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BEYOND A GAME: PEER EDUCATION TO SEPARATE FOOTBALL AND VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Football, one of the sports with roots in history, has been associated with violence and tragedy in various countries. Several studies have tried to understand the nature and structure of hooliganism and its common cross-national characteristics, severity, and causes. Although existing literature suggests a variety of strategies to prevent violence in football, it is widely accepted that there must be grassroots movements and self-awareness, besides these measures, to reduce cases of aggression in football. This study, which was awarded the Fair Play prize in 2014 by the Turkish Olympic Committee, focuses on training fans using the peer education methodology. The young fans of Beşiktaş Football Club implemented a peer education program and conducted an online survey to assess its effectiveness and understand the participants' perceptions and reflections regarding the causes of and methods to prevent football hooliganism. The results suggest that the training program was effective and that it should be disseminated to reach all other associations to achieve results that are more positive.

Keywords: violence, football, hooliganism, training of peers, Beşiktaş FC, Turkey

1. Introduction

Football hooliganism is a phenomenon that has been causing international anxiety over the past two decades. However, it is not a phenomenon that has emerged recently. On the contrary, football-related violence dates back to 13th century Britain. Football was a medieval folk game known as 'campball', 'hurling', and 'knappan' in Britain and by different names in other countries (Dunning, 2001, p. 50). Rules of football, the number of players, and the equipment used for the game varied from country to country. Unfortunately, violence associated with football has remained unchanged and still exists.

One of the tragic incidents in the history of football hooliganism, known as Heysel Stadium disaster, occurred in Brussels in 1985 during European Cup Final between Liverpool and Juventus. Due to the fight between fans from both sides and the police, and the collapse of a wall before kick-off, 39 Juventus fans were killed and over 500 injured (Dunning, 2001, p. 51).

Regrettably, there have been similar cases in Turkey. In 1967, the most tragic incident in Turkish football history occurred during a football match between Kayseri Spor and Sivas Spor. As a result of the violence, 40 people were killed and nearly 600 people were injured (Mil & Şanlı, 2015, p. 235).

Several studies have been conducted to understand the nature and structure of hooliganism. Some of these revealed the common cross-national characteristics of this social phenomenon while others revealed that the severity, cause, and nature of hooliganism vary significantly across countries (Spaaij, 2007).

The underlying reasons for incidence of violence in football can be explained by a variety of factors, but the core element is the perception of common identity among football fans. All individuals are equal among football fans, regardless of individual socio-economic status, educational, or profession, as the sense of support and devotion to the same team develops an identity based on common values and love of team. From this perspective, all fans perceive any offensive expression or act against their team as a personal attack and may retaliate instantly (Ayan, 2006).

A wide range of prevention strategies, including establishing international legislations that bind the entire football community, have been developed. The Stadium Safety and Security Regulations of Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) (Federation Internationale de Football Association, n.d.), and Stadium and security strategy of Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) (Union of European Football Associations, n.d.) are among the most well-known international regulations.

Since 1996, the European Union (EU) has taken several measures to tackle violence in football through legislative acts (Eur-Lex Access to European Union Law, 2007). The basic principle of these measures is to prevent any violence in football and strengthen security cooperation between EU Member States. Segregation of fans with prior violent behaviours, fencing in the stadiums, closed-circuit television surveillance, conversion to all-seater stadiums, and electronic identity cards for fans are some of the popular measures used to prevent hooligan violence in stadiums. However, these measures are insufficient to discourage fans from resorting to violence and to prevent the incidence of violence. In addition to these measures, grassroots movements and self-awareness are required to reduce cases of aggression in football.

Hooligans' violent behaviours are not just limited to stadiums. City centres, pubs, cafes, clubs, and metro stations are other places where hooligan groups engage in violent behaviour, vandalism, or attacks on public, other fan groups, or police (Spaaij, 2005, p. 1-10). Moreover, the structure and organization of hooliganism varies from highly disciplined and hierarchical, criminal organizations to casual, occasional grouping of young fans. Therefore, police and security-oriented prevention measures that mainly focus on stadiums are insufficient, sometimes even ineffective, in preventing hooligans' violence (Brimson, 2016). Furthermore, literature on football hooliganism suggests that it is not possible to draw a definite line between a 'fan' and a 'hooligan'. Hooligans and fans are two ambiguous sets of individuals that have continuous transactions between them. Some non-hooligan fans may get involved with hooligan groups and violence, while some hooligans may 'retire' and behave like ordinary fans at some point in their life. The transformation of fans to hooligans is gradual and subtle, and it is often not possible to pinpoint the exact time when they pass from non-hooligan set of fans to the violent ones (Rookwood & Pearson, 2010, pp. 149-164). The hypothesis of this research is that this transformation can be avoided and hooligan violence can be prevented through peer education of football fans.

Despite infamous incidents in football history, the sport can be played in a peaceful atmosphere, without any violence. For example, in Denmark, they have a concept known as ‘Roligans’ or ‘Cooligans’ that refers to Danish fans who have positive attitudes and respect towards opponents’ teams (Andersson & Radman, 2002, p. 150). This concept was recognized in 1984 as a phenomenon that draws attention to values of anti-hooliganism and fair play in football.

In Turkey, the incidence of violent events related to football has recently escalated dramatically. It is commonly termed the tribune terror in Turkey. The underlying reasons for the violence vary from the socio-economic status of the actors to attitudes of the football referee towards/against football teams to the effect of media on football. On the other hand, actors of violence are composed of sport fans. The most effective way to eradicate violence in football is to start from the core of the problem. Therefore, a project titled Training Young Sports Fans on Prevention of Violence was conducted in Ankara.

The overall aim of the project was to combat violence in football games using peer education of fans and establish a fair play fan group. This study was awarded the Fair Play prize by the Turkish Olympic Committee in 2014.

2. Methodology

The project began in 2013 with ten peer educators, between the ages of 20 and 30, with high school or university degrees. There were an equal number of women and men in the team to ensure gender equality. All of them were closely affiliated to various fan groups in their schools, social groups, or work place, and were familiar with the atmosphere in the stadium or Çarşı, a very well-known neighbourhood in Istanbul, where fans of the Beşiktaş football club gather in large groups from early hours on game days. After receiving training, each peer educator trained 20 fans. The aim was to train 200 fans in order to create a ‘fair play fan group’ that advocates fair play and stops hooligans’ violence in football.

A life-coach, psychologist, lawyer, and an ethicist were included in the project team to train the peer educators on ways of effective communication to create behavioural change, causes of violence in sports, sociologic and physiologic components of violence and uncontrolled rage, and the legal aspects of hooliganism. Each peer educator contacted 20 fans and coached them to avoid violent behaviour before, during, and after football games, both in stadiums and social environments such as cafes, city centres, pubs, and public transportation. The peer educators used various methodologies during the mentoring and peer education program. Case discussions and role play were the common methodologies used in class presentations. Additionally, peer educators organized a seminar on stopping hooliganism and violence at football games, with participation from leaders that the young people could relate to and considered role models. The fan groups of all peer educators attended the seminar as part of their training program.

3. Materials and Methods

Research was conducted to assess the results and the project’s effectiveness. The survey obtained the approval of the Research Ethics Committee from the Ankara University. (no 28; 23.1. 2017). The research used the online survey method (Online Survey System, n.d.) and the survey consisted of three sections. The first section comprised personal questions on age, sex, education level, and marital status. The second section had questions to evaluate participants’ perception of violence in football and their opinion on the role of education for violence prevention, and the third section had questions to determine whether the project had achieved the desired goals. The limitations of the study are the relatively small number of participants and their geographic constraints.

4. Results

The survey received responses from 100 fans. Of this, 98% were 18 years or older, 82% were men, and 18% women (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic data

		Women	Men
Educational Level	Primary Education	0	1
	High School	2	13
	University (Student)	1	4
	University Degree	7	46
	Master (Student)	1	4
	Master Degree	7	14
Age	Younger than 18	1	1
	Between 18 and 30	5	13
	Older than 30	12	68
Marital Status	Married	8	55
	Single	10	26
	Other	0	1

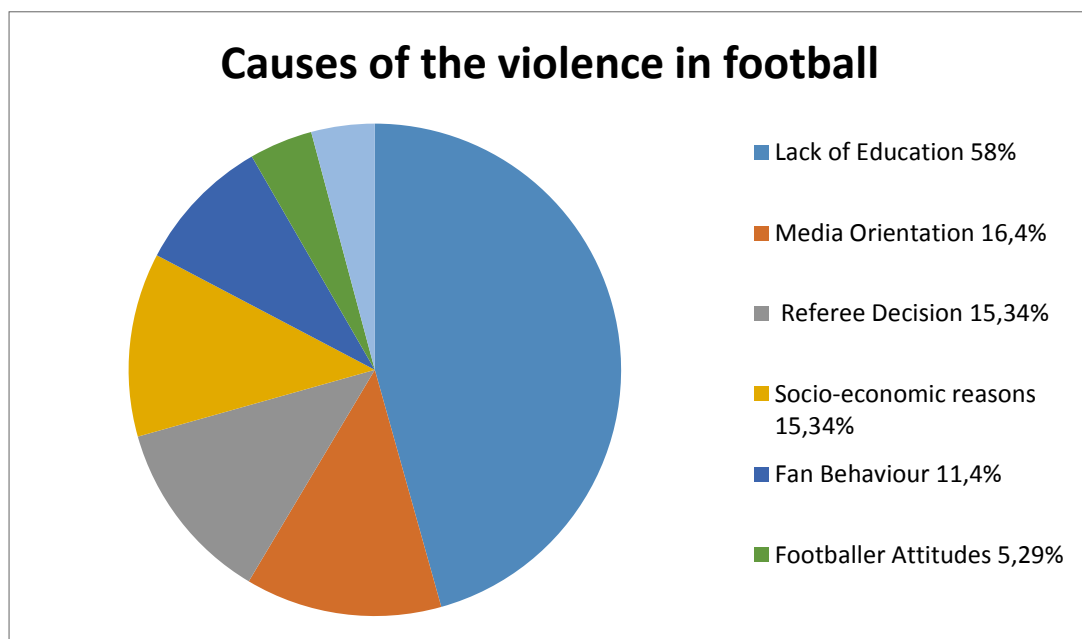


Figure1. Causes of violence in football

Participants selected more than one option for the question on the causes of violence.

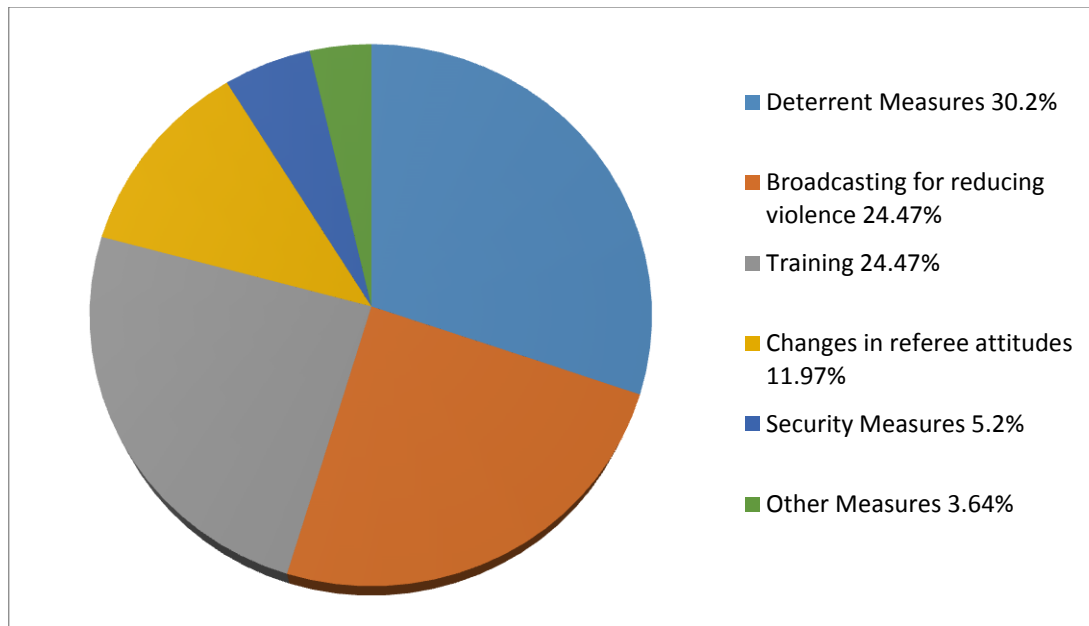


Figure 2. Measures for reducing violence in football

Table 2. The Project on Training Young Sports Fans on Prevention of Violence

Questions/Ideas	Answers	Women	Men
How should the project on Training Young Sports Fans on Prevention of Violence be continued?	Outcomes of the project should be disseminated to other football clubs or associations.	0	13
	Outcomes of the project should reach all fans across the country.	3	22
	Training should be conducted for cheer leaders and group leaders who have the potential to initiate behavioural change	3	11
	Other	0	4
I have become aware of the reasons of violence in football thanks to the activities within the scope of the project.	Agree	4	20
	Partially agree	2	20
	Disagree	0	5
I have become aware of the measures for preventing violence in football thanks to the activities within the scope of the project.	Agree	4	20
	Partially agree	2	21
	Disagree	0	4
My negative opinion on the possibility of prevention of violence in football has changed thanks to the activities within the scope of the project	Agree	3	16
	Partially agree	3	24
	Disagree	0	5

The results indicate that participants consider lack of education (58%) the main cause of violence in the football (Figure 1). Media orientation, referee decisions, socio-economic reasons, fan behaviours, footballer attitudes are the other causes of violence. Additionally, participants' responses indicate that the main actors and factors responsible for violence are non-sportive people with mental disorders (24.63%), herd mentality (20.77%), show of strength (14.49%), fanatics (12.56%), being defeated (6.28%), sense of belonging to the team (5.79%), fans cheering (4.83%), fans representatives (3.38%), and all fans at the stadium (1.44%).

On the question of how participants define themselves in terms of team commitment, 63% said they were fanatic Beşiktaş football team supporters, 24% said they were fans who have/feel a deep commitment, and 13% defined themselves as fans or just sympathizers. The survey also revealed that 35% of the participants watch football games at home, 26% watch games at the stadium a few times a year, 25% watch games at the stadium frequently, and 14% watch games outside their home.

A majority of the participants (96%) indicated that they are not uncomfortable when women come to watch football games at the stadium. On this question, 67% of the participants believe that incidence of violence will reduce if women come to watch football games at the stadium or other places where the games are broadcast.

With respect to the kind of measures necessary to prevent violence in football, participants responded with deterrent measures (30.2%), broadcasting aimed at reducing violence (24.47%), training fans (24.47%), and change in referee attitudes (11.97%), increased security measures (5.2%), and other measures (3.64%). (Figure 2)

Among the participants, 75% stated that peer education is effective in preventing violence in football.

According to the participants, the most effective factors that can prevent violence in football are football club manager (38.69%), fans representatives (20.83%), fans associations (20.83%), law-enforcement officers (8.92%), and international organizations and other institutions (10.73%).

In the context of their personalities, 29.13% of the participants described themselves as calm, 22.83% as a person who is able to cope with anger, 18.89% as quick-tempered, 15.74% as an extrovert, 3.14% as self-enclosed, and 1.57% as furious.

In the third section, participants answered questions related to the Training Young Sports Fans on Prevention of Violence project. Among the participants, 44.64% indicated that the outcomes of the project should reach all fans across the country, 25% thought that the training should be disseminated among cheerleaders and group leaders who have the potential to initiate behavioural change, and 23.21% emphasized the importance of disseminating to other football clubs or associations.

The survey also indicated that the project helped participants become aware of the reasons for violence (90%) and the measures for preventing violence in football (92%). Furthermore, the survey revealed that the most effective tool to prevent the incidence of violence in football is training fans and other related actors. The research also proves that the training activities helped improve the awareness among people on the prevention of violence and contributed to the reduction in the number of violent incidents. However, while it facilitates implementation of other measures, training cannot be the only tool to tackle this issue.

5. Discussion

Discussion on the appropriateness of the peer education method to stop violence at football games and hooliganism:

Peer education is a methodology that can be traced back to Aristotle. This methodology gained popularity in the 1960's, and has been widely used as a flexible, social strategy for health promotion and behavioural change in health, including reducing the incidence of smoking and substance abuse, preventing HIV infection, unwanted pregnancy, and treating sexually transmitted diseases, and improving nutrition and physical activity (Shiner, 1999, p.555-566; Harvard School of Public Health, n.d.). The rationale for peer-education initiatives is that peers are a credible and accepted source of information, and are more successful than professionals in transmitting information. Moreover, peer educators are considered positive role models who can reinforce learning through on-going contact and reach out to those who are difficult to contact via conventional education methods (Health Education Authority, 1993; Turner & Shepherd, 1999, pp. 235-247). Peer education method is also used to reduce violence in various situations, such as schools, community centres, and youth clubs, and is the most common method used in youth leadership programs in middle and high schools in the United States of America (Weisz & Black, 2010, pp. 641–660). The results of this project corroborate the literature and suggest that peer education is an effective training methodology to combat violence in football and that developing and implementing comprehensive peer-training modules would help achieve positive progress.

Effective tools to prevent the incidence of violence in football

Several studies suggest that a multidisciplinary national and international approach is required to reduce violence in football. Deterrent measures such as police control, ticketing, and organizational precautions have been suggested and used in various situations. Although the effectiveness of these measures is uncertain, the survey shows that they are still considered most important by the participants (Comeron, 2002).

However, these measures are likely to fail if they are not accompanied by other preventive strategies such as coaching of fans, improving club supporter relations, and strengthening clubs' role in society. The literature and results of the survey suggest that these strategies should be implemented nationally and internationally targeting people who have the potential to initiate behavioural change in various clubs or associations. Moreover, inclusion of women could potentially alleviate violent behaviours, and encourage fans to be civil.

6. Conclusions

Prevention of football hooliganism is an issue that has been on the agenda of the sports community and media for a long time. National and international measures, together with legislative precautions, have been examined in order to develop strategies to combat the violence in football. Recently, academia has become involved in the issue and several researches have been conducted on the social, cultural, economic, and communal causes of violence and prevention strategies. This study suggests that involving the fans through the peer education methodology could be an effective tool for reducing and preventing violence in football. However, considering the limitations of this study, more research is required to develop effective peer education programs.

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