

Analysis of Assaults on Basketball Referees in Turkey: Scientific Letter

Türkiye'deki Basketbol Hakemlerine Yapılan Saldırıların Analizi

Rıdvan EKMEKÇİ^a
Selhan ÖZBEY^b

^aSchool of Sport Science and
Technology, Pamukkale University,
Denizli

^bSchool of Physical Education and
Sport, Celal Bayar University,
Manisa

Geliş Tarihi/Received: 09.05.2008
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 20.02.2009

*Bu bildiri, ISSP 11. Dünya Spor
Psikolojisi Kongresi'nde (15-19
Ağustos 2005, Sydney-Australia)
poster bildiri olarak sunulmuştur*

Yazışma Adresi/Correspondence:
Rıdvan EKMEKÇİ
Pamukkale University,
School of Sport Science and
Technology, Denizli,
TÜRKİYE/TURKEY
rekmecki@pau.edu.tr

ABSTRACT The purpose of this study was to determine the rate and extent of assaults against sport officials at all levels. A total of 461 basketball referees participated in this survey and 19.5% (n= 90) of the participants were female and 80.5% (n= 371) were male. Forty one percent of referees reported being assaulted physically or verbally. In terms of the types of assaults, 31.4% were verbal, 2.6% were physical and 7.3% were both verbal-physical. Players and coaches together were the highest group who assaulted referees (54.4% of all assaults). "Losing ambition and getting upset" was the most common reason for assault (58.0%). Approximately, 81 percent (81.3%) of the assaults occurred during the game. Fifty-four an percent of the assailants received no punishment.

Key Words: Basketball, referee, assault, sport violence

ÖZET Bu araştırmanın amacı, Türkiye'de tüm düzeylerde hakemlere karşı yapılan karşılaştıkları saldırıları belirlemektir. Araştırmaya %19.5'i (n= 90) bayan %80.5'i (n= 371) erkek toplam 461 basketbol hakemi katılmıştır. Hakemlerin %41'i fiziksel veya sözlü olarak saldırıya uğradıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Yapılan saldırıların %31.4'ü sözlü, %2.6'sı fiziksel ve %7.3'ü sözlü ve fiziksel olarak tespit edilmiştir. Hakemlere saldırıda bulunanlar arasında %54.4'lük yüzde ile oyuncular ve antrenörler ilk sırada gelmektedir. Yapılan saldırıların nedeni olarak ilk sırada %58 ile kaybetme hırsı ve üzüntüsü gelmektedir. Hakemlere yapılan saldırıların yaklaşık %81'i (%81.3) oyun sırasında yapılmaktadır. Saldıran kişilerin %54'ü saldırı sonucunda herhangi bir ceza almıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Basketbol, hakem, saldırı, sporda şiddet

BESBD 2009;4(2):103-8

A report in the sport officials' magazine *Referee* described the legal case of Charles Taylor; a youth basketball coach who was suspended five years for beating a referee in 1995. Coach Taylor assaulted referee Charles Murray, knocking him unconscious. Murray who lost three teeth and had 26 stitches, was then hit with a metal chair by a 12 years old player, causing a broken ankle. Coach Taylor found guilty for an assault charge, was denied probation and was sentenced to five years in prison. Such stories seem more common but there has been very little formal research about assaults on sport officials.¹

Historical evidence shows that violence has been a common problem in sport for centuries, though little empirical research has been conducted on violence and assault within sport communities. After the mid-18th cen-

tury, incidence rates of sport related violence increased. Most of the incidents occurred during specific sport events and at or near the competitive environments.²

In the 21st century, sport and violence has become both relevant and a related phenomena. Specifically, in basketball and especially on referees there are many assaults appearing in Turkey. It was recently found that 235 cases of assault on referees occurred between 2002-2004 basketball seasons. Results of a survey of 782 baseball and softball umpires by Rainey (1994) found 11% of the umpires had been assaulted at some time in their careers. Nearly half of the assaults were considered serious because they involved such behaviors as punching, choking, or hitting with a bat or ball. Coaches were the most common assailants in baseball competition, but players were the most common assailants in softball competition.

On the other hand it is well documented that violence is tolerated in many forms in sport. It should not be surprising that assaults on sport officials are sometimes tolerated. For example, Smith (1986) has pointed out that hockey players and coaches believe fighting is a legitimate part of their sport, despite the fact that fighting is prohibited by the rules. Even off-the-field violence has sometimes been tolerated. Lawrence Phillips, at one time a Heisman trophy candidate, was suspended from the University of Nebraska football team for six games because he assaulted his girl friend. However, Phillips was allowed to return to the team, helping them win the national championship, and some observers believe his coach attempted to influence the legal proceedings related to his assault. Thus, tolerance for assault on sport officials may be related to a general tolerance for violence in sport.

In addition, there are some specific factors that may be related to violence and assault against sport officials. There is a tradition in the United States, dating back to 19th century baseball, of viewing sport officials as villains. Umpires and referees have historically been scapegoat by players, coaches and fans.³ The time-honored call to "Kill the ump" reflects an attitude on the part of some participants

that attacking the official is an acceptable solution when their team losing. It is easy to find such a tradition in other cultures. For example, football officials in Italy often fear for their lives from fan attacks after controversial matches in the Premier League.

Closely aligned with this tradition, there may be individuals who think that is acceptable to assault an official if they believe the official is partial towards or "in the pocket" of the opposing team. Weinberg and Gould (1995) identified factors they listed was that violence can occur when participants "perceive unfair officiating". When sport participant believe an official has behaved unfairly, they may reason that the official deserve to be punished and perceive that they are dispensing justice.

Finally another reason why some sport authorities overlook attacks on officials is that they may be reluctant to ruin the careers of player and coaches. This is especially likely if they believe the player or coach acted in the heat of competition and that the violent behavior was out of character. This reluctance may be related to the attitude that the game is really for players, coaches, and fans and that officials play a less meaningful role.

The issue of assault against sport officials has not been scientifically examined in any sport in Turkey. Therefore, it was very important to describe the situation and we believe that it will be useful for the all type of sport officiating and future research on this sport violence.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the extent and nature of assaults against male and female basketball referees in Turkey.

RESEARCH METHODS

INSTRUMENTATION

The research was made by gathering the necessary data using a survey technique. The survey was formed by 25 questions. The first group of items had ten questions to identify the demographic qualities including age, gender and number of years refereeing. The second group of items had 15 questions to define assault situation. The critical item for this

study asked respondent to mark “yes” or “no” to the question, “Have you ever been physically or verbally assaulted while refereeing?” Respondents who marked “yes” were then directed to answer 6 follow-up questions. These questions asked respondents to identify the assailant (player, coach, fan, team manager, etc.), and to identify what the reason for assault was and when the assault occurred. Also questions asked respondent to identify assailant had been punished in any way.

In the season of 2002-2003 1193 registered referees were found as active referees. Therefore, surveys were sent to 1193 certified basketball referees in Turkey. Referees were from national and local levels (Level A, B, C and federation, local and candidate). Some of the surveys were administered by representatives of the Turkish Basketball Federation who gave them to the referees; other surveys were mailed directly to the referees. Participants answered their surveys anonymously. Surveys were mailed at the end of the basketball season of 2002–2003. Survey information was analyzed using percentage, frequency, cross-tabs and arithmetic mean statistical methods.

RESULTS

Of the 1193 surveys sent to certified basketball referees in Turkey, 461 of them were returned, a 38.64% response rate. As revealed in Table 1, the average age of female and male respondents was 25.2 and 27 years respectively. The average years of refereeing experience was 3.2 years for females, and 3.8 years for males. Approximately 41 percent (41.3%) of referees reported that they had been assaulted verbally and physically at least once while officiating. Thirty-one percent of the assaults were verbal, 9.9% of the assaults were physically.

To summarize, the 461 certified referees (371 men and 90 women) in this study ranged in age from 17 to 50 years, with a mean age of 26.6 years. By comparison, Rainey and Duggan (1998) found that among American basketball referees; 92% were male and 8% were female. The referees average age was 41.9 years and refereeing experience was 14.4 years. In 1999, Rainey found 93% of referees were male, 7% of referees were female in Ohio. Kassisidis and Anshel (2000) reported that in Greece, the average age of referees was 33.9 years and refereeing experience was 8.9 years.

Referees in the age group of 22-26 year olds represented 51.6% of subjects. Forty-eight percent of the basketball referees were local referees. Considering referees education levels, 67.1% were university graduates. Regarding professional status, teachers accounted for 15.2% and 55.1% of referees were students. Thirty-one percent of referees were earning in terms of monthly income between 751 million-1 billion. Nearly 86 percent (85.8%) of referees were English speakers at the level of intermediate. Sixty-six percent had 1-3 year(s) officiating experience. Forty-five percent of referees were officiating more than six matches per month, 51.3% of referees were working 1-2 day(s) weekly and 40.6% of referees were spending 30-40 minutes training (work out).

Among respondents, 41.3% of referees (n= 192) had been assaulted; 6.94% female and 34.7% male (See Table 2).

In comparison, Rainey and Duggans (1998) found that at least one assault was reported by 98 of the respondents (13.6 percent; 91 male, 7 female).

According to the distribution of the type of assaults 31.4% were verbal, 2.6% were physical and 7.3% were both verbal-physical. Only one female

TABLE 1: Referees demographic qualities and assaults they faced by gender.

Subject Gender	Respondent		Age	Experience	Assault	
	(n)	%	Average	Average	(n)	%
Female	90	19.52	25.2	3.2	32	6.94
Male	371	80.48	27	3.8	160	34.70

TABLE 2: Type of assault against referees by gender.

Subject Gender	Respondent		Assault		Physical Ass.		Verbal Ass.	
	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%
Female	90	19.52	32	6.94	1	0.21	31	6.72
Male	371	80.48	160	34.70	45	9.76	115	24.94

referee and 45 (9.76%) male referees had been assaulted physically.

Players and coaches together were most frequently identified as assailants against referees (54.4%). Fifty-three percent of female referees reported being assaulted by coaches; and 43.8% were assaulted by players. Spectator assaults on female referees represented 40.6% and managers were 9.4%. 56.5% of male referees were assaulted by players, 49.7% of male referees were assaulted by spectators, 54.6% of male referees were assaulted by coaches and 21.1% male referees assaulted by managers (Table 3). The reason of assault with highest ratio “losing ambition and getting upset” by 58.0%. 81.3% of assault occurred “during the game”. Most of the assaults occurred in Ankara (the capital city of Turkey) by 4.3% percentage.

None of the referees reported that the physical assaults were serious or life-threatening. Many of the assaults were pushing or hitting (n= 46 referees reported including 1 female referee). Only two male referees reported that they believed their assailants had taken alcohol. Conversely, Rainey and Duggans (1998) found that among the reasons for assaults against referees, 20% involved alcohol or drugs.

Forty-six percent of referees in this study reported that their assailant was not punished in any way. Temporary suspension was the most common consequence the federation discipline committee has given to the assailants. A few fines (between \$250-\$500) had been seen in research of discipline committee reports.

Among referees assaulted, 4.1% reported the assault occurred before the game, 81.3% during the game and 53.4% after the game. It may be inferred from the totals that a referee may be assaulted more than once during the course of an event (Table 4). Referees reported that people are assaulting them because they are losing their inhibitions and/or their team is losing the game because of the referee.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Very little research (in comparison to athletes) on the sources of stress, anxiety and violence/assault

TABLE 3: Who assaulted on referees.

Gender Assailant	Female		Male		Total	
	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%
Player	14	43.8	91	56.5	105	54.4
Spectator	13	40.6	80	49.7	93	48.1
Coach	17	53.2	88	54.6	105	54.4
Manager	3	9.4	34	21.1	37	19.1
Total	47	147.0	293	181.9	340	176.0

TABLE 4: Assault time.

Gender Assault time	Female		Male		Total	
	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%
Before the game	1	3.1	7	4.3	8	4.1
During the game	26	81.3	131	81.4	157	81.3
After the game	15	46.9	88	54.6	103	53.4
Total	42	131.3	226	140.3	268	138.8

has been performed with basketball officials.⁴ Kassisidis and Anshel (1993) compared both the intensity and the sources of stress levels between young and adult basketball officials. Results showed younger (ages 14-18 years) referees were significantly more stressed than their adult (19-46 years) colleagues in making a wrong call and administering a technical foul. Stressors that were ranked the lowest included presence of the media, making a mistake in mechanics, and verbal abuse by spectators. Anshel and Weinberg (1995) found that Australian and American basketball referees differed markedly in the selected sources of stress. Stressors such as making the wrong call, verbal abuse by players, verbal abuse by spectators, and arguing with players were significantly different between cultures. Anshel and Weinberg (1996) with the use of the Basketball Officials Sources of Stress Inventory (BOSSI) discovered that American and Australian referees were more similar than different in terms of coping with strategies. Although there was a cultural difference in the self reported use of behavioral and emotional coping strategies, similarities arose between the actual coping strategies (i.e., giving a technical foul).

Anshel and Weinberg (1996) also found that far more Americans (39%) than Australians (13%) used the coping strategy of talking to the coach calmly in an abusive situation. Americans also preferred to ignore the coach and remain on task when arguing, while the Australians opted to discuss the coach's feelings. Burke and his friends (2000) reported a study in which National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball officials were asked to rank their stressors. Coaches were listed as two of the top three stressors, and a total of six of the top 14 stressors that officials encounter. Although the officials considered their role to be personally satisfying and rewarding, 90.6% reported their role to be stressful (43.5% = very stressful to stressful; 47.1% = moderately stressful).

While less than half of basketball referees in Turkey reported that they had been assaulted at some time during their officiating, the percentage (41.3%) is significantly high. Differences in assault rates between male (34.6%) and female (6.9%) referees must be considered seriously. Assaults on male referees were reported at approximately five times the rate of assaults on female referees. The differences could be due to social-cultural norms. Players, coaches and spectators may be more polite to female referees or the differences may be simply due to the lower number of female referees. In any case, female referees number too low as a whole among national certified referees. Although we can see some increase in the number of female referees in recent years, it is not representative of the female population in basketball, including players and coaches.

Other considerable result of the study is the type of the assault. Physical assaults are not as significant as verbal assaults in each subject. Other thing of this situation is about basketball federation. The federation has to take responsibility or use authority and give deterrent punishment to the assailant. Finally, there was considerable support for the hypothesis that many assaults on referees would be lightly punished or not punished at all. There was a similar pattern of results reported by

Rainey (1994) for assaults on baseball and softball umpires. In that study there was a significant relationship between seriousness of assault and seriousness of punishment.

Assault can be a reason for personal and environmental source of stress. Referees who have feeling assault threat from players, coaches, spectators and persons related to the game can be stressful during officiating. Stress affects performance of the referees and motivation on the game can be lost. This situation will completely change the game atmosphere and no one will enjoy it.

Along these lines, Burke and Miller (1990) argue that almost all of the training involved for sports officiating is restricted to the technical aspect of their performance with relatively little psychological training typically available in coping with stress. Given the extent to which sports officials are exposed to acute stress, and the potential deleterious effects of stress on the performance and retention of officials in sport, it is essential for researchers to study the coping process in sports officiating and to test the effectiveness of stress management programs.

When sport participants believe an official has behaved unfairly, they may reason that the official deserves to be punished and perceive that they are dispensing justice. Another reason why sport authorities overlook attacks on officials is that they may be reluctant to ruin the careers of players and coaches. This is especially likely if they believe the player or coach acted in the heat of competition and that the violent behavior was out of character. This reluctance may be related to the attitude that the game is really for players, coaches, and fans and that officials play a less meaningful role.

As Rainey (1998) mentioned in his study, while there is certainly a need for more research to examine the generality of these findings and to study the conditions surrounding assaults on officials, it is clear that this violent behavior should no longer be tolerated.

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