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Evaluation of an inventory for the assessment of critical incidents involving football fans

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Introduction:

Fan violence is a frequent occurrence in Swiss football (Bundesamt für Polizei, 2015) leading to high costs for prevention and control (Mensch & Maurer, 2014). Various theories put forward an explanation of fan violence, such as the Elaborated Social Identity Model (Drury & Reicher, 2000) and the Aggravation Mitigation Model (Hylander & Guvå, 2010). Important observations from these theories are the multi-dimensional understanding of fan violence and the dynamics occurring in the fan group. Nevertheless, none of them deal with critical incidents (CIs) which involve a tense atmosphere combined with a higher risk of fan violence. Schumacher Dimech, Brechbühl and Seiler (2015) tackled this gap in research and explored CIs where 43 defining criteria were identified and compiled in an integrated model of CIs. The defining criteria were categorised in four higher-order themes “antecedents” (e.g. a documented history of fan rivalry), “triggers” (e.g. the arrest of a fan), “reactions” (e.g. fans masking themselves) and “consequences” (e.g. fans avoiding communication with fan social workers).

Methods:

An inventory based on this model is being developed including these 43 criteria. In an exploratory phase, this inventory was presented as an online questionnaire and was completed by 143 individuals. Three main questions are examined: Firstly, the individual items are tested using descriptive analyses. An item analysis is conducted to test reliability, item difficulty and discriminatory power. Secondly, the model’s four higher-order themes are tested using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Thirdly, differences between sub-groups are explored, such as gender and age-related differences.

Results:

Respondents rated the items’ importance as high and the quota of incomplete responses was not systematic. Two items were removed from the inventory because of low mean or a high rate of “don’t know”-responses. EFA produced a six-factor solution grouping items into match-related factors, repressive measures, fans’ delinquent behaviour, intra-group behaviour, communication and control and inter-group factors. The item “fans consume alcohol” could not be ordered into any category but was retained since literature accentuates this factor’s influence on fan violence. Analyses examining possible differences between groups are underway.

Discussion:

Results exploring the adequacy of this inventory assessing defining criteria of CIs in football are promising and thus further evaluative investigation is recommended. This inventory can be used in two ways: as a standardised instrument of assessment for experts evaluating specific CIs and as an instrument for exploring differences in perception and assessment of a CI e.g. gender and age differences, differences between interest groups and stakeholders.

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