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## Causal explanations of sports violence

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### Abstract:

Violence in sport and around sports is one of those phenomena which worries society in general and more particularly sports federations, public authorities, and athletes themselves. It seems contrary to the values of sport such as the pleasure of playing, fair play, respect for competitors, anti-racism, even if the rivalry that can oppose two competitors or two teams is also part of sport.

Sports violence is a disturbing global phenomenon, it became necessary to study the causes that made it so widespread. In this article we will explore what is sports violence, and what is its history and how did it appear, we'll explore its forms, and discover the theoretical explanations for sports violence.

**Keywords:** Sport; Violence; Sports violence; Agressive behaviour.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Discussions of violence in sports like discussions of deviance, are often connected with people's ideas about the moral condition of society as a whole. When athletes engage in quasi-criminal violence on the field or criminal violence off the field, many people see it as evidence that the moral foundation of society is eroding. They fear that young people who look up to athletes as role models are learning a warped sense of morality.

Statements about violence in sports are often confusing. Some people say that violence is an inherent part of many games, whereas others say that it destroys the dynamics of games. Some people say that violence in sports reflects natural tendencies among males in society, whereas others say that men use violence in sports to promote the idea that physical size and strength is a legitimate basis for maintaining power over others. Some say that violence in sports is worse today than ever before, whereas others say it is less common and less brutal than in the past. (McGraw-Hill, 2013, p196)

Spectators often derive a sense of social identity and self-esteem from a team. Emulation of favorite players is an element of this identification. Group solidarity with players and coaches leads to a view of opposing teams as enemies and fosters hostility towards the "outgroup" and, by extension, its supporters, geographical locale, ethnic group, and perceived social class (Ismat, 1989, p1).

An increase in both frequency and seriousness of acts of violence has been well documented. Violence is most prevalent in team contact sports, such as ice hockey, football, and rugby. While most occurrences of violence emanate from players, others, including coaches, parents, fans and the media, also contribute to what has been described as an epidemic of violence in sports today (Ismat, 1989, p1)

Sports violence refers to behavior which causes harm and occurs outside the rules of the sport. Sports violence usually occurs in contact sports such as American football, ice hockey, rugby football, soccer, boxing, mixed martial arts, wrestling, and water polo. These include intentional attempts to injure a player by another player or coach, threats of physical harm or actual physical harm sustained by players or coaches by those engaged in looking out sports.

These violent behaviors negatively affected the athletes and the sport as a whole, so the phenomenon must be studied and analyzed scientifically to find appropriate solutions to prevent it.

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### **2. WHAT IS SPORTS VIOLENCE?**

Defining sports violence is an important task because it determines what behaviours and practices we render (in)visible, how we assess and respond to these, and where we look for explanations. For example, Young (2012: 13) laments the narrow customary parameters of definitions of sports violence and suggests that if these parameters are broadened to include a range of harmful or abusive behaviours within the context of sport, 'it becomes evident that the subject matter may be far more expansive and varied than commonly assumed.' This definitional concern similarly plagues the social sciences of violence more broadly, where the problems entailed in specifying violence in an unambiguous way are well established. ( Spaaij,2015, p325)

what we consider violence in sport is every use of illegal means or excessive force, in any form, on the part of the athletes, coaches, umpires, parents, spectators and other participants in sports or those involved in it (starting from the preliminaries, competitions, judging and reconstruction, to their media coverage), which harms those who are taking part in the sports event. (Nenad & Nebojša,2011, p206)

Sports violence can be defined as behavior which causes harm, occurs outside of the rules of the sport, and is unrelated to the competitive objectives of the sport (Ismat,1989, p1).

A somewhat broader definition is that sports violence is 'any behavior that causes either physical or psychological injury related to either a direct or indirect result of a sport experience' (Jamieson and Orr,2012, p4)

usually refers to violent and often unnecessarily harmful intentional physical acts committed during, or motivated by, a sports game, often in relation to contact sports such as American football, ice hockey, rugby football, lacrosse, association football, boxing, mixed martial arts, wrestling, and water polo and, when referring to the players themselves, often involving excessively violent or potentially illegal physical contact beyond the normal levels of contact expected while playing the sport. These acts of violence can include intentional attempts to injure a player or coach by another player or coach, but can also include threats of physical harm or actual physical harm sustained by players or coaches by fans or those engaging in the spectating of sports, or threats and acts of violence performed by fans or spectators upon opposing fans or other spectators.

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Berkowitz (1993) summarised that we need two factors present to classify a behaviour as showing aggression : (in Liam,2020)

- The behaviour must be directed at another human being with the goal of causing some form of physical harm.
- The behaviour must show a reasonable expectation that the attempt to inflict harm will be successful.
- Although other sports psychologists have slightly different classifications such as the criteria noted by Gill.

### **3. HISTORY OF SPORTS VIOLENCE**

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Very generally the history of sport describes as a model the sports of antiquity and more particularly the Olympic Games which lasted more than a thousand years (from 776 BC to 393) (Elias,1976, p3). However, the comparison with current practices and competitions can only be done with caution as the conditions were very different. The violence accepted in sport was far superior to ours, and the Greek games hardly obeyed the spirit of loyalty. During the Middle Ages, then the Renaissance, various sports games were played such as croquet (or mail game), archery (one of the first competitions took place in 1583, in England, with more than 3000 participants), la soule (ancestor of football). But the emblematic competition is the tournament, a fight of knights comprising various events, including combat on foot, but whose strongest image remains that of the knight with a lance. During the Renaissance, the most popular sport was undoubtedly the Jeu de Paume (In 1657, 114 tennis courts were listed in Paris). Unlike the previous ones, it is not a violent sport and women practice it. In the second half of the nineteenth century and then in the first half of the twentieth century many sports were invented in England and spread rapidly throughout the world h horse racing, football, wrestling, boxing, tennis, fox hunting, rowing, croquet, Athletics ; rather, they are aristocratic or worldly leisure activities. However, in football, violence existed in the stadiums from the end of the nineteenth century (Dominique & al,2004, p249); they are spontaneous and are made by supporters; they concern both professional and amateur sport (Comeron,2002 , p53).

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Pierre de Coubertin after having analyzed the social and moral training of British schools, began, from 1887, a campaign to promote school sport in France. The Games of the first Olympiad were held in 1896 in Athens, after the creation of the International Olympic Committee. The oath pronounced by an athlete and written by Pierre de Coubertin in 1920, is "We swear that we present ourselves to the Olympic Games as loyal competitors, respectful of the regulations which govern them and eager to participate in a chivalrous spirit, for the honor of our countries and for the glory of sport. " It was from the 1970s with the appearance of supporters' groups that violence became a social reality such that jurists and institutions could not ignore it. (Lassalle,1997, p127)

### **4. THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS OF SPORTS VIOLENCE**

This theories may help to provide and explanation to the the wide variety of motivational influences that can lead towards aggressive behaviours :

#### **4.1. Instinct theory and catharsis in sport**

This was the first theory for aggression in sport and was defined by Freud, and Lorenz (1966). This theory is based on a nature approach; it argues that aggressive behaviour is innate, genetically inherited and as a result inevitable. It suggests aggression is due to our evolutionary development, our life instinct and our death instinct. Aggression is a trait of our self destructive death instinct and this clashes with our life instincts until it is balanced.

The theory suggests aggression is built up and needs to be released to maintain our well being. This aggression can be directed towards another person or displaced and it argues that sport allows this release through a Catharsis. Rather than releasing our aggression in an inappropriate place we may wait until a more appropriate time to release it, and we use displacement when we want to do something that we know is not acceptable, and We re-direct this emotional response from a dangerous target to a safe one.( Belk,2012)

Instinct theory refers to early beliefs that an athlete's inevitability to be aggressive builds up over time before being expressed. It's the analogy of tightening a spring until it forcibly unwinds.

The instinct can either be expressed with a show of aggression such as attacking another living being or through displacement as catharsis. Catharsis is where feelings of aggression are released through socially acceptable means such as sporting activities.

Whilst many sports participants might consider that sport provides a socially acceptable means for them to vent their frustrations in the form of catharsis it is widely acknowledged within the psychology fraternity that no innate biologically aggressive behaviour has been identified and therefore very little support has been given to the notion of catharsis from the scientific community in assessing that sport offers a socially acceptable means of dispersing our natural aggressive feelings. (Liam,2020) Within this context, sports is seen as a socially acceptable way to discharge built-up aggression, a safety valve. (Ismat,1989)

However the theory has Criticisms: ( Belk,2012)

- Levels of aggression actually tend to increase in sport not decrease
- No innate aggressive characteristics have ever actually been found
- Aggressive sports players often don't show the same aggressive characteristics in society away from their sport.
- Aggressive behaviour is often learnt and is linked to culture not just innate.

### **4.2.Frustration-Aggression Theory**

The frustration aggression theory (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939) states that aggression occurs because frustration arises due to a goal blockage. However this theory states that every time a player becomes frustrated this will always cause aggression. This theory does not take into account any other intrinsic or extrinsic factors. On the other hand the general aggression model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) argues that situational and personal factors play a role in causing a person to behave aggressively. Therefore, a player's personality will play a large role in determining whether they are aggressive or not in certain situations. This model also takes into account socially learnt cues and therefore if a player has been taught not to be aggressive in certain situation then he will not use aggression.

It can be seen that aggression comes from a variety of sources and it is important to understand where these sources stem from. Sport stressors allow us to understand what causes an athlete to become frustrated which can lead to aggression and a decline in performance.

Stress can have a negative impact on performance and has been shown to even increase the likelihood of injury (Blackwell & McCullagh, 1990). In elite sport the main type of stress that has been studied is organisational stress. Shirom(1982) defined organisational stress as “work related social psychological

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stress". Woodman and Hardy(2001) investigated organisational stress in elite athletes and they found that there were four main stress issues, which were personal, team, leadership and environmental. Within team issues a large factor that caused stress was tension among athletes. Fletcher and Hanton (2003) conducted a similar study looking at organisational stress and they found that the coach athlete tension was a large contributing factor. Therefore strict coaching and negative feedback can affect performance in many ways. (Adam Morris). And the frustration-aggression theory refers to aggression being as a direct result of goal blockage or failure to achieve a specific goal.

Psychologists initially observed that most aggressive acts occur when people exhibit feelings of frustration. However the frustration-aggression theory carries little weight due to its insistence that frustration causes aggression. It does not factor into account that many individuals with develop coping strategies to deal with their feelings of frustration.

Adaptation of the the frustration-aggression theory shows that aggressive behaviour may not be obvious and through sport the feelings can be channelled through socially acceptable outlets in the form of catharsis. ( Liam,2020)

The main criticisms of the theory include: (Belk,2012)

- Not all frustration leads to aggression.
- Not all aggressive behaviour is caused by frustration some behaviours are learnt.
- It doesn't account for situational factors or individual differences.
- Miller (1941) also argued factors such as fear of retaliation, respect for another person or fear of penalties for aggression might stop someone who was frustrated from becoming aggressive.

### **4.3.Bandura's Social Learning Theory**

Bandura (1977) believed that behaviours are learnt as a result of environmental factors in the form of observational learning. As human's we consider the relationship between our actions and subsequent consequences through a procedure of information processing. Therefore observational learning can only occur when cognitive processes are exhibited. (Liam,2020)

Social Learning Theory applies to several human behavior theories in which the acquisition and maintenance of behaviors such as addictive behaviors depend on the connections between personal factors, environmental factors, and the behavior. Social Learning/Cognitive Theory, to which Albert Bandura greatly

contributed, focuses on several key constructs including differential reinforcement, vicarious learning, cognitive processes, and reciprocal determinism. (Clayton & Nicole ,2013)

Social Learning Theory is one of the most widely used theories to explain aggressive behavior(Akers & Jensen 2011). Social Learning Theory centers on the notion that aggressive behavior is learned in a social environment and during interactions with others (Pratt et al. 2010). Proponents of Social Learning Theory argue that learning is a cognitive process that occurs within a social context, and that learning is driven by observing and imitating other people. As part of this process, individuals extract information from those observations and decide whether they will model the behavior or not.( Kabiri & al,2020)

Behaviors are reinforced by the social context, although the learner is also active in the learning process. In criminology, the four main components of social learning include differential association, differential reinforcement, imitation, and definitions.

#### **4.4.Berkowitz's Reformulated Frustration Aggression Theory**

As the originally frustration aggression theory failed to account for justified and unjustified frustration and environmental cues to aggression it needed some adjustment become a justifiable hypothesis.

Berkowitz's (1993) reformulation of the theory pays considerations to the observation that frustration does not assuredly lead on to aggressive behaviour and proposed that frustration creates a readiness for aggression. To lead to aggression certain stimuli are required for the behaviour to occur.

Some psychologists have argued that we need to understand what aggressive acts mean to the individual. Some psychologists consider that aggression can be a calculated act and therefore not born from the frustrations of many theorists.

Berkowitz summarised that a large number of factors and events can influence the strength of impulse to commit acts of aggression.

Examples of these instigating factors include: (Liam,2020)

- Events having aggressive meaning to the athlete
- Objects having an aggression meaning to the athlete
- Lowered restraint towards aggression as a result of instances
- Negative effect
- An aggressive disposition



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-High levels of arousal

-Association with previous gratifications from aggression (Such as positive coach response towards previous aggressive behaviours).

### **5. FORMS OF SPORTS VIOLENCE**

La violence dans le sport concerne la plupart des activités sportives car la violence ne se limite pas à la force qui porte atteinte à l'intégrité physique des personnes, elle revêt des formes, verbales et psychologiques. Et, en conséquence la violence n'est pas réservée à certains sports ; elle touche des sports collectifs, des sports de combat et des sports individuels (Guilbert,2009, p21) Julian Jappert précise que le sport est le reflet de la société et donc tous les sports sont concernés, professionnels comme amateurs (Audrey,2018) Les violences concernent aussi bien les relations des sportifs entre eux que les relations des sportifs avec les entraîneurs, les dirigeants et les arbitres, les comportements des supporter.

Sports violence can be defined as behavior which causes harm, occurs outside of the rules of the sport, and is unrelated to the competitive objectives of the sport identifies two forms of aggression in sports. Instrumental aggression is non-emotional and task-oriented. Reactive aggression has an underlying emotional component, with harm as its goal. Violence is an outcome of reactive aggression. (M.Carter,2020)

Violence between athletes can take various forms. Athletes can be victims of physical (including sexual) or direct verbal aggression, that is to say when they are in the presence of the aggressor, for example during the game, in the locker room, during the activities of team, during competitions or during sports initiations. Violence can also be indirect and occur in the absence of the victim and manifest itself through indirect electronic attacks (e.g. via social networks, sexting), social (e.g. rumors, damage to reputation) or material ( e.g. breakage of personal sports equipment, theft of competition clothing). Peer athletes appear to be the main perpetrators of interpersonal violence in sport. Indeed, a study conducted in the United Kingdom among underage athletes reveals that 87.4% of cases of sexual violence were committed by a peer athlete. In Belgium and the Netherlands, peer athletes were identified as perpetrators of violence in 82% of cases of psychological violence, 45% of cases of sexual violence and 57% of cases of physical violence. Finally, a study in Australia found that 64.8% of athletes had experienced psychological violence from a peer athlete before the age

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of 18. When assaults (direct or indirect) are repeated over a period of time and take place within a power relationship between athletes, it is called bullying. Bullying in a sporting context affects 10 to 15% of athletes.

Leonard (1988,p165) identifies two forms of aggression in sports. Instrumental aggression is non-emotional and task-oriented. Reactive aggression has an underlying emotional component, with harm as its goal. Violence is an outcome of reactive aggression. (in Ismat,1989, p1)

It can also be categorized violence in sports into four categories:

### - **Body Contact**

The first type of sports violence is body contact, which is often accepted as a normal part of many contact sports, such as tackles in football and body checks in hockey. Players know that body contact is a part of these sports, and everyone expects that this type of body contact will occur. Even though body contact sometimes leads to injuries and can be quite brutal, athletes are expected to initiate body contact in these sports in order to successfully play the game. (in <http://lifeopedia>)

### - **Borderline Violence**

Borderline Violence is a physical act that violates the game's rules and causes bodily injury but is still generally accepted by participants and spectators. (SCI,2021)

. These acts are not normal parts of a contact sport; rather, they are illegal tactics that players often use to play "dirty" or get back at an opponent for a perceived slight. Borderline violence might include the outbreak of a fistfight in hockey or a sharp elbow throw while playing soccer.

These moves are not technically allowed, but players often utilize them in order to intimidate their opponents. These actions have become an expected part of contact sports. The concerns of this type of violence are the impact it may have on children watching the sport and observing the violence played over and over by the 'Media.' The Children may copy this activity, or imitate it, or just become non-sensitive to violence.

### - **Quasi-Criminal Violence**

The third type of sports violence is quasi-criminal violence, which include actions that violate the formal rules of the game. These violations can lead to game penalties, such as suspensions and even expulsions. Cheap shots and flagrant fouls can potentially hurt other athletes, and so game officials will punish players who take such actions.

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### **- Criminal Violent Behavior**

The final level of sports violence involves criminal violent behavior, which clearly not only violates the rules of a game, but also violates the law. No athlete should sanction such behavior, and it is clearly outside the norm of even the roughest contact sport. An example of a criminal act might be a premeditated assault on a player using a hockey stick as a weapon. (in <http://lifeopedia>)

the Criminal Violence is an extreme act that causes severe physical harm or even death and almost always results in criminal charges. (SCI,2021)

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Whether in professional competitions or in amateur meetings, violence in sport is a problem that affects players as well as referees and supporters. Moral, physical or verbal, violence in sport worries sports federations which take exemplary sanctions to try to stem this problem.

the Violence, racism, hooliganism, excesses, death of spectators, death of supporters, terrible images that the media have carried to the end of the world, have marred the image of sport for a very long time. Even recently, the events in the world show the topicality of this question.

The pluralism of points of view observed on violence in the scientific field makes it possible to consider that the term violence can give rise to differentiated representations in very diverse social spaces. Significant structures in the definition and explanation of violence in sport .

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