The Predictive Effect of Emotional Intelligence and its Components on Anger and Aggressiveness in Soccer Players

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The purpose of this study was to determine the predictive effect of emotional intelligence and its components on anger and aggressiveness in soccer players. The subjects included 95 soccer players from the second division of the soccer teams of Tehran. The data was collected by using two instruments including Shrink Emotional Intelligence Standardized Questionnaire and Competitive Aggressiveness and Anger Scale (CAAS). Statistical analysis included Pearson's correlation coefficient and linear regression analysis at the significant level of $p \leq 0.05$. The results of the analysis indicated that there is a negative and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and aggression in soccer players ($r=-0.431$, $p<0.01$). Emotional intelligence also significantly predicted aggressiveness (Adjusted $R^2=0.35$). The findings of the study suggest that a significant relationship exists between emotional intelligence and aggression; therefore, using proper training programs to improve emotional intelligence may lead to the improvement of social and interpersonal relationships and as a result control the aggression of competitive athletes such as soccer players.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, aggression, soccer player.

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Understanding anger and aggression in sport has increasingly become an aim of sport scientists. However, inconsistency in the operational definitions of these constructs (see Maxwell & Moores, 2008, Tenenbaum, Stewart, Singer, & Duda, 1997) and methodology (e.g., Kirker, Tenenbaum, & Mattson, 2000) has hindered the development of a coherent framework for examining aggression. Several definitions of aggression in sport have been proposed in the literature. Aggression in sport is defined by the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP; Tenenbaum, & et al. 1997) as ''the infliction of an aversive stimulus, either physical, verbal, gastrula, upon one person by another. Aggression is not an attitude but behavior and, most critically, it is reflected in acts committed with the intent to injure'' (p. 1).

Aggression is one of the important constructs that is the focus of research by many sport psychologists. Anger is associated with the thought that someone has done you harm (Tiedens, 2001).

Aggressive player inflicts harm on other players. The results of investigation using interview with the players and coaches by (Katorij & Cahoon, 1992) showed that 59% of injuries of junior B hockey players resulted from opponents aggressive acts. Hayes (1975) showed that 40% of spinal cord injuries in ice hockey were due to the aggressive behaviors. Bredemeier & Shields (1986) believe that poor moral development is the major cause of fight in competitive boy athletes. According to Silva (1990), aggression increases the level of arousal and diverts the attention toward non-performance goal (thinking about harming the opponent) and therefore it does no facilitate performance. As mentioned before, the aggression occurs in competitive sports (Kirker, Tenenbaum & Mattson, 2000) and may have consequences for the weak opponent (i.e., cause trauma and injury) and as a result the aggressive player may face penalty and so within the sport it may lead to the reduction of the number of participations in that sport, therefore, understanding the mechanisms by which to control aggressive behavior of athletes must be addressed and investigated. Research (Brunelle, & Janelle, & Tennant, 1999) shows that angry feelings and angry behavior, the precursor to aggression, can be modified through anger

awareness training and role playing. Also, (Ruiz & Hanin, 2004) who examined the content of anger suggest using a variety of techniques, including metaphoric descriptions, emotion profiling and open-ended questions. The perceived functional impact of anger on performance indicated that athletes can use anger in preparation for or during the competition. The facilitative effects of anger were related to positive feelings of increased motivation, confidence and powerful skill execution, whereas the debilitative effects were associated with tension, lack of confidence and perceived inability to cope with the situation.

Sport psychologists (Tenenbaum, & et al. 1997) recommend that the athletes must be learning skills necessary to control emotions and reactions that they experience during the time of defeat or failure. In this regard, International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) released a declaration in which recommendations for the purpose of controlling and reducing aggressive behavior in sports were included. In the eighth and the ninth recommendations, it was stated that athletes should participate in training programs intended for reducing their tendency toward the aggressive behavior and that coaches, authorities and media should encourage the athletes to show proper social conducts. These psychological programs, which may include the control of emotions, the ability to realize the feelings and the causes underlying them, the power to identify one's strength and weakness and the ability to manage one's behavior when dealing with the others, can lead to the decrease of psychological stress and aggression. Reducing these feelings is enhanced by what is known as the emotional intelligence (EI). Bar-on (2000) described emotional intelligence as a collection of abilities, capacities, and non-cognitive skills that assist the person to cope with the demands and environmental pressures.

According to Bar-on's theory the tolerance of a person to withstand environment pressure depends on the abilities to choose means by which to adjust with the environment pressures, the optimistic willingness toward the experiences and changes, and the ability to overcome the obstacles, the feeling a person is able to control the stressing situation or affect it (Bar-On, 2000). Salovey & Mayer, (1990) stated that the individuals who have

sufficient skill to control emotions can compensate for their negative feeling through the pleasant activities. Positive feelings are important for effective and quick decision making (Isen, 2001), creating future plans (Mayer, 1986), and organizing the thought (Fredrickson & Branigon, 2005), resistance against the problems (Salovey & Birnbaum, 1989), and the ability in solving problems through the social support (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001). Therefore, the team that has the ability to properly apply emotions to facilitate thinking in behavioral adjustment with players' performance, will probably has more chance of success (Kirker, Tenenbaum, & Mattson, 2000). The results of the research conducted before indicate that the emotional intelligence construct can be regarded as an effective factor in some sport situations such as the sport performance (Zizzi, & Deaner, & Hirschhorn, 2003), and the coaching efficacy (Thelwell, Lane, Weston, Neil, and Greenless, 2008). Blanchard, Mask, Vallerand, Sablonnie, & Provencher (2007) stated that emotions inherently affect the behaviors and relationship of athletes in training and competition. It has also been demonstrated that emotions play significant role in interpersonal situations and function as one of the main sources creating emotional and behavioral responses during interaction with other people. For instance, Latomer, & Rench, & Brackett, & Tara, & Rench (2007) believe that accurate perception of an individual's emotions (type and intensity of emotions) facilitate prediction and understanding of emotions in future. Therefore, correct cognition and the control of emotions leading to a decrease of aggressiveness that in turn increases the capacity to cope with frustration, control the discharging of negative emotions and/or to identify with ethical principles of a given sport (Wlazlo, Szuszkiewicz, & Wlazlo, 2007). Also, physical education teachers and coaches behaviors must represent model instances for students and athletes to follow. On the other hand, consciousness-based rules can be developed for children and youths by learning, acknowledging, understanding and digesting right emotions and by building ethics consciousness (Maxwell, 2004, Goral, 2008). Considering the fact that aggression and anger in sport are among the important factors that affect athletes' performance and

conditions negatively and lead to undesirable consequences in competitive sport for athletes, coaches, spectators, sport personnel, and most importantly the culture of a society, research in this context is of utmost importance. The present research was designed to assess the relationship between the emotional intelligence, anger, and aggression among soccer players. The main goal of the present study is to investigate the prediction effect of emotional intelligence and its factors on anger and aggressiveness in soccer players.

Method

Participants

The statistical population included the entire soccer players participating in the second division soccer league of the Province of Tehran. The sample consisted of 95 soccer players ranged in age from 18-32 years (M= 24.58, SD=2.32). The length of membership ranged from 1 to 6 years (M=2.10, SD=1.40). The number of participants per team ranged from 9 to 13, with an average of 11.87 players per team.

Instruments

Emotional Intelligence. Shrink Emotional Intelligence Inventory with 33 items was employed to assess the emotional intelligence. In Iran, this instrument is validated by Mansouri (1980) who used the 33 items of the questionnaire to measure the 5 subscales of emotional intelligence including self-motivation, self-awareness, self-control, Empathy, and social skills. The construct validity of the instrument was assessed by using Cooper Smith self-respect (r =0.84) and its reliability was determined by Cronbach's alphas which was equal to 0.84. The internal reliability of this instrument was tested by the researcher (r =0.77).

Aggression. To assess aggression, Competitive Aggressiveness and Anger Scale were used. This instrument includes 12 items measuring two subscales including sport anger and aggressiveness in competitive athletes. The development and psychometric properties of the instrument are

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described in detail elsewhere (Maxwell & Moores, 2008). In this study, the reliability of the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha, (1951) equals to 0.78.

Statistical analysis including Pearson correlation and linear regression were performed by using SPSS: pc 15.0. The level of significance was set to $p \leq 0.05$.

Procedure. Team coaches were contacted to gain permission to ask their athletes to participate in the study. Once permission was granted, a meeting was set up with the team at its convenience (e.g., usually subsequent to a team practice). At the beginning of the meeting, the general nature of the study was explained to the athletes, confidentiality was assured, and the voluntary nature of their participation was emphasized. Then, all participants completed the survey package (i.e., demographic questionnaire, Shrink emotional intelligence and CAAS questionnaires). The survey package took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the variables examined in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of descriptive statistics for all the Variables

	Mean	SD
Aggression	43.79	6.142
EI	123.9579	7.94518
Self-motivation	26.53	3.984
Self-awareness	19.92	3.034
Self-control	18.35	2.167
Empathy	23.14	3.221
Social skills	36.03	2.363

The Pearson correlation coefficient results between the total score of emotional intelligence and aggressiveness is significant r = -o.431, (p<0.01). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Correlations between emotional intelligence and
its five components with aggressiveness

Variables	
1-EI	-0.431**
2-Self-motivation	0.020
3-Self-awareness	-0.255**
4-Self-control	-0.348**
5-Empathy	0.022
6-Social skills	-0.614**

NOTE: EI= Emotional Intelligence

** P < 0.01   * P < 0.05

Also, the results of the analysis of subscales or components of emotional intelligence demonstrated that there is a negative and significant relationship between self-awareness, self-control, social skills and aggressiveness. In addition, the results of regression analysis showed that the components of emotional intelligence explained 38.9 percent of the variance of aggressiveness (Table 3).

Table 3
Simultaneous regression of aggressiveness on predictive variables

Regression model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate	df	F	P
Predictive variable	0.624	0.389	0.355	4.934	5& 89	11.329	0.0005

More specifically, considering the significant predictive values of self-awareness, self-control and social skills for aggressiveness (t= - 5.527,

p=0.005), these components may be used to predict aggressiveness. These results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Statistical values for constructing the regression equation for aggressiveness and emotional intelligence subscales

Predicting sub-scales	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	P
Self-awareness	-0.147	0.133	-0.096	-1.109	0.271
Self-motivation	-0.019	0.216	-0.007	-0.090	0.929
Self-control	-0.092	0.195	-0.046	-0.473	0.637
Empathy	0.074	0.159	0.039	0.463	0.644
social skills	-1.615	0.282	-0.570	-5.527	0.005

Discussion

The results of this research showed a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and self-awareness, self- control, social skills and aggressiveness in athletes. In other words, high levels of emotional intelligence go hand in hand with low levels of aggressive behavior. In addition, the subscale of social skills was the significant predictor of aggressive behavior. Despite the fact that the results observed in this research were similar to those that studied the association between emotional intelligence and mental health (Meyer & Fletcher, 2007), no result regarding the research subject was available to be compared with the results of the present study.

It seems likely that part of the success of emotional intelligence is due to the fact that athletes are helped to increase their self-awareness, self-control, social skills and to use them to solve problems rather than continue aggressive behaviors.

There are some theories in regard to the relationship between the emotional intelligence and mental health. Lopes, Brackett, Nezlek, Schutz, Sellin, & Salovey (2004) pointed to the role of emotional intelligence in regard to the ability to control feelings, self and the emotions in addition to the use of this knowledge to guide thinking and self-action. In the author's

view, persons who realize their feelings and understand them implicitly, can effectively regulate their emotional experience and as a result be more successfully in adaptation to the negative emotions than those who are weak when performing emotionally.

Of the most important attributes of people possessing social skills is their skill to control and direct the sensitive life events. The ability to control and regulate their feelings and emotions has an inverse relationship with the feelings of depression, frustration and disappointment according to what Ciarochi & et al. (2001) report. These people demonstrate greater optimism and hope in the face of stressful and unpleasant life events and this may explain how emotional intelligence operates in athletes.

Isberg (2000) states that in order to control appropriate emotions in sports, one of the strategies is the direct management of behavior and relationship skills between players and cohesive team structure. Cognitive behavioral techniques such as risk taking exercise, and social and communication skill exercise can indirectly be useful to prevent and control anger and aggression in sport.

According to Hanin (in press), a main issue in emotion research is to understand the individual's interpretation (meta-experience) of the emotional impact, as well as the underlying mechanisms by which different intensities of optimal/ dysfunctional, pleasant/unpleasant emotions are helpful or harmful for athletic performance (Robazza, & Bortoli, 2007).

As mentioned before, a number of researchers have emphasized the importance of social support, success and satisfaction of the players who possess higher ability to control emotions and believe that this very support will lead to the protection of the person from depression, frustration, stress and the experience of negative feelings.

It has been demonstrated that aggression and anger in competitive sport result in disputes and discordant relationship between the athletes, coaches, and spectators. Incidents of sport injuries, (Katorij and Cahoon, 1992., Hayes, 1975), disturbance of team moral atmosphere and poor skill performance and defeat (Bredmeier & Shields, 1984b), absence base of morality (Stephense & Karanagh, 2003), and uncontrollable increase in

arousal level and ignoring the performance (Silva, 1990) have been reported. In fact, what may be concluded from this and the previous research is that those who can control their emotions in sensitive situations have proper moral principles and try to control competitive stressful and frustrating situations. These types of people do not cause harm to their rival and for them fair play is more important than the result of the game.

Changing aggressive behaviors into focused support and encouragement is usually accompanied by dramatic changes in anger intensity and even complete extinction. Other cognitive behavioral techniques such as assertiveness training, communication skills training, and team building could also be useful indirect strategies for preventing and controlling excessive anger and aggression in sport (Isberg, 2000).

Accordingly, the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the attribute of simplifying facilitation, can have direct positive effect on sport success and it assists the person to organize his thoughts, memory and its content to face the problems more systematically. In addition, the attribute of emotional simplification with positive mood change helps the person to cope better with the environment and the stimuli within it. This adaptation in turn influences the person's sport performance.

In sport, particularly in competitive sports such as soccer, the emotional intelligence has a considerable effect on performance and the result of the game, (Zizzi, & et al. 2003, Latomer, & et al. 2007). Therefore, when individuals have the power to attenuate or regulate the emotions and the psychological pressure in a game, they can demonstrate a constructive interaction with the teammates, opponents, referees and spectators and so present an attractive fair play. Considering what was said, it can be concluded that the interaction of emotional intelligence can be applied to reduce the aggression and anger and so to perform successfully in sport. Kroll (1975) suggests that situations in which the person must choose between an ethical action and a successful action are the ones that develop our moral standards and values. All ethical decisions do not require sacrificing success, but we should not ignore ethical issues as we pursue success. In fact, we should make choices based on relevant ethical criteria.

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In general, sport psychologists think that coaches and athletes should have the opportunity to exercise control strategies of emotions due to competition stress and pressure. In this regard, there are reports that claim stress management can help athletes to face the stressful situations.

Applied sport psychologists, especially those who are working with competitors of contact sports, should help performers become aware of the facilitative or debilitative effects of cognitive and somatic symptoms related to anger. Athletes debilitated by anger could then be trained to reinterpret the harmful effects of emotional symptoms, in line with the view of directional proponents. For example, Hanton and Jones (1999) used cognitive restructuring to change performers' interpretation of the debilitative effects of anxiety towards more facilitative perceptions. Alternatively, a treatment could be devised to change the intensity of emotions together with (or rather than) their reinterpretation. The treatment enabled athletes to achieve an optimal level of emotions and self-confidence. In a similar manner, Robazza, Pellizzari, and Hanin (2004) trained performers to enter their optimal zones of functioning by enhancing or lowering the intensity level of their idiosyncratic emotions. Thus, cognitive restructuring or self-regulation of emotional levels might be proposed separately or in combination to help athletes attain control over their anger.

Also, it is believed that athletes have the ability to learn and promote their emotional intelligence (Grewal, Brackett, and Salovey, 2006). At the present time, the educational interventions for emotional intelligence have been carried out successfully (Brackett & Katulak, 2006), and it has been applied to commercial business (Lopes, & et al. 2006). In this research, it was observed that there is a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and the rate of anger and regression among soccer players. Also, the possibility of prediction of social skill subscale of emotional intelligence in aggression was observed. On the other hand, because a proper social conduct and as a result the development of social and communication skills is encouraged by the International Society of Psychologists, the emphasis on programs intended to increase emotional

intelligence of soccer players, that includes factors such as social relation, self-awareness, and self-motivation can be applied as one of the psychological intervention to reduce athletes' anger and aggression and consequently improve performance. In fact, the goal of these interventions is enhancing the emotional and social performance and not focusing on promotion of team performance goal, despite such a fact, it will indirectly influence team performance as well.

In summary, the present study examined the prediction effect of emotional intelligence and its components on aggressiveness in soccer players. A significant negative relationship was found between the two variables. Specifically, considering the significant negative predictive values of social skills for aggressiveness, this component may be used to negatively predict the aggressiveness.

This study focused on a sample of male athletes which is rather small. It must be taken into consideration that this was an exploratory study, may be underpowered; therefore, it must be acknowledged that the external validity of this sample may be limited. Recommendations for future research are to examine a larger and more similar sample of players from both sexes and different team sports. Another recommendation is longitudinal and experimental studies on the level of EI over time by holding emotional intelligence classes for players.

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