health of Soccer Fans in Kampala-Uganda” is my original work and has not been submitted to any other institution of higher learning for the award of a degree or diploma.

All sources of information used have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: Elisa.....Date: 19/12/2025.....

TUKASINGURA ELISA

SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

This is to certify that this research report has been submitted for examination with my approval as the university supervisor.

Signature:.....*Winfred Nakazibwe*.....Date:.....*19th/12/2025*.....

WINFRED NAKAZIBWE

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to all the soccer fans of Uganda who have demonstrated unwavering passion and resilience throughout the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Your love for the game and the community spirit it fosters inspire this study.

I also dedicate this work to the mental health professionals who tirelessly advocate for the well-being of individuals during these trying times, and to my family and friends for their encouragement and support throughout this journey. Your belief in the importance of this research motivates me to explore and understand the psychological health of our vibrant soccer community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I extend my sincere appreciation to my research supervisor Madam Winfred Nakazibwe for her invaluable guidance, support, and expertise throughout this process. Your insights and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this study. Thank you for believing in me.

I would also like to thank the Department members and staff of Exercise and Sports Science for providing resources and an academic environment conducive to research. Your commitment to fostering knowledge and learning has greatly influenced my academic journey.

Special thanks to soccer fans from Uganda whose experiences and stories form the cornerstone of this research. It is your passion and resilience that inspire the exploration of this important topic.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the mental health professionals and scholars whose previous research has paved the way for this study. Your contributions to the field are greatly valued.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family and friends for their unwavering support, understanding, and encouragement. Your belief in my work and your ability to remind me of the purpose behind this research have been a constant source of motivation.

Thank you all for being a part of this journey.

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted social and recreational activities globally, affecting psychological well-being. In Uganda, soccer plays an important role in fostering social connection and emotional balance. This study examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological health of soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda. Specifically, it identified the psychological challenges fans experienced, examined the impact of pandemic-related restrictions on soccer engagement and psychological well-being, and explored coping strategies that helped fans maintain mental health.

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used. Data were collected from 166 respondents through an online structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The findings revealed that loneliness (39.8%), stress (33.1%), anxiety (31.3%), and depression (26.5%) were the most common psychological challenges experienced by fans. Exercise (70.5%), social media interaction (58.4%), and talking with friends or family (55.4%) were the most used coping strategies. The study concluded that the disruption of soccer engagement during COVID-19 negatively affected the psychological well-being of soccer fans in Kampala. It recommends the integration of virtual fan engagement platforms, community-based psycho-social programs, and accessible mental health services to enhance resilience during future crises.

Keywords: COVID-19, psychological health, soccer fans, coping strategies, Kampala, Uganda.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions to daily life worldwide, profoundly affecting social and cultural activities, including sports engagement and fan culture. In Uganda, soccer is the most popular sport and serves as a vital source of entertainment, socialization, and emotional relief, particularly in urban centers such as Kampala (Nhamo et al., 2020). The pandemic led to the suspension of local and international soccer leagues, restrictions on public gatherings, and the cancellation of live matches, which significantly disrupted the typical fan experience.

Soccer fandom in Uganda is deeply intertwined with community identity and psychological well-being, providing fans with a sense of belonging and emotional support (Dwyer et al., 2021). The abrupt cessation of soccer events during the pandemic likely exacerbated feelings of isolation, anxiety, depression and more challenges among fans we are going to find out in this research, who were deprived of regular social interactions and communal experiences associated with match attendance and group viewing.

While previous studies have examined the impact of COVID-19 on athletes and sports organizations globally (Evans et al., 2020), there is a scarcity of empirical research focusing on the mental health effects of pandemic-related disruptions on soccer fans in Uganda. Moreover, limited data exist on how these disruptions correlate with symptom severity of psychological challenges.

This study aims to fill this gap by quantifying these psychological health challenges, their severity in relation to soccer engagement, and the coping strategies they adopted, this study seeks to generate evidence that can inform mental health interventions, guide sports management, and strengthen policy responses during future crises.

Sports contribute significantly to mental well-being by providing emotional release, fostering social bonds, and strengthening community identity (Dwyer et al., 2021). In Uganda, soccer is the most popular sport, with fans actively following both local leagues such as the Uganda Premier League and international competitions like the English Premier League and UEFA Champions League (Nhamo et al., 2020). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, fans in Kampala engaged through stadium attendance, group viewing, and public discussions, all of which promoted psychological well-being and social connectedness.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 disrupted these activities through lockdowns, match suspensions, and restrictions on social gatherings (Evans et al., 2020). Such disruptions deprived fans of key outlets for recreation and community, which research shows can increase stress, anxiety, and depression among sports followers (Wakefield et al., 2021). In Uganda, studies have reported significant psychological distress during the pandemic among slum residents, caregivers, students, and low-income earners (Wafula et al., 2023; Park et al., 2024; Nantaayi et al., 2022; Lemuel et al., 2021). However, despite soccer's cultural and emotional significance, little is known about its fans—an important social group likely to have faced unique psychological challenges.

This gap underscores the importance of investigating how the pandemic affected soccer fans in Kampala. By examining their psychological health challenges, the

severity of these challenges in relation to soccer engagement, and the coping strategies they adopted, this study seeks to generate evidence that can inform mental health interventions, guide sports management, and strengthen policy responses during future crises.

1.2 Problem Statement

Soccer is more than just a sport in Uganda; it is a cultural phenomenon that provides entertainment, social cohesion, and psychological relief for millions of fans. In Kampala, soccer fans actively engage through stadium attendance, group viewing, and lively discussions, all of which contribute positively to their mental well-being. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to the suspension of soccer leagues, cancellation of live matches, and restrictions on social gatherings, disrupting these traditional modes of engagement (Evans et al., 2020). These disruptions coincided with rising psychological health challenges globally and locally, including heightened levels of stress, depression, and anxiety (Wakefield et al., 2021; Wafula et al., 2023).

In Uganda, several studies have documented the mental health impact of COVID-19 among slum residents, caregivers, university students, and low-income earners (Nantaayi et al., 2022; Lemuel et al., 2021; Park et al., 2024). Findings consistently highlight increased vulnerability to depression, anxiety, and psychological distress during the pandemic. Yet, little is known about how these challenges affected soccer fans—a group for whom soccer engagement is not only recreational but also central to identity, community belonging, and emotional expression. Unlike students or workers, soccer fans have received limited scholarly attention, despite being a significant demographic that experienced unique disruptions to their social and cultural lives during the pandemic.

The absence of empirical data on the psychological impact of COVID-19 on soccer fans in Kampala creates a critical gap in both mental health research and sports studies. Without such evidence, interventions and policies designed to support psychological well-being during crises risk overlooking the specific needs of this group. This study therefore addresses the problem by investigating the psychological health challenges experienced by soccer fans during the pandemic, assessing their severity in relation to changes in soccer engagement, and identifying coping strategies that can inform future mental health interventions and sports management practices in Uganda.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative research is to examine the psychological health challenges experienced by soccer fans in Kampala during the COVID-19 pandemic, assess the severity of these challenges in relation to changes in soccer engagement, and explore the impact of pandemic-related restrictions (such as lockdowns and absence of live matches) on their psychological well-being. In addition, the study seeks to identify coping strategies that soccer fans used and collect suggestions for maintaining psychological well-being during future pandemics or similar disruptions. Previous studies in Uganda have shown that the pandemic significantly increased symptoms of depression and anxiety among urban slum residents (Wafula et al., 2023), caregivers of young children (Park et al., 2024), university students (Nantaayi et al., 2022), and low-income earners (Lemuel et al., 2021). However, little is known about how these psychological burdens affected soccer fans, a group for whom soccer serves as an important cultural and social outlet. By focusing on this population, the study contributes to filling a critical research gap and provides evidence to inform mental health support and sports policy in Uganda.

1.4 Objectives Of The Study

1.4.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to quantify and analyze the psychological health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the psychological health challenges experienced by soccer fans in Kampala during the COVID-19 pandemic and assess the severity of these psychological health challenges in relation to changes in soccer engagement.
2. To examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on soccer engagement and psychological well-being of soccer fans in Kampala-Uganda.
3. To suggest coping mechanisms that can help soccer fans in kampala - Uganda maintain psychological well-being during future pandemics or similar disruptions.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What psychological health challenges were experienced by soccer fans in Kampala during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how severe were these challenges in relation to changes in soccer engagement?
2. What was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on soccer engagement and psychological well-being of soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda?
3. What coping mechanisms can help soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda maintain psychological well-being during future pandemics or similar disruptions?

1.6 Justification of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to sports worldwide, severely affecting fans who depend on sports engagement for recreation, identity, and social connection (Dwyer et al., 2021). In Uganda, soccer is not only the most followed sport but also a vital cultural activity that fosters community cohesion and emotional expression (Nhamo et al., 2020). The suspension of soccer leagues, closure of stadiums, and restrictions on public gatherings during the pandemic deprived fans of key social outlets, potentially leading to feelings of loneliness, frustration, and anxiety (Evans et al., 2020; Wakefield et al., 2021).

While several Ugandan studies have examined the pandemic's mental health effects among specific groups such as urban slum residents, caregivers, students, and low-income earners (Wafula et al., 2023; Park et al., 2024; Nantaayi et al., 2022; Lemuel et al., 2021), the psychological impact on soccer fans has received little to no scholarly attention. This gap is critical because soccer fandom represents a unique social identity closely tied to emotional well-being and collective belonging. Understanding how fans in Kampala coped with the disruptions, and the psychological challenges they faced, can provide deeper insight into the intersection between sports, community, and mental health in times of crisis.

This study is therefore justified by its potential to generate empirical evidence on the psychological health of soccer fans in Uganda—an area largely unexplored. The findings will inform mental health practitioners, policymakers, and sports administrators in designing culturally sensitive interventions and fan-support programs that promote psychological resilience during future disruptions. By focusing on soccer fans as an overlooked yet socially significant group, the study

contributes to both sports psychology and public health research in Uganda's post-pandemic context.

1.7 Significance Of The Study

This study is significant because it explores the psychological health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on soccer fans in kampala, Uganda.

First, it is valuable to the soccer fans of Uganda by addressing a major research gap by examining the psychological health challenges experienced by soccer fans in Kampala during the COVID-19 pandemic—an area that has received little scholarly attention in Uganda despite soccer's deep cultural and social importance. By focusing on fans rather than athletes, this study broadens the soccer fans of Uganda's understanding of how disruptions in sports engagement affect their well-being and identity and how to quickly cope up with such kind of disruptions or pandemics.

Secondly, the findings will provide valuable insights for mental health practitioners and counselors by identifying the key psychological challenges faced by soccer fans and the coping mechanisms they employed. This knowledge can guide the design of targeted interventions, community support programs, and awareness campaigns aimed at promoting psychological resilience during crises.

Thirdly, the study will benefit sports administrators, club managers, and policymakers by highlighting the psychological implications of pandemic-related restrictions on sports fans. These insights can inform future sports management strategies, fan engagement policies, and post-crisis recovery initiatives, ensuring that mental health is integrated into sports governance and crisis response planning.

Finally, the study contributes to the academic field of sports psychology and public health research in Uganda by generating empirical data that connects sports fandom, mental health, and coping behavior. The results will not only inform local practices but also add to global discussions on the psychological resilience of sports communities during large-scale disruptions.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to investigating the psychological health challenges experienced by soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda, during the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–2022). It specifically focuses on identifying the types and severity of psychological challenges that fans faced as a result of disruptions in soccer engagement—such as the suspension of matches, closure of stadiums, and restrictions on public gatherings. The study also examines how these challenges affected fans' psychological well-being and explores the coping strategies they adopted to maintain mental health during this period.

The study covers the period from March 2020 to December 2022, encompassing the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda, the suspension of soccer activities, lock-downs, and restrictions on gatherings. This time-frame also includes the gradual resumption of sports events and the changing dynamics of fan engagement during the pandemic.

The target population comprises of active soccer fans residing in Kampala who regularly follow local and international leagues, including the Uganda Premier League, English Premier League, La Liga, and UEFA Champions League.

The research adopts a quantitative approach using structured questionnaires to collect data from participants, which will then be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Geographically, the study is limited to Kampala because it is Uganda's capital and a major hub of soccer fandom and social interaction. The findings may, however, offer insights applicable to other urban centers with similar cultural and sporting contexts. The study does not include professional athletes, coaches, or sports administrators, as its focus is specifically on soccer fans as a unique social group affected by the pandemic's psychological impacts.

1.9 Operational Definition Of Terms

COVID-19 Pandemic and Restrictions; it refers to the period between 2020–2022 when restrictions such as lock-downs, match suspensions, and social distancing measures affected soccer-related activities in Kampala.

Soccer Engagement; It refers to fans' level of involvement in soccer activities before and during the pandemic, including live match attendance, group viewing, and virtual interactions.

Psychological Health Challenges; it denotes self-reported experiences of stress, loneliness, frustration, anger, and sleep disturbance among soccer fans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Severity of Psychological Challenges; it refers to the rating of how strongly soccer fans experienced specific psychological challenges as a result of disruptions in soccer engagement.

Coping Strategies; they refer to the actions soccer fans used to maintain mental well-being during the pandemic, such as exercise, online fan interactions, prayer, or talking with friends.

Psychological Well-being; it refers to how soccer fans rated their overall mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Soccer Fans; they are adult male and female residents of Kampala who regularly follow local or international soccer leagues such as the Uganda Premier League, English Premier League, La Liga, or UEFA Champions League.

1.10 List of Abbreviations

GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item Scale) for anxiety levels.

PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item Scale) for depression levels.

UBOS – Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UPL – Uganda Premier League

KCCA – Kampala Capital City Authority

FUFA – Federation of Uganda Football Associations

In summary, this chapter has provided an overview of the study by introducing the background, problem statement, purpose, objectives, and conceptual foundation of the research. It established that soccer plays a vital role in promoting social connection and psychological well-being among fans in Uganda, particularly in Kampala, where fan culture is vibrant and deeply rooted. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these engagements through lock-downs, match suspensions, and social restrictions, leading to potential psychological health challenges among soccer fans. The chapter also identified a gap in existing research, noting that while previous Ugandan studies explored the pandemic's mental health effects among students, caregivers, and low-income earners, little attention has been paid to soccer fans as a distinct social group.

The purpose, justification, and significance of the study were clearly outlined, emphasizing its contribution to understanding the psychological effects of pandemic-related disruptions on sports communities. The scope defined the study's focus on soccer fans in Kampala during the 2020–2022 period. The next chapter reviews relevant literature on sports, mental health, and the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological health of soccer fans in Kampala, with a focus on challenges experienced, their severity in relation to engagement levels, the effects of restrictions on engagement and well-being, and coping strategies employed. The review draws from global, regional (African), and local (Ugandan) studies to identify key contributions, methodological limitations, geographical biases, and research gaps. It is structured around the study's specific objectives, highlighting how prior work informs the current research while revealing areas that remain under-explored, particularly in low-resource urban African contexts like Kampala, Uganda.

2.2 Psychological Health Challenges Experienced by Soccer Fans during the Covid-19 Pandemic and their Severity in Relation to Soccer Engagement

The suspension of live sports events during the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the social and emotional benefits derived from soccer fandom, leading to various psychological challenges. Globally, Kwon and Kwak (2021) conducted an empirical analysis of sport fans' stress during the pandemic lockdown, finding elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and frustration due to the absence of games to watch. Their study, based on U.S. respondents, used quantitative surveys to show that highly identified fans experienced greater emotional distress. However, it relied solely on quantitative methods, lacking qualitative insights into lived experiences, and did not examine severity variations based on pre-pandemic engagement levels (e.g., regular match attendance vs. casual viewing). This methodological and outcome gap limits understanding of nuanced severity. The current study addresses these by employing a mixed-methods approach in Kampala, explicitly linking challenge severity to soccer engagement intensity.

Similarly, Evans et al. (2020) explored the broader sociology of sport during the pandemic, noting that fans faced isolation and loss of community, exacerbating loneliness and depression. While insightful, their European-focused review highlighted a geographical gap, with minimal attention to developing regions where soccer serves as a primary social outlet. Wakefield et al. (2021) further documented increased anxiety among highly engaged fans due to disrupted routines, but their study was limited to online fan communities in Western contexts, overlooking cultural differences in emotional investment. This comparative gap is significant, as soccer fandom in Africa often intersects with identity and communal coping. By focusing on Ugandan soccer fans, this research bridges the geographical and cultural gaps, providing context-specific data on challenges like frustration and disconnection.

In African contexts, studies on general populations reveal parallel trends but rarely address sports fans specifically. Wafula et al. (2023) reported high depression (33.8%) and anxiety (13.4%) rates among Kampala slum residents during lockdowns, linked to social restrictions. Although not fan-focused, this suggests urban Ugandans were vulnerable to isolation-induced distress. Nantaayi et al. (2022) found elevated psychological distress among Ugandan university students, tied to limited interactions. These studies highlight a stakeholder gap, as they exclude dedicated soccer fans whose engagement provides unique psychological buffers. Kercher et al. (2024) globally noted withdrawal-like symptoms in highly engaged fans, with severity correlating to investment levels, but used dated pre-2023 data and quantitative metrics only. The timeliness and methodological gaps here underscore the need for updated, qualitative-rich research. This study fills these by assessing severity through fan-reported engagement scales and narratives in post-pandemic Kampala.

Furthermore, Bond et al. (2022) examined fan anxiety during ghost games (no spectators), finding heightened stress among ardent supporters, yet focused on European leagues without exploring long-term effects or low-income settings. This outcome and geographical gap persists in much literature, which prioritizes athletes over spectators (di Fronso et al., 2022). The present research addresses this by centering soccer fans in Uganda, quantifying and qualifying challenge severity relative to engagement, thus contributing empirical data from an underrepresented region.

2.3 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Restrictions on Soccer Engagement and Psychological Well-Being.

Pandemic restrictions profoundly altered soccer engagement, shifting from live attendance and communal viewing to virtual or absent alternatives, with detrimental

effects on well-being. Duarte and Garcia (2021) observed declines in emotional satisfaction among fans due to reduced interactions, based on Latin American data. Their findings indicate lockdowns eroded the communal joy of fandom, leading to irritability and lower well-being. However, the study was cross-sectional, missing longitudinal impacts, and lacked African comparisons. This comparative and timeliness gap is evident, as virtual engagement proved less fulfilling long-term. The current study bridges this by examining sustained effects in Kampala, where communal viewing is culturally central.

Globally, Fischer and Haucap (2021) used the pandemic as a natural experiment, showing loss of home advantage without crowds implied psychological boosts from fans were absent, indirectly affecting fan well-being through diminished excitement. Yet, their focus on performance outcomes ignored direct fan psychological impacts. Park et al. (2024) documented isolation-driven anxiety in confined populations, paralleling fan experiences, but not sports-specific. In Uganda, Lemuel et al. (2021) noted restlessness from recreational disruptions, highlighting urban fans' vulnerability amid limited alternatives. These local studies reveal a content gap: few link restrictions directly to soccer engagement changes and well-being.

Nhamo et al. (2020) discussed soccer's role in African cultural identity, disrupted by pandemics, leading to identity-related distress. Their conceptual work lacks empirical fan data from East Africa. More recent analyses, like those on post-lockdown fan attendance (Articlegateway, 2025), suggest lingering well-being effects from prolonged disengagement, but remain athlete-centered. This stakeholder and geographical gap limits applicability to fans in resource-constrained settings. By investigating engagement shifts (e.g., from stadiums to TV/online) and well-being in Kampala, this mixed-methods study provides comparative insights, addressing how restrictions magnified effects in high-fandom contexts.

Additionally, the literature often overlooks intersections with economic stress in urban Africa, where soccer offers escapism (Wafula et al., 2023). This multidimensional gap hinders holistic understanding. The proposed research fills it by exploring well-being declines tied to engagement loss among Ugandan fans.

2.4 Coping Strategies to Maintain Psychological Well-Being among Soccer Fans during Pandemics or similar Disruptions

Fans employed diverse strategies to mitigate distress, though effectiveness varied. Mastromartino et al. (2023) found North American fans coped via archival games, highlights, and online discussions, reducing stress temporarily. Their qualitative study highlighted digital engagement's role but noted it did not fully replace live experiences. However, it focused on high-resource contexts, leaving a geographical gap for regions with limited internet access. This study addresses this by examining strategies in Kampala, including informal ones like family discussions or prayer.

Kwon and Kwak (2021) identified avoidance and active coping (e.g., seeking alternatives), with moderate effectiveness. Quantitative dominance here represents a methodological gap, lacking depth on cultural adaptations. In Uganda, Nantaayi et al. (2022) reported reliance on family support, prayer, and exercise during lockdowns, effective for general distress but untested among fans. Wafula et al. (2023) echoed spiritual and social networks' roles in slums. These suggest community-based coping but highlight a content gap: no fan-specific evaluation.

Globally, Kercher et al. (2024) noted virtual fan clubs and rewatching matches helped highly engaged fans, yet access barriers limited equity. Lemuel et al. (2021) promoted exercise for anxiety reduction in confined settings. However, stigma and resource limits in Uganda constrain formal strategies (Nantaayi et al., 2022). This outcome and stakeholder gap—few studies assess fan-perceived effectiveness—

persists. Recent work (Delaplane, 2023) confirms archival viewing's efficacy but calls for context-specific research.

The literature also shows a timeliness gap, with post-2023 studies scarce on long-term strategy sustainability. By exploring strategies used by Kampala soccer fans (e.g., virtual vs. traditional) and their effectiveness via mixed methods, this study fills geographical, cultural, and evaluative gaps, informing resilient interventions.

In summary, while global literature establishes pandemic-induced challenges, engagement disruptions, and coping efforts among fans, significant gaps remain in African/Ugandan contexts, methodological diversity, severity-engagement links, and strategy effectiveness in low-resource settings. This study addresses these through focused, empirical investigation in Kampala, contributing to contextually relevant knowledge on soccer fans' psychological health.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presented the research methodology that was used to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological health of soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda. It described the research design, study area, target population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, validity and reliability, data collection procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations that guided the study.

3.2 Research Design

The study used a quantitative research design employing a descriptive cross-sectional survey approach. This design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to collect data from a large group of respondents at a single point in time in order to describe patterns, relationships, and variations among variables. The use of structured questionnaires made it possible to quantify data related to psychological health challenges, the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on soccer engagement, and the coping strategies adopted by soccer fans.

3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kampala City, Uganda's capital and largest urban center. Kampala was selected because it hosts the majority of Uganda's soccer fan base, owing to its vibrant social life, numerous soccer clubs such as KCCA FC, Express FC, and SC Villa, and easy access to international media coverage of leagues such as the English Premier League and UEFA Champions League. This

made it an ideal setting for examining the psychological experiences of soccer fans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4 Target Population

The target population comprised soccer fans residing in Kampala who regularly follow either local or international soccer leagues. These were chosen randomly from betting sites to football pitches in different parts of Kampala. These included both male and female adults aged 18 years and above, irrespective of their education level or occupation.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where n = sample size, N = population size, and e = margin of error (0.05). Assuming an accessible population of approximately 400 active soccer fans, the study obtained a sample size of 200 respondents.

The study employed a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to target individuals who were active soccer fans, while convenience sampling facilitated easy access to respondents through online platforms such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook fan pages, and soccer discussion forums.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire that was designed in line with the study objectives. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale items, divided into five sections:

- Section A: Demographic characteristics of respondents
- Section B: Psychological health challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Section C: Impact of the pandemic and restrictions on soccer engagement and psychological well-being
- Section D: Coping strategies used by soccer fans during the pandemic
- Section E: Open-ended suggestions for promoting psychological well-being among soccer fans

The questionnaire was distributed electronically using Google Forms to allow easy participation and wide geographical reach.

3.7 Validity of the Instrument

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a research supervisor from the Department of Exercise Sports Science at Makerere University to assess its content accuracy, clarity, and logical flow. The feedback was incorporated to refine the instrument before it was distributed.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining approval from the university and consent from participants, then shared the questionnaire link with selected respondents via online soccer communities, WhatsApp, and Facebook groups. Respondents were first required to read and agree to the informed consent statement before accessing the questions. Completed responses were automatically captured by the Google Forms system and stored securely in the online drive for analysis.

3.9 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the data. Inferential analysis, including Pearson correlation, was used to examine the relationships between the variables: COVID-19 restrictions, soccer engagement, and psychological well-being. The results were presented in tables and graphs for easy interpretation.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee of Makerere University. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the assurance of their confidentiality. No identifying information was collected to ensure their anonymity, and the data were used solely for academic purposes. They also had to affirm their consent before submission of their data as seen under the appendix.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

1. This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the findings of the study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological health of soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda. The results are presented according to the study objectives.

4.2 Response Rate

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed online using Google Forms. Out of these, 166 were successfully completed and returned, representing a response rate of 83%. This was considered satisfactory and sufficient for quantitative analysis, as a response rate above 70% is regarded as acceptable in social science research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Table 1:Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency(N = 166)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	104	62.7
	Female	61	36.7
		N= 165	99.4
Age	Mean age = 29.6 years	—	—
Education Level	Primary	11	6.63
	Secondary	48	28.92
	Tertiary	93	56.02
	Postgraduate	14	8.43
		N=166	%age total=100
Main League Followed	English Premier League	105	63.3
	La Liga	23	13.9
	Uganda Premier League	23	13.9
	UEFA Champions League	19	11.4

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 166 respondents. The majority were male (104 respondents, 62.7%), while females constituted a smaller proportion (61 respondents, 36.7%) and with 1 respondent that did not indicate their gender.

The mean age of respondents was 29.6 years that was gotten by dividing the total age of all respondents divided by the number of respondents, indicating a predominantly young adult sample.

In terms of education level, the largest group had tertiary education being 93 respondents(56.02%), followed by secondary education who were 48 respondents(28.92%), then postgraduate qualifications with 14 respondents(8.43%), and lastly primary education with 11 respondents(6.63%).

Regarding the main league followed, the English Premier League was the most popular with 105 respondents(63.3%), followed by La Liga and the Uganda Premier League each with 23 respondents(13.9%), and the UEFA Champions League with 19 respondents(11.4%). However, because this was a multiple choice objective, some respondents would choose more than 1 option hence the higher parentage and total number of respondents for this specific section than 100%.

These findings suggest that the sample consisted primarily of young, urban, and relatively well-educated male soccer fans, with a strong preference for international leagues, particularly the English Premier League. The lower representation of female fans and those following domestic or other European competitions reflects common patterns in Ugandan soccer fandom, where international leagues dominate interest.

4.3 Findings According to Study Objectives

Objective 1: To identify the psychological health challenges experienced by soccer fans in Kampala during the COVID-19 pandemic and assess their severity in relation to changes in soccer engagement

Respondents were asked to indicate the psychological challenges they experienced during the pandemic. Multiple responses were allowed.

Table 2: Findings according to study objectives

Psychological Challenge	Frequency (N = 166)	Percentage (%)
Loneliness / Isolation	66	39.8
Stress	55	33.1
Anxiety	52	31.3
Depression	44	26.5
Sleep Problems	28	16.9
Frustration	24	14.5

Table 2 shows the psychological health challenges reported by respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic (multiple responses were allowed).

The most frequently reported challenge was loneliness/isolation with 66 respondents (39.8%), followed by stress with 55 respondents (33.1%) and anxiety with 52

respondents (31.3%). Depression was reported by 44 respondents (26.5%), sleep problems by 28 respondents (16.9%), and frustration by 24 respondents (14.5%).

While loneliness/isolation, stress, and anxiety affected around one-third of the sample, indicating widespread emotional impact from disrupted soccer routines, depression, sleep problems, and frustration were less prevalent but still affected notable minorities (between 14.5% and 26.5%). The fact that even the least reported challenge (frustration) was experienced by nearly one in seven fans highlights the broad range of psychological effects caused by the suspension of live matches and fan gatherings. Overall, these results demonstrate that the pandemic-related restrictions had a substantial negative influence on the mental health of soccer fans in Kampala, with social disconnection emerging as the dominant issue.

4.4 Examining the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Restrictions on Both Soccer Engagement and Psychological Well-Being

The study investigated how restrictions such as lock-downs, stadium closures, and suspension of live matches affected soccer engagement and psychological health.

Key findings included:

- A large proportion of respondents reported reduced motivation to follow matches when live attendance was not possible.
- Many fans expressed loss of social connection, as they could not meet friends for group viewings or stadium experiences.
- Those who shifted to online engagement (social media, streaming, highlights) reported feeling less satisfied compared to pre-pandemic fan experiences.

Correlation analysis using Pearson's coefficient indicated a moderate negative relationship between the level of soccer engagement and reported stress ($r = -0.41$, $p < 0.05$), implying that as engagement decreased, stress and anxiety increased.

The findings under Objective 2 revealed several key impacts of pandemic restrictions on soccer engagement and well-being.

A large proportion of respondents reported reduced motivation to follow matches when live attendance was not possible. Many fans also experienced loss of social connection due to the inability to meet friends for group viewings or stadium experiences. Those who shifted to alternative forms of engagement, such as social media, streaming, or watching highlights, generally reported lower satisfaction compared to pre-pandemic experiences.

Additionally, correlation analysis showed a moderate negative relationship between the level of soccer engagement and reported stress ($r = -0.41$, $p < 0.05$), meaning that decreased engagement was associated with increased stress and anxiety.

Taken together, these results indicate that COVID-19 restrictions significantly disrupted traditional forms of soccer engagement, particularly the social and communal aspects that are central to fandom in Kampala. The loss of these interactive experiences reduced emotional outlets and community belonging, contributing to heightened psychological strain. The statistically significant correlation further supports the link between reduced engagement and poorer psychological well-being, underscoring the importance of soccer as a coping mechanism and social anchor for many fans.

4.5 Suggestions and Coping Strategies that Helped Soccer Fans Maintain Psychological Well-Being During the Pandemic

Respondents identified various coping strategies that helped them handle psychological distress during the pandemic.

Table 3: Suggestions and coping strategies that helped soccer fans maintain psychological well-being during the pandemic

Coping Strategy	Frequency (N = 166)	Percentage (%)
Exercising / Physical activity	117	70.5
Using social media for fan interaction	97	58.4
Talking to friends or family	92	55.4
Meditation / Prayer	26	15.7
Watching replays of classic matches	21	12.7
Accessing affordable streaming platforms	15	9.0
Participating in online mental health awareness	13	7.8

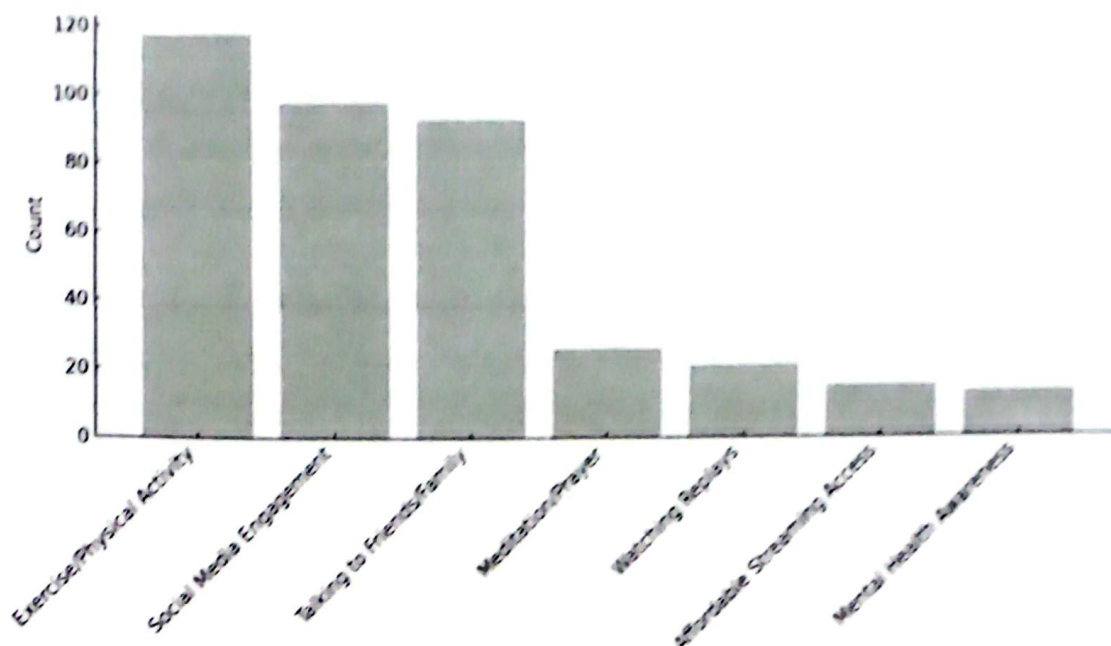


Table 3 presents the coping strategies that respondents reported using to maintain psychological well-being during the pandemic (multiple responses were allowed).

The most widely used strategy was exercising/physical activity with 117 respondents (70.5%), followed by using social media for fan interaction with 97 respondents (58.4%) and talking to friends or family with 92 respondents (55.4%). Less common strategies included meditation/prayer with 26 respondents, (15.7%), watching replays of classic matches with 21 respondents (12.7%), accessing affordable streaming platforms with 15 respondents (9.0%), and finally participating in online mental health awareness with 13 respondents (7.8%).

Physical activity emerged as the dominant coping mechanism, adopted by more than two-thirds of respondents, suggesting that fans actively sought alternative ways to stay physically and mentally engaged. Social media interaction and talking to friends/family were also popular, indicating a continued need for connection within the fan community despite physical restrictions. Although meditation/prayer,

watching replays, streaming, and mental health awareness activities were used by smaller proportions (7.8% to 15.7%), their presence shows that a minority of fans explored diverse strategies, including spiritual, mindfulness, and educational approaches.

Overall, these findings highlight practical, accessible coping mechanisms that helped soccer fans in Kampala mitigate psychological distress, with an emphasis on physical and social alternatives to traditional match-day experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to existing literature, draws conclusions from the study, and provides recommendations for practice, policy, and future research. The discussion is organized around the study objectives: to identify psychological health challenges among soccer fans in Kampala during the COVID-19 pandemic, to examine the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on soccer engagement and psychological well-being, and to collect coping strategies that helped fans maintain psychological well-being during this period.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

5.2.1 Psychological Health Challenges Experienced by Soccer Fans

The findings revealed that the majority of soccer fans experienced psychological challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, with loneliness (39.8%), stress (33.1%), and anxiety (31.3%) being the most commonly reported. Depression (26.5%) and sleep disturbances (16.9%) were also prevalent. These results indicate that the disruption of normal soccer activities significantly affected the emotional well-being of fans.

These findings are consistent with previous studies in Uganda. Wafula et al. (2023) reported that 33.8% of slum residents in Kampala experienced symptoms of depression and 13.4% had generalized anxiety disorder during the pandemic. Similarly, Nantaayi et al. (2022) found high levels of psychological distress among

university students due to lockdowns and limited access to mental health services. Although these studies focused on different groups, they align with the present findings, confirming that the COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread psychological strain across Ugandan populations.

Globally, Dwyer et al. (2021) and Wakefield et al. (2021) observed that sports fans derive emotional and social support from match attendance, shared rituals, and fan communities. When these engagements were disrupted, fans experienced loss, isolation, and decreased well-being. This suggests that the emotional connection between soccer fans and their teams plays a crucial role in sustaining psychological stability, and when interrupted, mental health is negatively impacted.

5.2.2 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Restrictions on Soccer Engagement and Psychological Well-Being

The study found that restrictions such as lock-downs, suspension of matches, and closure of stadiums significantly disrupted fan engagement. Most respondents reported reduced motivation to follow matches and less satisfaction with online engagement compared to live attendance. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate negative relationship ($r = -0.41$, $p < 0.05$) between levels of soccer engagement and stress, suggesting that as fan engagement declined, psychological distress increased.

These findings are in agreement with Freeman et al. (2021), who noted that while virtual engagement provided temporary relief, it could not replace the sense of community derived from physical attendance. Similarly, Evans et al. (2020) observed that lockdown measures led to emotional disconnection among sports fans worldwide. In the Ugandan context, soccer serves as a major avenue for socialization

and identity formation; thus, the closure of social spaces like stadiums had a direct effect on fans' mental well-being.

Overall, the findings emphasize that the psychological health of soccer fans is closely tied to their level of participation and engagement in soccer activities. When engagement declines, feelings of isolation and anxiety increase, showing that soccer functions not merely as entertainment but as a key component of psycho-social health.

5.2.3 Coping Strategies and Suggestions for Maintaining Psychological Well-Being

The results indicated that fans adopted various coping strategies to manage stress and maintain well-being during the pandemic. The most common strategies included exercising (70.5%), using social media for fan interaction (58.4%), and talking with friends or family (55.4%). A smaller proportion of respondents used meditation or prayer (15.7%) or participated in online mental health awareness programs (7.8%).

These findings resonate with Lemuel et al. (2021), who found that Ugandans commonly rely on informal coping mechanisms such as physical activity, social support, and faith during stressful situations. Similarly, Park et al. (2024) reported that social connectedness and family communication were major protective factors against depression and anxiety among caregivers during COVID-19.

However, the low usage of formal psychological support services in this study underscores the limited accessibility and awareness of mental health care in Uganda. This calls for the integration of mental health interventions within community and sports structures to make support more accessible to fans.

5.3 Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Soccer fans in Kampala experienced significant psychological challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including loneliness, stress, anxiety, and depression, primarily due to disruptions in normal soccer engagement.
2. The pandemic restrictions had a direct negative impact on soccer engagement and psychological well-being. Reduced fan gatherings and stadium closures led to emotional disconnection and decreased motivation to follow matches.
3. Fans adopted various informal coping strategies, such as physical exercise, social interaction, and online fan engagement, which helped them maintain a degree of psychological stability. However, reliance on professional mental health support was minimal.
4. The findings confirm that soccer plays a vital social and emotional role in Ugandan society, serving as a key source of community identity and psychological support.

5.4 Recommendations

a) For Sports Administrators and Clubs

- Develop virtual fan engagement platforms (e.g., online fan meetings, interactive discussions, and virtual match viewings) to maintain social connection during future disruptions.

- Collaborate with psychologists to provide mental health awareness campaigns and counselling sessions through sports clubs and fan associations.

b) For Mental Health Practitioners

- Design community-based interventions that target sports fans, using online and peer-led support systems.
- Partner with sports organizations to integrate psychosocial support within fan communities.

c) For Policymakers

- Support mental health policy implementation within the sports sector to promote well-being among athletes and fans.
- Invest in affordable and accessible digital counseling platforms that can reach youth and sports enthusiasts.

d) For Soccer Fans

- Diversify recreational activities beyond soccer, such as exercise, volunteering, and community involvement, to strengthen resilience.
- Seek help from mental health professionals when experiencing prolonged distress rather than relying solely on informal coping mechanisms.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias or under-reporting.

- The use of convenience sampling limited the generalization of findings to all soccer fans in Uganda.
- The online data collection method excluded individuals without internet access, potentially underrepresenting lower-income groups.
- The study was cross-sectional, preventing causal conclusions about relationships between soccer engagement and psychological health.

5.6 Areas for Further Research

Future studies should employ mixed-method or longitudinal designs to explore the long-term psychological effects of disruptions on sports fans.

- Comparative studies could be conducted between urban and rural fans to examine differences in coping mechanisms.
- Further research could also focus on gender-based differences in psychological experiences among soccer fans.

In summary, this chapter discussed the main findings of the study in relation to existing literature and drew conclusions on the psychological health of soccer fans during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study established that the pandemic caused widespread emotional challenges among fans, largely due to reduced engagement and social interaction. Nonetheless, many fans demonstrated resilience through social support, exercise, and virtual engagement. The chapter further provided recommendations to guide sports administrators, mental health professionals, policymakers, and fans in promoting mental well-being during future disruptions.

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Questionnaire

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF SOCCER FANS IN KAMPALA - UGANDA

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on soccer fans in Kampala, Uganda. The study seeks to identify the psychological health challenges experienced, assess the severity of these challenges in relation to changes in soccer engagement, and collect suggestions on strategies to maintain psychological well-being among soccer fans during future pandemics or similar disruptions.

Your participation is voluntary, and there are no right or wrong answers. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Responses will be analysed collectively, and no individual will be identified in any report or publication resulting from this study.

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible based on your own experiences and opinions.

Thank you for your time and valuable input. Your contribution will help provide insights that can benefit both soccer fans and psychological health support initiatives in the future.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

(Select your responses)

(Purpose: To characterize participants and identify subgroups)

This section collects basic background information about you as a respondent. These details will help in grouping and comparing responses among different categories of soccer fans. All information will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

1. **What is your Age?** _____ years
2. **What is your Gender?**
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
3. **What is your highest level of education completed?**
 - ☐ No formal education
 - ☐ Primary
 - ☐ Secondary
 - ☐ Tertiary (College/University)
4. **What is your occupation?** _____
5. **What is your Marital status?**
 - ☐ Single
 - ☐ Married
 - ☐ Divorced/Separated
 - ☐ Widowed
6. **What is your Primary soccer league followed?**

- Uganda Premier League (Local)
- English Premier League
- La Liga (Spain)
- UEFA Champions League
- Other (please specify): _____

SECTION B: PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

PART 1: (WHAT PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH CHALLENGES DID YOU AS A SOCCER FAN IN KAMPALA EXPERIENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?)

Introduction:

This section seeks to understand the psychological and emotional challenges you faced as a soccer fan during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your responses will help identify the most common psychological health concerns among soccer fans in Kampala.

B1. Did you experience any of the following psychological challenges during the Covid 19 pandemic? (Tick the box for all that apply)

- **Anxiety** (*feeling tense, worried, or uneasy, often about uncertain outcomes*)
- **Depression** (*persistent sadness, loss of interest, or feeling hopeless*)
- **Frustration** (*feeling upset or annoyed because something is not working as expected*)
- **Anger** (*strong feeling of displeasure or hostility toward a situation or person*)

- **Stress** (*mental or emotional strain caused by pressure or difficult situations*)
- **Loneliness / Isolation / Disconnection from others** (*feeling alone, cut off, or lacking social contact*)
- **Sleep disturbance** (*difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early*)
- **Irritability** (*getting annoyed or upset more easily than usual*)
- **Others** (please specify)

.....

PART 2: SEVERITY OF THESE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

INTRODUCTION:

This section aims to assess the severity of psychological challenges and how these relate to changes in your soccer engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic

These questions that use rating scales, kindly select the option that best represents your situation or viewpoint.

Instructions to Respondents:

Please tick the rate of severity of each psychological challenge and indicate the extent of change in your soccer engagement during the pandemic.

Question: *How severe were these psychological challenges due to changes in your soccer engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Severity of Psychological Challenges (*Likert scale: 1 = Not severe, 2 = Mild, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Severe, 5 = Extremely severe*)

Table 4:Severity of these psychological challenges experienced during the covid-19 pandemic.

Q. No	Psychological Challenge	1	2	3	4	5
B2	I felt lonely due to the absence of live soccer matches.					
B3	I felt anxious about when soccer activities would resume.					
B4	I experienced feelings of depression.					
B5	I had trouble sleeping because of thoughts about the pandemic's effect on soccer.					
B6	I experienced irritation in watching soccer highlights or replays.					
B7	I found myself feeling more frustrated than usual.					
B8	I found myself feeling more angry than usual					
B9	I felt too much Stress than usual					
Others						

SECTION C: IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO SOCCER ENGAGEMENT CHANGES

This section aims to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions affected both your soccer engagement and psychological well-being. Please rate the extent of impact for each question.

Table 5: Impact of psychological challenges in relation to soccer engagement changes

Q.No	Question	1 = Not at all	2 = A little	3 = Somewh at	4 = Very much
C1	How did the pandemic affect your interest in soccer?				
C2	How did the COVID-19 restrictions (e.g., social distancing, lockdowns) affect your psychological health?				
C3	How did the lack of live soccer matches affect your psychological state?				

C4. How would you rate your overall psychological well-being during the pandemic?

- 1- Poor
- 2- Fair
- 3- Good
- 4- Excellent

C5. Did you feel isolated or disconnected from others during the pandemic?

- Yes
- No

SECTION D: SUGGESTIONS FOR MAINTAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Introduction:

This section gathers your views on possible strategies to help soccer fans maintain psychological well-being during future pandemics or similar disruptions.

Please share your opinions by selecting from the options provided or adding your own suggestions.

Questions:

PART 1: STRATEGIES USED TO COPE WITH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

D1. What strategies did you use to cope with the psychological challenges during the pandemic? (select all that apply)

- Exercise
- Meditation or mindfulness
- Social media
- Talking to friends or family
- Regular virtual fan meet-ups and discussions
- Broadcasting classic matches during match bans
- Psychological health awareness campaigns targeting soccer fans
- Affordable access to sports streaming platforms
- Online counselling or peer-support groups for fans
- Others

(specify).....

.....

PART 2: HOW EFFECTIVE WERE THESE STRATEGIES IN MANAGING YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH?

Tick according to how effective the strategy worked for you. (*Likert scale: 1 = Not effective at all, 2 = Slightly effective, 3 = Moderately effective, 4 = Very effective, 5 = Extremely effective*)

Table 6: How effective were these strategies in managing your psychological health?

Q. No	Strategy	1	2	3	4	5
D2	Exercise					
D3	Meditation And Mindfulness					
D4	Social Media					
D5	Talking to friends or family					
D6	Regular virtual fan meet-ups and discussions.					
D7	Broadcasting classic matches during match bans.					
D8	Psychological health awareness campaigns targeting soccer fans.					
D9	Affordable access to sports streaming platforms.					
D10	Online counselling or peer-support groups for fans.					
Others						

PART 3: SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions on strategies to maintain psychological well-being among soccer fans during future pandemics or similar disruptions.

D11. In your own words/ opinion, what other strategies would you recommend to help soccer fans maintain psychological well-being during such disruptions?

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Appendix II

Consent Note

By completing and submitting this questionnaire, I voluntarily give my consent to participate in this study, with the understanding that my responses will remain confidential and be used only for academic research purposes.(Tick the box below)

- ☐ Yes I agree to participate in this study.
- ☐ No, I don't agree to participate in this study

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