

Making the right call: Understanding the development of sport officials

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Introduction

Most research on sport officials has focused on factors that influence *performance*. Very little research has considered the *development* of sport officials. Moreover, there are indications that approximately only 13% of studies have included females (Pina et al., 2018).

The purpose of this poster is to summarize some of the preliminary findings on the development of sport officials, with an emphasis on officials' participation and training histories, and some comparisons of male and female officials.

Methods

Sample: Canadian sport officials (n = 200 to 530)

Procedure: Participants completed an online version of the Developmental History of Officials Questionnaire (adapted from Hopwood, 2013)

Variables:

- Gender (male vs. female)
- Age (11 to 15; 16 to 20; 21 to 25; 26 to 30; 31 to 35; 36 to 40 years)
- Sport Officiated
- Highest level achieved (as an athlete and an official): National/International; Provincial; Recreational/Regional
- Age of officiating debut
- Volume match officiating (hours)
- Training history for officiating (i.e., deliberate practice)

Results

Athlete Participation History

- **97%** of respondents played sport *before* starting as an official
- **86%** participated in the same sport as their main officiating sport
- **81%** played sport *while* officiating their main sport
- Over **80%** of participants at the top three levels of officiating were still participating in sport, compared to approx. **50%** of the recreational level had stopped playing sport: $\chi^2(3) = 12.22, p < .01, \phi_c = 0.24$.
- Those that reached the national/international level of officiating were more likely to have played at higher levels of athletic performance than recreational, district, and provincial level officials (see Fig. 1): $H(3, n = 217) = 13.37, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.06$.

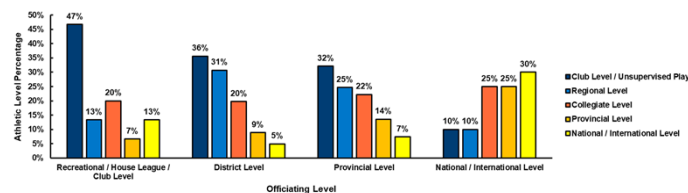


Fig 1. Percentage of respondents that reached each athletic level for each officiating level

Results

Officiating Participation History

Age of debut

- **Overall:** Female officials had younger mean start ages (years) than male officials: $t(509) = 3.59, p = .001$; Fig 2.

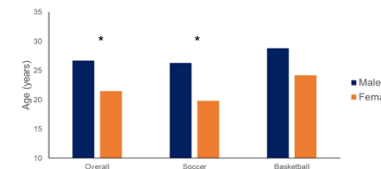


Fig 2. Average officiating debut age for male and female sport officials.

Training & Match Officiating

- The majority of respondents report not engaging in deliberate practice.
- Those that achieve the highest levels of officiating officiated more matches at each stage of development (Fig 3).
- Females and males officiated approximately the same amount of games prior to the age of 25, and thereafter, male officials averaged increasingly more games per year (not statistically significant differences); Fig 4.

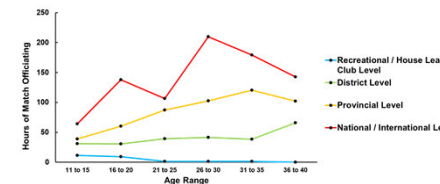


Fig 3. Hours of officiated matches stratified by age and level of achievement

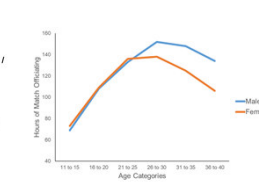


Fig 4. Hours of officiated matches stratified by age and gender

Discussion & Conclusion

- Consistent with previous research, prior participation in sport as an athlete appears to be an important correlate of officiating development.
- In the absence of training/practice, volume and history of match officiating appears to be an important influence on expertise development in officials.
- Limitations include small sample size for some cells, and a need to increase representation from sports other than soccer and basketball. Future studies would benefit from larger samples of female officials, and comparisons to registration data to understand representativeness.

References

Hopwood, M. J. (2013). *The Developmental History of Athletes Questionnaire: Towards a comprehensive understanding of the development of sport expertise*. Victoria University. Retrieved from <http://vuirvu.edu.au/22353/>

Pina, J.A., Passos, A., Araújo, D., & Maynard, M.T. (2018). Football refereeing: An integrative review. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 35, 10-26.

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