

Levels of burnout among sports referees in Jordan

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Abstract:

This study aimed to investigate the levels of burnout experienced by Jordanian referees and finding whether there was a relationship between their level of burnout and refereeing level, type of sport, and years of refereeing experience. One hundred and twenty referees representing four sport federations participated in this study. They completed the 15-item Referee Burnout Scale. The results of this study revealed that Jordanian referees had moderate levels of refereeing burnout. The results also showed a significant relationship between burnout levels and referees' experience. Less experienced referees had higher levels of burnout than did more experienced ones. Moreover, no significant relationships were detected between the levels of burnout of referees and the refereeing level and type of sport they refereed.

Key words: burnout, sport, referee, Jordan.

Introduction

Burnout is not a new problem, but it is only in the last few decades that burnout has been thoroughly studied by scholars and researchers from diverse areas of study (Altahayneh, 2003). Burnout, a term coined in the 1970s by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger, is a psychological process, brought about by unrelieved work stress that results in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 2001). The term *emotional exhaustion* refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and having depleted emotional resources. *Depersonalization* also called cynicism, refers to a negative, cynical, or excessively detached response to other people at work. *Reduced sense of personal accomplishment* refers to a decline in feelings of one's competence and productivity at work (Leiter & Maslach, 2001; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

Burnout is prevalent in many professions and affects everyone, and the professions related to sports are no exception. Researchers in the sport and exercise sciences have found evidence of stress and burnout in different sport populations such as athletes, coaches, referees, athletic trainers and athletic directors (e.g., Alam et al., 2012; Altahayneh, 2003; Allen, 2006; Caccese, & Mayerberg, 1984, Campbell, Miller, & Robinson, 1985; Cresswell, & Eklund, 2006; Goodger, Gorely, Lavallee, & Harwood, 2007; Karademir, 2012; Pietraszuk, 2006; Rainey, 1995, 1999; Rainey & Hardy, 1999; Taylor, Daniel, Leith, & Burke, 1990).

One group of sports participants who often experience a great deal of stress and burnout but have received little attention by researchers, is sports officials (i.e., referees, umpires, judges) (Anshel & Weinberg, 1995; Anshel, Kang, & Jubenville, 2013). Refereeing has been identified as a highly stressful occupation and is often referred to as the worst job in sport (Baldwin, 2008). Zoller (1985) asserted that the stress involved in sports officiating is so great that officials ranked behind only air traffic controllers, inner city teachers, and police officers when it comes to most stressful jobs.

Experiencing high levels of stress while refereeing could lead to negative psychological and somatic effects on the referees' health ranging from decreased satisfaction to various levels of burnout (Gencay, 2009; Kaissidis, 1994; Rainey, 1995, 1999; Taylor et al., 1990). Examples of acute stress among referees include fear of physical harm, verbal abuse from coaches, athletes and spectators, making a controversial call, lack of recognition, lack of respect, poor performance, interpersonal conflict, and time pressure (Anshel & Weinberg 1995; Anshel, et al., 2013; Kilani, Altahayneh, & Oudat, 2013; Kruger, Ekmekci, Strydom, & Ellis, 2012; Rainey, 1995, 1999; Rainey & Hardy, 1999). Several studies have addressed various issues related to referees' burnout in different sports and cultures. For example, Taylor et al. (1990) studied perceived stress, psychological burnout, and paths to turnover intentions among soccer referees. They found that younger referees tended to report more burnout, suggesting that older referees had developed better coping resources, such as more confidence and assertiveness. They also found that evaluative aspects of officiating (such as fear of failure)

related most strongly to feelings of burnout. In addition, the mismatch between expected and perceived appreciation and recognition also appeared to contribute to referees burnout. Rainey (1995) found that the main factors of burnout for soccer officials and baseball umpires were fear of physical harm, fear of failure, time pressure, and interpersonal conflict. A similar study completed on basketball referees found the same four factors that cause burnout. All of these factors along with age were significant predictors of burnout and intention to terminate refereeing (Rainey, 1999).

In non-western contexts, Al-Nahe (2007) examined the levels of burnout among Iraqi basketball referees and their relation to referees level (i.e., national and international) and referees level of education. The findings showed that basketball referees exhibited a low level of burnout. In addition, no significant differences in burnout levels were found due to referees educational level or their level of refereeing.

Khasawneh, Zu'bi and Al-Khaldi (2008) investigated the levels of psychological burnout among Jordanian football referees. Eighty-one referees participated in the study by completing a 24-item questionnaire. The results showed that the burnout level among football referees was moderate. Additionally, referees officiating at lower levels experienced higher levels of burnout than their counterparts officiating at international and first-degree level. Furthermore, no significant differences were found in burnout levels among referees due to referees' experience or their level of education. More recently, Alam et al. (2012) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout in Iranian soccer super league referees. The results showed that referees had above average emotional intelligence and had low levels of burnout. The results also revealed a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout in the referees. Karademir (2012) surveyed 272 Turkish football referees in order to explore the factors that affect their burnout levels according to some demographical variables. He found that marital status, referee age and crowd jeers, age, educational status, income, being happy to be a referee and the importance level of the match were found to be determiners of burnout levels of referees. The studies mentioned above have provided insight into the stress and burnout experiences of referees, however, there is still a need to research the burnout phenomenon in different sports and cultures so that practitioners and authorities in sport federations can be more knowledgeable and precise when intervening with sport officials. In this exploratory study, we sought to examine the levels of burnout experienced by referees in different sports in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the effects of refereeing level, type of sport, and years of refereeing experience on these levels of burnout.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 120 Jordanian referees representing four sport federations (47 football, 32 basketball, 22 handball, 19 volleyball). The referees' mean age was 33.77 (SD = 7.096), they had an average of 9.52 (SD = 6.189) years of experience. Seventy-nine referees were certified at national level and 41 at international level.

Instrument

Referee Burnout Scale: The participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire along with the Referee Burnout Scale (RBS). The RBS is a 15-item scale developed by Alawi (1998) to measure referees' burnout. Each item was assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 "doesn't apply" to 7 "completely apply". Scoring for the RBS is done by adding together the scores of all items to achieve a total score ranging from 15 to 105. Respondents scoring (86) or higher are deemed highly burned-out. Moderate level of burnout ranges from 42 to 85 and low level of burnout ranges from 15 to 41 (Alawi, 1998).

Validity and reliability: The content and construct validity of the RBS have been demonstrated by Alawi (1998). In terms of reliability, Alawi reported a test re-test reliability coefficient of 0.86. In the current study, internal consistency of the RBS was estimated by Cronbach Alpha coefficient. Reliability coefficient for the RBS was 0.91.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 18. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, t-test, ANOVA and LSD post hoc analyses were conducted.

Procedures

Each referee was sent a packet containing a questionnaire and a covering letter explaining the aims of the study. The referees were also informed of the confidentiality of their responses and that their participation would remain anonymous. Three weeks after the initial mailing, a reminder e-mail and phone calls were made to those who did not respond.

Results

Levels of burnout

To identify referees' levels of burnout, means, standard deviations and frequencies were computed. The results show that the level of burnout exhibited by sport referees was moderate ($M = 60.42$, $SD = 18.50$). The

findings presented in Table 1 indicated that the majority of referees experienced moderate to high levels of burnout and only 11.67% reported low levels of burnout.

Table 1. Levels of burnout among referees

Range	Level of burnout	Frequency	Percentage
86-105	High	19	15.83%
42-85	Medium	87	72.50%
15-41	Low	14	11.67%

Refereeing level and burnout

To explore the relationship between the burnout level of referees and Refereeing level, t-test was conducted. The findings presented in Table 2 show no significant relationship was identified between the burnout level of referees and their refereeing level.

Table 2. Relationship between refereeing level and referees level of burnout.

Refereeing Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
International	41	60.37	19.579	-.022	.982
National	79	60.44	17.488		

Referees' experience and burnout

To explore the relationship between the burnout level of referees and years of refereeing experience, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The findings presented in Table 3 show a significant difference in the mean scores of burnout based on referees' experience ($F_{(3,116)} = 7.626, p. \leq 0.000$).

Table 3. Analysis of variance of the variable of experience affects on the level of burnout among referees

Source of difference	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6455.747	3	2151.916	7.626	.000
Within Groups	32731.420	116	282.167		
Total	39187.167	119			

Post hoc analysis using LSD test was conducted to identify the differences between the mean scores. Results in Table 4 show that less experienced referees (less than 5 years) reported higher levels of burnout compared to referees with more refereeing experience.

Table 4. The results of LSD test to compare the means of referees' scores in the scale according the variable of referees' experience

Mean	Category	Less than 5 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	More than 15 years
68.94	Less than 5 years	-	*14.91	*14.08	*15.16
54.03	5-10 years		-	- 0.83	0.25
54.86	11-15 years			-	1.08
53.78	More than 15 years				-

* The difference between the two means is significant ($\alpha \leq 0.01$)

Type of sport and burnout

To explore the relationship between the burnout level of referees and type of sport, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Analysis of variance of the variable of sport type affects on referees level of burnout

Source of difference	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	535.502	3	178.501	.536	.659
Within Groups	38651.665	116	333.204		
Total	39187.167	119			

According to the results in Table 5, no significant relations were identified between the burnout levels of referees and the type of sport ($F_{(3,116)} = 0.536$).

Discussion

The main purpose of the current study was to investigate the levels of burnout among sports referees in Jordan. In addition, this study examined the relationships between referees burnout and refereeing level, type of sport, and years of refereeing experience.

The findings indicated that the majority of referees experienced moderate to high levels of burnout and only 11.67% reported low levels of burnout. This finding is consistent with findings from earlier research, which implies that burnout is a serious problem in sport contexts (e.g., Alam, et al., 2012; Constable, 1996; Khasawneh, et al., 2008; Rainey, 1995, 1999; Rainey & Hardy, 1999).

The literature suggests that sport referees are among the most stressed individuals in sporting contests due to the particular duties they have (e.g., Alam et al., 2012; Anshel & Weinberg, 1995; Dorsch & Paskevich, 2007; Karademir, 2012; Khasawneh, et al., 2008; Rainey, 1995, 1999; Rainey & Hardy, 1999; Taylor, et al., 1990). Regardless of the sport type, referees share adequate commonalities in their role as a referee (Dorsch & Paskevich, 2007). They are required to assess and judge the actions that occur during the match, make fast decisions, pay attention to various aspects of the game, keep order, and solve arguments (Guillen & Feltz, 2011). All this not only makes the job very complex, but also makes it very stressful (Guillen & Feltz, 2011).

As previously mentioned, this prevalence of stress could lead to negative psychological and somatic effects on the referees' health ranging from decreased satisfaction to various levels of burnout (Gencay, 2009; Kaissidis, 1994; Rainey, 1995, 1999; Taylor et al., 1990). Regarding referees' experience of officiating, it was found that less experienced referees have higher levels of burnout than do more experienced ones. This finding is in agreement with findings from earlier studies reporting that younger age and less experience are associated with higher levels of burnout (Kruger, et al., 2012; Karademir, 2012; Schaufeli & Enzmann 1998). A possible explanation for higher levels of burnout in less experienced referees is that they start their officiating career with high expectations and noble ideals. However, they soon face stressors attached to officiating such as making errors, receiving physical or verbal abuse from athletes, coaches, or spectators (Rainey, 1995, 1999). This leads to poor performance, a sense of ineffectiveness, and lack of productivity, which in turn influence the extent to which they experience burnout. Another possible explanation could be that older and more experienced referees have previously experienced most officiating stressors and learned how to cope with stress-producing situations effectively. With respect to type of sport, the present study revealed no significant relationship between referees levels of burnout and the type of sport. This finding supports the notion that team sports have various similarities and the referees in all types of sports have similar roles and perform similar duties. The referees are responsible for making decisions that enforce the rules of the game during a match and impose penalties on individuals who do not follow the rules (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2013). In addition, they face and suffer from the same stressors such as fear of injury, pressure of the game, judgment mistakes, interpersonal conflicts, and assault committed by players, coaches and spectators (Kilani, et al. 2013, Mirjamali, Ramzaninezhad, Rahmaninia, & Reihani, 2012). The results of this study are at odds with the findings from Mirjamali et al. (2013) research on Iranian referees. Their results showed that the international referees had higher levels of stress than national referees in personal and technical performance.

Limitations and directions for future research

A limitation of the current study was the cross-sectional design. This cross-sectional design limits consideration of causal inference. Therefore, longitudinal studies are needed to track changes in burnout among sport referees overtime rather than relying on cross-sectional data. A second limitation was the ability to generalize the findings. The present study collected data from referees of only 4 team sports, football, basketball, handball and volleyball. Other sports referees may have different stressors that have lead to different perceptions of burnout. So, future research in the area of burnout among referees should be expanded to other team and individual sports in Jordan. A final limitation to the present study was the use of male referees. This is because there are few female referees in Jordan. Future research should examine the effects of gender and other demographic variables on the perception of burnout among sport referees.

Future research should also do a combination of a qualitative and quantitative research to more in-depth responses from sport referees. Moreover, it would be beneficial to further explore prevention measures of burnout that are particularly relevant to referees work.

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