

Psychological Resilience of Soccer Referees: Comparing Novices and Veterans

Daniel Amoah-Oppong., Anthonia Afosah Kwaaso., Richmond Antwi

Jukwa Senior High School, Cape Coast, Central, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the psychological resilience of soccer referees, focusing on comparing novices and veterans. Referees must possess psychological resilience, or the capacity to adjust and flourish in the face of hardship since they are frequently subjected to scrutiny and high-stress circumstances. To identify the elements that lead to resilience, a sample of 35 participants, including referees, spectators, players, media, coaches, and club administrators, were interviewed in-depth as part of this phenomenological qualitative research design. A thematic study of these two groups' approaches to stress perception and management, setback recovery, and mental health maintenance uncovered both clear contrasts and parallels. Novice referees often reported higher levels of anxiety and self-doubt, attributing these feelings to their limited experience and the high expectations placed upon them. In contrast, veteran referees demonstrated greater confidence and a robust repertoire of coping strategies, developed through years of on-field experience. The results show that seasoned referees had better levels of psychological resilience than their less experienced peers. The development of mental toughness over time, experience-based coping mechanisms, and the support networks at their disposal are among the major themes that have been found. Contrarily, novices frequently experience self-doubt and lack the strong coping strategies that veterans possess. It is widely believed that the primary cause of the worldwide decline in referee numbers is the poor management of soccer officials. The study concludes that psychological resilience is a dynamic trait that may be enhanced with practice and the right kind of assistance. According to the study's conclusions, the relevant organisations should inform all parties involved about changes to the game's laws, target resilience training for novice referees, establish mentorship programs to bridge the gap between novices and veterans and hire sports psychologists to help new referees develop their mental faculties. These measures are vital for enhancing the overall performance and well-being of referees in the competitive environment of soccer.

Keywords: Novice, Phenomenological, Psychological resilience, Soccer referees, Veteran

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

To maintain the fairness and integrity of competitions, referees are indispensable. Their decisions have a significant impact on the outcome of games, putting their accountability under intense scrutiny. As a result, referees are subjected to intense pressure, criticism, and stress from players, coaches, spectators, and media analysts in equal measure (Duvina, & Jost, 2019; Pehkonen, 2019). Getting through this never-ending trial by fire requires strong mental toughness, which is defined as the ability to adjust and flourish in the face of hardship, pressures, and complex obstacles. This resilience is critical for referees' overall well-being in addition to being essential for them to perform their jobs accurately (Cowden, Meyer-Weitz & Asante, 2016). A lack of resilience can lead to stress, anxiety, and a host of other mental health issues, which can compromise their ability to make decisions and function as a whole. Given the pivotal significance of resilience in this sphere, delving into its nuanced dynamics across fledgling and seasoned referees proves invaluable (Bui, McInnes, Ennis & Foster, 2023).

Psychological resilience is an essential characteristic for people in high-stress occupations like sports officiating. It is described as the ability to manage emergencies and quickly regain emotional or mental equilibrium (Jacobs & Keegan, 2022). Referees who possess this resilience are better equipped to handle the demands and challenges

that come with their jobs. These difficulties include having to absorb criticism from players, coaches, and spectators while making snap judgments with great importance (Hani, 2021). The transition from a newbie to an experienced referee is marked by a substantial amount of experience and exposure to a range of game situations (Loghmani, Cuskelly & Webb, 2021). Along the way, this developmental journey develops psychological resilience in addition to honing technical proficiency and rule knowledge. Comparing the psychological fortitude of inexperienced and seasoned referees provides insightful information about how experience affects referees' ability to handle the unique pressures of the job (Pizzera, Laborde, Lahey & Wahl, 2022). Inexperienced referees usually have less experience and may struggle more than the psychological demands of the job. They may exhibit elevated levels of tension and anxiety, which might affect their ability to make decisions. On the other hand, seasoned referees are more likely to have developed coping skills and stress-reduction strategies. Their accumulated experiences probably help them be more self-assured and control their emotions. Referees' psychological resilience is influenced by a multitude of elements, including exposure and experience, training and support systems, as well as unique personality qualities and coping mechanisms. Experienced referees learn to cope with fatigue and psychological stress, which only negatively influences decision-making performance during submaximal physical stress conditions (Liu, Zhao, Wang, Gao & Zhang, 2022).

Referees have a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of the game in the high-stakes arena of soccer (Prots, Chopylko & Prots, 2023). Quick-witted decision-makers, their decisions have the power to tip the odds in favour of winning, frequently in front of relentless players, coaches, and passionate supporters. Referees must be resilient because of the constant strain they face, which can lead to a variety of psychological problems (Damrah, Pitnawati, Astuti, Muthahari, Erianti & Zulbahri, 2022). The ability to handle adversity and quickly return to a state of balance, known as psychological resilience, becomes essential to both successful refereeing and individual well-being. While the idea of psychological resilience has received a lot of attention from a variety of occupations that are high-stress and subject to public scrutiny, little study has been done on the resilience dynamics unique to soccer referees, especially when comparing the experiences of rookies and seasoned officials. In contrast to their more experienced peers, who have developed their skills over time and may have stronger coping methods, novice referees face different obstacles and pressures (Castillo-Rodríguez, Caparrós, Figueiredo, González-Fernández & Onetti-Onetti, 2023). The lively soccer culture of the Central Region of Ghana, which is tucked away in the country's centre, offers a perfect setting for this investigation. Its patchwork of soccer leagues provides an ideal environment for examining the paths taken by new and seasoned referees. By focusing on this location, the study hopes to uncover lessons that apply to other comparable athletic environments around the world. The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare the psychological fortitude of novice and experienced soccer referees (McCalman, Goddard, Fransen, Crowley-McHattan & Bennett, 2023). By investigating how experience shapes resilience, it seeks to provide useful hints for improving training programs and supporting structures that are suited to referees at various stages of their careers. Deciphering these nuances is essential to guaranteeing referees carry out their responsibilities effectively and maintain their mental health (Channon & Khomutova, 2023).

Soccer referees play a vital role in maintaining the integrity and flow of the game, but their work is not without its challenges, including high-stress situations, tense relationships with coaches and players, and media and fan scrutiny (Nurcahya, Rusdiana, Hidayat, Sidik, Kusumah, Yamin & Akbar, 2023). Referees play a critical role in sports since they are in charge of upholding the law, guaranteeing fair play, and rendering important decisions that have a big impact on games' outcomes. Referees are crucial, yet they frequently work under extreme pressure, deal with high-stress situations, and receive criticism from players, coaches, and fans. These difficulties may have an impact on their productivity and mental health (Nurcahya, Rusdiana, Hidayat, Sidik, Kusumah, Yamin, & Akbar, 2023). Referees must possess psychological resilience, or the capacity to handle stress and overcome hardship, to continue being effective and retain their emotional well-being. Individual differences in psychological resilience can be attributed to a variety of circumstances, including prior experience (Wang, Wang, Huang & Wan, 2023). Compared to novice referees who are unfamiliar with the profession and its demands, veteran officials, who have amassed years of experience, may have acquired coping mechanisms and resilience that enable them to handle stress more effectively (Lima, Devran, Öz, Webb & Bayraktar, 2022).

To create specialized training and support programs to increase the resilience of referees at various phases of their careers, it is imperative to comprehend these distinctions. Referee performance and well-being can be

improved by training programs and support systems that take these distinctions into account. This way, both new and seasoned referees will be prepared to protect their mental health while upholding the integrity and flow of the game (Peeters, Caniels & Verbruggen, 2022). This research aims to examine and contrast the psychological resilience of inexperienced and seasoned soccer referees to get insight into how experience affects their capacity to manage the psychological demands of officiating. This sheds light on how experience affects referees' capacity to withstand the demands and strains of their work by comparing the psychological resilience of novice and veteran officials. By focusing on soccer referees, this study hopes to add to the already rich body of research on psychological resilience. Examining the resilience gap between inexperienced and experienced soccer referees aims to disentangle resilience and identify pathways for assistance and intervention.

Research Questions

1. What types of violence do referees experience during soccer matches?
2. How can referees' level of experience lead to violence?
3. How do the levels of psychological resilience differ between novice and veteran soccer referees?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research methodology. For this study, the phenomenological qualitative research approach was selected as the research strategy. This method entails a thorough analysis of the participant's environment (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Instead, of trying to create an objective report of the thing or the event itself, it investigates a person's understanding and is concerned with personal observation or account of an object or event. A philosophical explanation of the experiences of violence and its impact on human intentionality can be found in a phenomenological approach to understanding violence (Kuchinke, 2022).

Study Area

The central region of Ghana is rich in history, culture, and natural resources, making it an intriguing area for study. The Central Region is home to numerous historical sites, including Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle, which played significant roles in the transatlantic slave trade. Studying the history of these sites and their impact on the region and the world can provide valuable insights into the colonial past and its legacy. The region is known for its vibrant cultural heritage, including traditional festivals like the Fetu Afahye festival in Cape Coast and the Aboakyer festival in Winneba. Investigating the significance of these festivals, traditional rites, and cultural practices can deepen understanding of the local culture. The Central Region boasts diverse ecosystems, including coastal plains, forests, and rivers. Researching topics such as environmental conservation, biodiversity, and sustainable resource management can shed light on the region's ecological significance and the challenges it faces. The region is also important economically, with industries such as fishing, agriculture, and tourism playing key roles. Analyzing economic trends, development initiatives, and their impact on local communities can provide valuable insights into the region's economic dynamics. The Central Region Football Association (CRFA) is the governing body or organization responsible for overseeing football (soccer) activities within the region. They manage leagues, tournaments, and other football-related events at various levels, from grassroots to professional in the region. They also work closely with the national football association (GFA) to promote sport and develop talent within the region.

Data Source and Sampling Procedures

To collect data for the study, in-depth interviews were conducted. According to Rolland (2023), in-depth interviews give participants the flexibility to answer questions on their terms, as opposed to pressuring them to select from pre-prepared answers. The participants in this study were drawn from stakeholders of soccer in the Central Region of Ghana including media, club administrators, fans, coaches, referees, and soccer players. The study's sample size was determined by taking into account the data saturation. Daher (2023) claims that saturation happens when no new ideas or facts are coming. In the Central Region, coaches, media, club administrators, players, supporters, and referees provided qualitative data. The research was carried out on thirty-

five subjects. Random, snowball, and accidental sampling were the sample techniques employed in this study. Enrolling a sufficient number of participants who met the study's inclusion criteria was made feasible by these techniques. The researcher selected volunteers who could provide the information needed to look into the phenomenon under study with the help of these samples. An accidental sampling technique was used to get responses from fans who were inadvertently contacted while football games were in progress. To contact a few potential participants who have directly experienced violence originating from football matches within a specific context, the researcher used the snowball sampling technique, which relies on referrals from initial participants.

ANALYSIS

Trustworthiness

In an attempt to ensure the trustworthiness of the results, a peer-review process was employed to examine the thematic analysis. This entailed exploring the methods, data analysis, and decision-making processes at every stage of the study. Additionally, the researchers were familiar with the Ghanaian football culture including officiating. They also had extensive knowledge of the various stakeholder groups in this particular sport and region. This familiarity and understanding before the study assisted with access to the participants and also helped to build a rapport which facilitated the interview process.

RESULTS

Table 1: Participants' Characteristics

Scale	Sub-Scale	Frequency
Gender	Male	23
	Female	12
Age	18-20	10
	21-29	6
	30-39	9
	40-49	7
	50-59	3
Level of Education	Basic Education	9
	Secondary Education	14
	Tertiary Education	12
Occupation	Media	2
	Coaches	3
	Club Administrators	5
	Players	8
	Referees	7

	Fans	11
Years of Work	1-10	15
	11-20	20

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 2: Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Type of violence	1.1. Referee abuse 1.2. Insults 1.3. Cursing
2. Referees' Experience and Violence Occurrence	2.1. Experience referees (Veterans) 2.2. Inexperience referees (Novices)

Source: Field Data (2024)

Theme 1: Types of violence

Physical abuse. The participants were of the view that physical abuse was the kind of violence referees were subjected to. Participants explained that referees are usually attacked by the spectators, players, and coaches. The following excerpts support this claim:

A player misbehaved and I showed him a red card and that player gave me a knock. I tried to fight the player back and the supporters came to the field to beat me severally. The supporters threw objects at me and the other match officials and those who were closer to us kicked and hit us with their legs and hands respectively. I disallowed a goal scored by the home team because it was offside and the supporters came to me on the field of play to attack me. I collapsed and was sent to Abura Dunkwa Hospital (Referees).

When sometimes supporters think that officiating did not go their way you will see them throwing stones, sachet water, kicking, and hitting. I have seen a referee being slapped, a referee who was attacked and his uniform torn, and a referee who was brought down by supporters and heavily beaten at Robert Mensah Sports Stadium, Cape Coast. I have also seen a referee who was forced out of the stadium with a sachet of water, plastic materials, sticks and metallic objects thrown by the supporters at the stadium. As for Saltpond United supporters, we beat referees most often. Whenever we are angry, anything that we hold hands with is used to beat the referees. When the referees make mistakes, we do not forgive them at all. We have beaten referees several times and mostly throw stones at the referees and we do not feel anything bad because the referees call for violence. As for Swedru professional supporters, we hardly beat referees but if they officiate badly, then we beat them. When we are angry, anything that we hold hands with is used to beat the referees. In the last one that happened in our match venue some of the supporters used a catapult to injure the referee because the supporters assumed that the referee was biased towards them (Fans).

I have seen referees being beaten before and am even a culprit I have beaten about three referees when I was coaching Srowie United. I most of the time slap them from their back. Some of the supporters throw stones, hit them with sticks, and most often slap the referees when they are not pleased with certain decisions. Some of the supporters throw stones, hit them with sticks, and most often slap the referees when they are not pleased with certain decisions (Coaches).

I have seen a referee being abused before and I can confidently say that my team was a victim to this three years

ago. *One of my players abused a referee by kicking and hitting him with the fist when he was sent off. Meanwhile, the referee was firm and neutral that very day. It is hurtful when referees are abused and I become angry when I see people brutalising them when they are discharging their duties (Media).*

Insults. The participants were of the view that insults were another kind of violence referees face on the field of play. The following excerpts support this claim:

I disallowed a penalty for the home team and the players started insulting me (by using the f-work) and cursing me. Mostly, the fans, players, and coaches insult referees when a decision goes against them. They went to the extent of insulting my parents and other family members. (Referees).

A novice referee also said that;

The insults from fans, players and coaches put me into psychological trauma. I became disturbed and frustrated till the last blow of the whistle. I could not concentrate during the match because the kind of insults that melted at me demolished me. I decided to quit officiating but my instructors talked to me afterwards (catch them young referee)

Cursing. Some participants claimed that most of the stakeholders curse the referees when they lose a match. They supported this claim;

We, the fans of Betenase FC, cursed the referees after the abrupt end of the Central Region middle league final held at the Cape Coast Sports Stadium in the 2023/2024 football season. We saw that the referees were in the game to cheat our team so we cursed the referees with some of the lesser gods in our area. Some of their decisions helped our opponent, UCC Youngsters FC, to qualify for the National Division One League (Soccer Fan)

Theme 3: Referees' experience and violence occurrence

Referees' experience and violence occurrence were a major theme that emerged out of participants' data. It was evident that participants held varied views concerning referees' experience and the occurrence of violence during matches. Some participants were of the view that the experienced referees are usually violated. This trend is because spectators believe that these referees should not be making certain mistakes. Some participants said:

At places where inexperienced referees make mistakes and the supporters know very well that these referees are inexperienced; they will not do anything to them. People will take it that the referee does not know the laws of the game and classify them as incompetent. However, the experienced ones suffer the most because the supporters perceive that these officials know the rules of the game but due to behind-the-scenes manipulations, these referees usually cheat some clubs. Hence, these referees are beaten (Referee, 35 years).

We mostly beat referees who are experienced because the old gurus are the ones who take bribes to officiate to favour the highest bidders. The inexperienced referees are sometimes afraid to rob a team and no team can approach these inexperienced referees because they can even report you to the appropriate quarters for bribery and corruption. As for the experienced referees, it is their habit to cheat teams because they sometimes call the team officials and negotiate the amount for the games. So, if we see that the senior referees are making mistakes then we assume that their decisions are intentional and biased. Hence, these referees are usually beaten (Fan, 39 years).

The inexperienced referees are not attacked much because we know that they do not know the laws much so if they commit any error(s) people pardon or forgive them. But for the experienced referees, supporters do not show any mercy for them because there is a perception that experienced referees like taking money from teams to compromise match outcomes for the other teams to win so any error(s) by referees, people perceive that it is intentional. Hence, these referees are beaten (Coach, 43 years).

However, some participants are of the view that inexperienced referees are the most violated because they are not conversant with the rules and regulations and how spectators behave at match centres. Hence, they are sometimes influenced by distractions from the spectators which make them make mistakes and subsequently

lead to their abuse.

More often, it is the inexperienced referees who suffer violence. This violent behaviour occurs to match officials because they can't stand the crowd and will be tense during officiating which will make them take wrong decisions. When people start to shout at them, the referees begin to falter by making wrong decisions because their knowledge of the laws of the game is inadequate (Fan, 39 years).

DISCUSSION

The study's findings suggest that physical abuse, insults and curses were the type of violence experienced by referees during soccer matches. That is the referees are beaten by spectators, players, or/and coaches. This type of violence is described as criminal violence (Ndlovu, 2023). This type of violence causes injury or even death resulting in criminal or unlawful charges. The finding is reliable and consistent with the findings of Mojtahedi (2019) who found that 15% of referees were physically abused while on the job which mostly resulted in the hospitalisation of the referees. Mojtahedi's study (2019) does not differ from this current study. Mojtahedi's study (2019) also found that verbal aggression was the most common (64%) form of abuse against referees followed by threats (36%). The difference between Mojtahedi's study (2019) and this current study could be as a result of strict security presence and proper infrastructure at the match centres, hence spectators are limited in their attempt to abuse referees physically. Consequently, they resort to verbal aggression most often. Similar to the findings of this current study are the findings of Fuente, Cantón, Montes, and Abella (2019) who found that referees were abused by spectators, players and coaches. Comparably, an exploratory study of abuse of referees in the English football league conducted by Webb, Rayner, and Thelwell (2018) revealed that 85.4% of referees experienced verbal abuse while 16.9 % of referees experienced some form of physical abuse whilst officiating. Although rugby and football are not the same, it is evident that referees are abused while officiating. The difference in the type of game could be a possible explanation for the prevalence of the kind of abuse experienced by referees while officiating. Similar to what was shown in earlier research (Fuente, Cantón, Montes & Abella, 2019), physical abuse from players, coaches, and fans was the most common form of hostility experienced by referees in the study.

The findings revealed that both experienced (veterans) and inexperienced referees (novices) are abused, insulted and cursed. In other words, the experience of the referee does not matter. However, the results showed that experienced referees are mistreated because viewers, supporters, players, and coaches think they are prejudiced because of bribes, while inexperienced officials are mistreated because they are incompetent. The findings of Ndlovu (2023), who indicated that referees from several levels on the football federation's referee continuum were laid up to a significant level of abuse or mishandling, are similar to those of this study. Inconsistent with the findings of this study is that of Folkesson et al. (2002) whose study focused on soccer referees' experience of threat and aggression in Värmland. These authors found that younger referees were mostly abused, insulted and cursed as compared to older referees. Folkesson et al. (2002) further investigated whether the experience of these younger referees contributed to their abuse, insult and curse or not. The findings showed that although younger soccer referees were the most abused, insulted and cursed, their experience did not play any role in the act. In other words, the experience of the younger referees does not contribute to their abuse. Additionally, the result showed that veteran referees can contain the pressure from the other stakeholders as compared to novice referees. The latter go to the extent of quitting officiating because of these acts. The current study is in line with that of Folkesson et al. (2002). Novice referees feel frustrated and traumatized when they are intimidated during soccer matches. They make unwarranted decisions to favour certain teams because of abuse, insults and curses (Zhang, Li, Gómez-Ruano, Memmert, Li, & Fu, 2022).

Practical Implications

In present-day sports, psychological resilience is a broadly used expression when it comes to performance. It is a factor, which differentiates the effective officials from the ineffective ones. Sports referees with psychological toughness can improve their excellence to the top level at crucial moments in a field. In recent years, scientists have started considering soccer referees as performers in their working areas. Referees have a propensity to react angrily and seek retribution when they are subjected to abuse and feel helpless and defenceless as a result. When making decisions, referees often favour the opponent or the opposing team to make up for previous infractions.

According to research by Biemen and colleagues (2023), 92% of referees admitted receiving personal threats, insults, and displays of rage; 32% of these officials claimed that these actions had an impact on the game's outcome. When a referee is mistreated, it may lead to unfair bias because the offending player's or coach's team will be oppressed or victimized. A sporting event's impartiality and fairness may be impacted if soccer referees are mistreated. Furthermore, the officials demonstrated that more than 50% of the time, aggressive behaviour led to the official losing control of the game (Biemen, Oudejans, Savelsbergh, Zwenk & Mann, 2022). In the end, this will have a variety of effects on Division Two affecting the referees' focus, performance, motivation, and decision-making (by favouring the opposition in those decisions). It also has the potential to have an impact on the fairness of the Division Two contest; and finally, the majority of the novice referees will leave the profession. The creation of interventions that address the reasons for referee abuse at different levels is necessary for the prevention of referee abuse, as recommended by the study's participants. Along with the support of numerous stakeholder groups, a proactive approach to referee abuse is crucial. Recognizing the differences in resilience between novice and veteran referees is crucial for designing effective training programs tailored to their specific needs.

Novice referees typically need more support in managing stress and making decisions under pressure. On the other hand, veteran referees can benefit from advanced techniques to maintain or enhance their resilience. Pairing novice referees with seasoned veteran mentors can offer invaluable real-life guidance and support, helping novices build resilience through shared experiences and effective coping strategies (Pizzera, Laborde, Lahey & Wahl, 2022). Veterans often have better-developed coping mechanisms for handling stress. Introducing these techniques into the training programs for novices early in their careers can significantly improve their on-field performance and decision-making skills. Resilient referees are less likely to be swayed by external pressures, such as crowd reactions or high-stakes situations (Kalinowski, Bugaj, Bojkowski, Kueh & Kuan, 2022). Ensuring that all referees develop psychological resilience regardless of their experience level can result in more consistent and fair officiating. Regular consultations with sports psychologists can help identify early signs of burnout or stress, especially in novice referees who may struggle more initially. For veteran referees, these assessments can ensure their long-term mental health. Providing access to counselling and mental health services can help referees cope with the psychological demands of their role, thereby preventing long-term issues such as burnout or anxiety. Novice referees who develop resilience are more likely to stay in the profession, which helps reduce turnover rates. Building resilience in new referees can lead to a more stable and experienced workforce (Wang, Wang, Huang & Wan, 2023).

Ensuring that veteran referees maintain their resilience can help extend their careers, preserving a high level of experience and expertise within the officiating community. Gathering data on the performance of referees across different experience levels can offer valuable insights into how resilience impacts their effectiveness. This data can then be used to refine and enhance training and support programs. Implementing robust feedback systems, where referees can reflect on their performance and receive constructive feedback, can help build resilience (Hani, 2021). This approach is particularly important for novices as they learn to adapt to the pressures of their role. Creating a community where referees, both novice and veteran, can share experiences and support each other can foster a sense of belonging and collective resilience. Regular workshops focused on psychological resilience can keep referees informed about the latest techniques and provide a platform for sharing best practices (Wang, Wang, Huang & Wan, 2023).

According to the facts mentioned above, this is typically connected to important strategic choices like goal disallowance, offside judgments, and disciplinary actions. Referees would benefit from instruction and assistance focused on making these choices. Pizzera, Laborde, Lahey, and Wahl (2022) have highlighted the importance of contextualizing referee judgments for coaches and players by emphasizing the role and complexity of official decision-making in coaching courses. Similarly, there is a need for referees to be more widely advocated for in the association's major decision-making situations. When media analysts criticize referees for making mistakes, they are not helping anyone. Referees have to make very tough judgments in real time due to physiological and psychological constraints. Not as referee failures to which scapegoating for unfavourable outcomes can be connected, but rather as a way to highlight the difficulties referees encounter when making complicated decisions on time, some of which may result in accidental errors. All parties involved in association football need to buy into the idea that there hasn't been any intentional wrongdoing.

Strengths of this Study

The study provides a detailed analysis of psychological resilience among soccer referees, comparing novices and veterans. This thorough examination allows for a deep understanding of how experience affects resilience and coping mechanisms. The focus on the Central Region of Ghana provides a specific context that can offer insights into the regional dynamics of referee abuse, which may apply to other similar contexts worldwide. The study concludes with practical recommendations for organizations to improve referee management and support, such as educational initiatives and hiring sports psychologists.

Weaknesses of this Study

The weaknesses of this article include the absence of essential reference resources, especially those pertinent to Ghanaian settings. Additionally, there was limited cooperation from individuals in some carefully selected samples, resulting in delays in responding to questions. The study's reliance on entirely self-reported data significantly constrained the research, as there was no way to independently verify the claims made by participants. This reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, as participants' selective memories or desire to present themselves in a favourable light may have skewed the data. These limitations should be considered when evaluating the conclusions drawn from the study. It is also recognized that a greater understanding of how individuals engaged in sports cope with adversity is needed, not only in terms of what resilience means but also in how it is measured. This would also help to establish the longer-term implications of the erosion of well-being on the motivation of soccer referees as a key stakeholder in sport and how better to support novice referees to overcome stress, frustrations and insecurity.

Suggestions

Based on the content of the article, it is recommended that the relevant authorities establish an award scheme to recognize and reward referees who perform exceptionally well in their matches. Moreover, it is crucial to develop targeted interventions to tackle the underlying types of referee abuse, including insults and curses, at various levels of the sport. This effort should involve collaboration with multiple stakeholder groups to ensure a comprehensive approach. This study offers significant insights into the different forms of violence directed at soccer referees and their psychological resilience. Nonetheless, the article could benefit from revisions to address some of the limitations identified in the study, including, the lack of essential references and the potential biases associated with self-reported data. Additionally, it is suggested that the study expand its sample size and explore alternative methods of data collection. These steps would likely improve the validity and reliability of the research findings.

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Declaration: We declare that this study is the result of our original research.

Ethics approval and consent to participants: The right to informed consent, the right to engage in the study, the right to protection from harm of any sort, and the right to secrecy and confidentiality were all taken into

account when protecting human rights. Formal consent was sought from those who willingly decided to partake in the study by validating a well-versed agreement form. The study's research questions and other terms that were used to ensure the participants' confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity were contained in this document. Special attention was given to the asymmetric informants, interviewer relationships, and potential scenarios of participants' susceptibility in public as recommended by specialized literature.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Daniel Amoah-Oppong

Data curation: Anthonia Afosah Kwaaso & Richmond Antwi

Formal analysis: Richmond Antwi

Methodology: Daniel Amoah-Oppong

Project administration: Anthonia Afosah Kwaaso

Supervision: Daniel Amoah-Oppong

Writing-original draft: Daniel Amoah-Oppong, Anthonia Afosah Kwaaso & Richmond Antwi

Writing-review and editing: Daniel Amoah-Oppong, Anthonia Afosah Kwaaso & Richmond Antwi

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