Augmenting Sports Officials’ Well-Being: From Prediction Variables of Referee Retention

Han Soo Kim, University of Mississippi  
Nathan Ferdinand, Ohio University  
Minjung Kim (Advisor), University of Mississippi  
Kofan Lee, University of Mississippi

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Enhancing the experience of sporting events and ensuring the spirit of sportsmanship necessitates maintaining the number of qualified officials practicing in every sport sector and improving their job performance (FIBA, 2004). Considering continued concern about the growing shortage of officials in school sports (Scandale, 2017), an imperative is to explore how they can be encouraged to engage with their work and elevate their psychological well-being. Understanding the factors associated with retention and the states of authenticity displayed by officials can be a starting point in the development of management strategies. The purpose of our study is to empirically examine the relationships among prediction variables of referee retention, authenticity, job engagement, and psychological well-being in interscholastic sports.

In anticipation of referee retention, a multidimensional model was developed by encompassing seven prediction variables, namely, intrinsic motives, sense of community, perceived administrator consideration, mentoring, remuneration, lack of stress, and continuing education in sport contexts (Ridinger, Kim, Warner, & Tingle, 2017). Based on the strong and positive relationship between intention to retention and job engagement (Wefald & Downey, 2009), we postulate that the higher degree of each prediction variable of retention could lead to greater job engagement (H1a through H1g). As a critical feature for sport employees, authenticity has been highlighted as playing a role in positive attitudes and behaviors, especially in improved ethical decision-making in sport organizations (Oja, Kim, Perrewé, & Christos, 2019). Therefore, the authenticity of referees is expected to promote their job engagement (H2). On the grounds of the strong predictive power of engagement as regards psychological well-being (Robertson, Birch, & Cooper, 2010), we propose that referees’ job engagement enhances their psychological well-being (H3).

We developed an online survey questionnaire and administered it to 410 referees registered in the National Federation of State High School Associations. Given the acceptable fit exhibited by the full measurement model, the hypothesized model also indicated that a reasonable model fit (S-B $\chi^2 = 1308.6$, df = 703, p < .001, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .05). Direct paths from intrinsic motives (H1a), sense of community (H1b), lack of stress (H1c) to job engagement were positive and significant at the alpha level of .05. However, the other prediction variables of referee retention to job engagement (H1d through H1g) were non-significant. The paths from authenticity to job engagement (H2: $\gamma = .35$, S.E. = .09, p < .001) and job engagement to psychological well-being (H3: $\gamma = .40$, S.E. = .06, p < .001) were positively significant.

The results indicated that intrinsic motives, sense of community, lack of stress, and authenticity were pivotal factors in enhancing job engagement and thereby augmented the referees’ psychological well-being. Our findings theoretically broaden the body of knowledge on the desirable psychological aspects of referees by considering their characteristic and well-being. Practically, such examination not only directly beneficial for comprehending the attitudes and behaviors of referees in interscholastic sports but also aids association administrators in formulating internal management strategies meant to increase the job engagement and well-being of officials.