

Original Paper

Emotional Analysis of First Division Football Referees in Burkina Faso during Matches

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Abstract

Introduction: First division (D1) referees in Burkina Faso suffer emotional violence when refereeing football matches.

Objective: The aim was to analyse the emotions felt by these referees during D1 national championship matches.

Method: The survey was conducted by interviewing 30 first division football referees. The content analysis method was used to analyse the data.

Results: Insults, threats and physical assaults are situations of violence experienced by D1 referees in Burkina Faso. Fear, anger and sadness were the negative emotions most frequently experienced.

Discussion: This study made it possible to describe situations of violence and to identify the negative emotions felt by these D1 referees.

Conclusion: As a determinant of sporting performance, it seems imperative to include emotion management in referee training in Burkina Faso.

Keywords

football, referees, violence, emotions

Introduction

The referee is an emblematic figure in modern sports (Ten èze, Joncheray, & Arnal, 2015). His duties are important and necessarily involve responsibility. The referee's role is to apply and enforce the rules of the game, to supervise and direct play: in concrete terms, this means ensuring that the rules are applied in practice during competitions. (Ten èze, Joncheray, & Arnal, 2015). For example, the

2020/2021 Laws of the Game define referees as match officials. These terms refer to any person responsible for controlling a football match on behalf of the football association and/or the organiser of a competition whose match falls within their remit. A referee is therefore defined as a man or woman whose function is to direct football matches organised either by a recognised federation, or by leagues or districts, or by any other recognised grouping (Statute of Burkina Faso football referees, 2013). The referee is the guarantor of respect for the rules; without respect for the referee, there can be no game (Chapron, 2005).

However, refereeing football is often difficult because of cheating and incivilities (Reynes. Pantalón, & Long, 2007). Refereeing in football, as in all other sports, is a highly demanding activity. In general, football referees suffer violence as a result of their work. Refereeing is cited as one of the most controversial issues in football today. The debates it provokes are numerous and still being discussed (Corner, 2019). The consequences of this violence lead to emotional feelings, as there is a link between violence and emotions (Fontimpe, 2015). The case of football seems to be more visible and is a breeding ground for the expression of a range of emotions and negative reactions (Mounir, 2015). Football is an activity with a lot of passion. For some (supporters), this excessive passion often leads to violence against referees, who are often accused, rightly or wrongly. As one of the world's most famous referees (Collina, Pellegrin) once said: "Football is not a perfect game, and I don't understand why people want referees to be perfect". Verbal and physical attacks are commonplace in amateur football. Almost every weekend, acts of violence occur at matches (Gadéa, 2019).

In Burkina Faso, referees were attacked by USCO supporters during the first leg of the 2018-2019 national first division men's championship match between Comoe Union Sportive (USCO) and Yennega Association Sportive Faso (ASFA-Y). It is in this sense that Pewzner (2005) said that "violence is a fact of society". She goes on to say that today's world is probably no more violent than yesterday's, but it is undoubtedly different. This violence has a negative effect on the referee. Trimbour (2019) points out that violence, in the form of insults, blows or threats, can clearly be a factor in ending a referee's career.

This description reflects the complexity of the refereeing profession, the referee's role and the conditions in which he exercises his power, which necessarily influence the referee as a person (Ten èze, Joncheray, & Arnal, 2015). In other words, refereeing is a highly emotional profession, as football has become a psychologically demanding sport (Bizzini & Piffaretti, 1998). Referees are required to process information quickly and efficiently in order to make the best possible choices. The obligation to achieve results inherent in modern football, the pressures of time, the conflicting relationships (players/referees/coaches/spectators/Managers), the pressures of the match (extensive media coverage), the questioning of physical integrity (physical and verbal aggression and/or threats) and the fear of failure are all factors that accelerate the emergence of psychological problems and place these football players in an emotional situation (Debois, 2003). So, what is emotion and how does it express itself in

referees?

Etymologically, the word emotion comes from the Latin *emotionem*, from *emotum*, supin of *emovere*, which means to move, to move (-motion) outwards (é). Historically, this term was used to designate movement, a disturbance in a population; movement, a disturbance in the body, perceptible to oneself or to the outside world. Today, emotion is described as a sensation disorder (Koreicho, 2020). For Dantzer (1988), the term “emotion” broadly refers to the feelings that we can recognise in ourselves by introspection or attribute to others by extrapolation. For this author, emotions are not simply “feelings”: although these have a status in everyday language, the term is rarely used in psychological language. Emotions are internal then external phenomena (a feeling, an expression) following the physiological or psychological modification or maintenance (a sensation, an impression) of a physical or psychic environment (an event, a situation) felt by a person or an animal. They are generally brutal, intense and short-lived, unlike feelings. It has two valences: a positive valence and a negative valence (Koreichi, 2020). It emerges that emotions are in fact made up of a set of processes that are more or less coordinated and present depending on the nature of the emotion. A definition that is suitable for the most rigorous scientific study, and operational for applications and interventions in the field, must specify the processes and the way in which emotions are expressed (Phillippot, 2007).

The six primary emotions cited in the literature are: anger, sadness, joy, fear, surprise and disgust (Ekman, 1992). According to Joannes (2020), these primary emotions are universal, whatever the socio-cultural environment. These emotions give rise to a multitude of more complex and nuanced emotions, such as secondary emotions (amusement, contempt, satisfaction, embarrassment, excitement, guilt, pride in success, relief, sensory pleasure and shame). Some emotions are accepted by everyone, while others are more controversial. The most common are: fear, sadness, joy, surprise, disgust and anger (Cosnier, 2015). Joy in refereeing is most often found when the referee succeeds in his match and is beyond reproach in everyone’s eyes. Anger, fear, disgust, surprise and sadness occur when decisions are controversial. The basic, well-differentiated (“discrete”) emotions are phylogenetically adapted to enable the organism to deal with various fundamental problems in everyday life that require rapid and temporary reactions (Cosnier, 2015).

In reviewing this literature, it is clear that the refereeing profession today is a source of considerable tension. In order to understand the problems faced by football referees in Burkina Faso, a number of studies have been carried out. But they have focused much more on the performance aspects of refereeing. However, the psychological aspect, which is an important determinant of referee performance, has been addressed to some extent. This paper therefore sets out to analyse referees’ emotions during the matches of national championship competitions with a view to taking stock of the situation.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive and exploratory cross-sectional study was carried out in the city of Ouagadougou from November 2023 to March 2024 in the form of a semi-directive interview lasting approximately twenty-five minutes. The referees were presented with four situations involving:

- situations of violence experienced during matches
- assessments of the behaviour of those around them
- emotions felt during football matches
- The most common emotions felt during matches

The survey was carried out at playing fields. The study population consisted of Burkina Faso referees officiating matches in the first division (D1) of Burkina Faso's national football championship. The non-probability method and the reasoned choice technique were used to select the study sample.

Inclusion criteria

- Must have been an official referee in Burkina Faso;
- Be a first division football referee;
- Be available at the time of the survey

Non-inclusion criteria

- Not available at the time of the survey

A total of 30 referees were interviewed. To collect the data, the four situations mentioned above were presented to the referees at the end of the matches they had officiated. The interviews were semi-directive, i.e., the referees were asked to talk about the violent situations they had experienced and the emotions they had felt.

The content analysis method was used to process the data. The analysis focused on the different themes (situations of violence experienced during matches; assessments of behaviour; emotions felt during football matches and the most frequent emotions felt during matches). The three stages of content analysis, i.e. transcription, coding of information or tri-themes and actual processing, were discussed.

Results

The table shows that league referees qualified to officiate in D1 and federation referees are the youngest (aged 25 to 40), while international referees are the oldest (aged 40 and over). In terms of length of service, league referees qualified to officiate in D1 have been in the profession for less than 04 years, compared with federal referees, who have been officiating for 7 to 9 years.

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Referees

Characteristics	Age range (years)				Number of years of service (years)				
	25-30	31-35	36-40	41 years and more	1	2	3	4	5 et plus
Referees									
League referees qualified to officiate in D1	5	4	3		3	5	4	2	
Federal referees	2	3	5	5					11
International referees				5					05
Total	5	7	8	10	3	5	4	2	16

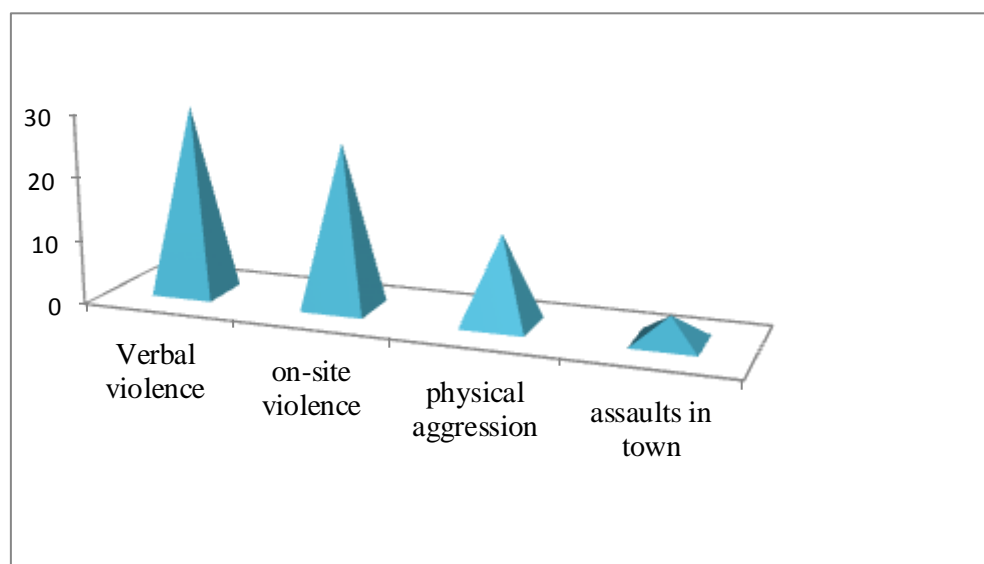
**Figure 1. Situations of Violence Against Referees**

Figure 1 shows that verbal abuse and threats on the pitch are the most common forms of violence suffered by referees. There were also cases of physical assault and assault in town.

Table 2 shows the results relating to the behaviour of those involved in sport around referees. It emerges that the fans and coaches are described as violent compared to the players. With regard to the activities of the media, the interviews reveal that they are biased during matches and have less control over the rules of the game.

Table 2. Behaviours Displayed by Officials around Referees

Actors	Verbatim	Key words
Supporters	The comments are discouraging; violent in some places	Violent; despondency
Players	Complain incessantly; and show their discontent through physical gesture	Violent; complaints
Trainers	The coaches become unrecognisable depending on what's at stake in the match. Some are reasonable, others very violent.	Violent matches
Media	They shock the referees with their comments; they are also less gentle and take sides in the comments; they are not well trained; they criticise a lot and encourage less; there are media who do not often master the laws of the game.	partial; shocked; criticised
Others: match delegates	the match commissioners, whose reports are often less than professional; there are the match inspectors, who do not trust the referees. There are club managers and league members who are violent.	Reports; forgery; executive

Table 3 shows that almost all the referees surveyed display negative emotions during matches. The most frequent were fear and anger. Added to this are sadness and surprise, which far outweigh disgust.

Table 3. Negative Emotions Felt by Referees

Fear	Anger	Sadness	Surprise	Disgust
30	21	15	10	5

Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyse the emotions felt by referees during matches. Analysis of the results indicates that the emotions felt by the referees interviewed during matches are similar to those identified in the literature. In order to understand these emotions, it seems necessary to examine the situations of violence experienced by these referees during matches.

• Situations of violence experienced by referees

Violence in sport is a scourge that worries officials and researchers alike, and is on the increase. Football stadiums are the scene of numerous acts of violence, most of which are directed at referees (Dunning & Poncharal, 2010). The results of our analyses show that verbal abuse, threats on the pitch and physical assaults are the violent situations most frequently encountered by referees during matches (Figure 1 and Table 2). Most of the verbal abuse directed at referees comes from supporters. For

example, when an action goes against them even though the rules have been respected, as they cannot reach the referee, their only means is to use insults. These insults are most often directed at the referees' parents with the intention of demeaning and intimidating them (Table 2). Threats to referees on the pitch (26 out of 30) were less frequent than verbal abuse, due to the presence of the police, who were able to repel the attackers (Figure 1). In terms of physical assaults, there were 14 cases (out of 30) of physical assault. Despite the presence of the police, referees are sometimes attacked during matches in certain localities. In short, referees unanimously acknowledge that violence is a reality in Burkinabe football and that this violence causes psychological disturbances such as emotions.

The presence of fans is necessary because they are the twelfth player on the pitch (Bandura, 2003). However, in the literature, fans who display violence during matches are described as unorganised supporters. They do not tolerate any mistakes made by either the players or the referee. What counts for them is winning, whereas in sport there are always two possibilities (winning and losing) to consider during a match. These situations of violence, whatever they may say, influence referees in one way or another, and in extreme cases can give rise to great tension. In other words, the environment in which referees operate is also a source of anxiety, as it is made up of people (supporters, players, media and coaches) with different objectives. As supporters are the most frequently criticised, their behaviour arouses emotions in referees. This influence is then discussed in terms of subjectivity (Lehman & Reifman, 1987). Referees contesting refereeing decisions point out that fans lack discipline and that to be a referee in Burkina Faso "you have to be mad". Generally speaking, there is always a team playing at home, in front of its own fans. The home team seems to modify the referee's judgement thanks to the supporters around them. The referee will not be very objective; he appears to be influenced by an external element. This is how Rix (2003) explains that without an audience, the referee regains a form of neutrality because knowledge of the area, the presence of a favourable spectator and the importance of the journey to be made, these three factors influence the officials so much.

In the light of these situations of violence analysed in this way, we can affirm with Gad éa (2019) that verbal and physical aggression are commonplace in football. Acts of violence are always to be deplored at matches. To paint a picture of the consequences of violence in the refereeing process, Trimbou (2019) mentioned the following: "Violence, in the form of insults, blows or threats, can clearly weigh in the end of a referee's career". Physical activities, particularly football, are a source of emotions, and sometimes these emotions can even be extreme for the players involved (Guilloux, 2015). From the verbatim of the interviewees, it emerges that all referees are faced with situations of violence that necessarily arouse emotions (Table 2). These emotions could be explained in several ways:

- Table 1 shows that the vast majority of referees who officiate in D1 championships have fewer years of experience than federal referees. This lack of experience can be seen in the fact that referees with fewer years in the profession experience more emotions with a significant negative valence than those with more years in the profession. The longer you officiate, the more experience you acquire. It is in

this sense that Fratzke (1975) specifies that if the relevance of questions about confidence is based on the differences observed between referees according to their level and year of practice, referees officiating at a high level and for a long time show themselves to be more confident than their colleagues.

- Also, the absence of a good technique for managing psychological qualities: concentration, courage, self-confidence, motivation, etc., is a major factor in confidence. The ability to manage these emotions in sport stems not only from mental preparation issues during their training but also from the referee's expertise.

Moreover, the socio-political and economic context in Burkina Faso since the popular uprising of 2014 indicates a growing power of incivism. Football is no exception, with violence against referees on the increase. The literature shows that acts of violence thrive among fans living in vulnerable socio-economic conditions, and are fuelled by culture. All referees identify with insults, and some prefer to reply with a smile to show their disinterest in the aggressors (respondents).

All in all, these analyses show that the behaviour of those involved in sport around referees creates difficult situations for referees. These tense situations give rise to negative emotions that influence the refereeing process. As one referee pointed out, football is not a perfect game, so it is difficult to want the referee to be perfect. Our analyses show that football players are vectors of emotions, especially negative emotions towards referees, such as fear, anger, sadness and disgust.

- **The predominant emotions felt by the referees surveyed**

The aim of this study was to categorise the predominant emotions among first division football referees in Burkina Faso. The results of the survey revealed that negative emotions are the most predominant among first division referees in Burkina Faso. Table 3 shows the negative emotions. The dichotomy according to the valence of the emotions shows that the negative emotions are fear, sadness, disgust and anger (Rivory, 2011). These negative emotions give a glimpse of the emotional feelings experienced by referees during matches and indicate the difficulty with which first division referees in Burkina Faso officiate matches. If we compare the behaviours of the players around referees with the negative emotions they experience, we can agree with Cosnier (2015) that sporting activities, and football in particular, provide a fertile ground for the expression of negative emotions.

The explanation of violent situations suggests that violence undoubtedly gives rise to emotions. As far as emotional feelings are concerned, the vast majority of referees interviewed said that they had been victims and felt negative emotions (fear, anger, sadness, surprise and disgust). However, these feelings vary depending on the situation and context. Fear: this was the emotion felt most by all the referees interviewed (30 out of 30). It is felt almost entirely, and the referees justify that the competitive aspect and the referee's role as judge create these feelings. Matches commonly referred to as "derby" matches between two rival teams are also very popular. Matches involving low-ranked teams (teams whose position in the league is critical) create fear among referees because their supporters tend to justify

results by the refereeing process. Fear blocks, limits and prevents referees from exploiting their full potential. Emotion with an identifier, referees' fear is directed towards supporters, the media (fear of being in the headlines) and managers.

As for the anger felt by referees, it seems that it is mostly linked to the physical integrity of the person (harming, injuring) even if certain related factors can modulate it positively or negatively (Reynes, Canovas, & Pantaleon, 2008). It has to be said that violence as expressed by supporters, coaches, etc. is bound to arouse anger when all the referees' actions are interpreted not in terms of the laws of the game but in terms of the subjectivity of others. The source of the anger is to be found in the recurrence of violent situations and the players' interpretation of refereeing decisions (Reynes, Canovas, & Pantaleon, 2008).

Sadness was also mentioned in the interviews. It generally stems from post-match criticism and insults. It is experienced during and most often after the match and is capable of influencing the referee's behaviour and changing his mood. In addition, the referees interviewed expressed surprise as an emotion, as well as disgust. These emotions can stem from the unsportsmanlike actions of players and fans alike. Situations that have already occurred reactivate these emotions. Even if surprise rarely occurs, as its name suggests, it has to be said that these emotions can influence the refereeing process and lead the referee to make mistakes.

The results obtained concerning the identification of the emotions most felt during the refereeing process by the referees interviewed include: fear, anger, sadness, surprise and disgust. They correlate with the work of Ekman (1992) and Joannes (2020), which reveal that fear, joy, anger, surprise, sadness and disgust are the basic or primary universal emotions that can be encountered in any socio-cultural environment.

From all the analysis carried out, it appears that the referees surveyed officiate in a hostile environment that can arouse emotions and, in turn, the refereeing process. As a result, the referees gave pejorative descriptions (violent, very violent and less violent) of these players. They claim that their working environment is unhealthy and that they experience tension during arbitration.

These tensions most often generate negative emotions. Teddy Riner (1989) said: "You have to tell yourself one thing, and that's that mistakes are human. Imagine there were no referees. Without referees, there is no sport. Anyone who assaults a referee should be banned from every pitch and every sports hall for life, without exception. Referees are the unloved ones on the pitch, yet they are the ones who make the game (Grun, 2022). They are subject to emotional pressure in the refereeing process. This is why it has been said that "becoming a referee in the 21st century is not difficult, it's remaining one that is difficult" (Vautrot, 1991).

Conclusion

Carried out in the form of a survey of first division football referees in Burkina Faso, the results of this study highlighted the situations of violence in which referees officiate and the negative emotions most felt during the refereeing process. Verbal violence, threats, physical aggression, etc. necessarily give rise to negative emotions such as fear, anger, sadness etc., as highlighted in the literature by Ekman. This is a clear indication of the conditions in which referees officiate matches and also reveals that football refereeing is a high-risk profession in the Burkina Faso league. It would therefore be advisable to introduce mental preparation modules into referee training to enable them to manage their emotions more effectively, but also to improve safety around stadiums and to raise awareness among all those involved in sport (coaches, supporters, sports journalists) of the need to respect the laws of the game. This study reveals the need for a prospective study on the influence of emotional feelings on the refereeing process among Burkina Faso referees.

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