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An Analysis on Football Referees' Mental Toughness Levels

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Abstract

Total 100 football referees, (9 female, 91 male), who actively work in Trabzon during the 2020-2021 football season were included in this study. As data collection tools, the "Personal Information Form" was used in the study. It was found that the control sub-dimension had a higher mean score than the other sub-dimensions, and the confidence sub-dimension had the lowest average score. There was no significant difference between the mean of male and female football referees in the confidence sub-dimension and commitment sub-dimension; in the control sub-dimension, however, a statistically significant difference was found. No correlation between age and mental toughness was evidenced. The commitment and control sub-dimensions showed significant differences in terms of education level; however, there was no significant difference in the confidence sub-dimension. No statistically significant results were obtained in the analysis of the variables such as title, refereeing duration. Conclusively, the mental toughness has an important place in improving and controlling the performance of football referees.

Introduction:

One of the most important actors of the football game is referees. The referees can affect the football game and its followers either directly or indirectly, positively or negatively with the decisions they make or not (Göksel et al., 2016). Therefore, referees are usually exposed to high pressure on and off the field. After each competition, they are scapegoated and held responsible for all kinds of positive or negative results. Most importantly, various comments are made about their personalities. These comments have negative effects on the referees both psychologically and mentally (Cel, 1994). In order to perform at a high level during the competition, a football referee must meet the physical demands of the game, do mental preparation and have full knowledge of the game rules. In addition, it is very important for a referee to make quick decisions and implement these decisions at any time during the competition, even though s/he is under physical and psychological pressure (Durna, 1997).

During the competition, referees must perform more than one task under pressure to fulfill their duties successfully and avoid mistakes in their decisions. For instance, referees must evaluate and judge actions during the competition, make quick decisions, direct the game, communicate correctly, pay attention to multiple aspects of

the game, maintain order, resolve disputes and problems under negative conditions and pressure (Karaçam & Pulur, 2016). Being incompetence and careless in these duties as a referee can lead to wrong decisions, delayed reactions, ultimate stress and burnout (Guillén & Feltz, 2011; Ekmekçi, 2016). For this reason, their profession is quite difficult and wearing. Referees have to show a strong character against all these negative factors (Peterson et al., 2009).

Football refereeing is a physical action with psychological and cognitive (mental) aspects. Being aware of the incident, a referee has to make a decision within a very short period of time. In short, the referee perceives the stimulus selectively, analyzes and categorizes it, and then gives the most appropriate response to this stimulus (Cel, 1994). Like the athletes, a competition referee has the psychological capacity and this should be considered as important as the physical aspect. This is the reason why the referees who experience emotional changes fail to achieve the expected success despite being physically ready. Considering that many top-class referees have excellent abilities in psychological capacities such as motivation, managing their anxiety, concentrating and setting goals besides their physical and physiological capacities, the fact that the psychological dimension should not be neglected in increasing sports performance becomes clear

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(Arslanoglu *et al.*, 2010).

Heavy responsibilities on the football referees and social and professional stress can lead to make some lasting effects on the individuals performing this profession. In this respect, the refereeing profession affects some psychological processes in the individual (Johansen & Haugen, 2013). At this point, mental toughness is a very important element to best overcome these psychological processes.

Mental toughness is the ability to fight and cope with stress, difficult situations, and feeling under pressure (Goldberg, 1998). The researchers consider every psychological quality, which is defined partly, positive in visual sense and expected to be associated with success, as mental toughness (Crust, 2007). It includes some points such as coping with feeling under psychological pressure, being psychologically resilient, high concentration ability, good determination and positive self-perception (Connaughton *et al.*, 2010). As per Jin & Wang (2018), mental toughness refers to a multidimensional psychological feature with cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimensions that enable individuals to cope better with difficult experiences and to remain healthy even under high stress. In addition to this, mental toughness is defined as a multidimensional umbrella concept which is beyond psychological toughness and contains psychological structures such as perseverance, self-efficacy, self-confidence and motivation as a coping mechanism (St Clair-Thompson *et al.*, 2017).

In the light of the information above, it is seen how important mental toughness is for the football referees. When the literature is examined, it is found that although there are studies examining psychological and mental characteristics in various fields in sports sciences (Gümüşoglu & Asçi, 2020; Temel & Karharman, 2019; Güleroglu & Eroglu, 2019; Soylu *et al.*, 2019; Menten & Saygin, 2019; Kurtulget *et al.*, 2018), there are very few studies examining the mental toughness levels of football referees (Afacan, 2019; Terekli & Çobanoğlu, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine the mental toughness levels of football referees.

Methodology:

Methodologically, a survey model was used in the study. Regarding this purpose, the data is gathered from a wide population in the survey researches (Büyükoztürk *et al.*, 2012). As the data collection technique, the questionnaire technique was used (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996).

The number of the participants was in total 100 football referees, 9 women (9%) and 91 were men (91%), who actively worked in Trabzon during the 2020-2021 football season [top-class referees (n=3; 3%), top-class assistant referees (n=8; 8%), classification referees (n=5; 5%), classification assistant referees (n=7; 7%), regional referees (n=7; 7%), regional assistant referees (n=10; 10%) and

provincial referees (n=60; 60%)] with the mean age of 26.04 (Min=19; Max=45). The random sampling methods, was used to collect the research data (Bastürk & Tastepe, 2013).

Research data were collected with the mental toughness scale in sports and a personal information form prepared by the researcher. The "Sports Mental Toughness Questionnaire" (SMTQ) was developed by Sheard *et al.*, (2009) and adapted to Turkish by Pehlivan (2014). The scale consisting of 13 items and three sub-dimensions (confidence, commitment and control), as well as general mental toughness, is 4-point Likert type (1= Absolutely True; 4= Not at all True). The mental toughness scale and personal information form in sports were applied by the researcher to the football referees before and after the training based on the necessary permissions and volunteering. Before starting the questionnaire, the aim of the research was explained to the football referees and information was given about the scale.

The analysis of the data collected was analyzed in SPSS 21.0 statistical package program. As the statistical method in data analysis; frequency, arithmetic mean, standard deviation; t-test for independent groups, multi-factor ANOVA (MANOVA) and Pearson correlation test was used. Whether the data meets the prerequisites of parametric tests is decided by examining the values of Skewness and Kurtosis (normal distribution of the data) (Büyükoztürk, 2010). According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2013), the skewness and kurtosis values obtained in the study were between +1.500 & -1.500 values, so that the distribution was normal. Therefore, parametric tests were used in the study.

Results & Discussion:

As per the results obtained in the study, it has been determined that the mean scores of total mental toughness levels of football referees are 7.53 in the confidence sub-dimension, 9.84 in the commitment sub-dimension, and 12.40 in the control sub-dimension. In addition, when the sub-dimensions of the SMTQ are examined, it has been found that the control sub-dimension has a higher mean score than the other sub-dimensions, and the confidence sub-dimension has the lowest mean score.

When the mental toughness levels of football referees are examined by gender, it is found that the mental toughness means of female football referees are higher than that of male football referees in the confidence sub-dimension while the mental toughness means of male football referees are higher than that of female football referees in the sub-dimensions of commitment and control. In the sub-dimensions of confidence and commitment, no significant difference was found between the means of male and female football referees. However, a statistically significant difference was found between the means of male and female football referees in the control sub-dimension. The findings in the control sub-dimension, in which a statistically significant difference was determined

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in the football referees by gender, show that the male football referees have better controllable mental toughness than the female football referees have. Güreter *et al.* (2019), Masum (2014), Crust *et al.* (2014) and St Clair-Thompson *et al.* (2017) found a significant difference between the gender variable and mental toughness in their studies, and these results are in line with our study. In addition, Şahinler & Ersoy (2019), Bektaş & Özben (2016), Gökmen (2014) and Bayrakdaroglu (2014) found that the gender variable does not cause a significant difference on mental toughness.

When the mental toughness levels are examined according to the title of football referees, it is observed that the regional assistant referee ($\bar{x}=8.50$) has the highest score in the confidence sub-dimension while the regional referee ($\bar{x}=10.14$) in the commitment sub-dimension, and the upper-class referee ($\bar{x}=15.00$) in the control sub-dimension. However, the main effect of the title variable on the sub-dimensions of SMTQ is not significant.

When the mental toughness levels of football referees are examined by the age variable, no statistically significant relationship is found between the age and the overall and sub-dimensions of the SMTQ scale. In other words, there is no relationship between the age of football referees and their mental toughness. In the studies conducted by Tekkurşun-Demir & Türkeli (2019) and Crust (2009), no significant difference was found between the age variable and mental toughness, and these results are in line with our study. Güreter *et al.* (2019) found a significant difference between age and mental toughness in their study. This study is also not similar to the results of the study.

When the mental toughness levels of the football referees are examined according to the duration of the refereeing, it is observed that those in the 6-10 years group in the confidence sub-dimension ($\bar{x}=7.78$), those in the 1-5 years group in the commitment sub-dimension ($\bar{x}=9.92$), and those in 11 and 15 years group ($\bar{x}=13.30$) in the control sub-dimension have the highest mean score. However, the main effect of the referees' duration variable on the sub-dimensions of SMTQ is not significant. Güreter *et al.* (2019) found significant results in terms of the continuity and control sub-dimensions according to the experience, and this result is not similar to our study.

When the mental toughness levels of football referees are examined by their education level, there is no significant difference in the confidence scores while the commitment scores and control scores differ significantly. In the commitment dimension, it is determined that the mean scores of the football referees in the university group ($\bar{x}=9.98$) are higher than the mean scores of the football referees in the high school group ($\bar{x}=8.85$). In the control dimension, the mean scores of the football referees in the university group ($\bar{x}=12.74$) are higher than the mean scores of the football referees in the high school group ($\bar{x}=10.23$). It can be thought that the reason for this is that with the

departments on refereeing opened within the universities recently, the referee candidates receive specific education on their own fields, and this education will contribute to the parallel development of their perspectives about refereeing. Şahinler & Ersoy (2019) found a significant relationship between the educational status of the athletes and their mental toughness their study. Güreter *et al.* (2019) found significant differences in the continuity and control sub-dimensions in terms of the education status. These studies are also in line with the results of the research.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are some results which support our research results. It is thought that mental toughness has an important role in improving and controlling the performance of football referees. Therefore, this psychological ability, which should be taken into account for the success of football referees, should be considered in the studies about the referees' performance. Therefore, it is thought that this study will make a great contribution to the literature and will set an example for future studies.

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