



Litterature Review on Officials Recruitment and Retention

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the current landscape when it comes to the experience of young officials in sports in order to better prevent our officials to leave the sport system to ensure access to a safe and healthy sport environment. This report will also consider the concept of recruitment and retention of officials in sports by going through a literature review.

The document is divided into three main sections: the refereeing experience, motivation & recruitment and support & retention. It will then be completed by some recommendations and prevention strategies to better recruit and retain officials.

Context

Officials have three main responsibilities: "to ensure that the rules of the game are followed and that the rules are respected, to ensure control of the game in collaboration with the other officials, and to remove any player who is ill or injured" (Demers & Abath, p. 3). Officials are needed in both individual and team sports, and may have the title of referee or judge (e.g., line judge in soccer). While many studies used the term "official" which is representative of more sports, the term "referee" is also used.

Officials are an integral part of the sport environment and are essential to the smooth running of games or competitions. In recent decades, research and sport organizations have reported a significant decline in the number of officials, ranging from 15% to 40% depending on the sport and country (Auger et al., 2010; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010; Australian Rugby Union Annual Report, 2010; Livingston & Forbes, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2008; Van Yperen, 1998). This trend is thought to be even more significant for younger officials, who are at particular risk of leaving within the first two years (Fry et al., 1987 cited in Auger et al., 2010; Deacon et al., 2001; Webb, Rayner et al., 2020). Research has addressed the issue of official attrition in order to better understand the phenomenon and thus develop prevention and intervention strategies.

The officiating profession has been described as inherently stressful, particularly with respect to controversial decisions or the fear of making mistakes (Voight, 2009; Webb, Rayner et al., 2020). The choice to leave the world of officiating occurs when the sources of stress and inconvenience associated with the job outweigh the perceived benefits to the official. A few studies have documented the reasons why officials leave, and these reasons can be divided into individual and organizational factors. On the individual level, activities related to family, school, or another job may create scheduling conflicts and limit the time available for officiating (Auger et al., 2010; Dorsch & Paskevich, 2007; Laboratory in Recreation and Community Living, 2005; Livingston & Forbes, 2006, 2017a, 2017b; Voight, 2009; Webb, Dicks, et al., 2020). Others cited fitness gaps related to age or health issues (Livingston & Forbes, 2017a). Finally, some officials explained their dropout as a loss of interest in officiating (Livingston & Forbes, 2007).

More recently, Theisen (2017) suggests we currently face a national shortage of youth sport officials. Kentucky athletic directors express the same concern reporting the number of school and prep level officials decreases (Mathison, 2017). The Kentucky High School Athletic Association reported a 4 % decrease in the number of officials from the 2016-17 to 2017-18 academic year (Steers, 2018). This crisis stems from several factors including poor

official retention rates, the aging out of officials, the increase in number of youth sport games, and poor conduct of fans causing officials to question their desire to officiate (Mathison, 2017). Complicating the current official shortage is an increase in prep sport participation in 12 sports. Mathison reported between 2000-2001 and 2015-16 academic year's participants in girls prep sports has increased 19.2 % while participation in boy's prep sports had risen 11%. At the same time sports was experiencing growth the pool of potential officials has decreased by 2.36 % between the 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 academic years. This trend is not unique to the United States, much of the research related to sport official retention stems from shortages experienced internationally across sports (Gray & Wilson, 2008; Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013; Forbes & Livingston, 2013).

The high rate of official attrition is disrupting the provision of service in many sports. Games or competitions are being played without the required number of officials or are being officiated by unqualified replacement volunteers, or are being cancelled altogether. Between 25% and 30% of officials drop out each year. This inevitably affects the growth and quality of the sport. In Québec, the baseball federation is showing less and less games officiated by two officials and they are now looking at involving parents, coaches and players in officiating the games. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/sports/1957223/chronique-martin-leclerc-baseball-quebec-innove-penurie-arbitres>

In 2022, hockey has also made the headlines with games being cancelled due to lack of officials. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1948342/federation-tournoi-m9-m11>

<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1930743/hockey-mineur-annulation-parties-shawinigan>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/hockey-ref-shortage-1.6556864>

This rate can be reduced if we take the trouble to implement a few simple solutions.

Organizationally, several studies highlight the influence of disrespect for officials in sport (Auger et al., 2010; Bettset al., 2007; Dorsch & Paskevich, 2007; Forbes & Livingston, 2013; Hancock et al., 2015; Rayner et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2018). Disrespect is exemplified through verbal and nonverbal manifestations that come from athletes, coaches, and parents (Cleland et al., 2015; Webb, Dicks, et al., 2020). A few studies have also documented gender-based abuse, where female referees report feeling more targeted than their male colleagues (Tingle et al., 2014; Forbes et al., 2014; Reid & Dallaire, 2019).

Motivations & Recruitment

Some research have shown that Participants identified several motivations for becoming an official, the most common of which was having participated in the sport as an athlete in the first place. Participants also cited social influence (from other referees, association officials, or their parents) and attractive working conditions (flexible hours, accessibility of a job at a young age, salary) as reasons for getting into officiating. Others mentioned personal reasons, such as wanting to gain confidence or authority. Finally, a few people mentioned the lack of referees in their area that had led to recruitment drives in organizations in their region.

It is important to acknowledge that not every referee experienced the same motivation factors or to the same degree. Each referee identified at least two of the factors illustrated in Figure 1. This suggests that interdependency exists between the factors that contributed towards a

referee's decision to get involved and stay involved. Understanding the diversity of influences that impact upon a referee's decision to continue officiating is important as this allows for the development of a variety of strategies to cater to different refereeing types.

Camaraderie and support	Individual goals	Rewards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referees • Referee coaches • Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement and bettering oneself • Fitness • Assist community and rugby union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievements • Promotions • Awards • Representative games • Milestones

Figure 1

Support & Retention

Some programs have been developed to improve the overall experience of officials. While these initiatives do not specifically address issues of violence, they have the potential to increase the retention of officials within organizations. The Excellence in Ice Hockey Officiating (EXAR) program, for example, aims to coach those responsible for managing officials and to recognize the importance of officiating within organizations (Poirier & Rouleau, 2015). However, no study has evaluated the implementation or effectiveness of this program in terms of improving recognition and the quality of the support received by referees. Some researchers emphasize the importance of including officials in the administrative and decision-making bodies of sports organizations (e.g., Milton, 2018), which is not the norm in many provinces/regions at present. Finally, a strategic action plan, in which officials would be at the heart of decision-making, would allow for better consideration of their needs.

The first two years after an official's initial training is the period when he or she is most likely to leave office (Webb, Rayner et al., 2020). Therefore, it becomes essential to put in place specific measures to support them in their journey.

Participants in research highlighted several elements that would contribute to this support, including monthly supervision meetings, individualized follow-up with perpetrators of inappropriate behaviour, supervisors at higher stakes games, and management in the stands by parents. To this end, workshops could be offered to parents to promote bystander intervention strategies (see for example McMahon & Banyard, 2012).

A number of studies have focused upon how sporting organizations recruit, retain and manage their volunteers ensuring the effective running of community sport (Hill, 2002; Misener, Doherty, & Hamm-Kerwin, 2010). For example, the motivations and commitment that volunteers exhibit, have been identified as key indicators in determining the intentions of sports volunteers to continue or cease volunteering (Bang & Ross, 2009; Bang et al., 2009; Dixon, 2008). Ensuring that volunteers are 'properly' looked after and recognized plays a large part in effectively handling their motivations and commitment and thus ensuring their continued voluntary participation (Bang et al., 2009).

The satisfaction of volunteers has been found to have a direct correlation with their recruitment into and retention within the activity for which they are volunteering (Dwiggins-Beeler, Spitzberg, & Roesch, 2011). In this study, 250 volunteers were surveyed from non-profit organizations in order to investigate the relationships between motivation, communication, job satisfaction, retention and recruitment. Results indicated that motivation was a key element of satisfaction along with communication. These in turn assisted with an overall positive job satisfaction, commitment to remaining involved and leading to the recruitment of others into the organization.

Participants in some of the research also described their initial training as primarily about learning the rules and responsibilities of their job. While this initial training was generally appreciated, some noted that there was little or no emphasis on game management or conflict resolution, while acknowledging that these types of skills are learned with experience. Several participants mentioned that they received a more rigorous coaching that was provided in their first year, particularly for their first games, where they were paired with an experienced official to support them in their decisions. Some regions also offer formative supervision, which is both a learning opportunity and a source of stress for participants. A few people explained that the "surprise" arrival of an evaluator at a game could increase their stress level even though the feedback was appreciated.

Additionally, the lack of support available to officials through their organizations increases the effects of conflict or stress, and decreases officials' sense of trust in organizations (Abath & Demers, 2008; Kellet & Warner, 2011; Recreation and Community Life Laboratory, 2005; Webb, Rayner et al., 2020). Lack of opportunity for advancement and lack of recognition for good performance also contribute to the choice to leave the officiating world (Auger et al., 2010; Baldwin & Vallance, 2016; Betts et al., 2007; Hancock et al., 2015; Livingston & Forbes, 2007; 2013; 2017b). In conclusion, the reasons for abandonment cited by officials—they are numerous and not limited to the abuse experienced. However, studies in the field of officiating consistently highlight officials' experiences of violence and abuse and the consequences generated.

Understanding the experiences of those who officiate in sports provides valuable insights for program administrators. A study provided an opportunity to garner ideas related to recruitment and retention as sport administrators face growing participation rates and a dwindling number of officials. Identification of potential stressors and/or reasons to quit could help sport administrators develop new trainings to help officials manage these stressors. These programs might include peer mentoring programs to help new officials begin to build relationships, develop their officiating skills, and have a sounding board for concerns as they learn their new role.

Table 1 Referee Retention Strategies

Dimension	Description	Supporting Citations
Referee Recruitment Stage		
Staying Part of the Game	A general desire to continue to be involved and give back to a sport through officiating	Cuskelly and Hoye (2013), Phillips and Fairley (2014), Ridinger (2015), Schaeperkoetter (2016)
Competition and Challenge	Elements related to the competitive nature of sport and the challenge to refine skills needed for officiating	Kellett and Warner (2011), Phillips and Fairley (2014), Ridinger (2015)
Remuneration	Financial incentives involved with officiating	Forbes and Livingston (2013), Kellett and Warner (2011), Ridinger (2015)
Socialization into the Community	The involvement of a mentor/friend that introduced an individual to officiating and aids in the integration into the social worlds in officiating	Kellett and Shilbury (2007), Kellett and Warner (2011), Ridinger (2015), Tingle et al. (2014)
Referee Retention Stage		
Problematic Social Interactions	Negative interactions with coaches, parents, and spectators	Kellett and Warner (2011), Kim and Hong (2016), Schaperkoetter (2016), Tingle et al. (2014)
Training/Mentoring	Formal evaluation system and/or being assigned a mentor	Cuskelly and Hoye (2013), Kim and Hong (2016), Nordstrom et al. (2016), Ridinger (2015), Schaeperkoetter (2016), Tingle et al. (2014)
Referee Advancement Stage		
Lack of Referee Community	Lack of support and lack of feeling of community among officials	Kellett and Shilbury (2007), Kellett and Warner (2011), Ridinger (2015), Tingle et al. (2014)
Lack of Administrator Consideration	Lack of understanding and consideration from administrators	Forbes and Livingston (2013), Kellett and Warner (2011), Kim (2016), Ridinger (2015), Schaperkoetter (2016)
Administrator Decision-Making	Decisions regarding referee assignments	Forbes and Livingston (2013), Tingle et al. (2014)
Sport Policies	Navigation of policies when relocating to a new league or state	Forbes and Livingston (2013), Tingle et al. (2014)

Note. Adapted from "Officiating Attrition: The Experiences of Former Referees via a Sport Development Lens," by S. Warner, J.K. Tingle, and P. Kellett, 2013, *Journal of Sport Management*, 27, p. 320. Copyright 2013 by the Human Kinetics Inc.

Potential solutions

Given the often isolating nature of refereeing at a community level, it is not surprising that the participants indicated a strong 'wanting' and 'need' for support from colleagues and mentors. Rowe (1999) identified the importance of people needing to feel part of a team and the overall effect that this need has on the whole 'sports package'. At the community level where people often come and go quit quickly in terms of volunteering, anything that can strengthen this bond in a positive way can often make all the difference to people's overall experiences.

A strategic action plan, with officials at the centre of decision-making, would allow for greater consideration of the needs of this group of stakeholders and for strategies that would influence all sports at the local to national level (Webb, Rayner et al., 2020). This is consistent with studies conducted with officials that suggest that improving recognition, including through better organizational support, increases athletes' and coaches' respect for officiating (Ilardi, 2018; Kellet & Warner, 2011).

To retain officials, the main focus should be on coaching and recognition.

Mentoring: Don't leave new officials to their own devices

The best form of mentoring is the mentoring of new officials by more experienced officials. After a game, for example, the new official should have the opportunity to review his or her behavior and decisions with the "sponsor," an experienced official, usually at a higher level. The two will also discuss the behaviors of players, coaches and spectators so that the new official will better understand the best attitudes to adopt in the future.

The supervision of officials should include the following points:

Ensure the presence or availability of an official in charge of the officials to ensure the smooth running of games or competitions (particularly important when the officials are young and inexperienced).

- all officials must be properly trained and receive a personalized evaluation;
- active supervision can be exercised by organizing "coaching meetings" that will focus on communication, communication
- emphasis on communication, advice and answering questions;
- supervision should provide positive feedback that builds self-esteem;
- age-appropriate teaching tools will be developed for youth and new officials.

Recognition: Officials are as important as coaches to the organization, athletes and parents

Officials, those "volunteers behind the scenes", deserve respect for their work and their contribution. Preferably personalized, recognition is done on a regular basis, consisting of highlighting and valuing the work of each official. The recognized and appreciated official will develop a sense of belonging to the organization, will be proud to perform his or her duties and will be less likely to leave or give up. Recognition of officials can be achieved by :

- Concrete initiatives must be taken to value and promote the work of officials as an integral part of the development of the sport, essential to its success.
- Concrete initiatives must be taken to value the work of officials and promote it as an integral part of the development of the sport, essential to the conduct of activities.
- The job of an official is sometimes thankless, with heavy responsibilities, as decisions in the heat of the moment can be of the action that can have serious consequences. It is therefore necessary to improve the respect for officials to ensure their credibility and safety.

To retain officials, the organization must provide stable guidance and support.

An ongoing supervision program, which extends beyond major events such as tournaments or championships, is an excellent and proven way to ensure that officials are well is an excellent and proven way to do this.

Officials need to feel a sense of interest and enjoyment in performing their duties. They must feel that they are progressing by having responsibilities commensurate with their abilities and aspirations. Optimizing the conditions under which they perform their duties can only contribute to their retention.

Sufficient training was also mentioned in some research. It appears that a lack of training could affect confidence and therefore the motivation to continue. Adequate training, including soft skills become important to keep a high level of retention rate in the sports system.

Finally, one of the things found in a study was that sport officials have a voice and they want to be heard. The study has provided a global or macro-level understanding of some of the reasons why officials enter into and remain active as sports officials in Canada. The results

also point toward some as yet unexplained higher level issues, including the observation that officiating is experienced differently in urban versus rural settings.