
ETHIOPIAN SOCCER REFEREES' EXPERIENCE OF THREAT, AGGRESSION, BURNOUT, STRESS AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES, ETHIOPIA, 2018/2019

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ABSTRACT

Soccer is the most popular sport worldwide and attracts both the greatest number of participants, as well as spectators. In Ethiopia, soccer is also one of the most popular sport. In soccer history, we have witnessed different threats and aggression on match referees. In recent years, in Ethiopia, we had heard and watching those kinds of inappropriate behaviors directed at referees. Due to this it is expected referees are experiencing stress and burnout. There was a multitude of investigations dealing with sports fans' aggression, threats, stress, and burnout in sports, but there is a lack of studies focusing on soccer referees exposed to threats, aggression, stress, and burnout. The experience of their coping strategies from these kinds of problem should be identified to alleviate the cases. Therefore, the aim of the study was to investigate Ethiopian Soccer Referees' Experience of Threat, Aggression, Burnout, Stress and their Coping strategies, Ethiopia, 2018/2019.

The Phenomenological qualitative study design was used from December 15, 2018, to January 14, 2018. The study included 45 present and former Ethiopian federal and international level referees by using purposive and snowball sampling. Data was collected by using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. A descriptive qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion involving those study participants was carried out to find out how referees experience threats, aggression, stress, and burnout directed to soccer referees by using a statistical software called NVivo.

All Ethiopian soccer referees had an experience of threat and aggression. Verbal aggression was the most aggression type that the Ethiopian soccer referees experienced.

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1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Having a sufficient number of sports referees to meet the demand for increased levels of participation in organized competitive sport can be achieved through any one or a combination of three actions. First, recruitment of additional sports referees where sports administrators work at attracting more people to take on roles as sports referees. Second, improving productivity where sports administrators negotiate increases in the workload of current sports officials by allocating more games per official or allocating fewer officials per game. Finally, increased retention where sport managers concentrate their efforts on reducing average rates of attrition and increasing the career length of current sports officials through improved training and organizational support strategies. From many studies, it was found that many referees facing different threats and aggression. Due to these, they are experiencing stress and burnout.

Sporting performances are associated with a number of different dimensions including suffering, hysteria, excitement, drama, traditional ideals, cheating, and aggression (Messner, 1992; Strählman, 1997). It has been suggested that sports provide an opportunity for the expression of feelings and emotions (i.e., aggression) (Coakley & Hughes, 1994), which on the one hand may lead to improved mastering of stressful and emotionally charged situations while on the other hand may lead to violent and aggressive behavior.

Such conduct in team sports may also be conceptualized as a kind of social interaction (Mummendey & Mummendey, 1983), which would suggest that aggression is not judged as an isolated act but as a set of actions and reactions between individuals. In many contexts including sport, individuals who transgress social norms and/or cause harm to another are confronted with the others' negative reactions and are frequently called upon to account or give a verbal explanation for that violation (Ohbuchi, 1999; Petrucci, 2002; Weiner, 1995).

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; 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 et al., 2013; Anshel & Weinberg, 1995).

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 (Alam et al., 2012; Allen, 2006; Altahayneh, 2003; Caccese &

Mayerberg, 1984; Campbell et al., 1985; Cresswell & Eklund, 2006).

Unlike most other roles in sport, referees are distinctive in that they have clear on-court (or field) and off-court (or field) responsibilities. Referees are key members of the workforce in the sport setting. From a service perspective, they ensure that competitions are conducted safely and under sanctioned rules and regulations. Referees are also key members of the on-court competitive play in organized sport. Thus, referees have both on-court and off-court experiences--a somewhat unique phenomenon in the sports workforce. Perhaps due to the duality of their involvement in sports programs, and methodological difficulties in capturing such experiences, referees have been understudied.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Soccer is the most popular sport worldwide and attracts both the greatest number of participants, as well as spectators. In Ethiopia, soccer is also one of the most popular sport. Soccer matches are intensely followed, as is demonstrated by millions of fans. In addition to the worldwide popularity of soccer, another phenomenon, called “football hooliganism” added to the rationale for this study. Football hooliganism includes forms of verbal and physical violence against players, match officials, as well as spectators. It also includes vandalizing clubs and private property (Dunning, 2000).

In Ethiopian football, there are recorded cases of players and coaches physically assaulting officials, throwing equipment at officials, and yelling and screaming at them. In last year's higher league competitions, many referees were attacked by players, when a teammate was sent off, a penalty award is given, and a goal was disallowed.

There is a multitude of investigations dealing with sports fans' aggression, threats, stress, and burnout in sports, but there is a lack of studies focusing on sports judges/referees/umpires exposed to aggression.

Referees routinely experience dissent and abuse and other forms of aggression at all levels of match. They experience hostile reactions to their decisions and aggressive attempts to influence them from players, coaches, parents, and spectators. Abuse of sports officials is widely understood to be the main reason for a decline in the number of sports officials in different countries. Although there have been many investigations dealing with sports fan and other aggression, threats, stress, burnout and coping strategies in sports, there is a lack of studies that have focused about sports judges/referees/umpires exposed to aggression, threats, stress, and burnout; especially in Ethiopia, there were no previous studies in this area. So, an evidence-based approach is mandatory to respond comprehensively to resolve this issue. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Threats, Aggression, Burnout, Stress

and their Coping strategies experienced by Ethiopian Soccer Referees, Ethiopia, 2018/2019.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

Investigate Ethiopian Soccer Referees' Experience of Threat, Aggression, Burnout, Stress and their Coping strategies, Ethiopia, 2018/2019

3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Theme 1: Investigate to what extent soccer referees are exposed to and the type of threat and aggression from soccer players, coaches/trainers, and the watching public

Theme 2: Examine how threat and aggression influence referees' concentration, motivation, and performance

Theme 3: Examine the levels of burnout experienced by Ethiopian soccer referees, and the effects of refereeing level and years of refereeing experience on these levels of burnout.

Theme 5: Examining the coping strategies among professional Ethiopian soccer referees

4. METHODS

4.1 STUDY DESIGN AND PERIOD

A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized in this research, allowing soccer referees to explore the experience of threat, aggression, stress, burnout, and their coping strategies. Phenomenology encourages researchers to not stray from the context which is

being researched and to stay true to the original meaning of the data, rather than reducing the data to several measurable, and controllable variables (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). It allows the participant to reflect on their experiences, therefore developing their meaning or 'perception' related to that experience (Smith et al., 2009). The present study was conducted from December 15, 2018, to January 14, 2018.

5. THE STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is in the north-eastern part of Africa commonly known as the Horn of Africa. Neighboring countries include Djibouti and Somalia in the east, Kenya in the south; Sudan in the west and south-west; and Eritrea in the north and north-east. Now a day Ethiopian football federation has many clubs that compete each other in three different levels. These are Ethiopia premier league, Ethiopia super league, and Ethiopia national league.

6. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Target population: All Ethiopian federal and FIFA international level soccer referees

The subject of the study: All Ethiopian federal and FIFA international level soccer referees and selected to be included in this study

7. SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

15 former and 30 current high-profile soccer referees were selected and participate in the

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present study by using purposive sampling. Among these referees, 10 were FIFA international level soccer referees. To assist this purposive sampling snowball sampling was also used. This means those existed participants recruited additional referees. Recruitment continued until data saturation (when no new information emerged from analysis) (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

8. TOOLS and COLLECTION of DATA

Data was collected by using, Focus group discussion and in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview section was used to ask all participants questions: (1) Tell me how you experience the referee situation and (2). What feelings and thoughts do you experience when judging? Questions of threats and aggression (allowing the respondents to indicate whether different forms of aggression had occurred; whether they were caused by players, coaches, or public; and the number of incidents), and questions about motivation, concentration, and performance was also interviewed.

To support the information collected through interviews, focus group discussions were used. Questions/ guidelines for FGD/prepared in English and translated to Amharic to create a better understanding. The moderator has guided the discussion and the supervisor was try to introduce topics prepared for discussion and clarifying concepts whenever needed during the discussion. Four group discussions were

employed (two in Addis Ababa, one in Hawassa, and one in Bahir Dar).

9. DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews and focus group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third party. The investigators then were listening to each of the interviews and focus group discussions tapes and scrutinized the transcriptions to verify their accuracy. Data management was facilitated using a standard word-processing package (Microsoft Word) and all transcripts were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

The interview transcriptions were analyzed using a process of selective coding. At the start of this process, instances were identified within the text where respondents have talked about issues pertinent to the project's aims. Following procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), these individual units of meaning were then initially represented by a word and then amplified into a descriptive sentence to allow for further axial coding. The result contained various sub-themes and subsequent 'thematic descriptions' were used to ensure consistent application of findings.

Once themes had been assigned at both the structural and sub-structural level, they were designated as branches within the NVivo software system for qualitative data analysis, and a further process of cross-analysis was conducted. A comparison of themes facilitated by

NVivo was also conducted at both the initial and post-analysis stages allowing units to be merged or split appropriately.

10. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the ethical review committee of the University of Gondar. An official permission letter was obtained from the Ethiopian sport /football federation/ and the Ethiopian referees association. Written consent was taken from each participant after explaining the purpose of the study. The study participants could withdraw at any time and/or refrain from responding to questions. Participants were also informed that all the data obtained from them would be kept confidential using codes instead of any personal identifiers.

11. RESULTS

11.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The respondents were predominantly male (93.33%, n=42) with 6.67% (n=3) from female referees, with the majority of the respondents (40% and 31.11%) falling within the 25-34 and 35-44 age bracket.

Theme 1: Investigate to what extent soccer referees are exposed to and the type of threat and aggression from soccer players, coaches/trainers, and the watching public

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research was to provide a detailed explanation of the experiences of threats, aggression, stress, burnout, and coping strategies among Ethiopian soccer referees. Please note that pseudonyms have been used throughout the narrative to protect the identity of the participants. These outcomes are ultimately intended to influence policy, support referees, understanding any issues they faced, and reducing any referee discontinuation.

1. Did you ever experience a threat before, during, or after officiating the game? Would you please tell me in detail about the events?

The entire referees (100%) reported that they had been experienced threats before, during, or after officiating the game. In terms of the type of the threat in total around 96% of referees reported that they had been subjected to verbal abuse whilst about 35% of referees also reported that they had received some form of physical abuse.

In addition, when referees were asked how often the abuse occurred 28% of referees said every match, 36% said every couple of games, 28% of referees replied a couple of times a season, whereas 7.9% of referees stated that they received abuse every few years, and 0% of referees also believe that they never receive abuse.

An official from the Ethiopian referee association from the focus group discussion revealed that "... we always receive an accusation from fans, players, coaches....

everybody that they were attacked or receive a death threat...I have to tell you this accusation is reported almost in every game.”

Every type of aggression and threat was experienced by the referees. Most of the threats and aggression they confronted were verbal aggression. These threats and aggressions happened to referees all the time. It could be before, during, and after the games, special when the game is decisive.

A federal referee with more than 10 years of experience in refereeing said that “Verbal aggression is common, whether it is players or club members or spectators. Physical aggression in particular scared me. I reported this to my designator who filed a report which was not followed up because I was asked if I knew the name of the individual (spectator coming towards me with a knife in their hands at the end of a match!!) I was not going to ask him his name”

The same referee revealed that “Yes, “verbal” attacks are commonplace for many referees. I suffered during a super league game ... someone spitting on my back after the match”.

The experience of aggression and threat was not limited to the referees. It extended to their families. Their families have received insults even a death threat.

A 35 years old referee from an individual interview revealed that “... It is common to

receive insulting and threats to the referees. But to your surprise, my family, my wife via her cell phone and son was from school, received of insulting and even one individual says he will kill them...”

Another Federal level referee from the group discussion said that “...2 days before the game started 3 individuals come to my home. They knocked on the door and I opened it. They said they want to talk to me in private. I responded before we talk they have to reveal who are they. After a long argument, they told me to give a favor to their team, because this point is very important for their team survival. I don’t know who told them that I am going to officiate that game. Anyways I refuse to give a favor to their team. But, they were sure that they will get a favor because they threaten me. The game was played and their team draw. After the game... what can I tell you? Hmmmm, it seems like a war. They said they are going to kill me on the field. I was gone home by getting support from polices. After coming home those individuals come home again and they threaten me not to report the events on the field. They know if I report their team is going to be punished by the federation, I have reported the event and that club was punished. Another group, who was furious about their club punishment, was come to home again....”

The sources of threats were everywhere; the players, coaching staffs, fans, club leaders, and

even the medical staff participated. It may be perceived by most concerned bodies medical staff would not involve in such kinds of inappropriate behavior.

“...The medical staff usually, after the player was injured and permitted to come to the field to support the injured player, said you did this. How could I do that? The opponent player did that. The player that did this foul was got a yellow or red card, but they accused us. And, sometimes insulting and threatening is common...” was reported by 47 years of age and an international referee during a focus group discussion.

Moreover, the inconsistent report was observed from the study participants. 44.9% of referees believe that abuse has increased in recent times, whereas 28.1% of referees do not believe abuse has increased, and 27% are not sure if abuse has increased. But the result showed that referee abuse is increasing over time.

A 34-year-old international referee said that “... for your better understanding let me tell you my statistics on this case. In the last year, tournament abuse was experienced in every five or six games. By this year's tournament, it becomes common in every two or every game ...”

Theme 2: Examine how threat and aggression influence referees' concentration, motivation, and performance

Experience of aggression and threat is expected to have adverse effects on an official's performance. In the present

study, many referees report a loss in concentration, motivation, and performance after being abused by players, coaches, and spectators.

Several participants described their reaction to mental stress as a loss of concentration, performance, and motivation.

For example, a 38-year-old female federal-level referee revealed that:-- “...It is very difficult to officiate a game with this kind of environment. My concentration gets divided. The feeling of “if I call this what will the players, the coaches, fans reacted makes?” I feel anxious. This anxiety plays a major role in losing my concentration...”

In terms of loss of motivation half of the study, participants described that their motivation was declined because of their experience of aggression and threat by players, coaches, medical staff, and spectators.

For example, the same referee, from the above, revealed that “.... When such kind of cases is happening on the field, I feel insecure. Whose problem is this? ... Is it my or my team's problem? This question always comes to my mind. So, many times I lose interest and motivation to lead a game in the next matches....”

The present study revealed that the aggregated effect of anxiety, loss of concentration, and motivation leads to a worse level of performance.

Example 47 years of age and an international referee during a focus group discussion /... “Sure the performance is going to be worse... It can be confusing when judging some games with this aggression and threats. I'm exhausted and I'm adding to it.”/... “Motivation is really low.”/ ... “... “I tell myself, 'Hey X there's just a few minutes left.' I have to tell myself, 'I can do it.' However, inspiration is still lacking... This self-talk may help me to sustain my low level of motivation, but still, the performance is going to be decline...”

Theme 3: Examine the levels of burnout experienced by Ethiopian soccer referees, and the effects of refereeing level and years of refereeing experience on these levels of burnout.

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).

To measure the level of burnout experienced by Ethiopian soccer referees

The present study revealed that the mean and the standard deviation of the RBS on the Ethiopian soccer referees were 69.28, *SD* = 17.48.

The findings presented in the lower table indicated that the majority of referees (91.12%) experienced moderate to high levels of burnout and only a few (8.88%) reported low levels of burnout.

Table 1: Level of burnout among Ethiopian soccer referees

Range	Level of Burnout	Frequency	Percentage
86-105	High	9	20
42-85	Medium	32	71.12
15-41	Low	4	8.88

To evaluate the effects of refereeing level on the levels of burnout

The maximum mean was recorded among Federal level referees as compared to International level referees. But this result was not supported by the independent t-test. To explore the relationship between the burnout level of referees and the Refereeing level, an

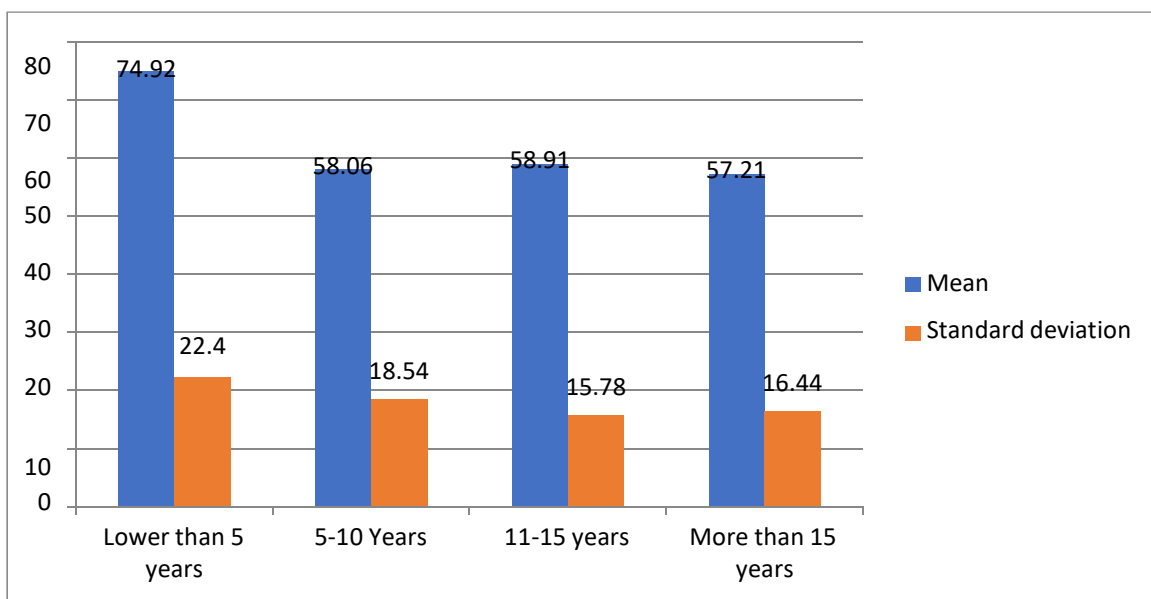
independent sample t-test was performed. The findings presented in the lower Table showed that no statistically significant relationship was observed between the burnout level of referees and their refereeing level.

Table 2. The relationship between referees' level of burnout and refereeing level.

Referring level	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	P-value
International	10	68.95	18.28	-0.219	0.854
Federal	35	71.42	16.89		

To evaluate the effects of years of refereeing experience on the levels of burnout

The mean levels of Burnout based on the referee year of experience have been illustrated in the lower figure. The figure showed that referees with less than five years of experience in referring were recorded the maximum mean followed by referees with 11-15 years of experience.



Similar to the above descriptive statistics, which showed there were differences in RBS means among a different referring year of experience, the one-way ANOVA also revealed that there is a statistically significant difference.

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Between Groups	7632.884	3	2544.3	2.3	.001
Within Groups	46608.741	42	1109.73		
Total	54241.625	45			

To find out which year of experience showed a statistically significant difference, a post hoc test was performed. The test revealed that the difference found in one-way ANOVA was occurred by the difference between mean scores of the higher and lower level of referring experience (p -value-<0.001). From the result, it was observed that less experienced referees (less than 5 years) had a higher level of burnout as compared to referees with more refereeing experience.

Post-hoc test

Year of experience	Less than five years	5-10 Years	11-15 Years	More than 15 years
Less than five years	*	**22.23	**22.76	**23.15
5-10 Years	*	*	-0.68	0.19
11-15 Years	*	*	*	4.01
More than 15 years	*	*	*	*

Theme 4: Examining the coping strategies among professional Ethiopian soccer referees

To describe the main coping strategies of professional soccer Ethiopian soccer referees

Some participants adopted active coping strategies while others adopted avoidant strategies (Table). Examples of active coping strategies included cognitive self-rewarding, planning and time management, and socializing, and communicating. On the other hand, examples of avoidant strategies were avoiding refereeing discussions with

friends, building relationships with the other sex, smoking, and physical exercise. The following themes emerged from the focus group discussions and in-depth interview:

A) Active strategies

Cognitive self-rewarding

Participants felt that referees are respected by society. The referee profession was viewed by all participants as prestigious and this is an emotional reward for them. This self-satisfaction reward compensates for the stress they feel throughout their refereeing years of experience. For example, a

participant noted:

“We have a stressful life, but I think we are greatly satisfied. Sometimes I compare myself to my relatives and I believe that I have a better social status, everybody is praising referees. You are a referee, I saw on TV, you have something ... So, I am stressed, but I’m doing good” (39 years of age International level referee)

Male 29 Years of age Federal level referee participants believed that stress is an inherent part of life that is inevitable and is lifelong. If a person wants a better social and financial life, it should be handled and dealt with healthily.

“Consultants have good lives, they’re used to stressful situations all the time, so they are okay with it” (29 Years of age Federal level referee)

Another example:

“For myself, I realized that I have to live with this stress because I think having the stress refereeing, is healthier. Otherwise, I’m not going to survive it” (39 years of age International level referee)

Socializing and communication

To lessen the stress, referees spend time with family and attend gatherings, where no one speaks about officiating a game.

“If I am stressed I go and sit with my family, I don’t show that I am stressed. They usually ask whether the game was going well. I assure them and change the topic; this is how I relieve my stress. (Female 38 years of age federal level referee)

Engaging in recreational activities

Most participants accepted that engaging in recreational activities or hobbies such as, reading, physical exercise or voluntarily work helps to relieve stress and feel relaxed. Others believed that it’s a way of self-distraction rather than stress-relieving per se. For example, they may accuse themselves of “*wasting their time*” and may feel guilty after spending time doing what they like to do. One referee noted:

“I started going to the gym ... to control the stress ... most of the time I feel guilty after going to the gym because I could spend my time studying for doing some jobs which can generate extra income” (A federal referee with more than 10 years of experience)

Other participants believed that they were not able to pursue their hobbies because of their busy schedules or as a way to avoid the guilt they may feel afterward.

B) Avoidant strategies

Avoiding refereeing discussions

A federal referee with more than 10 years of experience mentioned that to reduce the stress they may resort to non-sport friends or

colleagues who refrain from the game and sport-related discussions. This was believed to be common among referees but hard to maintain.

“I hate to hang out with some sports lovers because I know exactly what we’re going to discuss, it is all about the game... Even if we say: Do not discuss the game! We eventually do”

Smoking

Participants acknowledged that smoking is

not an effective strategy to relieve stress; however, they do smoke when they are stressed. One participant explained the smoking phenomenon as:

“One of the ways to escape stress is to try other new things in life”

Another participant explained:

“If I’m under stress or anybody is under stress, will not start smoking, but if he is a previous or a frequent smoker, and he is under stress, he will start or smoke more”

Table: Process of developing themes from focus group discussions & interviews with referees

Primary Codes	Categories	Organizing Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - View about future social and financial status to self-motivate - instant treats to self-motivate - Reframe stress to be inevitable and healthy - Organizing short-term plans - Relationship of the marital status of referees to their time management ability - Socializing - Physical exercise, reading, and volunteering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-Cognitive self-rewarding 2-Planning and time management 3- Socializing and communication 4- Engaging in recreational activities 	Active strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refraining from referring related talks with friends - Building relationships with the other gender as self-distraction or for ventilation - Smoking to relieve stress - Smoking as self-distraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Avoiding referring discussions 2- Building relationships with the other sex 3-Smoking 4-Physical exercise 	Avoidant strategies

12. DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study and connect them to the previous research, implications, recommendations for practitioners

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and future researchers, and conclusion. The purpose of the study was to investigate Ethiopian Soccer Referees' Experience of Threats, Aggression, Burnout, Stress, and their Coping strategies.

The first theme represented in the present study was investigating to what extent soccer referees are exposed to and the type of threat and aggression from soccer players, coaches/trainers, and the watching public.

The finding of the present study revealed that the entire referees (100%) had an experience of threat before, during, or after officiating the game. The result of the present study is compared with other studies. Even if the magnitude of the problem is higher in the present study, threat, and aggression before, during, and after officiating the game is common.

A possible explanation for the threats and aggressions that the spectators directed at the referee may be a lack of knowledge about the rules of the game. For instance, several participants attested to the anger that players, coaches/trainers, and the watching crowd expressed in situations when they were not fully aware of the rules or the latest interpretation of the rules.

Players and spectators often engage in abusive behavior in part due to what's known as "in-game triggers". These can be frustrations towards a decision they believe to be unfair – or as a method of externalizing their problems in the game.

Many people also use interpersonal conflict with the referee in an attempt to influence future refereeing decisions.

Such abuse is frequently demonstrated by players and managers at the highest level of football – who often face little consequences for their actions. As a result, these actions are seen as acceptable conduct by viewers and spectators. And it normalizes the behavior as an integral part of football. This allows players and spectators to emulate the actions in future matches with little consideration of the moral implications.

In terms of the type of the threat in total around 96% of referees reported that they had been subjected to verbal abuse whilst about 35% of referees also reported that they had received some form of physical abuse. This shows that how much the referees are abused in the Ethiopian context.

The second thematic area was to examine how threat and aggression influence referees' concentration, motivation, and performance. The result of the present study showed that experience of aggression and threat is expected to have adverse effects on an official's performance. In the present study, many referees report a loss in concentration, motivation, and performance after being abused by players, coaches, and spectators.

One possible explanation for this is a loss of self-confidence which affects performance. Critical situations sometimes appeared to be due to a lack of knowledge among players and spectators. Still,

the referee was blamed because he/she was expected to be responsible for managing such situations. A feeling of insecurity, depression, and a desire to quit are examples of reactions to threats and violence. However, some referees don't think they are affected by threats and violence. This result indicates that referees react differently in different situations. In addition, there was no clear support for previous findings that younger referees are more subjected to threats and aggression (Folkesson et al., 2002).

Regarding the third theme which aims to examine the levels of burnout experienced by Ethiopian soccer referees, and the effects of refereeing level and years of refereeing experience on these levels of burnout the findings indicated that the majority of referees experienced moderate to high levels of burnout and only 8.88% reported low levels of burnout. The findings of the present study are consistent with findings from other studies, 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).

A lot of studies revealed that sports referees are one of the most stressed individuals in the sports arena because of 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).

The fourth and the last theme was to examine the coping strategies among professional Ethiopian soccer referees. For this theme, the present study found that the referees used active coping (View about future social and financial status to self-motivate, instant treats to self-motivate, Reframe stress to be inevitable and healthy, Organizing short-term plans, Relationship of the marital status of referees to their time management ability, Socializing, and Physical exercise, reading, and volunteering) and avoidant coping strategies (Refraining from referring, related talks with friends, Building relationships with the other gender as self-distraction or for ventilation, Smoking to relieve stress and Smoking as self-distraction). Which of the coping strategies used more in the present study was not answered, because the data was not available (since it was not the objective of the study).

The reader will notice there are a variety of terms that refer to avoidant strategies —denial, distraction, and one could add repression and suppression. For our purposes here, it is useful to combine these strategies into one group and

consider that they all have a critical feature in common — all involve a strategy that focuses attention away from either the source of stress or away from one's psychological/somatic reactions to the stressor. Such strategies will be referred to as avoidant strategies.

The result of the study was compared with other studies which were conducted on other professionals. Most of the studies were conducted on medical professionals from Nepal, Malaysia and Pakistan were found that the participants used more active coping strategies than avoidant strategies to cope with stress, though a significant proportion of them used avoidant coping strategies to escape from stress.

13. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the present study the following conclusions are drawn for the present study:

All Ethiopian soccer referees had an experience of threat and aggression.

Verbal aggression was the most aggression type that the Ethiopian soccer referees experienced.

Ethiopian soccer referees admitting that, experience of aggression and threat before, during, and after the game have a big impact on a loss in concentration, motivation, and performance.

Majority of Ethiopian soccer

referees experienced moderate to high levels of burnout

The less experienced Ethiopian soccer referees (less than 5 years) had a higher level of burnout as compared to referees with more refereeing experience, however in terms of refereeing level (being federal level or international level) there were no significant difference.

To cope up the stressed faced before, during and after the game the Ethiopian soccer referees adopted active and avoidant coping strategies.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Ethiopia Soccer Referees

Better to adapt different kinds of controlling mechanisms for threat and aggression

It is better to develop the skills which can be used in keep concentration, motivation, and performance during an experience of threat and aggression.

It is better to work on controlling the burn-out effect, since this burn-out have lots of negative social and psychological effects.

It is better to adopt the active coping strategies from stress



**For Ethiopia Soccer referees Association
and Ethiopian Football Federation**

To lower the level of burn-out especially referees with low level of experience the association and the federation better to give psychological training

**For Ethiopian sport commission and
Ethiopian Peace minister**

To make the sport arena peaceful and a source of healthy and fit society these stake holders should participate by protecting and training the soccer referees

For researchers

Further research is needed with longitudinal research design, enlarge the study, and include other sport referees and additional variables

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