



Research Article

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Football Spectator Violence During Matches at the Zimbabwe Football Association Division One Level in Gweru District

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Abstract

Background: A number of football matches in Gweru district have been characterised by undesirable acts of spectator violence resulting in injury and malicious damage to property. Football spectator violence is a very negative phenomenon in football because it chases away sponsors who do not want their organisations and brands to be associated with hooliganism. Violence also discourages spectators from attending football matches as they fear for their safety. This status quo precipitated the need to identify football stakeholders' perceptions on the causes of spectator violence during football matches at Division One level in Gweru District. **Aims:** The primary aim and focus of this study was to investigate spectator violence among football spectators in Gweru district in Zimbabwe. **Objectives:** The objectives of the study were to identify the main causes of football spectator violence and recommend strategies to mitigate or even eliminate this scourge. **Study Setting:** The study was conducted in Gweru district in the midlands province of Zimbabwe. **Materials and Methods:** The study adopted the quantitative research approach utilising the descriptive survey design. Closed questionnaires were used to collect data from, twenty division one footballers from four Gweru division one football clubs, twenty spectators, six football referees and four coaches. This resulted in a total sample of fifty (50) respondents. Simple random sampling (Gold Fish Bowl procedure) was used to select the twenty players and six referees. Purposive sampling was used to select the four coaches and twenty football spectators. **Statistics:** Data was analysed statistically using simple frequency tables. **Results and Conclusion:** The study revealed that spectator violence during football matches at division one level in Gweru is mainly a result of hooliganism, controversial refereeing, lack of fair play by footballers in the field of play, outcome of matches, rivalry between clubs and euphoria. Factors such as use of juju, prestige seeking by spectators and reporting of violence by the media were found to be minor contributors towards football spectator violence during football matches in Gweru district. **Recommendations:** The study recommends that the Zimbabwe republic police who provide security during these violent matches should tighten security at football matches by searching all fans thoroughly for dangerous weapons and alcohol at stadia entry points. ZIFA and PSL should educate all football clubs on the negative effects of violence and punish offending teams severely. The clubs should educate their fans to shun violence. Sponsors should include funds in their sponsorship packages for purposes of educating fans on violence. Soccer players should lead by example and avoid provoking other team's fans.

Keywords: spectator violence, football matches, ZIFA division one.

INTRODUCTION

Football is a beautiful game that is loved and watched by millions of people all over the world including women and children ^[1]. However, for most peace loving Zimbabweans football stadia has become a no go area especially women, children and minority races who fear for their safety ^[1]. The violence which occurs during football matches is not just physical but also takes the form of foul language and sexual abuse ^[1]. The violence also sometimes takes on a racial dimension where minority races in attendance are subjected to violent abuse and intimidation by rowdy football spectators which results in them fearing to attend football matches ^[1].

Spectator violence is a common feature in Zimbabwe football especially during local matches involving the most prominent football clubs and perpetual arch rivals ^[1]. Even international matches played in Zimbabwe have had their own fair share of violence ^[1]. Spectator violence in Zimbabwe is not restricted to matches between the country's biggest teams or to international matches as described above. It has also been witnessed at lower levels such as Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) division one in Gweru district. The absence of empirical research focusing on football violence in Zimbabwe in general and Gweru district in particular necessitating the need to empirically identify the causative factors of this undesirable phenomenon which continues to put the beautiful game into disrepute.

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The study therefore sought to achieve the following research objectives and contribute towards closing this gap in academic literature:

- a) To establish the factors that lead to football spectator violence in Gweru district
- b) To identify strategies which can be used to eliminate or reduce football spectator violence in Gweru District

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors leading to spectator violence

Hooliganism

Hooliganism has always been associated with the sport of football since its origins which dates as far back as 225BC ^[2]. Hooliganism is any purposeful harmful or damaging conduct or behaviour by football spectators for the sole purpose of causing injury to another person ^[2]. In football hooliganism is characterised by destructive behaviour which include brawls, vandalism and intimidation by football fans ^[3]. In football acts of hooliganism are motivated by the desire to cause harm, planned or deliberate injury to supporters of opposing teams. At international level examples of hooliganism that have resulted in the disruption of football matches, harm and injury to spectators have been reported in many countries including Greece, France and Belgium ^[4].

Undesirable outcome of matches

In some instances, the result of so called important football matches has proved to be a critical contributor towards football fans violence ^[5]. Victory celebration following victory in these important football matches has been proved to contribute towards football spectator violence ^[5]. For example, spectator violence occurred in Rotterdam in April 1999 leaving many people dead and many others injured as a result of victory celebrations after a local team emerged victorious in a football championship ^[5]. Similar violent incidences resulting from victory celebrations have been reported in China, South Africa and Zimbabwe where celebrating the outcome of matches instigated violence among fans which resulted in injury and death.

Prestige and recognition seeking

Some football spectators engage in violence for purposes of seeking prestige and recognition. In this context violent spectators may attach significance to their ability to attack fans from opposing teams in order to show solidarity and loyalty with their own peers ^[2]. Some spectators who perpetrate violence at football matches do so with the aim to earn prestige and recognition from onlookers per se ^[2, 5]. Football spectator violence at football matches from this perspective is mostly about men trying to prove their manliness against likeminded football fans from opposing teams ^[6]. Spectator violence at football matches is dominated by young men whose objective is to show off their manly prowess and supremacy as real men thereby gaining prestige and recognition from the crowd present ^[6].

Mass media reporting of football violence

Football spectator violence is usually brought to the attention of most people through mass media ^[7]. The manner in which violence is reported by the media can therefore encourage or discourage violent behaviour among football spectators ^[7]. Media reporting which focuses more on the message accompanying violence and less on the violence itself presents a legitimising effect which tend to condone or legitimise the violence ^[7]. In this light the media is regarded as frequently conveying the idea that violence is acceptable, even desirable ^[7]. The act of watching aggressive and violent media models in football and sport in general, appear to have a long term impact on the behaviour

of football spectators ^[8]. On the other side of the coin responsible mass media reporting can also be used as a tool to discourage spectators from engaging in violent conduct ^[9].

Controversial refereeing

Controversial decisions by referees constitute the most common cause of crowd anger and hostility during football matches ^[10]. Unpopular referee decisions can sometimes give rise to football spectator violence during matches at all levels, particularly at crucial situations ^[11]. There are many examples of violent incidences which were triggered by controversial refereeing in many part of the world for example a Saudi Arabia football spectator was reported to have assaulted a referee during a match between United Arab Emirates and Liverpool in Rydah in Saudi Arabia as a result of a controversial decision by the referee ^[5].

Absence of fair play

The concept of fair play as it applies to sport entails how reasonably a player behaves before, during and after a football match ^[13]. The fair play philosophy dictates that one plays within the dictates of the rules of the game and consciously avoids taking unfair advantage of an opponent even when the opportunity arises ^[13]. Fair play entail that the player treats the opposition with respect and dignity and behaves modestly while maintaining composure in both victory and defeat ^[13]. Harming opponent players is discouraged in the context of fair play as this could motivate supporters of harmed player to take violent revenge action as well as attempt to protect their player ^[11]. Unfair play such as dangerous tackles, blocks, body cheeks, hits and jabs in football leads to the enmity displayed rubbing off to the spectators who in turn respond with verbal or physical violence ^[11].

Rivalry between football teams

Rivalry between certain football teams is a major factor leading to spectator violence ^[3]. In the presence of rivalry spectator violence between opposing team supporters often starts without a succeeding apparent cause but only by virtue of being in close contact with one another and frequently challenging each other ^[3]. Rivalry is usually more serious between home and away football team spectators ^[10]. It is noted that when home and away spectators watch the matches together, chances of fighting each other are very high ^[10]. Simultaneous departure of home and away team spectators is likely to result in violent interactions ^[10]. In addition, leaving some stands unoccupied between rival spectators or selecting coinciding routes for rival spectators encourage violence ^[14].

The use of juju

Juju, Muti, Voodoo or African electronics is a philosophy whereby knowledgeable people use plants, herbs, fetishes, animals, spirits and rituals to attain certain goals ^[15]. Juju is not restricted to top teams but extends as low as primary school teams ^[16]. Juju is believed to increase the chance of achieving the desired results for a team whilst casting a bad spell on the opponent ^[15]. Juju is believed to have the power to weaken the opposing team so as to present one team with more chances of getting the desired results ^[15]. Spectators turn violent whenever they suspect that the other team is practicing Juju against them ^[15].

Euphoria

Some football spectators drink alcohol and smoke marijuana before and during football matches to gain excitement reduce tension, raise spirits or seek relief from overbearing impending situations such as losing a match ^[14]. However, it is important to note that in the developed countries alcohol only played a major role in the early years but does not seem to be an important factor anymore because of the current strict enforcement of alcohol prohibitions during football

matches ^[14]. However, in Zimbabwe alcohol still finds its way illegally into football stadia with police seemingly taking no action as shown by figure 1 below:



Figure 1: A Vendor Selling Smuggled Alcohol at one Stadium in Zimbabwe: (Source: ¹⁷)

The literature reviewed above revealed that there are many factors which contribute to football spectator violence. The factors identified by various authors include hooliganism, undesirable outcome of matches, prestige and recognition seeking, the manner in which violence is reported by the media, controversial refereeing, absence of fair play, football rivalry, the use of juju and euphoria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a quantitative methodology and utilised the descriptive survey research design. Four clubs based in Gweru from the ZIFA Central Region in the Division One league formed the population. Specifically, the players, coaches and supporters of the four clubs as well as referees based in Gweru formed the population from which the study sample was drawn. Simple random sampling (Gold Fish Bowl procedure) was used to select twenty players and six referees. Purposive sampling was used to select all the four coaches and twenty football spectators. This resulted in a total sample of 50 respondents. The football spectators were purposively selected due to lack of an established database which could be used as sampling frame for random sampling.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data was analysed statistically using simple frequency distributions displaying frequencies and percentages of those respondents who perceived each factor as contributing towards football spectator violence. A frequency distribution displays the number, percentage (the relative frequencies), or both corresponding to each of a variable's values ^[18]. Frequency distributions were found to be suitable for this study because they constitute one of the simplest and useful ways of presenting a univariate (one-variable) distribution ^[18].

RESULTS

Table 1: The extent to which unfavourable outcomes of football matches contributes to football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Outcome of matches	15	75	15	75	6	100	4	100	40	80

N=50

Table 2: The contribution of poor/controversial refereeing towards football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Poor Refereeing	14	70	17	85	6	100	4	100	41	82

N=50

Table 3: The contribution of drugs and alcohol use towards football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Drugs/alcohol	15	75	13	65	6	100	4	100	38	76

N=50

Table 4: The contribution of hooliganism towards football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Hooliganism	14	70	15	75	6	100	2	50	37	74

N=50

Table 5: The extent to which sports rivalry contributes to football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Sports rivalry	14	70	14	70	2	20	3	75	33	66

N=50

Table 6: The extent to which lack of fair play/sportsmanship contributes to football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Lack of fair play	14	70	10	50	3	50	3	75	30	60

N=50

Table 7: The contribution of Mass Media Reporting towards football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Mass Media Reporting	11	55	8	40	2	20	2	50	23	46

N=50

Table 8: The extent to which the use of Juju contributes to football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Juju	11	55	6	30	4	80	2	50	23	46

N=50

Table 9: The extent to which desire to earn prestige and recognition contributes to football spectator violence

Factor	Spectators		players		Referees		Coaches		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Desire for prestige and recognition	10	50	5	25	4	80	1	25	20	40

N=50

DISCUSSION

According to data reflected in table 1, seventy-five percent of spectators and players, 100% of referees and coaches concurred that the outcome of crucial football matches is an important element in as far as football fan violence is concerned in Gweru district. Authorities such as Theberge ^[5] also observed that associated with the outcome are the victory celebrations after emerging victorious which provoke losing opponents and thereby resulting in violent conduct.

Data in table 2 indicate that on the overall 82% of the stakeholders surveyed all agreed that poor or controversial refereeing is a major cause of spectator violence during football matches in Gweru. The findings are in agreement with Coakley and Dunning ^[10], who state that the most common cause of crowd enmity during football matches is unpopular decisions by the referees. This observation is also supported by Wesson *et al.*, ^[11] who argue that controversial official decisions can sometimes cause an increase in spectator violence at football matches at all levels, particularly if the situation is considered to be at a decisive state.

Findings in table 3 shows that a total of 76% of all the respondents surveyed identified that Euphoria associated with the use of drugs and alcohol as a significant factor in causing violence associated with football matches in Gweru. On the contrary Honlon ^[14] argues that alcohol only played a significant part in causing spectator violence in the early years, but currently, it does not seem to be a significant factor because of the enforcement of alcohol bans during football matches. His observation is however, seem to be at variance with what is currently happening in Zimbabwe where there is evidence to show that alcohol still finds its way into football stadia with police taking no action as shown in figure 1 above thereby becoming a major cause of violence. This is possibly because alcohol bans in Zimbabwe stadia are not being stringently enforced

Table 4 above depicts that 70% of the spectators, 75% of the players, 100% of the referees and 50% of the coaches surveyed concurred that hooliganism is a major contributor to violence during football matches in Gweru. The results indicate that a total of 74% of all the football stakeholders surveyed were in agreement that hooliganism is a contributing factor towards violence. The findings from this study are supported by Grayson ^[12]'s findings that hooliganisms is indeed a critical factor which can be traced back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. William and Wag ^[4] also make similar claims by stating that hooliganism has disrupted the flow of football matches since the history of the game.

In table 5, a cumulative total of 66% of the respondents were in agreement that rivalry is a major contributor to football spectator violence. Their perception is supported by Burford ^[3], Coakely and Dunning ^[10] who identified rivalry between certain football teams as a major factor leading to spectator violence. It has been noted that when home and away spectators watch the matches together, chances of fighting each other are very high ^[10].

In table 6, a total of 60% agreed that lack of fair play indeed contributes to football spectator violence. This factor was also identified by Wesson *et al.*, ^[11] who warned that against harming opponent players as this could lead supporters of harmed player to take violent revenge action as a way of protecting of their harmed player. Unfair play committed by a player leads to the animosity rubbing off to the spectators who in turn respond in a verbal and physically violent manner.

Table 7 shows that on the overall only 46% of all the respondents identified media reporting as a critical factor causing violence in Gweru. This means that 54% of the respondents did not believe that mass media reporting was a critical factor contributing towards

football violence in Gweru District. The findings seem to be contrary to observations made by Messner ^[8] who indicated that media coverage was a major contributor of football spectator violence.

Results in table 8 show that a total of only 40% of the stakeholders perceived prestige and recognition seeking as a critical factor contributing to football spectator violence. These stakeholders' views contradict the views of Smith ^[2] who states that the desire to earn prestige by spectators is a major factor contributing to violent behaviour. The majority of the respondents in this study, that is, 60% however did not perceive prestige and recognition as a significant factor contributing to violence in Gweru.

Data in table 9 shows that on the overall only 46% of the stakeholders perceived the use of Juju by teams as a critical factor contributing to violence during football matches. These stakeholders' perceptions are supported by Leseth ^[15] who also observed that spectators turn violent whenever they suspect the use of juju against their team. However, 60% percent of respondents did not regard the use of Juju as critical factor towards football spectator violence in Gweru District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings the study recommendations recommends the following strategies which could assist in reducing spectator violence during football matches:

- The number of security personnel should be increases during football matches and security personnel should receive relevant training on how to manage sport violence.
- The study recommended that the Security should do its job conscientiously and tighten security measures at football matches by searching all fans thoroughly for dangerous weapons and alcohol at stadia entry points.
- ZIFA and PSL should educate all football clubs on the negative effects of violence and punish offending teams severely.
- The clubs should educate their fans to shun violence. Sponsors should include funds in their sponsorship packages for purposes of educating fans on violence. Soccer players should lead by example and avoid provoking other team's fans.

CONCLUSION

Basing on the perceptions of the various football stakeholders surveyed and the literature reviewed it can be concluded that violence during football matches is a worrying phenomenon which is caused by a myriad of major factors which include outcome of matches, controversial refereeing, euphoria, hooliganism, rivalry between clubs, lack of fair play by footballers in the field of play. Factors such as reporting of violence by the media, belief in juju and prestige seeking by spectators were only cited by a few respondents and therefore were not major causative factors of violence during football matches in Gweru district. A number of strategies were proposed to reduce the violence and hence thereby enhancing the status of football as the world 's most beautiful game.

Conflict of interest

The Authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors contributions

N. Pedzisai: Conceptualising and designing of empirical study, data collecting, analysis and writing of full research report. E. Nhamo: Drafting of research article for publication. S. Magonde: Supervision of initial field research by principal researcher, proof reading of final research article for important intellectual content.

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