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Aggression: Analysis on the south zone inter university footballers based on field positions

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between field positions and aggression levels among 148 male football players aged 18-23 who participated in the 2023-2024 South Zone Inter University Football Tournament held at the University of Calicut, Kerala. Participants were categorised into offensive, midfield, and defensive roles, with goalkeepers excluded from analysis. Aggression was assessed using Bandura's Aggression Questionnaire, which demonstrated high reliability ($r = 0.91$, $p < 0.01$) through a test-retest method. Players completed the questionnaires individually after being briefed on the study's purpose and procedure, and responses were scored using standard guidelines. One-way ANOVA was used to analyse differences in aggression based on positions, followed by Scheffe's post hoc test for detailed pairwise comparisons. The results revealed that midfielders exhibited significantly higher aggression than both offensive and defensive players, while no significant difference was observed between the latter groups. The findings underscore how positional demands shape psychological characteristics like aggression and indicate a need for targeted interventions in training and psychological support, particularly for midfielders. The study recommends that coaches and sports psychologists implement aggression management and emotional regulation strategies tailored to different playing positions. Such approaches can help maximize athletic performance and team cohesion while minimising maladaptive behaviours, thus contributing to the holistic development of football athletes.

Keywords: Aggression, bandura's aggression questionnaire, football, defence, offence, midfield

Introduction

Sports are institutionalised competitive activities that involve physical exertion and skill, structured by a set of rules or customs. The primary objective is typically to determine a winner through the comparison of abilities, whether measured by objective performance (e.g., time, score) or subjective judgment (e.g., artistic impression). Participation in sports ranges from amateur recreational levels to highly organised professional competitions, serving functions such as entertainment, physical health, social cohesion, and personal development ^[1]. The institutional nature of sports distinguishes them from casual play by their formal organisation, governing bodies, and regular schedules.

Sports psychology is an interdisciplinary science that draws on knowledge from the fields of kinesiology (human movement) and psychology. It is defined as the scientific study of people and their behaviours in sport and exercise contexts and the practical application of that knowledge. The primary objectives are to understand how psychological factors affect an individual's physical performance and how participation in sport and exercise affects a person's psychological development, health, and well-being. Practitioners in this field often work with athletes to enhance performance through techniques like goal-setting, imagery, and concentration training ^[3].

Personality traits are enduring predispositions that influence behaviour, cognition, and emotion across various situations. They represent consistent patterns in the way individuals perceive, relate to, and think about themselves and their environment. The most widely accepted model for describing core personality traits is the Five-Factor Model (or "Big Five"), which includes the dimensions of Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (often remembered by the acronym OCEAN). This trait approach assumes that personality can be described and measured by where an individual falls on a continuum for each of these broad dimensions ^[4].

In a psychological context, aggression is defined as any behaviour directed toward another individual that is carried out with the immediate intent to cause harm. Furthermore, the

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perpetrator must believe that the behaviour will harm the target, and the target must be motivated to avoid the behaviour. A critical distinction in sports literature is between hostile aggression (which is impulsive, emotion-driven, and has harm as its primary goal) and instrumental aggression (which is purposeful, calculated, and uses harm as a means to achieve a non-aggressive goal, such as winning a ball in soccer). This distinction is vital for understanding and managing aggressive acts within the rules of a sport [5].

Hostile aggression is behaviour that is primarily intended to inflict injury or psychological harm on an opponent. The ultimate goal is to cause harm; the act is an end in itself. This type of aggression is often driven by anger, frustration, or a desire for retaliation. It is impulsive, emotionally charged, and violates the rules and spirit of the game. This is the type of aggression that is universally condemned and penalised in sports.

Instrumental Aggression is a specific subtype where aggression is used as a tool or instrument to achieve a goal. The primary intent is still to achieve a non-aggressive outcome (e.g., winning the ball), but the method involves legitimate force that carries a risk of harm. It is calculated, not angry.

Methodology

A total of 148 male football players (aged 18-23) from the

2023-2024 South Inter University Football Tournament held at the University of Calicut, Kerala, participated in the study. Players were categorised by their field position: offensive (n=60), midfielders (n=28), defensive (n=60); goalkeepers were excluded. Field position was the independent variable, and Aggression was the dependent variable, assessed using the Aggression questionnaire developed by Bandura [6]. This instrument employs a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Reliability was established via test-retest on 10 players, producing a coefficient of $r = 0.91$ ($p < 0.01$), which is highly robust and consistent with previous studies validating aggression measurement in athletes [7]. Subjects were given an orientation regarding the study's purpose and procedure; questionnaires were administered individually, and responses were scored as per standard protocol. The data analysis involved one-way ANOVA to compare aggression across field positions, with post hoc pairwise comparisons conducted using Scheffe's test and the level of confidence was fixed at 0.005

Results and Findings

The analysis of variance of offensive, defensive and midfield football players on Aggression was analysed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: ANOVA of Aggression across Field Positions

SL. No.	Variables	N	Offensive		Offensive Defensive		Defensive		'F' value
			X	σ	X	σ	X	σ	
1.	Aggression	142	12.80	1.77	14.05	1.65	12.92	1.21	5.62*

Table 1 shows that the mean values of offensive, midfield and defensive football players on anxiety were 12.80, 14.05 and 12.92, respectively. The obtained F ratio value of 5.62 was greater than the required table value of 3.06 for significant at .05 level of confidence with df 2 and 145. The results of the

study showed that there was a significant difference among offensive, midfield and defensive football players on aggression. To find out the paired mean difference the Scheffe's test was applied and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Scheffe's Test for the Difference between the Paired Means on Aggression

Offensive	Midfield	Defensive	Mean Difference (MD)	Confidence Interval (CI)
12.80	14.05		1.25*	1.01
12.80		12.92	0.12	0.76
	14.05	12.92	1.13*	1.01

*Significant at .05 level of confidence

Table 2 showed that the mean difference value between offensive, midfield and defensive football players on aggression.

The mean difference of aggression between offensive and midfield and offensive, defensive, and defensive players was significant at .05 level of confidence. From the results, it was concluded that midfield players had higher aggression than offensive and defensive football players. But the results fail to show a significant difference between offensive and defensive football players on aggression.

Discussion

The results showed that midfielders exhibited higher aggression than both offensive and defensive players, with no significant difference observed between the offensive and defensive positions. This may be attributed to the central tactical responsibilities of midfielders, who must frequently engage in both distribution and tackling during transitional phases, thus requiring heightened assertiveness and physical

engagement. This heightened aggression among midfielders is likely linked to their central tactical responsibilities involving frequent ball distribution, tackling, and transitions between offence and defence. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that aggression levels can vary according to field position due to the differing demands and strategies of each role, and that both offensive and defensive players may deploy aggression in functionally distinct ways during play, often balancing assertive actions with required control and skill [8, 9].

Conclusion

The results of the study demonstrate that midfielders exhibit significantly higher levels of aggression compared to offensive and defensive football players, while no significant difference was found between offensive and defensive groups. This heightened aggression among midfielders is likely due to the demands of their central role in both offensive and defensive play, requiring them to be more

assertive and physically engaged during matches. These findings confirm that positional responsibilities influence aggressive tendencies on the field and that aggression is a context-dependent behaviour among football athletes.

Recommendation

It is recommended that coaches and sports psychologists recognise the unique psychological and tactical demands placed on midfielders and tailor training programs to address aggression management and constructive assertiveness. By emphasising emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and situational awareness during practice, clubs can help midfielders channel their aggression positively, thereby enhancing overall team cohesion and minimising maladaptive behaviours. Further research should explore targeted interventions for aggression control in different field positions to optimise both performance and well-being among football players.

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