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The Study of Fear of Crime and Its Impact on Fans' Abnormal Behavior at Stadiums (A Case Study of Football Fans at Fooladshahr Stadium in Isfahan, Iran)

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ABSTRACT

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The overall purpose of this study was to perform a descriptive research on fear of crime, its related individual factors and sports environments, as well as the occurrence of inappropriate behavior by fans at stadiums. The research tool was a researcher-developed questionnaire that was found to be valid and reliable. 315 football fans completed the questionnaires at Fooladshahr Stadium in Isfahan, Iran in the second half of 2019. The results showed that the variables of age, level of education and marital status had a significant relationship with fear of crime. Among the teens, 13 to 17 years old, fear of crime was less than the youth while among the youth, it was more considerable than adults. Other individual variables (ethnicity, parents' income and family cultural environment) did not have a significant relationship with fear of crime. Variables related to sports environments, group of friends, rudeness at stadiums, the quality of sports environments, extreme attachment to a team, and crime perception in sports environments are also significantly related to fear of crime. This study emphasizes the need for special attention of sports and security officials to the strict implementation of laws, as well as updating the laws in line with developments and training of fans behavior at stadiums.

Introduction

Developments in the world of sports over the past few decades, especially the commercialization of many sports, the growing role of money in sports and the development of private clubs have led to changes in the behavior of human resources in sports, including fans and fans of sports teams. Today, one of the most important concerns not only of sports officials but also of community managers, especially law enforcement forces, is how to control and deal with incidents and events that occur

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during football matches at sports stadiums (Shortway et al., 2019). Many studies and researches in different parts of the world on the factors affecting the occurrence of crime and abnormal behavior among fans, athletes and coaches in different sports, have been conducted by researchers, and each have enlisted some factors considering the cultural, geographical, sports, political and economic factors. This attention is largely due to the fact that fear of crime and abnormal behavior have a significant impact on the quality of services and sports competitions at stadiums and even individual life of both athletes and fans, needless to mention that fear of crime and abnormal behavior at stadiums may hinder the development of morality and humane manners. The negative and unpleasant consequences of fear of crime for people in a society, especially young people, such as feelings of distrust, insecurity and vulnerability are quite obvious (Dellaserra et al, 2018). Of course, the impact of fear of crime is not limited to the individual level but also has negative consequences at the social level. Fear of crime at stadiums has tarnished the image of competitions and sports venues, and has even gone so far as to reduce the ability to deal effectively with criminal activities and abnormal behavior. Spreading fear of crime leads to behavior and actions that disrupt discipline and the normal course of society (Roper, 2016). Since the 1960s, fear of crime has been recognized as a social reality, as important as the crime itself (Berry & Smith, 2000). Crime fear studies generally emphasize individual and environmental characteristics such as influential variables. The present study deals with the important and effective factors of fear of crime at sports stadiums during football matches and how the fans feel about the atmosphere of the stadiums and what variables, in particular which aspects of the characteristics of the matches at the stadiums, affect this feeling. The present study deals with the role of sports environments such as sports stadiums and its concerned fan behavior, as a very critical and effective variable on fear of crime and also sense of security (McGinn et al., 2008).

Some argue that social inactivity has the same effect on fear of crime as physical inactivity (Rodrigues et al., 2019). Performing abnormal and criminal behavior over the years during sports competitions in many sports arenas such as football, volleyball and basketball at stadiums reflects the presupposition of the sociological theory about the disorganized and chaotic nature of fans at stadiums. Therefore, the main question of the research is first; what the relationship between the personal characteristics of football fans and fear of crime is, and secondly what might be the relationship between the main aspects related to sports competitions and the stadium environment (level of support and attachment to teams, quality of stadiums and winning-losing thinking in competitions) and the fear of crime among the football fans?

One of the problems of the existing literature on fear of crime is disagreement about an agreed definition of fear of crime. The results of some researches show that three concepts have been proposed to explain fear of crime, which shows a variety of hypotheses in explaining this phenomenon. These concepts of victimization are current issues related to sports stadiums and physical and social disasters. (Patch et al., 2019). Some studies and researches have reported a positive relationship between physical violence and indirect victimization with fear of crime. (Roper, 2016) While victimization plays a major role in fear of crime, the victimization perspective indirectly seeks to explain that indirect experiences of victimhood increase fear of crime. As those who hear about a crime or know the victims of a crime are indirectly victims (Loh et al., 2018). The victim perspective also includes the idea that physical and social vulnerability based on demographic factors such as age, gender, and social and cultural status exacerbates fear of crime. Many studies have shown that older people who feel more vulnerable also show more fear of crime (Harada et al., 2017). This idea is also emphasized in the theory of Broken windows, which is related to the feeling of public insecurity among people, the commission of crime, abnormal behavior and fear of crime (Berry & Smith, 2000). When fans perceive the unrest at stadiums, controlling the fan grandstands and bleachers will be threatened. As a result, the plans of law enforcement officials are weakened and fear of crime increases (Shortway et al., 2019). Social and physical deterioration may lead to the loss of control over fan platforms and hence fear of crime will increase, resulting in behavioral abnormalities, obscenity, physical conflict, and damage to public facilities in many sports. On the other hand, strong and, in most cases, extreme ties of fans with their favorite sports teams can lead to

greater attachment, understanding of social integration, formation of fan clubs, and setting up a fan ethical charter which then can result in the prevention of fear. Studies show that in sports environments, fear and a sense of security as well, are more related to the fans' mental perceptions and expectations of the quality of sports matches (favorite team performance) as well as the quality and manner of providing services to fans at sports stadiums than the crime itself. Poor teams and their poor quality of service and facilities at stadiums are statistically significant in most of the models offered. Accordingly, reducing crime may not reduce fear. Instead, reducing perceived unhealthy situations and improving the quality of services and appropriate planning for fan well-being at stadiums may be more effective in reducing fan fear. Some studies show that if people feel that the condition of sports stadiums has deteriorated, then fear of crime will increase. In this study, fear of crime is presented as an emotional response to a threat and expressing a person's sense of danger and anxiety about being harmed (Patch et al., 2019). Many studies that have considered community-related variables (fans), have shown that a fan's negative perception of matches, a sense of social order or supervision, and an observation of inaction (Perez et al., 2018) affect the level of fear of crime. In short, fear of crime is a function of both the person and the environment. Personal factors such as age, gender, victimization and a sense of security risk at stadiums, along with some environmental factors such as advocacy, quality of stadiums, police control, participation in social activities and signs of indecency at stadiums, fear of arisen crime, coexist and interact. Considering all these, during football matches at stadiums aggression, discourtesy and abnormal behavior on the part of fans are crucially observed. In the present study, the role of personal and environmental variables in fear of crime at Fooladshahr Stadium, in Isfahan, Iran, has been studied with more emphasis on the environmental characteristics of the stadium.

Methodology

The present study is a descriptive survey that was conducted to collect the required data. The statistical population consisted of the fans of Iranian football teams in 2019. 369 football fans completed the questionnaires through random sampling. Given that fear of crime is a concept that is not clearly defined, in order to build a questionnaire based on the eight abnormal behavior and crime, which are mostly reported in sports settings, fear of crime is defined as a combination of respondents' concerns about becoming a victim personally and financially, and levels of security, which was evaluated through the five Likert values. Also, in this study, the variables of age, self or family income, marital status, occupation and level of education were evaluated. The research questionnaire was built including 9 components and 68 items. The content validity was confirmed by experts and its reliability was tested, using Cronbach's alpha that are shown in table 1.

Table1.Number of Questions and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

Components of fear of crime	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficients
Attitude to the police	7	0.82
Attitude to the state of the stadium	6	0.79
Stadium quality	8	0.84
The degree of belonging and attachment to the sports team	8	0.86
Experiencing abnormal behavior at stadiums	5	0.78
Perception of crime and abnormal behavior	16	0.81
Ethnic subculture	9	0.78
Failure to meet fan expectations	5	0.82
Police presence at the stadium to provide security	4	0.91

The results of table 1 showed that Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of all components was confirmed and truly validated.

Findings

Descriptive and inferential statistics related to the variables of research and fear of crime are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistics Related to Variables of Fear of Crime

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	F	P
Attitude to the police	3.26	0.856	2.45	0.002
Attitude to the state of stadiums	3.17	0.918	1.98	0.03
Stadium quality	3.42	1.06	8.31	0.003
The degree of belonging and attachment to the sport team	3.51	0.984	6.97	0.001
Experience abnormal behavior at stadiums	3.27	0.679	7.32	0.12
Perception of crime and abnormal behavior	3.41	0.831	9.56	0.15
Ethnic subculture	3.18	0.959	9.12	0.003
Failure to meet fan expectations	2.98	0.897	5.98	0.002
Police presence at the stadium to provide security	3.46	0.938	6.86	0.001

The results of Table 2 show that the feeling of security does not have a statistically significant effect on fear of crime. But fear of crimes against property and people has a statistically significant effect on fear of crimes from the respondents' point of view. Also, other variables have a significant effect on fear of crime at the significant level of $p= 0.50$.

Table 3. The Effect of Demographic Variables on Fear of Crime

Variable	F	P
Age	0.58	0.112
Income	1.18	0.213
Marital status	0.615	0.09
Education level	1.23	0.112

The results of Table 3 showed that demographic variables do not have a statistically significant effect on fear of crime.

Table 4. Variables Entered into the Multivariate Regression Equation

Variable	R ²	S.E	Beta	T	Sig. T
Discourtesy between fans	0.19	9.26	0.43	6.68	0.002
The degree of belonging and attachment to the sports team	0.27	10.52	0.45	8.13	0.001

The results of Table (4) indicate that among the variables that showed a significant relationship with fear of crime in bivariate analysis, not only the perception of discourtesy but also the degree of belonging and attachment to the sports team entered the regression equation, each successively explain 19% and 27% of the dependent variable.

Discussion and Conclusion

The result of this research study emphasizes the need for special attention of sports and security officials to the behavior of fans at stadiums and during competitions. The results show that demographic and individual variables have not shown a statistically significant effect on fear of crime and its dimensions. Given that all sports fans are male and gender is not measured, and also more than 92% of fans are between 14 and 38 years old, and in sensitive competition conditions, personal characteristics such as education level, income or age do not have a significant effect on fear of crime. Of course, some research on age shows that fear of crime increases with age. But some other research shows that age has no significant relationship with fear of crime and its dimensions (Roper, 2016). The results also showed that the amount of income from the perspective of the respondents does not affect the fear of crime. Contrary to previous findings, which indicated that fear of crime increases with lower economic bases (Rodrigues et al., 2019, Loh et al., 2018), this study has not found any relationship between income level and fear of crime. One of the most important causes of fear of crime is the observation of discourtesy. It is found that discourtesy is a sign of crime and mechanisms indicating anarchy and chaos, threatening law and order at stadiums, which can pave the way for breaking the law and causing behavioral disorders (Roper, 2016). Satisfaction from the stadium environment is one of the main predictors of crime fear and its inverse relationship shows that fan satisfaction with sports facilities reduces fear of crime. Among the variables related to sports stadiums, which have meaningful impact on fear of crime are; the characteristics of the stadium in terms of quality and access to services, the degree of attachment to the sports team, the attitude of people towards law enforcement and stadium security, the perception of crime and impunity, and the general concern about crimes against property and people. These results show that at sports stadiums and during competitions, the characteristics of stadiums and fan platforms are more important than demographic and individual variables.

Since the variables related to sports environments are very important and have a statistically significant effect on the fear of crimes against property and people, so it can be said that CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) programs can reduce fear of crime.

When fans are more attached to their favorite team, have a positive attitude toward it, be members of the fan club, and participate in the fate of sports teams, they will feel less afraid of crime. Creating a safe, secure, and lively environment at stadiums during matches requires fan participation in fan grandstand management, which can be achieved through the development of rules and regulations and the voluntary participation of individuals in decision making processes and providing motivational incentives for them. Improving the quality of the match, spreading the win-win thinking pattern among the fans and not making the games unnecessarily sensitive is a good way to create a safe environment at sports stadiums. Although the issue of the fan club in football has been discussed for a long time, in practice, the participation of fans in the club is very low. The fan's moral charter, along with the necessary executive support and training, is a useful measure that must be taken as soon as possible to help the police maintain law and order and provide a stress-free atmosphere in different sports arenas.

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