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Elite Algerian Football Referees Stress Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine how the elite Algerian football referees handle stress. The 67 referees in the study sample—field and assistant referees—were under much tension. Thus, they employed the avoidance approach to deal with any potential issues. In the research sample, there was a correlation between strategies and stress. The different types of refereeing (court referee, assistance referee) also cause variations in the sample's stress levels. A few suggestions were made to strengthen the training programs for players and referees. Additionally, some aimed to enlighten the public about the value of discipline and self-control during football games and other sports.

Keywords: Elite, Referees, Stress Coping, Strategies.

المخلص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية للتعرف على استراتيجيات التعامل مع الضغوط لدى حكام النخبة الجزائريين لكرة القدم، وقد استخدم فيها المنهج الوصفي على عينة قدرها 67 حكاما (حكم ساحة، حكم مساعد)، وخلصت الدراسة إلى تمتع العينة بمستوى مرتفع من الضغوط، كما أن حكام النخبة يستخدمون استراتيجيات التجنب في حل المشكل الذي يواجههم، مع وجود علاقة ارتباط بين الضغوط واستراتيجيات التعامل معها لدى عينة البحث، كما أن هناك فروق في مستوى الضغط لدى العينة تعزى لمتغير نوع التحكيم (حكم ساحة، حكم مساعد). في الأخير تم اقتراح بعض التوصيات تكثيف الدورات التدريبية للحكام واللاعبين على حد سواء، والعمل على توعية الجمهور كذلك حول أهمية ضبط النفس أثناء مباريات كرة القدم خصوصا والرياضات الأخرى عموما.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النخبة، الحكام، استراتيجيات التعامل، الضغط.

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Introduction

- Problem Statement:

People frequently find themselves in unwelcome or dangerous circumstances, jeopardizing their integrity and well-being. According to Cooper and Apply (1984, p113), one of the stressful life events associated with the emergence of psychological and physical problems is the presence of chronic diseases, such as cancer. One of the things that lead to maladjustment is thought to be psychological stressors, which can occur on an individual or group level (as in the case of disease). The key to comprehending how people react to stressors lies not in the type of stress or where they originate but instead in the way each person tackles them. While some people are collapsing, others are trying to handle the difficult emergency. This depends on the fact that every person has a psychological breaking point, which varies from one person to another, and according to the nature of the stress and their sources, the individual's personality structure, temperament, age, gender, and psychological health (Botros, 2008, p121).

Refereeing is considered one of the basic pillars of sports competitions, as it is sometimes a factor in the victory of a player or team and the loss of the effort of another. The referee may lose an entire training season due to a simple error, and refereeing may be one of the causes of riots in stadiums or even in cities and countries. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the referee to advance the field of refereeing. Since the referees have a great responsibility, they must be careful, precise and focused on decision-making. The referee is the only person with the authority to decide and apply the law's provisions during the match.

Sports referees and football referees, in particular, are exposed to much stress while managing matches like ordinary people in our current era as they face various types of stress during work or outside of work for reasons other than work, which results in many diseases and a state of imbalance in the daily life of individuals. Accordingly, the researcher shed light on this topic for several reasons, including humanitarian ones, as modern organizations, especially sports ones, must bear a great social responsibility through dealing with employees humanely and caring for them as human wealth. What distinguishes modern management is the great sense of social responsibility that requires it to pay attention to workers' mental and physical health.

There are reasons related to productivity (and in our case, it is expressed by the wise management of matches) because it (i.e., productivity) is the result of the referee's physical and psychological health and reasons related to creativity and innovation related to the ability to bear responsibility and sound mind and body. Elite football referees were chosen as a sample for the current study to reveal the levels of stress they are exposed to during their management of matches. Also, it is an attempt to examine ways to reduce the stress that referees may suffer due to the difficulty of the assigned tasks, as they are required to proceed with matches to smooth endings that guarantee the satisfaction of both parties to the matches and even the audience. Hence, the problem of the study is represented in the main question: To what extent are the elite football referees in Algeria exposed to psychological stress, and what are the most important strategies for dealing with psychological stress? To answer these two questions, a set of sub-questions are needed:

- 1- What is the stress level among elite football referees in Algeria?
- 2- What behavioural strategies are used by elite football referees in Algeria?
- 3- Is there a relationship between work stress and the behaviour strategies of elite football referees in Algeria?
- 4- Are there differences in the stress level among the study sample due to the variable type of refereeing (field referee, assistant referee)?

- Hypotheses:

In light of the previous questions, a set of hypotheses were formulated:

- 1- There is a positive correlation between work stress and behaviour strategies among the study sample.
- 2- There are no differences in the stress level in the study sample due to the variable type of arbitration (court referee, assistant referee).

- The importance of the study:

The importance of the current study arises from the importance of the topic it addresses and the importance of the goals it sets about the relationship between coping strategies and stress among elite football referees in Algeria. Psychological stress, as well as the strategy followed by the individual in dealing with it, is one of the important factors behind good or bad performance. Therefore, our study will reveal the level of stress the referees are exposed to and the strategies used to overcome and mitigate them. Accordingly, the importance of the study is crystallized in the following points:

It is one of the few studies - to the researcher's knowledge - that have been conducted on elite football referees in Algeria to reveal the most common coping methods used by them to deal with the psychological stress they face, and this is what enables researchers to form a clear view of the feasibility of these methods and their suitability. It opens the way for more future research and studies covering this problem's dimensions, which facilitates the development of a sound map of methods for dealing with stress.

- Objectives of the study:

The current study aims to achieve the following:

- 1- Detecting the level of stress among elite football referees in Algeria.
- 2- Identify the strategies for dealing with stress prevailing among elite football referees in Algeria.
- 3- Identifying the nature of the relationship between stress and behaviour strategies among elite football referees in Algeria.
- 4- Revealing the nature of the differences according to the variable type of refereeing.

- Definitions:

A - Psychological stress is the outcome of an occurrence that may happen to a person. It unnerves him either physically or emotionally. Individual differences cause variations in how stressful situations are perceived and how people respond to this psychological stress.

B - Stress coping Strategies: Strategies for dealing with stress are defined as a set of methods and dynamic, behavioural and cognitive activities that the individual uses in the face of a stressful situation to solve the problem and reduce the resulting emotional tension (Hussein & Hussein, 2006, p. 48). It is defined procedurally as the total score obtained by the subject in his responses on the scale of strategies for dealing with stress used in this study.

C - Elite referees: They are the ones who work to implement the sports law in all circumstances while preserving the safety of the players. They consist of four people (a field referee - two assistant referees - and a fourth referee). The referee's authority is the main one, and he manages the match in cooperation with the two assistant referees and the fourth referee whenever required. His decisions are considered final. Referees are known procedurally as a category of referees chosen by the Federal Referees Committee to manage the matches of the Algerian professional championship. Those who practice arbitration are classified into international or local, whether pitch referees or assistant referees for the 2023 sports season. -2024 (Mohamed Haddada, 2015: 63)

- Previous studies:

1-Study by Abdullah Al-Thabi (2010) "Methods of coping with professional psychological stress and their relationship to some variables, a field study on a sample of workers at the Al-Qadam Glass Factory in Damascus."

This study aims to statistically reveal the methods workers use to confront the psychological stress they are exposed to. Also, it attempts to determine whether there are significant differences in stress due to the variables of academic qualification, years of experience, and age. The study was conducted on (200) workers who were selected randomly. The researcher applied the psychological stress coping methods scale. The study arrived at the following results:

* Positive methods are more used than harmful methods among members of the research sample.

* There is an effect of interaction between educational qualification and age on the methods of coping with stress among members of the research sample.

2-Walid Shaheen's study (2010) showed that psychological stress is among the most common causes of reluctance to practice refereeing sports competitions, as they are represented by frequent insults by the public and weak legal protection for the referees. As for continental and international referees, the psychological stress on them is represented in refereeing the most important international and global championships, as the nature of these tournaments requires holding more than one match per week, which usually requires referees to work on more than one match per week, which leads to mental and physical exhaustion for them.

3- The study of Osama Kamel (1997): In this study, Osama indicated that the reason many athletes withdraw from sports is due to the stress they are exposed to. Also, they withdraw for the lack of enjoyment. Hence, they respond to this stress negatively, such as feeling fear of failure, anxiety, frustration, and depression.

Overall, although the current study differs from the aforementioned previous studies in terms of the sample or the method of dealing with research variables, it is consistent with the general orientation of those studies, as it seeks to reveal the levels of stress, the most prominent strategies for confronting them, as well as their impact on referees.

The Field Study:

The approach:

The researcher used the descriptive approach based on the nature of the study. "The descriptive approach is based on careful monitoring and observation of a specific phenomenon or event quantitatively or qualitatively in a specific period or several periods, to identify the phenomenon or event in terms of content, and to reach results and generalizations that help understand and develop reality." (Alyan et al., 2000: 43). The researcher followed the stages of the descriptive approach, which are summarized in two basic stages: the first is the survey or exploratory study stage, which aims to form theoretical frameworks that can be tested after clearly defining the problem of the study, and testing the study tools to determine their validity and readiness to move to the next stage. The second relates to the diagnosis or objective description of the phenomenon under study.

The study sample:

The population of the study consists of all individuals who belong to the national referee's elite in Algerian football. The researcher relied on choosing the sample by a purposive method, meaning the researcher intended to include the sample members according to specific factors:

-The referees must be registered in the lists of the Algerian Football Federation.

-The referees have to officiate in the professional championship matches of the first and second league divisions.

-They were chosen according to the refereeing category (international, local).

-Pitch and assistant referees alike are also included. 90 questionnaires were distributed to the referees, and after excluding incomplete ones, the researcher obtained a research sample of 67, distributed according to the following table:

Table No. 01 shows the characteristics of the study sample.

Sample characteristics	Alternatives	Frequencies	Percentage%
Academic level	Senior technician	21	31.34
	undergraduate	32	47.76
	Postgraduate	14	20.90
Refereeing level	International Referee	11	16.42
	Local Referee	56	83.58
Type of refereeing	Pitch Referee	33	49.26
	Assistant referee	34	50.74
Total		67	100.00

Tools of the study:

This paper relied on the Job Stress Survey (29 items) by Spielberger and the Action Strategies Scale (29 items) by Parker M.A. adopted by J.P. Rolland after ensuring their validity and reliability through the sample.

Psychometric properties of the study tools:

1- Validity:

To ensure the validity of the tool, we calculated the validity of the internal consistency through the degrees of correlation of the items with the total scores of their variables. The results were as follows:

Table No. 02 shows the correlation coefficients of the items with their variables and the letter with the total score of the occupational stress scale.

items	correlation coefficients with work obstacles	items	correlation coefficients with the lack of organizational support
01	205.	15	260.
02	**633.	16	622**.
03	312*.	17	.773**
04	455**.	18	.632**
05	.608**	19	449**.
06	.637**	20	722**.
07	411**.	21	492**.
08	385*.	22	468**.
09	596**.	23	.582**
10	556**.	24	591**.
11	.657**	25	714**.
12	.523**	26	509**.
13	228.	27	650**.
14	379*.	28	.588**
/	/	29	.609**

The correlation coefficient for the work obstacles variable with the scale as a whole is .716

.716

The correlation coefficient for the loss of organizational support variable with the scale as a whole is .773

.773

** The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

* The correlation is significant at the significance level of 0.05

According to the table, we notice that the correlation coefficients of the items are positive and statistically significant at the level of 0.05 and 0.01, except for items 1, 13, and 15, which are not significant and will be deleted.

Table No. 03 shows the correlation coefficients of the items with their variables and the letter with the total score to measure stress coping strategies.

Item	The problem solution	Item	searching for social support	Item	avoidance	Item	positive re- evaluation	Item	self- accusation
01	0.73**	09	0.81**	14	0.64**	21	0.65**	26	0.77**
02	0.66**	10	0.77**	15	0.62**	22	0.75**	27	0.76**
03	0.78**	11	0.79**	16	0.64**	23	0.76**	28	0.79**
04	0.75**	12	0.82**	17	0.70**	24	0.72**	29	0.61**
05	0.73**	13	0.77**	8	0.75**	25	0.64**	/	/
06	0.84**	/	/	19	0.66**	/	/	/	/
07	0.87**	/	/	20	0.58**	/	/	/	/
08	0.86**	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
The problem solution					0.91**				
searching for social support					0.88**				
avoidance					0.77**				
positive re-evaluation					0.76**				
self-accusation					0.79**				

** The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

* The correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

All items are significant at the level of 0.05 and 0.01, and therefore, all of them have been retained.

Tool reliability:

After deleting the items that did not indicate a significant correlation in the occupational stress variable, we calculated the reliability of the study tool by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results were:

Table No. 04 shows the reliability coefficient of the study tool.

variable	Number of items	Reliability rate (Cronbach's alpha coefficient value)
Occupational stress	27	0.87
Solving the problem	08	0.78
Searching for social support	05	0.80
Positive re-evaluation	07	0.78
Self-accusation	05	0.63
Avoidance	04	0.81
Strategies for dealing with stress	29	0.89

Table N04 shows that the reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha method for the total values or variables was high, ranging between 0.63 and 0.89. All of them had high coefficients, confirming the reliability of the study tool.

- Hypothesis testing:

***The answer to the first sub-question:** What is the stress level among elite football referees in Algeria?

To judge the level of occupational stress among the study sample, the primary unit of measurement was used, which ranges from 01 to 05 according to the classification of the scale (alternatives). Therefore, average scores ranging from 2.5 to 3.5 will be considered to indicate an average level, and scores that are less than 2.5 indicate a below-average or low level. An average score of more than 3.5 indicates an above-average or high level. The results are shown in the following table:

Table No. 05 shows the level of stress in the study sample.

	Average sample scores on the occupational stress scale	work obstacles	lack of organizational support
The value	04.22	04.21	04.29
The standard	Less than 02.5 (low level)	2.5 to 03.5 (medium level)	greater than 03.5 (high level)
The observation	High level	High level	High level

The sample has a high level of stress whether on the variable as a whole, with an average score of 04.22, which is greater than (03.5), or even on the level of its axes (work obstacles and loss of organizational support) with values ranging between 04.21 and 04.29.

***The answer to the second sub-question:** What behavioural strategies are followed by elite football referees in Algeria?

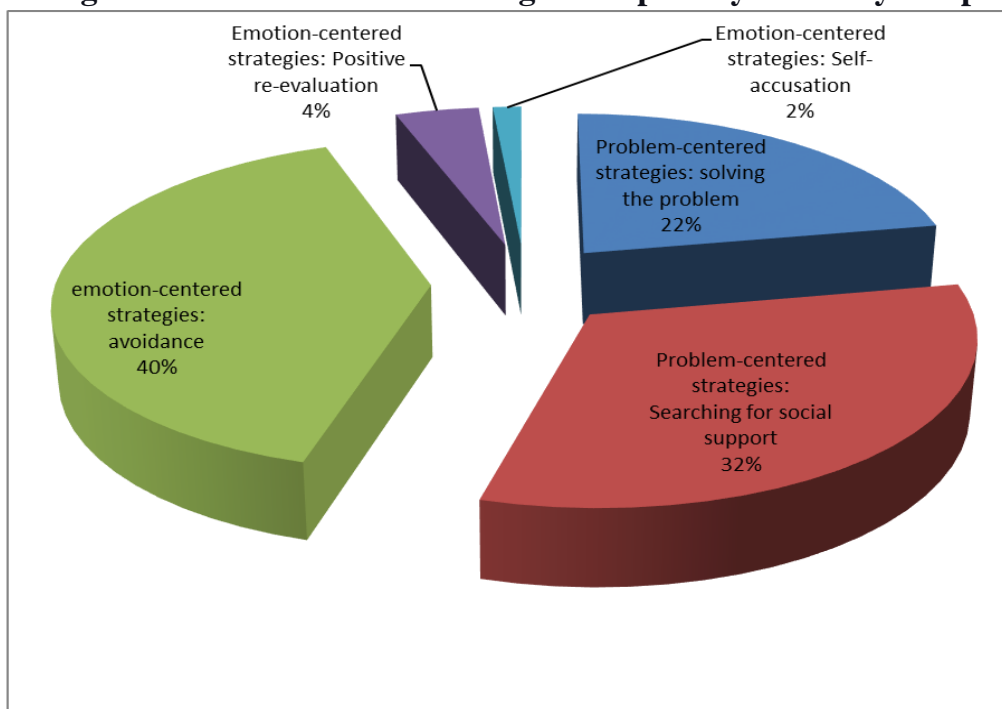
To answer this question, the researcher relied on the total number of repetitions of the sample members on the behavioural strategies scale. Thus, most of the methods that referees followed in dealing with their stress according to the highest number of repetitions of these strategies were identified, and the results were as follows:

Table No. 06 Shows the most common behaviour strategies adopted by the study sample.

		Frequencies	Percentage%	
Problem-Centered Strategies	-Problem Solving	2.21	22.10	54.40
	-Seeking Social Support	3.23	32.30	
Emotion-Centered Strategies	-Avoidance	4.01	40.10	45.60
	-Positive Re-Evaluation	0.41	4.10	
	-Self-Accusation	0.14	01.40	

Concerning the table results, the sample members focus on the strategy of avoidance in solving the problem they face, followed by the strategy of searching for social support. At the same time, they do not pay attention or do not pursue the strategies of solving the problem, re-evaluating themselves, or even self-accusing, as it received the lowest value. In general, the sample members from the category of elite referees adopted problem-centered strategies with a percentage estimated at 54.40. In contrast, emotion-centered strategies accounted for a percentage of 45.60 of the total referees' responses, as shown in the table, and the relative circle shows that.

Figure No. 01: Behaviour strategies adopted by the study sample



***The answer to the first hypothesis:** There is a positive correlation between work stress and behaviour strategies among the study sample. This relationship was revealed by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables, and the results are in the following table:

Table No. 07 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient between work stress and behaviour strategies.

Coping Strategies		Coping Strategies			All Strategies		
Problem-centered strategies		emotion-centered strategies					
		Solving the Problem	Searching for Social support	Avoidance	Positive Re-evaluation	Self-Accusation	
Work stress		0.161*	0.131**	0.155**	0.072	0.059	0.147** Significant
		0.164 significant		0.080 Not significant			
** The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01		* The correlation is significant at the significance level of 0.05					

With respect to the table results, it is clear that there is a positive correlation between work stress and coping strategies at the level of the total values of the two variables. However, at the dimensional level, we notice a relationship between work stress and problem-centered strategies, while general stress is unrelated to emotion-centered strategies.

***The answer to the second hypothesis:** There are no differences in the stress level in the study sample due to the variable type of refereeing (field referee, assistant referee).

To detect differences between referees in the level of stress depending on the type of refereeing, the researcher used a T-test for two independent samples, and the results were as follows:

Table No. 08 shows the T-test for two independent samples.

	Sum of averages	Degree Of Freedom	t-value	Significance Level
Field Referee	314.310	66	4.712	Significant at 0.05
Assistant Referee	122.414			

In reference to the table, there are statistically significant differences in stress among the study sample due to the referee level variable. The value of (t) was equal to 4.712, which is statistically significant at the level of 0.05. Accordingly, the hypothesis still needs to be fulfilled, indicating no differences in stress among the referees in the study sample due to the variable type of refereeing. The researcher rejects it and accepts the alternative hypothesis, "There are differences in the stress level in the study sample due to the variable type of refereeing (pitch referee, assistant referee)." By referring to the table above and comparing the sum of the averages of each group, we find that the averages of the leading referees or arena referees are higher than those of the assistant referees. Hence, there are differences in the stress level in the study sample due to the variable type of refereeing in favor of the main referees.

- Results and Discussion:

*** Research questions:**

-Discussion of the first question result: The result of the first question concluded that the sample members have a high level of stress. According to the researcher's belief, this is a logical result because the sample is the referees of the hugely popular sport (football) and the focus of society's attention. Also, as it is an outlet for the people, the fans monitor its referees, players, and administrators alike, and the slightest lapse from them will irritate them and create an atmosphere filled with resentment. Although referees are the most vulnerable to criticism because they are the weakest link after coaches in the football system, the stress can make the individual and the referee, in particular, dissatisfied with his work. Abdul Rahman Hijan (2006) believes that at the organizational level, support has increased to the theory that stress is the main factor in many organizational problems, especially problems of low performance, turnover, absenteeism and professional attrition. Compensation demands related to work have also become among the most growing demands

in the world and the United States of America. Our results are also consistent with what Rashid Sarhan (2004) stated: building sound relations between workers and bosses in sports is one way of confronting work stress among individuals. Stressed relationships reduce employees' satisfaction with their organization, inevitably lead to hatred and conflicts, and an unhealthy atmosphere prevails in the work environment. Thus, the researcher has answered the first question of the research, "What is the level of stress among elite football referees?" The first goal of the research was achieved.

-Discussion of the second question result: The result of the second question concluded that the sample members focused on the avoidance strategy in solving the problem, leading to searching for social support. They do not pay attention or do not pursue strategies for solving the problem, self-re-evaluating, or even self-accusation. Hence, this category showed the lowest value.

Based on the courses and training referees take in refereeing by the Algerian Football Federation or The International Association Football Federation, the elite referees increase self-confidence and the effectiveness of their performance. Also, the transformations and the tools (material or moral) undertaken by the authorities to reform sports in general, and football in particular in Algeria, facilitate the tasks of the referees and limit the human origin errors that can occur in matches. Accordingly, as an active pillar in the sports system, the referee's resort to ignore and avoid stress as a first step, and then they seek social support as a second step. They ignore other strategies because they do not like them based on what was mentioned above, especially since they see that they have a high level of qualifications and training, and mistakes rarely occur on their part.

***Hypotheses:**

- Discussion of the first hypothesis result: The result of the first hypothesis concluded that there is a positive correlation between work stress and behaviour strategies at the level of the total values of the two variables. However, at the dimensional level, we notice a relationship between work stress and problem-focused strategies, while work stress is unrelated to emotion-centered strategies.

The obtained result by the researcher is consistent with the vision of Yakhlef (2000), through which he refers to the emotional, material, or moral support that the worker or individual derives from others in his social and cultural environment during crises. According to Hagga et al., social support is

represented by the help of relatives, friends, and parents, which enables the individual to deal with stressful situations using coping methods.

The researcher in this study attributed the obtained result to the nature of the Algerian individual, which is characterized by sociality and an attempt to get close to others in order to spread his concerns to them and discuss the feelings he or she is experiencing and why not try to alleviate the stress they have. Given the nature of their work, referees are difficult and require concentration. At the same time, they usually resort to referees to justify or alleviate their stress instead of accusing themselves or focusing on strategies centred on emotion. According to the researcher, referees need to adopt the mentioned strategies, as they do not produce immediate and effective results for work problems in the refereeing profession.

-Discussion of the second hypothesis result: The result of the second hypothesis concluded that there are differences in the level of stress among the study sample due to the variable type of refereeing in favor of the pitch referees.

It contradicts the study of Muhammad Hadada (2015), which found no statistically significant differences in the level of psychological stress according to speciality. Therefore, arena referees or assistant referees are characterized by the same level of psychological stress. However, the researcher believes that the result of the hypothesis in the current study is due to the amount of responsibility placed on the shoulders of the main referees in managing matches at different levels. They are more responsible than the assistant referees for managing the match in good conditions, so they feel a higher stress from their counterparts, the assistant referees.

- Study Recommendations:

Based on the findings of our current study, which aimed to shed light on the stress faced by elite football referees in Algeria as well as the fundamental techniques they employ to mitigate those stress, we suggest a series of recommendations that can be summed up as follows:

- The necessity of reforming the sports system, especially football, by the authorities to create a good atmosphere characterized by stability.
- Intensifying training courses for referees and players alike and working to educate the public about the importance of self-control during football matches in particular and other sports in general.
- Addressing other psychological variables that interact with the variable of professional and psychological stress and employing other variables that would

contribute to the psychological stability of actors in sports in general and referees in particular.

- The need to diversify approaches and methods of analyzing research related to sports, athletes, and referees.

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