

Identification of factors of aggression incidence among football spectators in Khuzestan

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Aggression in sport has been defined as behaviors or actions performed with the intent to harm an opponent, either physically or psychologically. Investigation of incidents of violence and aggression in football matches has been an important research subject tackled by social scientists and sport experts for the last two decades.

Aim of Study: The purpose of this research was to identify factors affecting the incidence of aggression among fans of two Iranian league football teams from Khuzestan.

Material and Methods: The statistical material was a population of 6,500 spectators of two Iranian super league teams. The random study sample consisted of 354 respondents. Data was gathered using a two-part questionnaire that included respondents' personal data and 30 questions on a 5-degree Likert scale, grouped in 4 factor ranges related to stadium safety and hygiene, refereeing, media coverage and event management. The questionnaire reliability was estimated at Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Friedman ranking test) were used in the analysis.

Results: The study findings showed that factors such as kickoff delay, holding the games in hot weather, repeated uses of red and yellow cards by the referee, referees' misconduct towards players, referee's mistakes as well as confined entrance and exit pathways to the stadium do affect spectators' potential aggression.

Conclusions: The results show that sports managers through appropriate planning can minimize potential football fans' aggression.

KEY WORDS

aggression, spectators, football matches, Khuzestan.

Introduction

Exercise and sport activities consume a great deal of time and energy of individuals and communities. In some circumstances sport competitions may put athletes, spectators and coaches in situations in which rules and accepted norms in sport can be easily broken and aggressive confrontations may ensue [1]. Some researchers believe that participating in exercise and physical activities reduces social aggressive behaviors because it releases energy not only in athletes but also in spectators [2]. However, many researchers observed that such a notion does not constitute a solid scientific basis of violent incidents and behaviors, and they pose vandalism as one of issues in sport [3, 4]. Aggression is generally a purposeful behavior displayed in order to humiliate or hurt others [5], and aggressive behavior can be defined as deliberate and conscious behavior aimed to harm another person [6].

Football as the most popular sport in many countries [7] is an area in which aggressive behaviors can be frequently observed. Such behaviors occur between players, between players and the referee, between spectators and players, or between spectators and the referee. Spectators and players may also vent their aggression on sports facilities and equipment. Outrageous behaviors of athletes, teams and spectators make the headlines and sports news in many countries [8]. The game of football has been associated with violence since its beginnings in 13th-century England. The phenomenon currently known as 'football hooliganism' originated in England in the early 1960s, and has been closely associated with television coverage of football matches. In other countries, similar patterns of behavior emerged in the early 1970s. In most European countries, football-related violence is currently a predominantly internal problem, with the majority of incidents occurring at club-level matches,

while supporters of the national team abroad are generally better-behaved [9].

Although football became more "respectable" in the interwar period and violence went into decline, levels of disorder and public concern about them rose sharply in the 1960s in conjunction with a number of moral panics related to new youth cultures and growing racial tensions. In the 1960s and 1970s, football violence was largely confined to football stadiums, but the trend since then has been increasingly to move outside. In the 1990s, following the introduction of all-seater stadiums, in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster, nearly all large-scale football violence occurred outside stadiums [10]. Nowadays, the media are constantly reporting on disruptive behaviors of athletes, fans and spectators; while researchers are trying to find reasons for such behaviors.

According to Chychynadze, releasing norepinephrine while focusing on winning does contribute to triggering aggression [11]. Following Anderson, sport events can lead to corruption and suicide in individuals due to puberty, gender, marriage status, alcohol and stimulants as well as the game's outcome: a draw, victory, defeat [12]. Breschi (2007) suggests that the media and sport magazines may incite potential violence in spectators by reporting on provocative subjects [13]. Lynch states that a kickoff delay is one of reasons for spectators' bad behavior [14]. Dunning et al. argue that referees' mistakes and disruptions of spectators' behavior can lead to vandalism [15]. In Friman's opinion the lack of information about detailed rules of the game, referees' mistakes and failure to match spectators' demands with referee's decisions are among the causes of aggressions [16]. Wakefield et al. concluded that congestion, seating comfort and scoreboard quality can make spectators satisfied enough to willingly return to the stadium [17].

Aim of Study

Football is one of the most common and most popular sports in Iran, and in comparison with other sports, it has the largest number of athletes, fans and spectators [18]. Also, inappropriate behaviors of varied intensity have been observed in Iran. Important football competitions can lead to irreparable losses such as injuries and physical damage, vandalism and demolition of sport venues and equipment, and finally financial penalties and suspensions for teams [19].

In the province of Khuzestan, football has enjoyed popularity for a long time. There is evidence that the first football game in Iran was held in the city of Masjed Soleiman in Khuzestan. Nowadays, with a great number of Khuzestani soccer players in the Iranian Major League Football, the province plays an important role in Iranian football. Esteghlal Ahvaz and Foolad Khuzestan are the two oldest and most popular teams in Ahwaz, and physical education department officials are now more concerned than ever during football tournaments witnessing fanatic spectators' attendance. Since violence and aggression often accompany football competitions, it is important to identify their causes among the spectators. This study aims to identify factors influencing the incidence of aggression and provide an

answer to the question: What are the most important causes of aggression among the supporters of the Esteghlal Ahvaz and Foolad Khuzestan football teams?

Material and Methods

The study material comprised supporters of the Esteghlal Ahvaz and Foolad Khuzestan football teams (N = 6,500: 4,000 Foolad Khuzestan fans and 2,500 Esteghlal Ahvaz fans). A random sample was chosen (n = 354) using the Morgan-Krjisy table. In the sample, 218 respondents were fans of Foolad Khuzestan and 137 of Esteghlal Ahvaz. Data was collected with the use of a researcher-made questionnaire that included two sections. Section A consisted of respondents' personal data (age, gender, education, occupation, etc). Section B contained 30 items graded on a 5-degree Likert scale. The items were grouped in four factor ranges related to stadium safety and hygiene (1-8), refereeing (9-17), the media (18-22), and management and planning (23-30). The questionnaire validity was confirmed by 15 physical education experts. The reliability of questionnaire was calculated at 0.87 (Cronbach's alpha). Descriptive and inferential statistics (Friedman test) were used in the analysis. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. All statistical calculations were made using SPSS for Windows (ver. 16).

Results

The average age of the fans of Esteghlal Ahvaz and Foolad Khuzestan football teams was 22 years. 53 supporters (16%) were married and 281 (84%) were single. As far as their occupation was concerned, 23% of spectators were school students, 44% – college students, 7% – employees and 26% – self-employed.

Table I shows mean ranks of factors related to stadium safety and hygiene from the spectators' point of view. Confined entrance and exit pathways (mean rank 5.12), poor quality surface (4.63), and lack of seats or their poor quality (4.56) were the most important factors in the area of stadium safety and hygiene, which can lead to spectator aggression.

Table II presents the ranking of spectators' views concerning refereeing. The most significant factors in this area that could potentially lead to spectator aggression included referee's excessive use of yellow and red cards (5.76), unfairness towards players (5.63), and stopping play by frequent whistling (5.29).

Table III shows the ranking of spectators' viewpoints regarding the media coverage of the game. The main factors which can potentially lead to spectators' aggression included press coverage (3.13), photographers gathering behind the gates (3.06) and presence of reporters around the pitch (3.05).

Finally, Table IV shows the ranking of factors related to the management of football events. The factors that could potentially trigger spectators' violence were kick-off delay (4.90), organizing matches in hot weather (4.88), and organizing matches on holidays (4.73).

The differences between mean ranks of the four factor ranges were significant at $p < 0.05$. The greatest impact on

Table I. Friedman test ranks of factors related to stadium safety and hygiene (Factor Range 1)

Factors related to stadium safety and hygiene	Mean rank	Priority	X ²	SD	sig
Confined entrance and exit pathways	5.12	1			
Poor quality surface	4.63	2			
Lack of seats in the grandstand or their poor quality	4.56	3			
Insecurity	4.52	4	57.211	7	0.001
Lack of discipline	4.46	5			
Lack of food and beverage facilities	4.34	6			
General uncleanness	4.34	7			
No first aid facilities	4.02	8			

Table II. Friedman test ranks of factors related to refereeing (Factor Range 2)

Factors related to refereeing	Mean rank	Priority	X ²	SD	sig
Extensive use of red and yellow cards	5.76	1			
Referee's unfairness towards players	5.63	2			
Stopping play by frequent whistling	5.29	3			
Miscalculating overtime	5.13	4			
Violence during the game	4.96	5	133.545	8	0.001
Players' faking being fouled	4.82	6			
Players' provocative behavior	4.81	7			
Refereeing mistakes in key moments of the game	4.61	8			
Incorrect interpretation or unnoticing situations during the game	4.00	9			

Table III. Friedman test ranks of factors related to the media (Factor Range 3)

Factors related to the media	Mean of rank	Priority	X ²	SD	sig
Football overage in sport magazines and newspapers	3.13	1			
Photographers' gathering behind the gates	3.06	2			
Presence of reporters around the pitch	3.05	3	17.032	4	0.001
Live TV broadcast	3.01	4			
Sensationalizing the game	2.57	5			

Table IV. Friedman test ranks of factors related to management and planning (Factor Range 4)

Factors related to management and planning	Mean rank	Priority	X ²	SD	sig
Kick-off delay	4.90	1			
Organizing games in hot weather	4.88	2			
Organizing games during holidays	4.73	3			
Organizing games at night	4.49	4	45.569	7	0.001
Early entrance of spectators	4.36	5			
Spectator crowd	4.30	6			
Ticket price	4.24	7			
Poor performance of favorite team	4.10	8			

spectators' aggression was associated with factors related to refereeing, followed by those related to management and planning, stadium safety and hygiene and media coverage of football events (Table V).

Discussion

Football is a manifestation of modern times, and as they pass it attracts more and more attention. What is the key to this attractiveness? Football is a symbolic replica

Table V. Friedman test ranks related to all four factor ranges

Factor range	Mean rank	Priority	X ²	SD	sig
Refereeing	3.15	1			
Management and planning	2.99	2			
Stadium safety and hygiene	2.35	3	329.227	3	0.001
The media	1.52	4			

of competition in the real, highly regulated world. Violent behavior, especially of spectators, can be observed in football more often than in any other sport [20]. Football fans can be divided into direct and indirect fans. The former are present at stadiums and support their favorite teams as the "twelfth player". The latter follow football matches via the media [21]. The most obvious example of violent behavior among football fans is known as vandalism, which is a fairly common phenomenon during organized football competitions, particularly in Europe [13]. During sporting events, such as football matches, alcohol-related violence can also increase in and around stadiums and venues where matches are viewed. During the 1998 World Cup, a single match (Scotland vs. Brazil) led to a four-fold increase in admissions to hospital emergency departments in Scotland, of which one-third were violence-related and more than two thirds alcohol-related [22].

The aim of this study was to investigate the causes of aggression among Iranian fans of the Esteghlal Ahvaz and Foolad Khuzestan football teams. The study findings in the areas of stadium safety and hygiene revealed that confined entrance and exit pathways to the stadium, poor quality surface, lack of seats or poor quality of the grandstands are the most important factors of aggression incidence from spectators' point of view. These findings are consistent with the results of Shah Mansouri [23], who indicated that the lack of well-planned stadium entering and exiting procedures was a main cause of fans' aggression, and those by Wakefield et al. [17] who indicated smooth crowd flow in and out of stadium, comfortable seats and scoreboard quality as causes of spectators' satisfaction. Other factors behind spectators' aggression included stadium location [24] and unsuitable structure [25].

Most significant factors contributing to fans' aggression related to refereeing were frequent uses of red and yellow cards by the referee, referee's unfairness towards players, and game stopping by the referee's steady whistling. These results correspond to observations made by Duning et al. [15] and Friman et al. [16], who also pointed to refereeing mistakes as causes of fans' aggression. Also Rahmati and Mohseni Tabrizi [26] revealed that 79% of spectators displayed aggressive behavior when the referee's decision was wrong. A significant correlation between the ways of refereeing and aggression incidence was also found [27].

Most important causes of spectators' aggression related to the media included football coverage in sports magazines and newspapers, photographers' gathering behind the gates, and the presence of reporters around the pitch. This finding is consistent with other research results revealing media excitement and exaggeration, especially presentation of provocative material in the press, as potential causes of spectators' aggression [13].

Finally, the main factors affecting spectators' aggression, related to the management of sports competitions, included kick-off delays and organizing matches in hot weather and on holidays. These results are in agreement with those by Lynch [14], who considered the delay of the start of the game as a factor affecting spectators' violent behavior. A significant relationship between summer weather and spectators' aggression was also found in earlier studies [11, 29].

Conclusions

Aggression in sport has been defined as behaviors or actions performed with the intent to harm an opponent, either physically or psychologically [30]. According to various theoretical principles and research results aggression, violence and vandalism have been associated with football almost from the beginning of the popularity of this sport. However, despite the long history of these football-associated phenomena, it was in the 1960s that the causes of violent behavior started to attract the attention of social scientists. Losing a game seems to be merely one contributing factor to the aggression and violence of fans during football matches. Most of spectators' aggression is not related directly to the football game, but it results from social abnormalities such as lack of attention to young people's needs, poverty, unemployment, urbanization and changes in leisure patterns. Sometimes a harsh and reckless reaction of security forces attracting excessive attention of the media to sports can effectively shape the aggressive and violent behavior of spectators in different countries. However, the cultural influences are also important, as fans in Denmark, for example, are renowned for consuming large amounts of alcohol yet maintaining a cheerful sociability [31]. The results of the present study suggest that managers of sport organizations, officials and organizers of competitions should minimize spectators' potential aggression by controlling and monitoring factors related to the poor functioning and disturbances of the socialization process as they cause an increase in spectators' tendency to resort to aggressive and violent behaviors.

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