

The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Burnout in Iranian Soccer Super League Referees

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Abstract: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout in Iranian soccer super league referees. The method of the study is descriptive-correlational and the data was collected via questionnaires using field study procedure. The population of the study consisted of all 73 soccer super league referees in the 2010-2011 season. The sample size was equated with the population. From among the 73 questionnaires distributed to the referees, a number of 67 questionnaires (91.78%) were regarded as valid and analyzable. Emotional intelligence scale developed based on the Mayer and Salovey (1990) model of emotional intelligence and revised questionnaire of burnout developed based on the Maslach burnout inventory were used to examine emotional intelligence and burnout in the referees, respectively. Both descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics including Pearson correlation formula and regression analysis (both enter and stepwise methods) were used to analyze the data ($p < 0.05$). The results showed that Iranian soccer super league referees had above average emotional intelligence and had low levels of refereeing burnout. The results also revealed a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and burnout in the referees ($r = -0.35$, $p = 0.003$). There were multiple relationships between the components of emotional intelligence and burnout in the super league referees so that 10% of burnout variance can be accounted for by emotional assessment and expression. Accordingly, it seems that referees with higher emotional intelligence suffer from less burnout. Thus, it is recommended that adequate training programs be provided for the referees to increase the emotional intelligence in them, which may help prevent referee burnout to some extent.

Keywords: Burnout, emotional intelligence, referee, soccer

INTRODUCTION

In addition to its management issues, soccer comprises important components including players, coaches, spectators and referees. As with other components, issues related to refereeing have assumed a scientific guise and require training and experience. A referee in the pitch is not only in charge of the judging team, but he also may make decisions which significantly affect the behavior and reactions of players, coaches, spectators, officials and clubs (Hampton, 2006).

Referees are among the most influential members in holding sports competitions, whose endeavor, expertise and perseverance have contributed a lot to all types of sports. Following players and coaches, referees are regarded as the third pillar of sports competitions and undertake one of the most critical responsibilities in

sports. Refereeing is a rapturous and stressful job. Research has shown that referees may encounter potential stressful scenes including spectator pressures, individual factors, and situational experiences like players or spectators' aggression during a match, which may affect their decisions (Lane *et al.*, 2006). Referees are often subject to reproaches and vulnerable to many stresses such as maltreatment, spectator affronts, and lack of appropriate financial support by the officials Baldwin (2007). Since there is positive correlation between referees' job stresses and their health conditions and mental disorders (Andy, 2006), the referees who suffer from stress and burnout are emotionally exhausted, bear low morals and have inadequate mental health (Marco *et al.*, 2005). Considering the fact that referees, particularly soccer referees, should continuously deal with media critiques, nervous coaches, aggressive spectators, discontent

players and breathtaking pressures of a right or wrong decision, they may become vulnerable to anxiety, stress and burnout unless they can efficiently cope with these pressures. In this regard, it seems that Emotional Intelligence (EI), along with the ability of careful reasoning about emotional feelings (Mayer *et al.*, 2008) and bearing such properties as the ability to excite oneself, the ability to resist failures, maintaining one's morals, repressing depression during thinking, empathy, intimacy and optimism (Goleman, 1995), not only helps control emotional responses, but it also facilitates the appropriate exploitation of emotions in various situations and can predict reductions in burnout. Indeed, by adequate processing of the events which bear emotional load, EI empowers the individual to sensibly deal with the events, apply continence and control immediate demands. It, therefore, may be contended that, considering its significant role in emotional control (appropriate emotional management and individual's adaptability to the environment), EI may help reduce burnout and enhance emotional control in the athletes (Goleman, 1998).

Generally speaking, the influential effect of emotions on athletic performance has drawn the attention of many researchers who have tried to find procedures to control and regulate emotions (Lane *et al.*, 2010). Research has shown a significant relationship between EI and a variety of other constructs including athletic performance (Mayer *et al.*, 2000), mental and physical health (Mohammadyfar *et al.*, 2009), optimal performance (Lane *et al.*, 2009) and self-efficacy (Verissimo, 2005). Besides, the results of investigations on teacher population (Mohammad, 2010), office worker population (Le, 2010), manager population (Cote and Golden, 2006), nurse population (Tamari, 2007) and athlete population (Kababi, 2010) have revealed a significant negative correlation between EI and burnout. However, EI has not yet been investigated in referees, particularly soccer referees. The present study assumes that increased EI may reduce burnout in the soccer super league referees. Therefore, the researcher aims at investigating the relationship between EI and burnout in the Iranian soccer super league referees. This study is to answer the question whether or not there is a significant correlation between EI and its components with the prevalence and intensity of burnout in the Iranian soccer super league referees.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method of the study is descriptive-correlational. The data was collected using questionnaires and through field study procedure. The

Table 1: Reliability coefficients of EI scale and revised burnout questionnaire

Scale	α	Split-half method
Emotional assessment and expression	0.68	0.75
Emotional regulation	0.88	0.81
Emotional exploitation	0.74	0.74
Overall EI	0.88	0.77
Burnout intensity	0.87	0.85
Burnout prevalence	0.88	0.85
Overall Burnout	0.81	0.78

Table 2: Demographic information of soccer super league referees

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Marital status	Married	60	89.6
	Bachelor	7	10.4
	Diploma	9	13.4
Academic degree	Associate degree	13	19.4
	BA/BSc	37	55.2
	MA/MSc	8	11.9
Field of study	Physical education	20	29.9
	other	47	70.1
Living in	Tehran	18	26.9
	Other cities	49	73.1
Occupation	Self-employed	14	20.9
	Office worker	53	79.1
Total		67	100

population of the study consisted of all 73 soccer super league referees in the 2010-2011 season in Iran. The sample size was equated with the population. From among the 73 questionnaires distributed to the referees, a number of 67 questionnaires (91.78%) were regarded as valid and analyzable. Emotional intelligence scale (Schutte *et al.*, 1998) developed based on the model of emotional intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) and revised questionnaire of burnout (Weinberg and Richardson, 2002) developed based on the Maslach burnout inventory were used to examine emotional intelligence and burnout in the referees, respectively. Moreover, in order to define the reliability of the questionnaire, the two methods of Cronbach's Alpha and split-halves were used, which showed the values of (0.88 and 0.77) and (0.81 and 0.78), respectively, for the entire questionnaire (Table 1).

RESULTS

The results showed that Iranian soccer super league referees with mentioned Demographic information in below (Table 2), enjoyed above average EI and had low levels of refereeing burnout (Table 3). The results also revealed a significant negative correlation between EI

Table 3: Statistics of EI and burnout in soccer super league referees

Statistics variables	Mean.	S.D.	Min.	Max.	No.
Overall EI	123.00	12.99	87	151	67
Emotional assessment and expression	46.75	6.21	33	59	67
Emotional regulation	9.93	7.02	15	50	67
Emotional exploitation	36.40	4.88	23	44	67
Overall burnout	69.18	26.49	32	138	67
Burnout prevalence	33.99	13.56	16	71	67
Burnout intensity	35.19	14.16	16	78	67

Table 4: Simple correlation coefficient between EI and burnout and their subscales

Variable	Statistical indices	Burnout	Burnout prevalence	Burnout intensity
EI	Correlation	-0.35	-0.41	-0.26
	P	0.003	0.01	0.32
Emotional assessment and expression	Correlation	-0.32	-0.33	0.28
	P	0.009	0.007	-0.024
Emotional regulation	Correlation	-0.20	-0.25	-0.12
	P	0.115	0.040	0.329
Emotional exploitation	Correlation	-0.25	-0.31	-0.17
	P	0.040	0.012	0.161

Table 5: Multiple regression coefficient between EI components and burnout using both enter and stepwise methods

Criterion variable	Statistical index Predicting variables	Multiple Regression (MR)	RS	P for F	Regression coefficients (β)		
					1	2	3
A Burnout	Emotional assessment and expression	0.318	0.101	F = 7.333 p = 0.009	β = -0.318 t = -2.708 p = 0.009		
	Emotional regulation	0.367	0.134	F = 4.971 p = 0.010	β = -0.311 t = -2.672 p = 0.010	β = -0.182 t = -1.564 p = 0.123	
	Emotional exploitation	0.388	0.151	F = 3.733 p = 0.016	β = -0.297 t = -2.536 p = 0.014	β = -0.062 t = -0.394 p = 0.659	β = -0.176 t = -1.106 p = 0.273
B Burnout	Emotional assessment and expression	0.318	0.101	F = 7.333 p = 0.009	β = -0.318 t = -2.708 p = 0.009		

and burnout in the referees ($r = -0.35$, $P = 0.003$) (Table 4). There were multiple relationships between the components of EI and burnout in the super league referees so that 10% of referee burnout variance can be accounted for by emotional assessment and expression (Table 5).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present findings revealed that EI mean score ($M = 123$) and its components, including emotional assessment and expression, emotional regulation and exploitation, were above average (Average = 99) in the soccer super league referees. In other words, this finding indicates that Iranian soccer super league referees have a good level of EI. The literature lacked a previous study in line with the present one to compare the results; however, since referees are among the most influential members in holding sports competitions (Baldwin, 2007), the present findings are consistent with the findings of Lane *et al.* (2010), Vassiliki and Dimitra (2009), Saklofske *et al.* (2007), Perlini and Halverson (2006), Tsaousis and Nikolaou (2005), Aries

Table 6: Anthropometric characteristics of soccer super league referees

Variables	Mean.	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Age	36.82	3.90	29	45
Height	179.10	5.41	168	189
Weight	75.42	5.94	60	89

et al. (2004), Ciarrochi and Deane (2001), Shaun (2005-2006) and Zizzi *et al.* (2003), as cited in Brinberg *et al.* (2007) who reported that athletes have higher EI comparing with non-athletes (Tsaousis and Nikolaou, 2005). This finding may be accounted for based on some present possibilities as follows:

- Considering the fact that EI can be acquired through experience and training (Goleman, 1998) and usually peaks at the age of 40 (Bar-On, 2001) and requires training, patience and lapse of time (Shields and Warner, 2007) and regarding the fact that no EI training program has yet been developed for Iranian referees, some characteristics of the research population including referees' age (about 37, Table 6), qualifications (47% national and 20%

Table 7: Professional profile of soccer super league referees

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Type of refereeing	Referee	32	47.8
	Assistant Referee	35	52.2
Referee qualifications	National	47	70.1
	International	20	29.9
	Less than 10	14	20.9
Number of refereeing in the season	Between 11 and 20	45	67.2
	More than 21	8	11.9
	Less than 10 years	5	7.5
Refereeing history	Between 11 and 15 years	31	46.3
	Between 16 and 20 years	20	29.9
	More than 21 years	11	16.4
Refereeing history in the super league	1 to 4 years	24	35.8
	5 to 9 years	35	52.5
	More than 10 years	8	11.9
Total		67	100

international, Table 7), refereeing history in national competitions (51% more than 10 years , Table 7) and in super league (64% more than 5 years, Table 7) may have empowered the them to achieve a considerable level of EI through experience and trial and error;

- Goleman (1995) contend that, in addition to technical abilities, high performance requires some particular abilities including precise control of one's emotions, appropriate reaction, persuasion, group work, ability to negotiate, transparent communication, mediation and the ability to communicate. This is because these characteristics help the individual become vigilant, calm, respectful, observant, attentive, responsive, illustrative and receptive in dealing with people and situations (Goleman, 1995). In this regard, it seems that the social skills of soccer super league referees have developed consistent with their technical and professional skills and as a result of extensive communication with coaches, players, colleagues, managers and media over the course of time, which has resulted in their increased EI.
- EI refers to a hierarchy of non-cognitive skills which influence individual abilities so that the individual may overcome environmental pressures (Bar-On, 2005). Since refereeing is a stressful job and referee decisions can influence the behavior of all players, coaches, spectators, officials and clubs (Hampton, 2006), referees may incrementally learn that emotional assessment, expression, regulation and exploitation help them effectively deal with media critiques, nervous coaches, aggressive spectators, discontent players and breathtaking pressures of a right or wrong decision, and consequently, they may increase their EI through practice and emotional control.
- EI is one of the best predictors of living a successful life such that 85-90% of perfect

performance has been attributed to it Brinberg *et al.* (2007). Accordingly, referees who judge super league and international games have attained the highest levels of career success, which may indicate that, in addition to technical abilities, they have also attained high levels of EI.

The present findings showed that the mean score of burnout (M = 69.18) and its components (prevalence and intensity of burnout) were below average (Average = 128) in Iranian soccer super league referees. In other words, this indicates that Iranian soccer super league referees had a good status in terms of burnout and its components. This is consistent with two previous studies on burnout in Iranian soccer referees. Accordingly, Ahmadi *et al.* (2009) investigated stressors, burnout and desire for retirement in 86 Iranian professional referees and Gholamian *et al.* (2009) studied burnout in 32 Iranian national and international referees. Having found a relationship between referee burnout and the level of stresses, they reported that Iranian referee burnout was moderate to low (Ahmadi *et al.*, 2006). Considering the present findings which revealed high levels of EI in Iranian referees, and regarding the previous findings which attribute a great deal of mental health and reduced burnout to high levels of EI (Benson *et al.*, 2007), it seems that high EI has empowered the Iranian referees to avoid burnout.

The results also demonstrated a significant negative correlation between EI and burnout in Iranian soccer super league referees. There was also a significant negative correlation between EI and the prevalence (repetition) of burnout in the referees so that with increased EI, both overall and repeated burnouts significantly decreased in the referees. However, there was no significant correlation between EI and the intensity of burnout. This is consistent with results of investigations on teacher population (Momenian, 2009), office worker population (Auxliadora *et al.* 2004),

manager population (Cote and Golden, 2006), nurse population (Tamari, 2007) and athlete population (Kababi, 2010), which revealed a significant negative correlation between EI and burnout. A review on the literature shows that there is consensus among the researchers on the negative correlation between EI and burnout. In order to account for this relation, it can be contended that, firstly, emotional disorders may efficiently predict burnout (De Vito, 2009). Secondly, burnout significantly reduces the individual's mental health (Niazi, 2009). Thirdly, EI significantly improves professional activities, career success, and acquisition of necessary skills (Raedeke, 1997) and influences emotional management, that is, effective management of emotions and compatibility with the environment, which may reduce burnout in the athletes (Mayer *et al.*, 2000). It seems that high EI not only controls emotional responses in soccer super league referees, but, as a good predictor of reduced burnout, it also helps the referees accurately utilize their emotions in various situations. Besides, the results of regression analysis showed that there are multiple correlations between the components of EI and burnout in the Iranian soccer super league referees. From among the components of EI, emotional assessment and expression was the best predictor of the repetition and intensity of burnout as well as overall burnout in the super league referees. Similarly, Mohammadi (2010), Kababi (2010), Momenian (2009) and Chan (2006) also reported that there are multiple correlations between the components of EI and burnout (Chan, 2006). Accordingly, Kababi (2010) reported self-regulation, Chan (2006) reported emotional perception and regulation and Momenian (2009) reported all the three components of EI to predict burnout (Kababi, 2010). Emotional self-assessment and self-expression can be determined based on verbal and non-verbal components and emotional assessment of others may be determined based on the sub-components of non-verbal perception and empathy (Mayer and Salovey, 1990). Considering the fact that emotional assessment and expression can be defined in terms of emotional self-knowledge and empathy and that empathy originates from emotional self-knowledge (Goleman, 1995) which is in turn the building block of EI (Mayer *et al.*, 1999) and since self-knowledge and building a protective empathy system with family, friends and colleagues can help avoid burnout (Beverly, 2005), it seems that emotional assessment and expression are the best predictors of the repetition and intensity of burnout as well as overall burnout in soccer super league referees. Therefore, super league referees can avoid burnout via achieving a deep understanding of their emotions, feelings, strengths and weaknesses, needs and drives. They may also increase their emotional self-knowledge and perception of various

aspects of others' emotions and empathetic reactions to other individuals in the environment (Goleman, 1995), which is an index of emotional assessment and expression (Mayer and Salovey, 1990), which may help them avoid burnout.

Overall, the present study showed that there is a significant negative correlation between EI and burnout as well as its subscales (prevalence and intensity of burnout) in the soccer super league referees. Accordingly, referees with higher EI may suffer from less burnout due to better management of and reasonable coping with their emotions. In other words, referees with higher EI may better assess, regulate and exploit their own and others' emotions so that in stressful conditions of refereeing and under the stresses induced by the environment, spectators, coaches, players and media, referees with higher levels of EI may be less vulnerable to burnout. Despite the general intelligence which is confirmed in early life, EI may develop during the life via training and endeavor and acquisition of new skills (Shields and Warner, 2007). Therefore, it is recommended that EI training programs be designed for the referees in order to prevent and reduce burnout in them. It is notable to mention that EI training does not mean giving advice to the referees; rather it means that they need to be made sensitive toward their emotions and raise awareness toward their emotional dimension. The emotional skills they have learned can facilitate their communication with others. Consequently, referees' interpersonal interaction and performance may improve. Moreover, EI training may increase the awareness of human emotions and improve the ability of listening, effective interaction, emotional expression, conflict resolution, coping with mental pressures, which consequently reduces burnout in the referees.

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