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The effects of pre-competitive anxiety in men's soccer referees of Greek super league and football league and in women's referees of all categories

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of competitive anxiety, in a game with great importance. The survey involved a total of 92 referees. Twenty-nine (n=29) from the Super League category, thirty-two (n=32) from the Football League category and thirty-one (n=31) women from national and local categories. The instrumentation used to evaluate the effect of competitive anxiety was a questionnaire that calculates the specific situation of sport anxiety scale. The questionnaire separates anxiety into three parts: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and into one factor that correlates directly with anxiety and that is self-confidence. The results showed that men referees had less cognitive and somatic anxiety compared with women, in contrast to confidence which was higher in men than women.

Keywords: Soccer referee, cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, self-confidence

1. Introduction

Anxiety is an emotional situation of dysthymia that comes from a subjective experience of a threat, which appears in situations with uncertain outcome or in situations that include the parameter of danger and the person exposed is helpless (Weidenmann, 1981; Grubitzch & Rexilius, 1987) ^[1, 2]. Spielberger (1979) ^[3] defined anxiety "as an emotional reaction to a stimulus of the environment - a stimulus that is interpreted as dangerous, even if it is not directly threatening to a person". The same stimulus can be considered as neutral by another person or beneficial by others. Pre-competitive anxiety is a form of anxiety experienced by referees before a soccer game. According to Martens, Vealey & Burton (1990), ^[4] the anxiety has both somatic and cognitive traits.

For most people anxiety has a totally negative significance, although Selye (1979) ^[5] used the term as neutral. According to Selye, ^[5] anxiety is a stimulus that is necessary to mobilize people and which, in reasonable doses, can also be useful. The problem of anxiety is when its level is much greater than what we can withstand. Very low levels of anxiety as well as very high ones have a negative impact on athletic performance.

Anxiety can be seen as an interactive relationship between the individual and the environment, when environmental conditions and challenges go beyond the individual's powers and threaten his prosperity (Folkman, 1984) ^[6]. The individual experiences anxiety when assessing an event as superior to his/her psychosomatic, emotional and social abilities, or when he/she subjectively feels he/she is unable to cope with the given environmental requirements.

Signs of anxiety can be somatic, psychological and social. Somatic anxiety can manifest itself in any part of the body, and in some cases, it may have its appearance in an impressive way. People have different levels of tolerance and react in different ways to anxiety.

Anxiety may be psychogenic in origin or may be a consequence of bodily disease. In addition, it depends on the cognitive, emotional processes, the way of life and the perception of the person. Each person exhibits a certain degree of anxiety, which is considered normal under certain circumstances. In some other cases, increased anxiety causes harm and can have the result of sub-functioning of the person in his activities, negatively affecting his/her health. That's why it is important for every person to learn how to control the feeling of anxiety as best as he/she can and to be able to manage it whenever necessary.

Some ways to manage anxiety are: biofeedback, rational emotive therapy, physical methods, relaxation methods, biological methods and social support.

It is well recognized that both the physiological abilities and the psychological abilities of an athlete-referee can contribute equally to maximizing performance. With anxiety in all its manifestations, a central element of almost all negative states of stimulation in sports (Bauman & Tsorbatzoudis, 2007) [7], the cultivation of psychosomatic skills is particularly important in achieving the ideal emotional state of the referee. Spiritual abilities play an important role in controlling anxiety by giving referees more effective and tailored responses to situations and events that can distract them.

Soccer is a team sport that is of great interest to sports psychologists, since its group character requires communication between many people with different characters, behaviors and habits. Within this team climate the referee also belongs, who must be concentrated throughout the time spent on the court either inside or outside the field, because a referee is not judged only by his decisions and behavior during the game. That is why the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), as part of its efforts to improve the performance of football arbitration, has decided that referees should be trained in ways of communication and the proper use of body language by a sports psychologist. UEFA believes that this will improve the communication of the referees with the players on the pitch.

2. Method & Procedure

2.1 Participants

92 soccer referees (61 men and 31 women) participated in the survey. Twenty-nine (n=29) from the Super League category, Thirty-two (n=32) from the Football League category and Thirty-one (n=31) women from national and local categories.

2.2 Measurements

For the purpose of the study, the participating referees completed the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) questionnaire (Martens, Burton, Vealey, Bump & Smith, 1990) [8]. The questionnaire consists of 27 questions divided into three categories of questions: Cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence. Each category consisted of 9 questions. Participants were asked how they usually feel before the game. The answers were given on a 4-step scale (1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = enough, 4 = too much)

2.3 Procedure

We attended referees seminars throughout Greece held by the Hellenic Football Association. In the seminars for the North and South regions, we contacted the referees. We first explained to the referees that we would like them to complete some questionnaires, having in mind a difficult and demanding game. We asked them to be honest because the questionnaires were anonymous. At the end of the process the researchers explained to the participants the purpose of the study and were then thanked for their participation.

3. Results

For the purposes of the survey, the CSAI-2 questionnaire was used as adapted for the Greek population by Tsorbatzoudis, Barkoukis, Kaissidis-Rodafinos & Grouios (1998) [9]. The questionnaire reveals three factors: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence. For the purposes of the survey, the factor values were calculated according to the Martens, Vealey & Burton (1990) [4] labels. For data analysis the t-test was applied for independent variables.

3.1 Cognitive anxiety

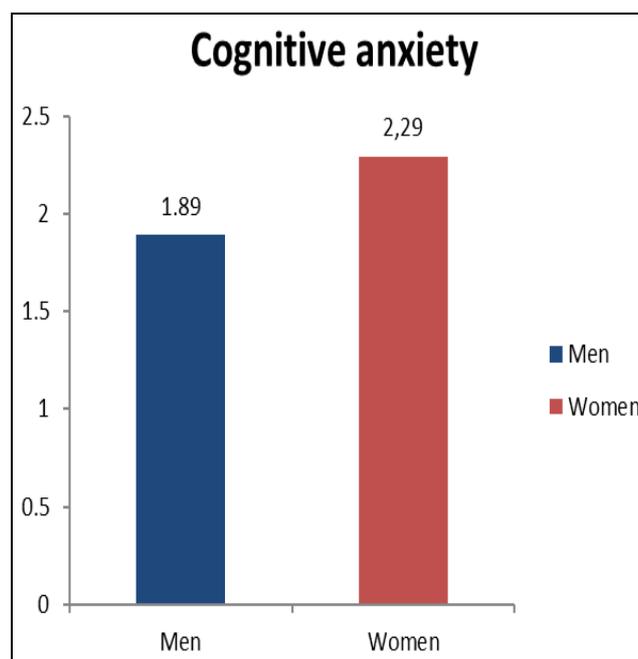


Fig 1: Cognitive anxiety of men and women soccer referees

From the results, there were statistically significant differences in cognitive anxiety $t(90) = 3,654$, $p < 0,001$ with men ($M = 1,89 \pm 0,41$) having less cognitive anxiety than women ($M = 2,29 \pm 0,63$). (Figure 1)

3.2 Somatic Anxiety

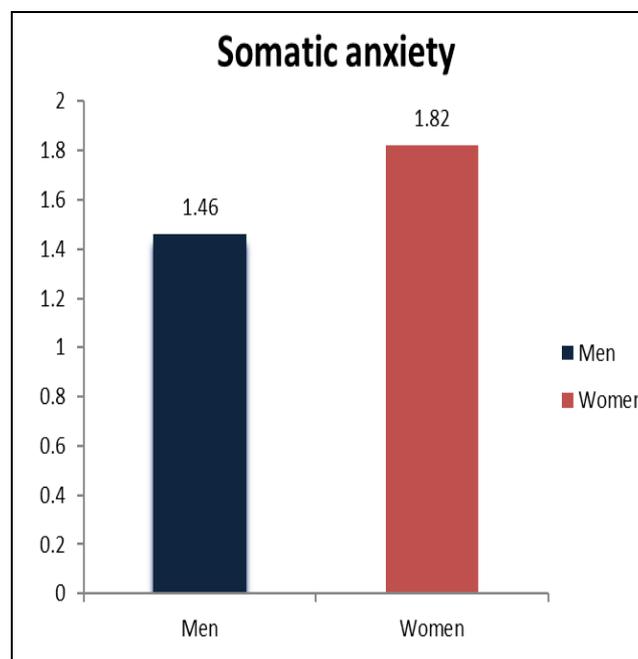


Fig 2: Somatic anxiety of men and women soccer referees

Regarding somatic anxiety, the results showed that there were statistically significant differences of $t(90) = 4,528$, $p < 0,001$ with men having lower values for somatic anxiety ($M = 1,46 \pm 0,30$) women ($M = 1,82 \pm 0,44$). (Figure 2)

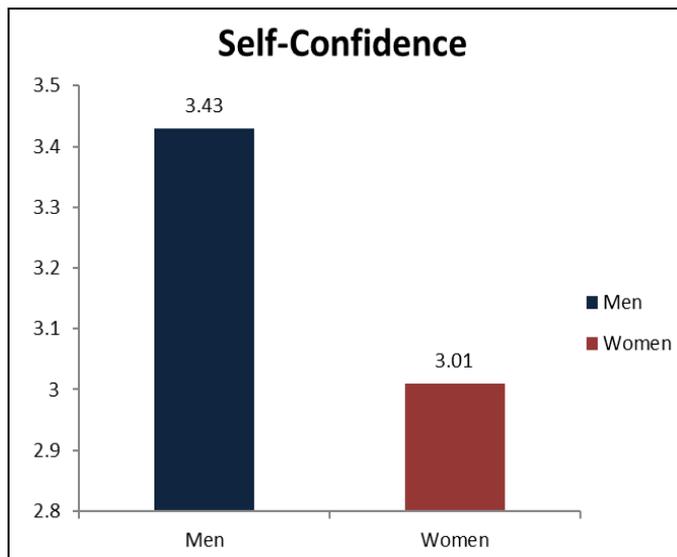
Self confidence

Fig 3: Self confidence of men and women soccer referees

Finally, with regard to self-confidence, the results showed that there were statistically significant differences between male and female referees $t(90) = 4.340$, $p < 0.001$ with men ($M = 3.43 \pm 0.37$) more self-confident than with women ($M = 3.01 \pm 0.44$). (Figure 3)

4. Discussion

The purpose of this work was to examine the extent to which pre-competitive anxiety can affect referees in a soccer match. The results showed statistically significant differences between levels of pre-competitive anxiety among Greek men and women referees. As we noticed from the referee's answers, women had elevated cognitive and somatic anxiety values and lower values in self-confidence compared to men.

The results of the survey confirmed the initial hypothesis, which referred to the anxiety of female referees, which is more than men. The case, which is also similar as that found by Filaire, Alix, Ferrand & Verger (2009) ^[10], addressed that women's somatic anxiety was higher than that of men and at the same time men were more confident than women.

The results of the survey also show that men as a sample show low levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety, which means that during the game they have little anxiety that does not directly affect their decisions. In addition, men's referees have fairly high levels of self-confidence resulting in better decision-making and management of the game. On the other hand, the representative sample of women showed relatively high levels of both somatic and cognitive anxiety, possibly leading to wrong decisions. Regarding their self-confidence during the game, their response data shows that they have low self-confidence, which may also affect their performance.

Rainey (1999) ^[11] examined the relationship between burnout and stress and the sources of stress in basketball referees. The three stresses that led to greater burnout scores were performance concerns, interpersonal conflict and time pressure. In another study dealing with perceived stress and burn out, Taylor, A. H., Daniel, J. V., Leith, L., & Burke, R. J. (1990) ^[12], examined the turn over intention in sport officials. Taylor *et al.* (1990) ^[12] uncovered three sources of stress: fear of failure, interpersonal conflicts and role – culture conflicts. Burnout also increased showing that through the season, sport officials were scoring higher on burnout scores.

In Greece it is true that refereeing has always been a serious

problem. The positive thing is that steps to improve it are becoming more and more rapid. Any mistakes of the referees adversely affect the smooth course and development of national, regional and local soccer championships in Greek championships. The inability to understand and uniformly enforce the regulations and the lack of judgment (objectively and fairly), are the main causes of so-called "human mistakes" in the playing field. In an old statement, an international referee once said that the mental strength of Greek referee's was influenced by events on and off the pitch: "The needs of the game require the referee to be well-trained. Soccer is faster than it used to be in the past. The referee's perception of the pitch is related to his position within the pitch. For example, where the referee is located and at what angle he/she sees the action. If he/she has a good physical condition, it means he/she has a restful brain. If he/she does not, as time passes the refereeing becomes more difficult. In the past there were no physical fitness tests. Today the referees are faster and fitter than they were 20 years ago. The problem is the lack of psychological training for referees in Greece. The errors made on the court are mainly due to the lack of good psychology. The referee's psychology has not been evaluated and estimated to date".

In another statement, a former chairman of the National Hellenic Referees Association (NHRA) and a former international referee argued that his colleagues should not apologize during the game for their decisions: "The referee is not obliged to explain his or her decision. The only one who is responsible for judging is the referees' observer and there is no reason a referee needs to apologize to the players for any of his decisions either by explaining verbally or by using a coded behavior such as body language".

We all know that the referee's functional abilities (kinetic response, thinking mobility, perception speed and stereoscopic vision) are of particular importance. The referee must immediately whistle in any breach of the rules and not wait for the reaction of the fans and the players. A referee's physical condition must be the same as that of the player. Otherwise, when referees feel fatigued, there is a direct reduction to all psychosomatic functions. The above reason is where the Greek referees suffer. Observing the statistics, it is depicted that most of the errors occur during the late stages of the game, where the referee due to fatigue and anxiety is unable to make the right decisions.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that both anxiety and self-confidence affect the referee's athletic performance by not allowing them to take proper initiatives by making mistakes in their decisions. An incorrect whistle of the referee means that the score is altered, depending on the severity of the error and the outcome of the game, as well as the annoyance of the fans and players. It is therefore important for a referee to be relaxed before and during the game in order to avoid serious mistakes that will affect the outcome of the match.

For the above reasons, the study of the pre-competitive anxiety of soccer referees is more than significant. Pre-competitive anxiety affects the referees and therefore their performance. The aim is that the referees give us the information about the pre-competitive anxiety that they experience in high-level matches, where the teams of similar level have the same goal, the victory. With this study we have a first picture of the anxious environment that develops in that particular group of referees and how it varies depending on the difficulty of the game.

6. Recommendations

A possible future approach may be to study ways of addressing pre-competitive anxiety to soccer referees (men and women) in a trial, in order to improve their game performance before very important or even less important soccer matches, as they are all stress-inducing. Such research could be carried out with various stress testing methods prior to each game.

By testing and implementing the various anxiety techniques that would help referees reduce their anxiety levels, research could lead to the most effective methods of anxiety management. Such a study would help both the referees and the players who are adversely affected by anxiety. The proper techniques of anxiety management will help referees and players in enhancing their sport performance.

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