
EXPLORING THE MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS IN THE AMATEUR FOOTBALL REFEREE

EXPLORANDO AS MOTIVAÇÕES E EXPECTATIVAS DO ÁRBITRO DE FUTEBOL AMADOR

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RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo foi compreender as diferenças entre as motivações e experiências masculinas e femininas de ser árbitro de futebol. Foi realizada uma entrevista qualitativa semiestruturada com oito árbitros de futebol (4 homens e 4 mulheres) com idades entre 19 e 27 anos (23,4±3,10). Os participantes foram árbitros de jogos regionais e nacionais do futebol Português. Na análise de conteúdo emergiram dois componentes (Experiências e Motivações) e, para cada componente, seis e quatro categorias, respectivamente. Os resultados demonstraram que as árbitras são percebidas como capazes da mesma conquista que os homens. Nas primeiras etapas da carreira de árbitro, mulheres e homens apresentam motivações semelhantes em relação ao desenvolvimento de diferentes capacidades (foco; tomada de decisão; liderança com pressão; gerenciamento de conflitos) e o mais importante sendo a paixão pelo jogo. No entanto, o sexismo ainda é sentido pelas mulheres, que precisam lidar com mais estereótipos e abusos psicológicos dos esportes dominantes dos homens. Consequentemente, o sentimento de que é preciso trabalhar mais do que os homens para alcançar seus objetivos.

Palavras-chave: Árbitro amador. Opiniões de gênero. Experiências. Motivações.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the differences between male and female motivations and experiences of being football referee. A semi-structure qualitative interview was made to eighth football referees (4 male and 4 female) with ages between 19 and 27 years (23.4±3.10). The participants were refereeing regional and national Portuguese football matches. In the content analysis emerged two components (Experiences and Motivations) and for each component six and four categories respectively. Results demonstrated that female referees are perceived as capable of the same achievement than men. In the first stages of refereeing career, female and male presents similar motivations regarding the development of different capabilities (focus; decision-making; leading with pressure; conflict management) and the most important relevant being passion for the game. However, the sexism is still felt by women which have to lead with more stereotypes and psychological abuse of a men dominant sports. Consequently the feeling that have to work harder than men to achieve their goals.

Keywords: Amateur referee. Gender opinions. Experiences. Motivations.

Introduction

Refereeing is considered a prerequisite for organized football, such that the development, training and performance of referees have become significant features of the sport's governance in every country that plays the game¹. In fact, nowadays, the football game is focused on both players and referees, which are the main stakeholders of the outcome of the matches².

Indeed, referees have a pedagogical function in co-creating the educational practice of competitive games in youth sport and influencing young players' behavior, learning and socialization within the game, creating a joyful atmosphere of learning and development³.

Despite the previously written, nowadays, be a football referee it's something that goes beyond the simple rule application⁴. Previous studies have demonstrated that football referee is associated to several conditions that can induce stress and coping⁴⁻⁶, thus, there is a need to referees to learn and implement numerous stress management interventions, including time management, restructuring unproductive thoughts, physiological relaxation techniques, communication training and mental skill training techniques such as imagery, relaxation

breathing and self-talk are⁷. Yet, it is known that the perceived organizational support has a positive effect on referee personal motivation⁸, but at the same time, that motivation could be influenced by the context that referees are included, and as pessimist orientation increase, less motivation to be referee⁹.

In this sense, motivation could be influenced by different variables. Thus, a study that identified the previous factors, indicated that the items related to the social dimension, such as lack security is the main characteristic which cause high level of stress¹⁰.

Beyond the motivation variable, experience in refereeing should be also considered as a main factor to be a successful football referee, because its known that younger referees shows to be most prone to adverse conditions⁹.

However, despite the importance of considering a variety of factors associated with the referee experience, which include administrator consideration, intrinsic motives, mentoring, remuneration, sense of community, lack of stress, and continuing education¹¹, literature demonstrated that the personal relationships within the refereeing family as well as a good job on the pitch are the main factors no to give up the career¹².

Added to that, the increase of female referees in football has exposed even more the issues often reported. Bearing in mind that the equality promoted in sports should be required in order to empower female referees and enhance their capacities to tackle traditional gender inequalities¹³. Recently, the equality in sport have been a strength by the stakeholders, but there is still a preconception because societal belief is still that football is a male sport that is played by predominately men, thus it remains a male domain in society^{14,15}. Owing to these views, many women do not think football officiating is an option for them¹⁶.

Recent literature has shown qualitative research in refereeing, but there is a scarce evidence regarding to sociological perspective between male and female referee. For that reason, the purpose of this study was to understand the differences between male and female motivations and experiences of being football referee.

Methods

Participants

Eighth football referees (4 male and 4 female) participate in this research. These football referees, with ages between 19 and 27 years (23.4 ± 3.10), were involve in refereeing regional and national Portuguese football matches (male and female) with an average of 6.14 ± 3.18 years of refereeing experience. The inclusion criteria was twofold: a) at least 2 years of experience in any refereeing level; b) up to 18 years old. Regarding to the exclusion criteria: a) refereeing less than 10 games from the previous season.

Five of the participants have previous football experience as players (4 males and 1 female) in young ages and it is possible to find in Table 1 that 5 referees are already graduated and the other 3 are students.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

ID	Sex	Age (years)	Academic Degree	Profession/Occupation	Referee Experience (years)	Referee Category	Former Football Player
MR1	M	24	Master in Psychology	IT Recruiter	8	C3	Yes
MR2	M	21	High School	Degree Student	4	Student Referee	Yes
MR3	M	26	Business Degree	Company manager	10	C3	Yes
MR4	M	27	Sport and Leisure Degree	Personal Trainer	5	C3	Yes
FR1	F	21	Education Degree	Degree Student	4	Student Referee	No
FR2	F	19	High School	Student	2	Student Referee	No
FR3	F	26	Business Degree	Company manager	10	CF2	No
FR4	F	21	High School	Student	4	AACF	Yes

Note: M = male; F = female

Source: Authors

Procedures and Instruments

To accomplish the specifications of the research a panel of three specialists in sports science, considering a former football referee and involved in the development several qualitative researches, develop the semi-structure interview according to specialized literature (CIT)¹⁷. The interview script was reviewed and changed until the panel agreed that all the questions meet the needs of these research and objectively connected, according to the main purposes.

Beside the demographic data of the referees (age, academic degree, occupation, experience in refereeing and football player experience), the semi-structure interview had 2 domains (1 – Motivations; 2 – Experiences). After receiving the approval of the Institutional Review Board (CTC-ESDL-CE002-2020), it was made a pre-test, carried out to check interview duration and if the questions where understandable. After some minor changes to maximize questions comprehension, the final interview included 32 questions divided in the 2 domains. This two domains emerged from the content analysis. Thus, after participants responds, the researchers grouped the content with similar information. After that previous analysis, the domain Motivation and Experience were created and developed. All interviews were performed by the same researcher that after explained the purpose of the research and the potentials risks and benefits, scheduled the date to conduct the interview and participants sign the informed consent. Because of the pandemic situation (Covid-19) and to preserve the safety distance, all interviews were made online (via Colibri-Zoom) between March and April 2020. The interviews, lasting between 15 to 40 minutes, were recorded to transcribe *verbatim*, by the first author. Finally, to analyze the content and ensure transcriptions accuracy, the second and third authors, randomly compared the full transcription with the respective audio file¹⁸.

Content Analysis

The aim of the qualitative research is to understand, in an inductive way, the perspective of the actors involved in the process¹⁹. In this sense, to analyze the content of the interviews and to validate the categories, it was asked to experts, an independent analysis of the answers. After that review, emerged 4 categories for Motivation domain and 7 categories for Experience domain (Figure 1). All categories and quotes from the participants were analyzed in the software NVIVO version 12.0 for Mac (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). This software provides a reliable analysis beyond the organization of information obtained by the participants²⁰.

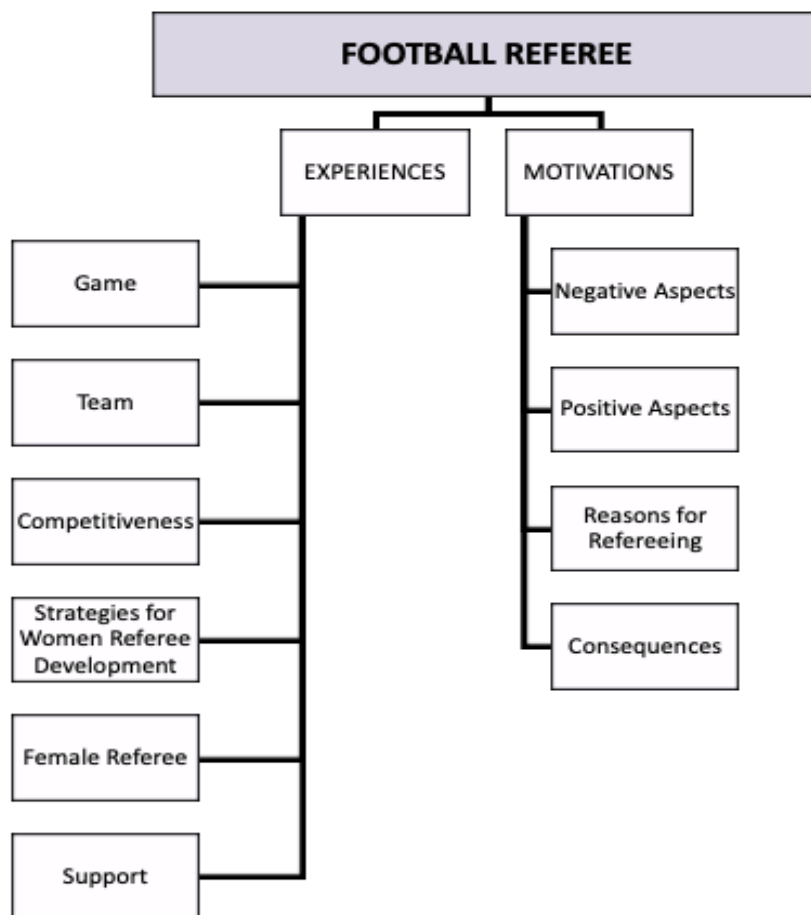


Figure 1. Mind chart of the categorial tree

Source: Authors

Results

In the content analysis emerged two components (Comp. 1 – Experiences and Comp. 2 – Motivations) and for each component six (6) and four (4) categories respectively.

Comp. 1 - Experiences

The first component it's constituted with six (6) categories: game, team, competitiveness, strategies for women referees development, female referee and support.

C1 – Game

Regarding to the game, both genres revealed that every game is a different game with different characteristics. Thus, they report the need to adapt to the context to make there refereeing easier. Furthermore, both men and women have the opinion that nowadays there is no surprise for the fans when a match is refereeing by a woman, despite the insults when they are not agree with some decision.

“There are no easy games. One youth game requires the same focus as a senior game. Yet, the difference is that in a youth game, we need to communicate in a different way, in a more pedagogical way.” (MR3)

“The male game intensity is higher, then is more demanding and we need to adapt to the match characteristic. For example, a girl game has more stops because they are weaker than the boys, so we are always whistling faults.” (FR3)

“Every game is a different game, with different players and, sometimes with different ages. I need to adapt my refereeing to them.” (FR1)

C2 – Team

The relationship between the referees as a team is important and fundamental for a best individual performance as a team performance. Also, when they work as a team, they develop their self-confident and self-help.

“Relationship between referees and assistant referees is crucial for develop confidence, security, friendship, motivation, support and leadership.”(MR3)

“No doubt, the relationship between the referee and the assistant referee is the most important in a team. A good relationship fosters the confidence and the team spirit. This are things that develop with time and has a great impact in our work inside the pitch.” (FR2)

C3 – Competitiveness

Regarding to the competitiveness between genres, the male referees look favorably to the increase of the number of female referee in football, while female referees felt that their work is not recognized by entities when compared with the males referee. Although, woman referees reveal proud and happiness for what their peers feel for them.

“Even without conditions that other country’s have, is to be commended the performance of the female referees in Portugal.” (MR4)

“There is always someone that gives you value and are proud for your work, but in the opposite way, there are always someone that think, because we are girls, our job is easier.” (FR4)

C4 – Strategies for women referees development

The differences between males and females referees are becoming smaller despite the difference between physical fitness. Male referees referred that, to fight against this adversity, more opportunities should be given to women’s. Regarding to female referees opinion, the only way to develop is working hard in the field.

“One of the procedures to be taken would be to start implementing measures for having more women in refereeing during the championship games in Portugal, and perhaps following the example of Germany where there are already women refereeing the elite.” (MR4)

“Taking in account our physical fitness, we need to practice more to decrease the differences between them..” (FR3)

C5 – Female Referee

Regarding to the participation of female referees in football, participants revealed that the mindset is changing, but there is a long way to go through. In fact, there are still women not choosing to be referee because, most of the times, football is still viewed as a male sport, and for that reason, they think that the difficulties are bigger to stablish in football context.

“(…) first of all, few girls like this sport and don’t know the rules; second, woman is more sensitive and is not prepared to feel intimidated in a football match.” (MF4)

“If one female referee wants to be mother, she needs to stop the career for, at least, one season, while in men that’s not happen. For that reason, despite be a growing world, the female numbers will be always behind the male world.” (FR3)

C6 – Support

Finally, in the last category, both male and female referees are satisfied with the support of the organizations in charge to their activity. It was also referred that the Portuguese Football Federation gives support in different workshops, seminars and training actions as well as the Portuguese Association of the Referees Support and Referees Council give the help needed to the abused referees.

“There are different support systems, namely the Portuguese Association of the Referees Support as well as the referees council. Furthermore, there are several training actions promoting our competences and knowledges” (MR2)

“Yes, beyond the referee council we have the Association of the Referees Support” (FR4)

Comp. 2 – Motivations

The second component it’s constituted with four (4) categories: negative aspects, positive expects, reasons for refereeing and consequences.

C1 – Negative Aspects

According to both male and female referees the mains negative aspects is to know how to face with the error, intimidation and insults that, sometimes, may have consequences in their familiar life. Furthermore, female referees say that feel more pressure because of the sexism in football.

“(…) lack of availability mostly at the weekend to be with my girlfriend, parents, friends…” (MR3)

“Unfortunately, there are still a lot of people who do not respect the work of women in this area and it is not always easy to be able to deal with the pressure that is placed on top of what we already have.” (FR4)

C2 – Positive Aspects

The positive aspects identified for both referees, male and female, are the development of different capabilities such as: a) focus; b) decision making; c) leading with pressure; d) conflict management, among others. It should be noted that these capabilities are useful not only for refereeing as well as day life.

“Skills development such as leadership, conflict management, impartiality, time management, organization, coordination among other that are beneficial in personal and professional life.” (MR3)

“That we are able to do our job with competence and rigor. We cannot let ourselves be demoted by the discrimination that exists.” (FR4)

C3 – Reasons for Refereeing

The main reasons for refereeing was the fact of being a former football players and, for some reason they were not able continue to play. So, refereeing was a possibility to stay connected to football. The curiosity about the game laws, the challenge to undertake the difficulties that referees feel and financial issue are also a *motif for refereeing*.

“The fact that in the last few years as a player, i had some injuries and after I went to the school made it difficult to reconcile everything. Thus it was a way to stay connected to football and continue to earn some money.” (MR4)

“(…) despite my curiosity about the game laws, i was also unable to continue playing federated football and there were no female teams at the time.” (FR4)

C4 – Consequences

The decision of become a referee uncovered some consequences regarding to their life style. The fact of the participants weren't professionals make it difficult to reconcile the refereeing, work and studies. Yet, the lack of time and tiredness are the main adversities which they face with.

“Actually my I need to schedule my time with my activities. However, sometimes I feel it is an ungrateful work, because we are constantly condemned to hear what we don't want to ear, and of course, being woman, could affect my self-confidence and my performance during the refereeing.” (FR4)

“(…) I work during the week, so I don't have free weekends and free time to rest.” (MR3)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the differences between a male and female referee in the beginning of the career considering motivations and experiences of being football referee.

Regarding to experiences live by both male and female referees, the results revealed similar thoughts in different categories, but there exist keywords that allow us to split some ideas. In general, in the practical experiences for both referees, participants assumed that they need to adapt to the context, stay confident with himself and herself as well with their teammates, because the confident and the relationship with the referee team is one of the main reason to do a good work during the game.

In this respect, corroborating within the results of this research¹², in a study that assessed football referees initial, continuing and drop-out motivations, revealed that the personal relationships within the refereeing family and doing a good job in the pitch is the most satisfying element of the refereeing work. Actually, the absence of support and advocacy by the referee team and Associations are one of the main reasons to quit refereeing and lack of motivation will appear and consequently, referees will be object of censure by players, coaches and spectators^{1,4,21}. Thus, being the motivation level a key influence in this high-pressure role²², the support strategies by different associations may have a determinant influence into motivation

since in the dimension support all referees mention the importance of workshops, seminars, training actions and support to abused referees actions by different institutions.

Other element that could be associated to the confident of the referees is explained in a study from Hacicaferoglu e Gundogdu⁵, exposing that women compared to men, referees with postgraduate education compared to the other educational groups, less experienced compared to more experienced referees, were more exposed to mobbing behaviors.

Regarding to the participation of female referees in football, participants explained, beyond the sexism and preconception in football, the main difference in refereeing between male and female is the physical fitness. Actually, female with required skills are potentially eligible to officiate male matches²³. Still, and when analyzed the dimension Game and Strategies for Women Refereeing Development, and independently of participants sex, that women are capable for refereeing equal to men, however, they must cope with stereotypes and train harder.

Throughout, and despite the growing participation of women in sports, this remains a masculinity domain in world society^{14,24}. This fact, justified by cultural identity, causes large differences between gender in sports and one of those differences is regarding the referees physical fitness competences. From the physiological point of view it was found that female top level referees need additional training in order to match the average level of aerobic fitness and strength/power from elite male referees and tolerate the higher external-loads when compared to female competitions²⁵.

In this sense, referees must have good levels of fitness, speed and agility to keep up with play in order to be close to the action when decisions need to be made^{26,27}. Same authors ensure if both referees, male and female, reach a certain level of speed and fitness deemed necessary for the role, sex cannot be used as grounds to discriminate²⁵⁻²⁷. For that reason, to decrease the fitness differences, referees need to dedicate a large proportion of their overall training to the development of physical capacity likewise the high-intensity (>85% maximal heart rate) training protocols and match running performance²⁸.

Additionally, not only physiological differences should be taken into account, but also the lack of opportunities and the stereotyping constructed by soccer players, coaches and stakeholders from soccer should be valued to fight against this discrimination²⁹. Moreover, in a recent study that reflect about what is a good referee in the perspective of a female soccer referee, revealed that being good referee was antagonistic to being feminine³⁰. This is another cultural issue which must be set aside.

Furthermore, hostility toward female football referee confirms the existence of sexist responses³¹ as cited the participant MF4 "...few girls like this sport and don't know the rules... woman is more sensitive and is not prepared to feel intimidated in a football match". This highlights demonstrate the need to work close to all stakeholders because the study of Souchon, Livingstone and Maio³² revealed that gender bias can be reduced in conditions which participants were motivated to control.

Finally, and as referred previously, in the category experience, both male and female referees are satisfied with the support of the organizations in charge to their activity, namely with Portuguese Football Federation and Portuguese Football of Refereeing Support Association. In a study that tried to understand the factors that influenced football referees intentions to quit the game showed that the organizational factors were cited more than any others in relation to intention to quit^{1,23}.

However, in the opposite way, and considering amateur football referees, organizational support may be perceived by referees as a positive effect on internal motivation which, consequently, reduce work-family conflict as well as could mediate the relationship between perceived organizational support and work-family conflict³³. Furthermore, younger officials (i.e. under 20 years) demonstrated higher levels of perceived organizational support than those in older age groups, with females displaying significantly lower mean perceived organizational

support scores in urban environments and higher mean perceived organizational support scores in rural settings than males³⁴.

In the motivation component, participants explained the positive and negative aspects for being referee. The negative aspects are explained by the intimidations, insults, lack of valorizations of their work and the consequence that could have in their familiar life. This specifically considerations are mainly connected to psychological well-being enhance the importance in reducing the feelings of loneliness and anxiety described as one of the main reasons for refereeing drop out²¹. These aspects could also bring positive strategies, because while admitting to making errors, referees perceive their misjudgments as opportunities to improve their performance⁴. Furthermore, some of that errors are related to the way that assistants are preoccupied by central referee's decision-making³⁵, highlighting the importance of the team, support and advocacy.

The positive aspects are mainly about improving leadership skills, financial support and the passion about the game, being with agreement with previous researches^{16,36}. Although, the great passion about the game was often referred during the interviews as well as the pride they felt when refereeing.

This study has the strength to understand that the amateur refereeing is the base to work and increasing the motivation for refereeing in a long term. Thus, it's necessary to work, as soon as possible, with all stakeholders, to avoid any kind of sexism, lack of conditions to work as well as make this referees felt useful and motivated during the game.

As a limitation, beyond the number of participants, other variables could be analyzed and compared, such as the category levels, experience, previous contact with sports and occupation. However, considering the exploratory factor of these research and the main purpose, these factor can be considered as future directions when studying the first stages of football refereeing.

Conclusions

Refereeing analyses can be categorized in Experiences and motivations, being motivations a key component for being in the game.

In the first stages of refereeing career, female and male presents similar motivations regarding the development of different capabilities (focus; decision-making; leading with pressure; conflict management) and the most important relevant being passion for the game.

The support from the national and local football associations concerning football and refereeing are important in the promoting of support and advocacy, allowing motivation and well-being.

Female referees are perceived as capable of the same achievement than men. However at the same time, female have to lead with more stereotypes and phycological abuse of a men dominant sports, i.e., the feeling that have to work harder than men to achieve there goals.

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