



THE DYNAMICS OF SPORT VIOLENCE IN PREMIER LEAGUE FOOTBALL CLUBS IN ETHIOPIA

Girma Reta (PhD Candidate in sport management)^a, Dr. Kesatie Legesse^b, Dr. Theodros Birhane^c, Dr. Hailay Gebretinsae^d

a. PhD candidate in Sport Management, Department of Sport Science, Mekelle University, Ethiopia

b. PhD in Sport Science, Sport Academy, Mekelle University, Ethiopia.

c. PhD in Sport Psychology, Sport Academy, Mekelle University, Ethiopia.

d. PhD in Management, Department of Management, Mekelle University, Ethiopia.

Abstract

Received in July. 2025. Revised from Sep-Dec. 2025, Accepted: Dec, 2025. Ethiopian Journal of Sport Science (EJSS), Volume VI, and Issue I, Published by Ethiopian Sport Academy 2025

Keywords: Reasons attending football, Deviant behavior of Fun, Management approach of sport violence

Football, as the world's most popular sport, has historically been associated with incidents of violence, particularly among spectators. This study investigates the deviant behaviors exhibited by fans in the Ethiopian Premier League, particularly in Addis Ababa and other regional club residents, where football matches often experience violence and unsportsmanlike conduct. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative approach. A total of 410 respondents were participated, including fans, club officials, players, and law enforcement officers. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (Mean, Standard Deviation, Charts/Figures). The largest age group among respondents is 18-25 years, comprising 38.3% of the total. This suggests that younger adults are more likely to attend football events, indicating a strong interest in football among this demographic. The potential challenge of football violence are death with mean of 2.73 ($SD \pm 1.36$), Major Injuries with mean of 3.46 ($SD \pm 1.38$), Minor Injuries with mean of 3.80 ($SD \pm 1.37$), Climate of Fear with mean of 3.61 ($SD \pm 1.29$), Players Unable to Use Potential Fully with mean of 3.33 ($SD \pm 1.40$), Biased decision of referee. Findings highlight that leisure and team loyalty are the predominant factors driving fan engagement in Ethiopian football, while financial considerations play a minimal role. The alarmingly high mean score for deviant incidents underscores the pressing need for stakeholders in the football community clubs, governing bodies, and law enforcement to address these issues proactively. By understanding the factors contributing to negative behaviors and fostering a more positive atmosphere at matches, it is possible to enhance the overall experience for all attendees. To enhance safety in football competitions, interviewees proposed several intervention strategies: Implement awareness campaigns promoting positive supporter behavior, Enforce stricter conduct policies for fans and players. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, focusing on effective interventions and strategies to promote positive supporter behavior, ensuring that football remains a safe and enjoyable environment for everyone involved. Further research or similar study should be carried out in other Higher league, super league and regional league football club in Ethiopia in order to fill the information gap.



Introduction

Football is the world's most popular sport, with millions of fans annually watching professional football on their television or at public viewing places such as fan zones, or attending matches in person. Fans are extremely important for sport clubs, as they generate a large part of the clubs' income by attending games, buying merchandise, paying to watch games on television or on the Internet, and attracting sponsors. They also contribute to the atmosphere in sport stadia, the identity of the teams, and what makes them attractive to others (Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-klein, and Schmitt 2010). Unsportsmanlike behavior, such as diving, taunting, or engaging in verbal altercations, is frequently discussed in the context of football. Research indicates that this behavior can be influenced by peer pressure, the desire for media attention, and a lack of accountability within teams (Poeller, 2023). Most of the studies in this area tend to focus on incidences of football violence and hooliganism around the world and not the underlying deviant behavior of fun, football violence and its management approach. Even then, there is need for further research on the causes, especially to determine whether they are specific to particular areas, including Addis Ababa. Significant ground has been covered by researchers in establishing the effects of football violence on societies and individuals. None of the researches

has however focused on capital and regional city, despite the fact that it hosts many football matches, local and international. There is therefore need to determine the unique circumstances that make capital city and other urban of soccer entertainment highly susceptible to violence.

Research objectives

- To examine reasons of attending football by spectator?
- To identify the behaviour of fun in Ethiopian football premier league clubs.
- To examine the management approach of football federation in implementing appropriate punitive measures for combating the violence.

Review of related literature

The definition of sports-related violence is the subject of academic debate. There is no universally agreed upon scholarly definition of violence in sport. (Haslam, 2020). The culture surrounding football, including fan behavior and media portrayal, plays a significant role in shaping deviant behaviors. Supportive fan environments can sometimes encourage aggression, while media coverage can amplify negative actions (Wakefield, 2006). Studies focusing on youth football emphasize the importance of coaching styles and parental influence on player behavior. Coaches who prioritize winning over sportsmanship may



inadvertently promote deviant behaviors among young athletes (Ellison, 2018). Despite the wealth violence in other countries, there is a notable gap in research focusing on Ethiopia. The unique socio-political landscape and cultural dynamics in Addis Ababa may contribute to the prevalence of violence during football matches. Factors such as ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and the political climate may exacerbate the situation (Prince, 2023). Recent incidents involving prominent clubs

highlight the urgent need for localized studies to understand these dynamics better.

Research methodology

Descriptive was used, in order to identify and describe the problem under investigation. Descriptive research design is a systematic method used to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. It focuses on

providing an accurate representation of the variables involved without manipulating them.

This type of research is often employed in social sciences, education, and health studies to gather insights into various aspects of human behavior, opinions, and conditions. A stratified sampling procedure was used to choose sample respondents from the population of sixteen male football clubs' players in Ethiopian primer league. Stratification

of literature on football

Therefore, expert of football federation, the coaching staffs of football clubs, sport journalist, referees, security personnel and players which are responsible to obtain information from them.

Based on formula the number of samples was 384 people but, the researcher increased it to 410 to promote reliability of study.

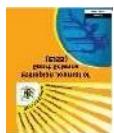
$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.5 * 0.5}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16 \approx 384$$

The population size=N for all clubs is 5000. Out of this population, using the sample size determination formula given above the sample size was determined to be 384. However, the population is categorized in to 6 stratum. Hence, it is necessary to allocate the sample size to each

stratum based on their respective size. $n_h = \frac{N_h}{N} * n$

Where n_h is sample size for h^{th} stratum and N_h is

was designed based on regional and administration city club representatives. As a first step researcher was selected six teams out of the sixteen, according to particular criteria:



the population size for h^{th} stratum.

Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 20.0 was employed for data analysis. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (Mean, Standard Deviation, Charts/Figures).

Descriptive statistics such as mean, and standard deviation were employed to summaries the data obtained from the respondents. To confirm the prepositions in this study, inter item correlation was tested using Cronbach's alpha test a value



greater than 0.7 shows they are reliable measuring similar objectives.

Results

Table 1. Background Information of the Respondents

	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Age	18-25	157	38.3
	26-35	90	22.0
	36-45	98	23.9
	above 45	65	15.9
Sex	Male	355	86.6
	Female	55	13.4
Organization	Football federation	10	2.4
	Referee	10	2.4
	Sport Media	10	2.4
	Football club	23	5.6
	police	12	2.9
	fun	345	84.1

Table 1; Demography of respondents

The above table indicates the demographic characteristics of respondents on their age, Sex and organization. Accordingly, the largest age group among respondents is 18-25 years, comprising 38.3% of the total. This suggests that younger adults are more likely to attend football events, indicating a strong interest in football among this demographic. Respondents aged above 45 years represent the smallest group at 15.9%. This might suggest that older adults are less engaged with football events. The data shows that 86.6% of respondents are male, this suggests that male fans are more likely to participate in surveys while with

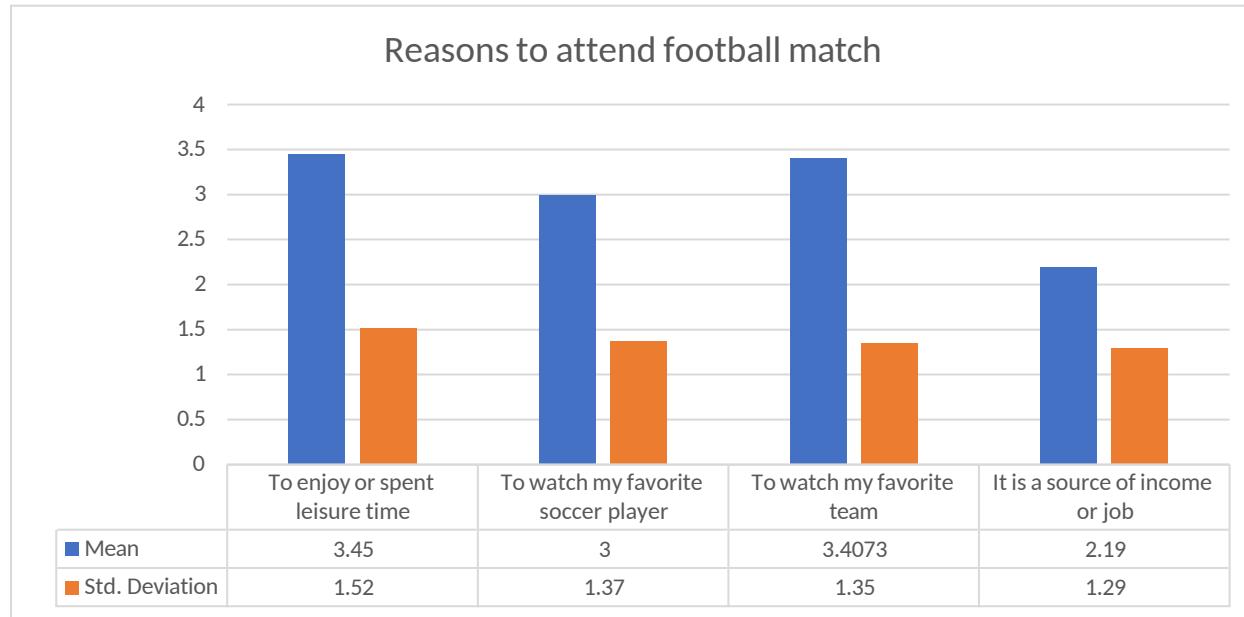
only 13.4% of respondents identifying as female in order to incorporate their thoughts about football violence in and outside stadium. A significant 84.1% of respondents identified as fan members, reinforcing the idea that the majority of participants are regular supporters of football clubs. This overwhelming representation highlights the importance of fans in shaping the culture and popularity of the Ethiopian Football Premier League. The combined total of all professional organizations (Ethiopia Football Federation, Referees, Mass Media Broadcast, Football Clubs, and Ethiopian Police) accounts for 15.9% of



respondents. This suggests the presence of referees, media, and police indicates a variety of perspectives that are essential for understanding

different aspects of league operations, such as officiating, media coverage, and security.

Fig 1. Reasons to attend football match



From the above figures, it can be seen that Enjoying or Spending Leisure Time 3.45 ($SD \pm 1.52$), Watching My Favorite Team 3.41 ($SD \pm 1.35$), Watching My Favorite Soccer Player 3.00 ($SD \pm 1.37$), and 2.19 ($SD \pm 1.292$) Source of Income or Job. Significant portion of respondents view football as a primary leisure activity. Close behind is the motivation to watch favorite teams. This indicates that team loyalty plays a crucial role in fan engagement. The lower standard deviation compared to leisure time suggests more consensus among respondents on this point. The mean score

Watching My Favorite Soccer Player is exactly at the midpoint of the scale. The standard deviation shows some variability in how much value fans place on individual players, which may depend on personal preferences and player popularity. Regarding Source of Income or Job scored the lowest, suggesting that very few respondents view football primarily as a source of income or employment the relatively low standard deviation indicates that there is general agreement on this point, as most fans do not associate their engagement with financial motives.

Fig 2. shows behavior of fun

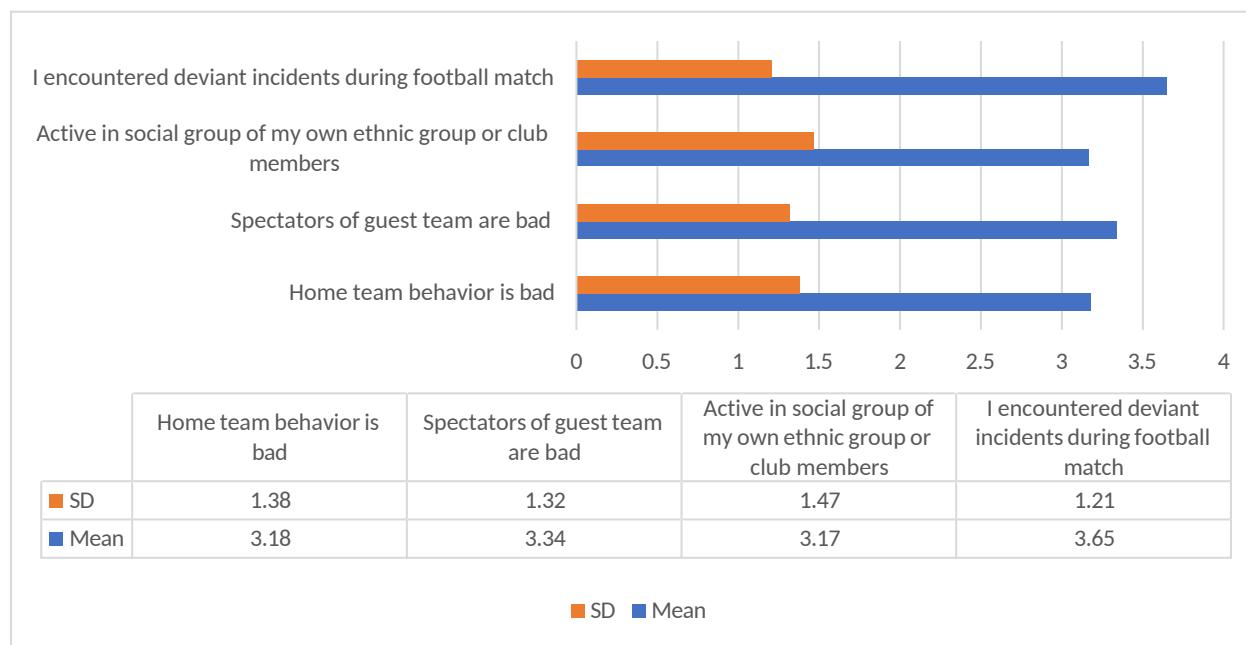
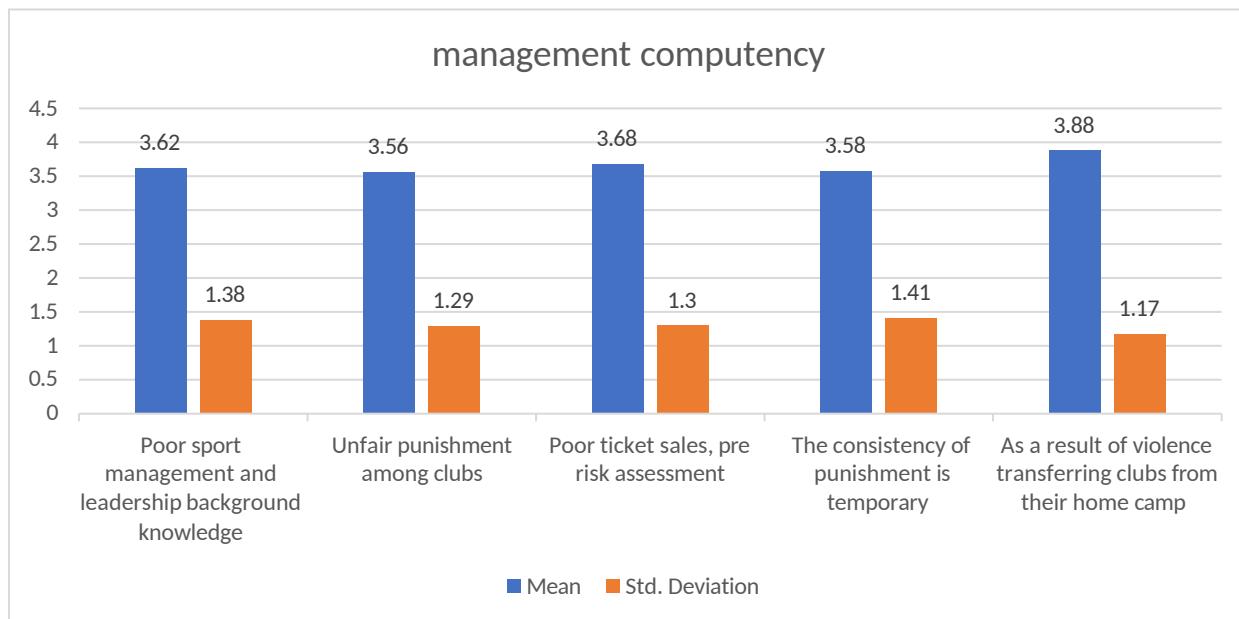


Figure 2; results related to behaviors of fans

From the above table we can see that Home Team Behavior is bad with Mean of 3.18 ($SD \pm 1.386$). This score indicates a moderate level of agreement among respondents that the behavior of home team supporters is often negative. The relatively high standard deviation suggests that opinions vary widely; while some respondents may feel strongly about this issue, others may not perceive it as a significant problem. Spectators of Guest Team are Bad with Mean score 3.34($SD \pm 1.327$). This item shows a slightly higher mean score than the previous one, indicating that respondents perceive the behavior of the guest team's supporters as problematic as well. The lower standard deviation compared to home team behavior suggests a more consistent perception among respondents regarding this issue. Active in Social Group of My

Own Ethnic Group or Club Members Mean 3.17 ($SD \pm 1.478$). The mean score here indicates a moderate level of engagement among fans with their own ethnic or club groups during matches. The high standard deviation suggests considerable variability in how actively individuals engage with their social groups, indicating that some fans may be very involved while others may not be. Encountered Deviant Incidents During Football Match (Mean: 3.65, $SD \pm 1.215$). This item has the highest mean score, suggesting that many respondents have experienced deviant incidents during matches. The lower standard deviation indicates a more uniform agreement among respondents regarding this experience, highlighting it as a significant concern.

Figure 3; results related to management approach of federation

From the above table we can see that Poor Sport Management and Leadership Background Knowledge with mean of 3.62 ($SD \pm 1.38$), Unfair Punishment Among Clubs with mean of 3.56 ($SD \pm 1.29$), Poor Ticket Sales, Pre-Risk Assessment with mean of 3.68 ($SD \pm 1.30$), The Consistency of Punishment is Temporary with mean of 3.58 ($SD \pm 1.41$), As a Result of Violence, Transferring Clubs from Their Home Camp with mean value of 3.88 ($SD \pm 1.17$). The impact of violence leading to clubs being transferred from their home grounds is viewed as a significant concern leading them for financial crises. Poor Sport Management and Leadership Background Knowledge indicates a concern regarding the level of knowledge and expertise in sport management and leadership among relevant stakeholders. Respondents perceive unfair punishment among

clubs as a moderate issue, suggesting concerns about equity and fairness in disciplinary actions. poor ticket sales and inadequate pre-risk assessment indicates poor proactive measures taken by event stakeholders. Respondents feel there is a moderate issue with the consistency of punishments, indicating potential instability in enforcement practices among clubs. To enhance safety in football competitions, interviewees proposed several intervention strategies: Implement awareness campaigns promoting positive supporter behavior, Enforce stricter conduct policies for fans and players.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature that highlights moderate mean scores regarding home and guest team behaviors in this



study align with the findings of previous research often critical of their own and opposing supporters (Angell, (2016)). It shows the importance of addressing these behaviors not only for the sake of individual safety but also for the integrity of the sport itself. Moreover, the engagement levels within ethnic or club groups observed in this study reflect how fan identity is often intertwined with cultural and social dimensions. This incident particularly pronounced in Ethiopia, where management strategies are often insufficient to address the root causes of fan violence. This connection emphasizes the need for clubs and governing bodies to consider these factors when developing strategies to promote positive supporter behavior (Breitbarth, 2008). Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that assess the impact of specific interventions aimed at reducing deviant behavior and promoting positive supporter culture in football.

Conclusion

The findings highlight the complexity of factors affecting fan perceptions in football matches. It shows the need for a nuanced understanding of fan behavior in Ethiopian football, particularly regarding unsportsmanlike conduct and violence. As football continues to grow in popularity in Ethiopia, addressing these issues becomes imperative for fostering a positive sporting

environment. This study provides valuable insights into fan perceptions of supporter behaviour at football matches, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced within the crowd dynamics. The moderate mean scores regarding both home and guest team behaviours indicate a shared concern among fans about negative conduct, while the variability in individual opinions suggests that experiences and perceptions can differ widely within the community. The notable engagement levels within ethnic or club groups further emphasize the diverse nature of fan interactions and the potential for varying degrees of involvement in supporter culture. The alarmingly high mean score for deviant incidents underscores the pressing need for stakeholders in the football community clubs, governing bodies, and law enforcement to address these issues proactively. By understanding the factors contributing to negative behaviours and fostering a more positive atmosphere at matches, it is possible to enhance the overall experience for all attendees. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, focusing on effective interventions and strategies to promote positive supporter behaviour, ensuring that football remains a safe and enjoyable environment for everyone involved.

**Author address:**

¹Department of Sport Science, Arsi University, Assela, Ethiopia
^{1,2}Department of Sport Science, Mekelle University, Mekelle, Ethiopia.
³Department of Management, Mekelle University, Mekelle, Ethiopia.

References

- Andres, L. F. (2023). How much violence does football hooliganism cause?. *Journal of Public Economics*, 225, 104970.
- Andrews, M. (2015). Being special: The rise of super clubs in European football. *CID Working Paper Series*.
- Angell, R. J. ((2016).). Understanding fans' responses to the sponsor of a rival team. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 16(2), 190-213.
- Breitbarth, T. &. (2008). The role of corporate social responsibility in the football business: Towards the development of a conceptual model. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 8(2), 179-206.
- Calleja, P. M. (2022). The effects of audience behaviour on football players' performance.
- Cleland, J. &. ((2016).). Football fans' views of violence in British football: Evidence of a sanitized and gentrified culture. *. Journal of sport and social issues*, 40(2), 124-142.
- Dubois, D. R. (2015). Social class, power, and selfishness: when and why upper and lower class individuals behave unethically. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 108(3), 436.
- Ellison, R. M. (2018). Effective Football Coaching Behaviors Instilled to Motivate and Discipline Adolescents (Doctoral dissertation, The University of the Rockies).
- Fairley, S. &. (2013). Something lived, something learned: Nostalgia's expanding role in sport tourism. In Sport Tourism, Routledge. , 50-65.
- Haslam, S. A. (2020). The new psychology of sport and exercise: The social identity approach.
- Hill, D. (2010). A critical mass of corruption: Why some football leagues have more match-fixing than others. *. International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 11(3) , 38-52.
- Kang, B. (2016). Impact of player quality on demand in Major League Soccer. *A study of star and international player effect on match attendance*.
- Koenigstorfer, J. G.-K. (2010). "You'll never walk alone"—How loyal are soccer fans to their clubs when they are struggling against relegation? *Journal of Sport Management*, , 24(6), 649-675.
- Lages, C. R.-V.-M.-R. (2023). A systematic review and bibliometric analysis of the dark side of customer behavior: An integrative customer incivility framework. *Journal of Business Research*.
- Mutz, M. &. (2009). The role of sports for violence prevention: sport club participation and violent behaviour among adolescents. *. International journal of sport policy*, 1(3) , 305-321.
- Newson, M. (2017). United in defeat: The causes and consequences of identity fusion in football fans (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford). .
- Pearson, G. (2024). An ethnography of English football fans: Cans, cops and carnivals. In An ethnography of English football fans. *Manchester University Press*.
- Poeller, S. D. (2023). Suspecting sarcasm: how league of legends players dismiss positive communication in toxic environments. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 7(CHI PLAY), 1-26.
- Prince, A. I. (2023). The Intersection of Economic Inequality and Political Conflict in Africa: A Comprehensive Analysis. *. International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research*, 9, 69-87.
- Spears, R. (2011). Group identities: The social identity perspective. In Handbook of identity theory and researchNew York, . NY: *Springer New York*. , pp. 201-224.
- Tenenbaum, G. S. (2015). Aggression and violence in sport: An ISSP position stand..
- Thacher, D. &. (2014). *Managing value conflict in public policy*. *Governance*, 17(4) , 457-486.
- Warner, A. (2013). For honor and country: understanding the link between football hooliganism and nationalism.
- Zhou, J. H. (2015). Alcohol consumption, athlete identity, and happiness among student sportspeople as a function of sport-type. *Alcohol and alcoholism*.
- Zhou, R. &. (2018). Building social capital from sport event participation: An exploration of the social impacts of participatory sport events on the community. *. Sport Management Review*, 21(5) , 491-503.