

# Knowledge of Offside, Fouls and Misconduct Laws as Predictors of Violence at Football Events: Perception of Stakeholders in Southwest Nigeria

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## Abstract

There have been several reported cases of violence leading to death of referees and many others have sustained injuries while some have been maimed during football matches in Nigeria League. Hence this study was carried out to investigate the place of the knowledge of the laws as predictor of violence as perceived by the stakeholders. Descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study and three hypotheses tested. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to glean one thousand two hundred and thirty two participants ( $n=1232$ ). A self-structured questionnaire was the instrument used to elicit information from the respondents: knowledge of Football Laws questionnaire (KFLQ,  $r=0.78$ ), Rules on offside questionnaire (ROQ,  $r=0.8$ ), Rules of fouls and misconduct questionnaire (RFMQ,  $r=0.83$ ), Gender and violence vulnerability questionnaire, (GVVQ,  $r=0.92$ ) was structured and validated to collect information to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. The findings revealed that good knowledge of the laws of the game relating to off side rules was perceived to reduce the incidence of violence in the field of football game ( $R = .541^a$ ;  $R^2 = .221$ ;  $F_{(1,1231)} = 22.69$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Also it was found out that good knowledge of the laws as it relates to fouls and misconduct will predict violence reduction in the field of football game ( $R = .541^a$ ;  $R^2 = .221$ ;  $F_{(1,1231)} = 22.69$ ;  $p < .05$ ) as perceived by the participants. In the result, it was also found out that violence in the field of the game has implications on the gender of the Referees as the female referees are always vulnerable ( $t = 2.09$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). It is therefore recommended that stakeholders should be more equipped with the sound knowledge of the laws of the game and lastly, the female Referees should be more protected with adequate security during matches.

**Keywords:** Football, Football Laws, Stakeholders, Violence.

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## Introduction

The game of Football has been associated with violence since its beginnings in the 13th century England. The term from which soccer is thought to have emerged, has been used to differentiate football from other sporting codes, such as rugby union and rugby league Rookwood, (2014). With millions of Fans annually watching professional Football on their television or at public viewing spaces such as fan zones, or attending matches in person. For example, the FIFA World Cup, held in 2014 in Brazil, had a cumulative attendance of nearly 3.5 million across the 64 matches that took place (FIFA, 2014). Although, Football often considered to be of English invention, there is a degree of uncertainty surrounding the origins of Football, with preexisting versions thought to have been introduced in different localities and exported along trade routes and through military conquests for instance, from countries such as China and Italy Walvin (2010).

Ostrowsky (2014) postulated that there are many factors that may potentially influence Violence behavior, includes alcohol consumption, rivalries, situational and atmosphere-related conditions, socio-political considerations and fan reaction to play on the pitch, among others. Firms of violent supporters have often adopted names to describe connections to given identities or practices or to confuse perceived enemies, namely rival firms, the media, the police, and even academics (Davis & Redhead, 2015; Dunning, 1988). Slabbert & Ukpere, (2010) argued that spectator violence is an active behavior, where the spectator personally participates but it could also be less active and possibly less sinister, in the sense that the spectator becomes and remains a passive observer of aggressive behavior.

Šljukić (2001) asserted that the consequences of violent action are sometimes very serious. Fans provoked by a referee's incorrect decision start to demonstrate violence, players start "explaining" to the referee that he was wrong sometimes the entire chain of violent behavior is triggered, culminating in police intervention against spectators. Eker (2010) Stated that the reason that an individual supports a team is because he is trying to find an identity and promissory of identity. When the person who sees himself as ordinary plays the role of a supporter, he believes that he has achieved the dignity and success that he never achieved in his normal life. Aycan (2009) described people who support Football teams and watch Football have been the most important factor in industrializing Football,

Murad (2017) opined that one of the causes of violence in Football is alcoholic beverages consumption, its

consumption increases aggressiveness and violence among Football Fans. Reis (2014) believes that consumption of alcoholic beverages is not related with hooliganism and argues that not all hooligans drink and not all those who drink will fight, considers that relating all violence in Football to alcohol consumption is reductionist and has no empirical reliability, but admitted that hooliganism must be approached from a multifactorial perspective that examines several converging causes and alcoholic beverages are undoubtedly one of them. Earle (2011) reported that young persons in a group are more aggressive and prone to provoking disorder and violence compared to their peers who are not organized Members of such groups are exceptionally active in criminal terms because they are surrounded by friends with thick criminal records. Spending time in such an environment, great opportunities and chances are opened to new members to commit new criminal offences (Bouchard & Spindler, 2010). Criminality shows that almost a half of criminal offences relating to sports events are committed by persons below 30. Extreme groups of Fans are particularly dangerous for young people as they offer them the feeling of power and belonging, which helps them develop their individual identity. These groups have a structure, hierarchy, territory, symbols (an anthem, coat-of-arms, flag) which differentiate them from other fan groups (Đorić, 2012).

The word hooligan or hooliganism originates from the English word and its etymology has been interpreted in different ways. Two interpretations seem to be the most reliable. According to the first version, based on police reports of 1898 in England, the word “hooligan” was linked to the name of a criminal from the notorious three-member gang Hooligan, Hoodlum, Larkin (Lieberman, 2005). Under the second version, the word stems from the name of an Irish immigrant family living in London and terrorizing the East End. This street gang was called “Hooley” Under this assumption, the word “hooligan” consists of words “hooley” and “gang”. In any case, hooliganism is the behavior implying the use of violence, as the origin of the word explicitly shows (Kontos & Brotherton, 2008). Hooliganism does not relate only to fan violence. Its meaning may be much broader. In colloquial speech, the term “hooligan” may be attached to a rascal or a violent person, and does not necessarily connote violence at a sports event. In this regard, hooliganism is understood both in a wider and narrow sense. The wider meaning connotes improper behavior, usually related to a street style which implies violence. In the narrow sense, hooliganism is violent behavior of sports Fans, i.e. extreme Fans, which coincides with a sport event; most often Football matches (Đorić, 2012). Experiences in the struggle against hooliganism in Western Europe show that in some cases violence may be triggered also by aggressive policing or an extremely unfavorable result (Spaaij, 2005).

Rookwood, (2014) described Football hooligan as an individual who attends Football matches with the intention of becoming involved in violence with rival supporters whether or not they achieve that aim or a fan who becomes involved in violence but no other disorder or criminal activities even if this was not their initial aim. Spaaij (2014) distinguishes between spontaneous, relatively isolated incidents of fan violence and the behavior of institutionalized or socially organized hooligan firms who engage in competitive violence, primarily against other hooligan groups. Indeed, the term “Football violence” has often been employed as a synonym for Football hooliganism (Goldblatt, 2014). Mastrogiannakis & Dorville, (2012) postulated that the seriousness of Football hooliganism has been a source of contention for several decades.

Football violence or destructive behavior perpetrated by spectators at Football events and certain clubs have long-standing rivalries with other clubs and violence associated in Nigeria leagues with matches between them sometimes called local derbies such as Kastina United Football Club (FC) vs Kano Pillars Football Club (FC) Heartland FC vs Eyimba FC Shooting Stars FC vs Sunshine Starts FC. Conflict may take place before; during or after matches and participants often select locations away from stadia to avoid arrest by the Police, but conflict can also erupt spontaneously inside the stadia or in the surrounding streets. Alcohol, irregular tickets sales, religion, ethnicity, Political factors and the “cowardly ineptitude” of the Police can lead to the violence. In 2013, Shooting Stars FC Fans descended on Kwara United FC players because they draw at 1-1. It was reported that the home Fans accused the center Referee, Cristianus Okoro from Imo State of denying them a penalty. In April 2017, Kano Pillars FC Fans descended on Akwa United FC players after they lost 1-0 to their visitors, similarly, in 2018 Enyimba FC players tasted the bitter pills of violence when Kastina United FC Fans beat them up for daring to win a 2-1 on their home ground.

In Confederation of Africa Football (CAF) Champions League match context, massive Police presence on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018 at Agege Stadium, Lagos during the CAF Champions League match between Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries Football Club (MFM FC) and AS Real Bamako Football Club of Mali was a successful match and violence free because of the adequate security personnel available for the match. The match involving MFM FC and AS Real Bamako FC had the full complement of Police personnel, with one or two Policemen at every 20 meters areas on the field providing security and safe guarding the spectators and the Officials. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for any trouble maker to have his way in that match. The road leading to the dressing room was with stern-looking Police officers. The issue of violence in Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL) has become part of culture of win at all cost. In 2016, NPFL has lost lucrative sponsorship deal worth millions of naira loss following incessant crowd violence and disruption of matches,

forcing Globacom Company a telecommunication firm, to quit sponsorship deal with NPFL, while violence at Football is a global phenomenon, the rate at which violence mars league matches in Nigeria has assumed an alarming dimension.

The Laws mention the number of players a team should have, the game duration, the size of the field and ball, the type and nature of fouls that Referees may penalize, the frequently misinterpreted offside law, and many other Laws that define Football. During a match, it is the task of the Referee to interpret and enforce the Laws of the Game. The Laws allow some minor optional variations which can be implemented by National Football associations, including some for play at the lowest levels, but otherwise almost all organized Football worldwide is played under the same set rule. The current Laws of the Game (LOTG) consist of seventeen individual Laws, each law containing several rules and directions. Football Laws have 17 “rules” by which the game is played. The Laws are designed to make Football safe, fun and fair for all participants. A Referee is in charge of the Football game, the Referee’s main objective is to enforces the Laws of the game and ensure the safety of the players. It is the Referee’s responsibility to ensure that the game remains fun for everyone. This includes Players, Spectators, Club Officials and Match Officials. The 17 Laws are the basic Football Laws accepted throughout the world. These Laws are usually altered slightly so the game is more fun and beneficial for young players. Each league should have a specific set of rules it will follow. Referees are expected to use their judgment and common sense in applying the Laws; this is colloquially known as “Law 18” which is not written in the Laws of the Game. There are two most controversial Laws in the 17 Laws of the game which are law 11 Offside and law 12 Fouls and Misconduct. These two Laws are often the cause of disagreement leading to violence in the field of play following its misinterpretation by the stakeholders after the Referee decision on such event and making them query the decisions of the referee. In view of this, law 11 and law 12 must be well understood by all the stakeholders in the game of Football such as the Referees, Coaches, Players, Club Officials, Spectators and Fans. It is meant to help in curbing violence at Football events. Violence perpetrators at Football matches have always been among Players, Club Officials, Football Fans and Football Spectators.

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested in the course of this study:

1. Knowledge of the Laws guiding off-side rules will not be perceived to significantly prevent violence on the field of play.
2. Knowledge of the Laws guiding fouls and misconduct will not be perceived to significantly predict incidence of violence on the field of play.
3. Gender of Football referees will not be perceived to significantly determine the incidence of Football violence during matches.

### **Methods**

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study, the population consisted of Football stakeholders: Players, Fans, Spectators, Club Officials and Match Officials in Southwest Nigeria, one thousand five hundred (1,500) participants was gleaned for the study using multistage sampling procedure. Purposive sampling techniques was adopted to select five States out of the existing 6 States in Southwest Nigeria because the 6<sup>th</sup> state Ondo State has no Football Club participating in NNL for the 2020/2021 season, purposive sampling technique was also used to select the participating clubs. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the spectators for the study, stratified simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the match Officials at the last stage, and simple random sampling technique was used to select the Club Officials. A self-structured questionnaire was used as instrument to elicit information from the respondents on Football Violence and knowledge of the Laws of the game among Football stakeholders in Nigeria league. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; A and B, (A)collected demographic information of the participants, while (B) was on Rules on offside questionnaire (ROQ,  $r=0.82$ ),and Rules of fouls and misconduct questionnaire (RFMQ,  $r= 0.83$ ). To determine the face and content validity of the instruments, copies of questionnaire was given researchers in the field of sport science and other experts, on the game of football from Olabisi Onabanjo University. Three weeks was set aside for data collection with visit to all the selected stake holders: players, club officials, match officials, spectators and Fans. Data collection involved the training of four research assistants who assisted in administering the instrument at the various locations, linear regression analysis was used to test hypotheses 1 and 2 while hypotheses 3 was tested using T- test at 0.05 level of significance.

### **Ethical consideration**

Informed consent form was signed by the participants. The inform consent form spelt out the title of the study, purpose of the study, justification for doing the study as well as the benefit that will be derived from the study. Participation was considered voluntary and participants’ status and other bio-data written on the questionnaire were not disclosed in order to keep their data confidential.

## Result and findings

### Laws guiding offside rules

Linear regression analysis showing the influence of the knowledge of the Laws guiding off-side rules on prevention and reduction in violence on the field of play. The result indicated a significant outcome ( $= -0.728$ ;  $t = 16.38$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). The outcome further stressed that with the predictor variables entered into the regression model at once, there was a significant prediction of the reduction in violence on the field of play ( $R = .558^a$ ;  $R^2 = .312$ ;  $F_{(1,1231)} = 28.78$ ;  $p < .05$ ). This showed that all the exogenous variables (rules on off-side accounted for 31.2% of the variation in the endogenous variable (violence) in the field of play. The hypothesis of no significance in table 2 is rejected. Thus, knowledge of the Laws guiding off-side rules was perceived to significantly prevent violence on the field of play.

### Laws guiding Fouls and Misconducts

Linear regression analysis showing the influence of the knowledge of the Laws guiding fouls and misconduct on reduction of violence in the field of play. The result indicated a significant outcome ( $= -0.745$   $t = 11.51$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). The outcome further stressed that with the predictor variables entered into the regression model at once, there was a significant prediction of the reduction in violence on the field of play ( $R = .541^a$ ;  $R^2 = .221$ ;  $F_{(1,1231)} = 22.69$ ;  $p < .05$ ). This showed that all the exogenous variables (fouls and misconduct) accounted for 29.3% of the variation in the endogenous variable (violence) in the field of play. The hypothesis of no significance in table 3 is rejected. Thus, Knowledge of the Laws guiding fouls and misconduct will not be perceived to significantly reduce the incidence of violence on the field of play.

### Gender of Referee as predictor of Violence

Independents sample t-test showing whether gender of Football Referees will not be perceived to significantly determine the incidence of Football violence during games. Findings revealed a significant outcome ( $t = 2.09$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). This outcome implies that gender of Football Referees significantly determined the incidence of Football violence during games as shown in table 4.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the study Participants (N = 1232)**

Parameters	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	1122	91.1
Female	110	8.9
<i>Age Group</i>		
<i>Under 13 years</i>	21	1.7
13-20 years	96	7.79
21-30 years	345	28.0
31-40 years	371	30.11
Above 40 years	399	32.38
<i>Tribe</i>		
Yoruba	1171	95.0
Igbo	54	4.4
Hausa	7	0.6
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	497	40.3
Married	731	59.3
Divorced	4	0.3
<i>Religion</i>		
Islam	560	45.5
Christianity	666	54.1
Traditional	6	0.5
<i>Level of Education</i>		
No formal Education	27	2.2
Primary Education	3	0.2
Secondary Education	156	12.7
Tertiary Education	1056	87.9

		<i>Stakeholders</i>	
<b>Match Officials</b>		<b>392</b>	<b>31.8</b>
<b>Players</b>		<b>89</b>	<b>7.2</b>
<b>Spectators</b>		<b>318</b>	<b>25.8</b>
<b>Fans</b>		<b>383</b>	<b>31.9</b>
<b>Club Officials</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>3.2</b>

*Source: Field Survey; 2021*

**Hypotheses one:** Knowledge of the Laws guiding off-side rules will not be perceived to significantly prevent violence on the field of play.

**Table 2: Model Summary of the Linear Regression Analysis for knowledge of the law guiding off-side and violence in the field of play**

<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	20.210	0.672		11.45	.000
	Rules on off-side	-0.728	0.523	-0.435	16.38	.000
<i>R</i> = .558 <sup>a</sup> ; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .312; <i>p</i> < .05, <i>F</i> = 28.78; <i>P</i> < 0.05						

a. Dependent Variable: Violence

**Hypothesis two:** Knowledge of the Laws guiding fouls and misconduct will not be perceived to significantly reduce the incidence of violence on the field of play.

**Table 3: Model Summary of the Linear Regression Analysis for knowledge of the law guiding fouls and misconduct and violence in the field of play**

<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constadt)	10.577	0.789		18.15	.000
	Fowls and misconduct	-0.745	0.044	-0.698	11.51	.000
<i>R</i> = .541; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .293; <i>F</i> = 22.69; <i>P</i> < .05						

a. Dependent Variable: Violence

**Table 4: Independent sample t-test showing gender differences in determine the incidence of Football Violence during game**

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-cal	Probability	Remark
Male	340	19.7324	2.63326	2.09	0.037	Significant
Female	52	18.9038	2.79537			

### Discussion of Findings

On the knowledge of Football Laws, the findings of this study were in line with the work of Mastrogiannakis & Dorville (2012) who indicated that knowledge of Football among stakeholders is a major determinant towards violence prevention in the field of Football. According to the authors, the knowledge therein is a subject of progressive consolidation and expansion of judicial powers as well as techniques in the fight against Football hooliganism. Similarly, findings of this study correlate with that of Rookwood (2014). According to the researcher, violence in the field of play occurs majorly from Fans, supporters club and the so called spectators. This according to report, it was their inability to understand the real Laws guiding the game. Rockwood (2014) further stated that this individuals are refers to as Football hooligan who has motive of involved in violence with rival supporters most especially when they do not achieve that aim of winning the match.

Equally, findings above were in agreement with the work of Strang, Baker, Pollard and Hofman (2018) who affirmed that use alcohol and care free attitude of spectator which has direct correlation with lack of knowledge of fouls among others contributed to Football violence in the field of play. In addition, findings Spaaij (2014) who stressed that violence in the fiend of Football cannot the totally eradicated but could be controlled. According to him, the knowledge of law of the game is a major determinant that needs urgent attention among Football stakeholders, He emphasized that club Officials as well as match Officials should try to avoid what can trigger violence by being neutral and factual with whatever decision he or she will make during the game.

In addition finding of this study were in line with the work of Gumusgun & Acet (2014) who indicated that misapplication of the rules guiding fouls and misconduct determined the incidence of violence in the field of

play. The work of Sherif (2001) correlate with the findings of this study. According to him, in a standard Football environment, there must be reasonable amount of equipment in the modern programme, otherwise the activities cannot be maintained. This means that when equipment and facilities are available it will prevent the hooligan to instigate violence at all time.

On the causes of Football violence, the findings of this study were in accordance with the work of Saka (2014). According to him, poor officiating by the officiating Officials is a factors that can promote violence during Football match. In the like manner, the findings of this study corroborate with that of Leonard (2013) who stressed that most violence in Football emanate from players, Officials, coaches, Fans, and spectators because of their lack of knowledge about the law of the game. In addition the work of researchers like Anyanwu, (2011), Mohammed (2013), Ukwayi (2014), Agbanusi (2010) and Oyewusi (2011) agreed with the findings of this work. According to them incompetent and biased officiating, the quest to win at all cost, poorly designed facilities, excessive consumption of alcohol during competition, measuring performance with only winning, use of unregistered or no eligible players, Fans interception and climatic factors resulted into Football crises.

### Conclusion

There is no doubt that in the game of Football, violence cannot be overruled for one reason or the other. The key factors that can reduce or minimize violence at Football event is adequate knowledge of the Laws guiding the game among the stakeholders. It is therefore expedient for stakeholders in Football and most exceptionally the match Officials to always update their knowledge to avoid any form of violence that can emanate as a result of not apply proper judgment while game is ongoing on fouls and misconducts with offside. Similarly, it is also concluded that the key factors that instigate violence are the Fans, supporters club or spectator should be made to familiar with the law guiding the game before allowing them into the stadium.

### Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, it is hereby recommended that:

- i. Officials should show sign of neutrality and be vast in the knowledge of the game
- ii. The Stakeholders (Supporters club members, Club Managers) should be adequately trained on the rules guiding the game.
- iii. Adequate security gadget should be provided in and around the stadium especially when female officials are to be involved
- iv. Around and within the stadium, there is the need for prohibition of sales of alcohol

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