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## *Teaching Awareness of Ethical Governance in Sport*

### **Topic: 10**

## **Violence and aggression**

### **Teacher's Guide**



UNIVERSITY OF  
THESSALY



Universitatea  
Transilvania  
din Braşov



UNIVERSITY OF  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE  
at Cheltenham and Gloucester



Palacký University  
Olomouc

SPORT RESOLUTIONS<sup>(UK)</sup>  
SPECIALIST INDEPENDENT DISPUTE SERVICE



The aim of the topic is to inform students regarding violence and aggression in sport settings and to increase their awareness regarding the causes of violence and aggression, the factors associated with these phenomena and the ethical issues involved. Moreover, to increase students' knowledge regarding educational material and interventions for reducing violence and aggression in sport settings.

### **Definitions of violence and aggression**

Aggression and violence are terms often used interchangeably; however, the two differ. In social psychology, aggression is most commonly defined as a behavior that is intended to harm another person who is motivated to avoid that harm (Bushman & Huesmann, 2010; DeWall, Anderson, & Bushman, 2012).

The most common scientific definition of violence is as an extreme form of aggression that has severe physical harm (e.g., serious injury or death) as its goal (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Bushman & Huesmann, 2010; Huesmann & Taylor, 2006).

Characteristics of aggressive behaviour:

- Any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another person.
- Aggression is a behavior/not an attitude or emotion
- It involves harm or injury/ physical or psychological
- It is directed toward a living organism
- It involves intention. Accidental harm is not aggressive if you did not intent to do harm

For more information regarding definition of violence and aggression see the following work: Allen, J. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2017). Aggression and violence: Definitions and distinctions. *The Wiley handbook of violence and aggression*, 1-14. [<https://public.psych.iastate.edu/caa/abstracts/2015-2019/17AA2.pdf>]

There are three types of aggressive behaviour, hostile and instrumental aggression, plus assertion.

*Hostile aggression:* Act of aggression stemming from a feeling of anger and *intended to cause pain or injury* (e. if a player believes his opponent has been playing dirty, he might become angry and go out of his way to hurt his opponent, even if doing so doesn't increase his opportunity to tackle the ball carrier)

*Instrumental aggression:* An act of aggression that intends to hurt someone, but *as a means to a goal other than causing pain* (e.g., in football, a defensive lineman will usually do whatever it takes to thwart his opponent (the blocker) and tackle the ball carrier. This often includes intentionally inflicting pain on his opponent if doing so is useful in helping him get the blocker out of the way so he can get the ball carrier.

*Assertive behaviour* is different from aggressive behaviour because the play is playing within the rules of the game. Assertive behaviour links to four main criteria:

- Is goal directed
- Not intended to harm or injure
- Uses only legitimate force (even if this amount could be classed as aggression in a non-sport or non-game situation)



- Does not break any rules of the game

### **The causes of violence and aggression**

Various causes have been suggested for violence and aggression in sport settings including the type of the sport (some of them are intentional to harm some others not), the importance of the event, and the frustration that participants involved may experience, the level of arousal, stress.

### **Theoretical approaches explaining violence and aggression.**

Theories proposed for explaining violence and aggression in sport setting include the instinct theory, the social learning theory and the frustration-aggression theory.

The **instinct theory** suggests that “we have an instinct to be aggressive that builds until we can release that aggression in some way”. Mostly this aggression is released in sport or socially acceptable means. However there can be times when you let it out on another being. For example you may be playing in the centre midfield in football; they were beating you to the ball every single time, occasionally nicking your ankles in the process...the next time an opportunity arises. You will snap, you will beat them to the ball even if it means you clatter them in the process, teaching them to not do it again. A lot of coaches say it’s all in the first tackle, or in the first cross. If you win that first one, you set yourself up for the rest of the game, you are a foot in front of the other, have shown them where you stand.

The **frustration-aggression theory** suggests that “aggression comes from you being frustrated by not achieving goals or having progress towards a goal blocked”. Now this theory doesn’t have a lot of support or evidence to back up the theory, as when you begin to become frustrated, there are ways to control it, before it gets to the aggression stage. There is a revised version which states the same, but combines it with the social learning theory, saying that aggression occurs in certain situations where you may become frustrated. If you cannot control this frustration and what comes along with it (anger and arousal) it is then when you are likely to become aggressive. “This theory states that you are only more likely to become aggressive if the aggressive acts are supported”

The **social learning theory** suggests that “aggression is a behaviour that we learn from observing others and experiencing reinforcement for such behaviours”. Observing an individual perform aggressive acts will likely lead one to demonstrate similar behaviour. The observer is more likely to aggress after watching persons who are rewarded rather than punished for acting aggressively. For example a 10 year old could be sat watching his favourite player on television with his friends and parents. If this player then makes an awful challenge, taking out the opposition off the ball and doesn’t get a yellow/red card, and his parents and friends cheer at this, he will be more likely to re-enact this behaviour when playing with his own friends in the park. So the social learning theory, states that the reason for us acting in an aggressive manner whilst playing sports or otherwise, is because we have seen our idols and sporting heroes do the same, which has been applauded by friends, family and others, making us think that it is acceptable and correct to do such a thing. Social learning theory has considerable scientific support.

**The role of the media:** Media exploit the desire for violence in three ways

- Through an over-cover age of violent plays on TV



- Many articles in news papers, magazines, and social media focus on and glorify violence
- Promotion in TV programming by using past violent acts, to encourage spectators to attend or watch upcoming events.

The media must become more responsible in its reporting of sport. There is no need to rehash examples of violence and aggression in sport. The focus should be on the skills demonstrated and strategies employed by athletes and coaches rather than on acts of aggression. There are many sensitive and humane athletes and coaches who are involved in sport at all levels. Attempts should be made to present these individuals in a favorable light and give them media coverage

### **Spectators and aggression**

Spectators also may exhibit either hostile or instrumental aggression when they verbally abuse or throw objects at an opposing athlete or team. If the intent is to physically or psychologically injure the athlete, spectators are being hostile. If their intent is to gain an advantage for their team by distracting the opposing player(s), then this is considered instrumental aggression.

Physical factors like heat, noise, and crowding, are causes of aggression, especially among spectators. Other factors of spectators' vandalism and hooliganism are alcohol abuse, the rival fans.

In the following link you can find a paper with more information regarding the issue of spectators' violence in stadiums: <https://popcenter.asu.edu/content/spectator-violence-stadiums-0>

### **Associations between aggression and sport performance**

Aggressive behaviour reduces athletes' attentional focus, increase their stress and anxiety, destroy their performance and reduce the possibility of winning. If the athlete is already psych up or on high arousal, to be more aggressive is unwise. This will reduce performance quality. A coach should expose athletes to models, or examples, of individuals who have succeeded without hostility by using good skills.

### **Aggressive behaviour in the courts and ethical related issues**

Discuss with students the differences between Hostile and Instrumental aggression (see definitions and examples above) and the issue of assertion in sport.

Use the video in the following link: to discuss the issue of aggression vs assertion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hxxf4ztTpl>

Use the Case #33: ITF v Player P for discussing with students the issue of aggravated behaviour and threats against officials during matches. The video in the following link is associated with this issue:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-\\_2rjocv-Jo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_2rjocv-Jo)

### **Recommendations for reducing violence and aggression in sport settings**

The International Society of Sport Psychology has provided several recommendations for reducing violence and aggression in sport settings. See the paper in the following link:



[https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/portal/files/10893310/1997\\_Tenenbaum\\_Stewart\\_Singer\\_Duda\\_Aggression\\_and\\_Violence\\_in\\_Sport\\_An\\_ISSP\\_Position\\_Stand.pdf](https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/portal/files/10893310/1997_Tenenbaum_Stewart_Singer_Duda_Aggression_and_Violence_in_Sport_An_ISSP_Position_Stand.pdf)

### **Strategies to help athletes control their emotions**

- Teach athletes to cope with failure. An opponent who says terrible things about the players' family or teams should be ignored.
- Teach athletes how to react after a referee's wrong decision.
- Use self talk "relax, calm, let it go, control"
- Teach athletes to use Imagery to control their emotions and stay calm
- Breathing exercise: Choose to breathe in and out slowly whenever you need to relax or before you perform. Choose to let go of any unnecessary stress, doubts, or worries. Let them flow away like water flowing gently down a stream.

For a detail description about emotions and their associations with sport performance you can see the following paper: Jones, M. V. (2003). Controlling emotions in sport. *The Sport Psychologist*, 17(4), 471-486.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.693.196&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

In this paper, several techniques for controlling emotions are described including comprise self-statement modification, imagery, socratic dialogue, corrective experiences, self-analysis, didactic approach, storytelling metaphors and poetry, reframing, cognitive paradox, and use of problem-solving skills.