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The English Football Association's Respect Campaign: the referees' view

Through semi-structured interviews with 11 practising referees registered to one English County Football Association (FA), this article examines their experiences of officiating since the English FA implemented a Respect Campaign in 2008. Despite this high-profile public information campaign focusing on the role of the referee, the results outline that little has changed for those officiating at the youth and adult grassroots level. Referees highlight continuing verbal and physical abuse and argue that County FAs need to demonstrate greater levels of support towards them when dealing with cases of misconduct. Overall, the article illustrates that whilst the Respect Campaign remains a relatively new initiative, it requires further proactive development and improvements due to the unwelcome experiences that remain for referees when officiating matches.

Keywords: football; Respect Campaign; referees; Football Association; behaviour; grassroots

Introduction

The morphing of elite football into a commercially driven and entertainment-based product through the relationship between satellite television (most notably BSkyB) and the English Premier League (EPL) since its inception in 1992 has increased the focus and seriousness attached to the game (Cleland 2015). The global coverage has amplified the pressure on players to perform, managers to gain favourable results and the media to effectively showcase the game as a form of entertainment to be consumed in large numbers. As new satellite channels and new media have emerged, so too has the use of new technology to provide viewers with different camera angles and slow motion replays. Of particular scrutiny has been an increasing focus on what is deemed to be correct or incorrect refereeing decisions as they often provide the best talking points about critical moments in matches (MacMahon *et al.* 2007).

The introduction of the Respect Campaign by the English Football Association (FA) in 2008 was a relatively new attempt at addressing the longstanding issue of abuse and criticism directed towards referees at all levels of the game. Initial investigations into the impact of a pilot of the Respect Campaign reported broadly positive outcomes (Brackenridge *et al.* 2011), suggesting that young people appeared to be 'supportive' of the campaign's message and were aware of the reasons behind its existence. Yet to date, there has been no research that has purely focused on the experiences of referees in relation to the Respect

Campaign, or established whether there has been a behaviour change in the tendency for referees to be ‘abused’ since its implementation. As argued by Colwell (2000), referees have remained relatively peripheral and under-researched in the context of the development of football.

Therefore, the focus of this article is on the examination of the potential efficacy of the FA’s approach by drawing on whether the Respect Campaign has altered the experiences of a small sample of practising referees registered with one English County FA in the Midlands. Despite the inclusion of former EPL referees in the sample, the article will pay particular attention to youth and adult grassroots football, where there is a greater need for the campaign to be effective in order to prevent referees leaving the game, as well as improving the experience of those that remain.

To put this in context, we start by briefly discussing the history of referees and how criticism or abuse is a cultural fabric of English football. We then locate the Respect Campaign as a form of public information campaign; a policy instrument utilised by the FA to challenge and alter culturally embedded norms with regard to attitudes and behaviour towards referees.

Refereeing in Context

The propensity for players, coaches and spectators to ‘abuse’ referees in a variety of ways is a longstanding and culturally embedded practice within football. For example, Colwell (2004) noted that abuse directed towards referees has been deeply rooted since the nineteenth century and part of the explanation may rest in the potential for disparity between those governing the laws of the game (the FA), those applying the laws in an ostensibly objective manner (the referees) and those playing the game (the players and the increasing tendency to push the rule boundaries through the desire to win at all costs).

In more contemporary times, the role and performance of the referee in the professional game have faced greater public scrutiny. This has often been the source of aggravation between officials and players, coaches and spectators and, in doing so, has highlighted the vulnerability of the referee's position. In some ways, such pressures are not far removed from the experiences of youth and adult grassroots referees, but under very different conditions and levels of exposure. Given the growth of football in England, for example, there is a high density of small and often competing youth and adult grassroots clubs in which rivalries are redolent of those in the professional game (Pitchford 2007). Despite relatively recent changes made by the FA to the format and organisation of youth grassroots football, the youth game originally developed along the organisational lines of the adult game. It is possible, therefore, that the essentially arbitrary design also contributed to interactions where anti-social actions were heightened due to the adult-centred and confrontational nature of the contest (Elliott *et al.* 2013).

These recent changes have also highlighted the increasing separation of grassroots and elite football. Elite level professional referees (a process that started in 2001 through the introduction of Professional Game Match Official Limited) have a team of officials and are to some extent protected by the proximity of stewards and the police, whereas referees at youth and adult grassroots level are amateur, volunteers, often alone in their duty, and more exposed to threats and instances of verbal and physical abuse with less immediate protection.

The Respect Campaign

The growing problem of disrespect, particularly in grassroots football, was recognised during a consultation exercise by the English FA in 2008/09, when it launched a Respect Campaign to combat the poor behaviour of individuals (players, coaches, spectators and parents) and teams towards match officials (initially it focused on amateur football but was later applied to the professional game). The campaign was introduced in a prevailing socio-political climate

in England that experienced a rise in the number and scale of policies centred on social equality and social justice. For example, the then Labour Government had promoted a rather loosely defined ‘respect’ agenda which set out ‘a framework of powers and approaches to promote respect positively; bear down uncompromisingly on anti-social behaviour; tackle its causes; and offer leadership and support’ (Home Office 2006, p. 1). The agenda attempted to fuse anti-social behaviour policies and active citizenship with regulatory measures that matched punitive sanctions with the provision of positive support and ‘opportunities’ for responsible behaviours across all areas of society (Gaskell 2008). For sport, a proliferation of policy documents formalising desired pro-social behaviours and actions placed national governing bodies as central to achieving a variety of social equality outcomes (Lusted 2014).

Not only did sports organisations feel that wider policy legislation encouraging policy commitments to equality was applicable to them, but the adoption of formal equality policies were also conditionality attached to funding mechanisms. Political pressure to increase participation rates in sport to achieve wider social policy objectives was enforced by a regime of key performance indicators, whereby funding was allocated on the basis of meeting targets. Thus, national governing bodies appear to have been persuaded to contribute to the wider equality agenda through a reward or punish mechanism (Green and Houlihan 2006). Simultaneously, meeting the equality and respect agenda was also attractive in a strategic and business sense (Lusted 2014), where achieving equality objectives, such as respect, was one way in which the FA could achieve an increase in participation rates and, therefore, access public sources of funding for the grassroots game.

Whilst contributing to the wider social equality agenda by promoting active citizenship through self-regulated personal responsibility, the Respect Campaign was also a direct response to the concerning amount of referees leaving the game. Of particular concern is the 14-18 age band, which not only records the highest level of referee recruitment, but

also represents the highest levels of dropout (Nutt 2007). Brackenridge *et al.* (2011) indicated that between the 2007/08 and 2008/09 seasons, 17% of active referees had ceased officiating, with obvious deleterious consequences for the fulfilment of grassroots fixtures. Although the causes for dropout appear to be inherently complex, one of the principle reasons, particularly amongst young referees at the grassroots level, is related to the reactions and abuse they receive from players, coaches, spectators and parents (Nutt 2007, Dell *et al.* 2014). This appears to be more acute with female officials given their increased chance of being exposed to subtle forms of benevolent sexist views based on stereotypical notions of women's roles (Forbes *et al.* 2014). Indeed, these findings are consistent with research on sports officials more broadly that highlight how negative perceptions of officials among parents, spectators and coaches contribute towards higher levels of stress that include a fear of failure, fear of physical harm, interpersonal conflict and time pressure as reasons to cease their role as a match official (Balch and Scott 2007, Dell *et al.* 2014).

Reflecting anxieties about the rate of dropout, the Respect Campaign underpins a key priority of the FA's National Game Strategy (2011-2015) by seeking to address abusive behaviour in youth and adult grassroots football. This includes reducing the level of assaults to improve retention as this is the environment where referees often start their career. It also aims to build on an 18% increase in the number of male and female active referees at the grassroots level that has been recorded between 2008 and 2011, with a target set by the FA (2011) of achieving 28,200 registered referees (27,200 male and 1,000 female).

Whilst the capacity for the FA to act on poor behaviour to match officials would appear to be significant in terms of knowledge, expertise and resources available to the governing body, the sheer number of participants, coaches and officials participating in the grassroots game presents challenges for the FA to implement change or tackle deeply embedded cultural norms that expose referees to criticism and abuse. For example, one

County FA may have four or five football development professionals to oversee in excess of 2,000 clubs and their associated personnel. Given this number of clubs, it is not surprising that football development professionals have little regular contact with the parents attached to specific teams within these clubs. Therefore, a suitable and effective means by which to engage a large captive audience was required; hence the emergence of a Respect Campaign.

The Respect Campaign is a particular procedural ‘policy instrument’ which takes on the characteristics of a public information campaign with the desired policy outcome of an increase in the recruitment and retention of referees, to be achieved by improved behaviour towards them. According to Howlett (2000), organisations in similar positions of power, but lacking capacity to effect changes in societal groups, have sought to govern through procedural policy instruments to garner support for aims and outcomes of particular programmes. Compared to other policy instruments that seek to change societal structures, information campaigns as procedural instruments are distinctive in that they attempt to produce policy results without substantially altering incentives or authority systems (Weiss and Tschitart 1994). They are generally ‘passive’ instruments in that they intend to make a large targeted population more knowledgeable of a particular issue at a relatively low cost to inform choices and alter behaviour.

Public information campaigns are usually supplemented by other instruments or tools, such as the creation of lobbies or networks on a given issue. In an attempt to tackle some of the longstanding culturally embedded issues raised earlier, the Respect Campaign has been underpinned by the implementation of policy tools. These include codes of conduct for participants and clubs; the use of spectator barriers at the sides of football pitches and the introduction of a communication system during matches where only the captains of both teams can approach the referee. Furthermore, the FA has widely distributed an online

educational video of the effects of abuse towards officials, aimed at the main protagonists of abuse: over competitive and pushy parents (Brackenridge *et al.* 2011).

Despite the introduction of public information campaigns like this, there is scant attention as to how they can achieve desired policy outcomes such as behaviour change in the sports policy literature. Elliott and Drummond's (2014) examination of codes of conduct aimed at promoting awareness of the need for more positive parental behaviour change in grassroots sports environments, for example, has noted how a campaign's effectiveness is mediated by wider social and cultural antecedents. In fact, other work that has focused on a change in behaviour and attitudes in grassroots football has indicated a lack of awareness among those responsible for delivering the policy to the target group (Lusted and O'Gorman 2010). In addition, O'Gorman (2011) outlined how the largely 'top-down' approach towards the implementation of sport policies has exposed the meaning and interpretation of policy instruments, tools and goals and leads to questions about how they are delivered, altered or even subverted.

In this sense, the FA has sought to implement the campaign in what may be traditionally described as a 'top-down' fashion through the existing infrastructure of the National FA to County FAs and local associations and clubs. As with other public information campaigns (see Howlett and Ramesh 2003), there appears to be no obligation for the target group - in this case parents, coaches and players - to respond in a particular manner. Passive coercion is therefore supplemented by further procedural policy tools and/or instruments such as more punitive, command and control mechanisms available to the referee and club personnel to report abusive behaviour from players (in the form of carding and submitting match reports) or parents/spectators and coaches/club officials to County FAs who have the power to sanction individuals and clubs with fines and suspensions.

In addition, the Respect Campaign is complemented by a dedicated national lead officer who oversees the implementation of the campaign within County FAs, and the existing expected behavioural standards and codes of conduct promoted through the FA's Equality Policy, Charter Standard Scheme, Safeguarding Policy and the Laws of the Game. Indeed, it has been noted that officials and parents from Charter Standard accredited clubs have shown a greater tendency to be more respectful towards officials, which in turn has been attributed to more positive attitudes and behaviours amongst the players (Nutt 2007).

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 referees registered with one English County FA located in the Midlands between February 2012 and April 2012. Access to this association was aided through one of the authors who is a level 5 qualified referee. After permission was given by the County FA to carry out the research, the participants were identified via a systematic approach where every sixth person on the list of referees (totalling over 100) was formally contacted by letter. The letter explained the research objective, the guarantee of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time and contained an email address and phone number to reply to if they were willing to take part. In total, 21 referees were initially contacted with 11 agreeing to take part in an interview process. At the beginning of each interview, all participants were reminded of the research objective, the proposed dissemination and all gave their verbal consent for the interview to take place. All interviews were tape recorded via a digital device and transcribed verbatim immediately afterwards.

The participants ranged from three referees who had very recently been officiating at level 1 (a referee selected by The Association to serve on the National List) to level 7 (junior referees who officiate in local leagues), as well as those with referee coaching experience and a secretary of a youth league who was also a qualified referee.¹ Despite the wide sample, the

article makes no claim to be representative of all referees' views on the Respect Campaign, but we felt that a county-specific approach provided an opportunity to analyse the personal experiences of referees who would not ordinarily be available (such as youth and adult grassroots referees, a female referee and an ethnic minority referee). This allowed all referees to raise points and issues that *they* believed were important to them (Denscombe 2003).

To maintain anonymity, the names of the referees have been changed, but the level they officiated at has remained in order to contextualise the environment in which they referee matches. In analysing all of the interview data, a thematic analysis was adopted. As this can often be found to be a highly subjective process, all three authors worked separately to begin coding the data and highlighting common themes. Once notes had been compared, the analysis then began to identify 'patterns and processes, commonalities and differences' (Miles and Huberman 1984, p. 9). This eventually led to the emergence of three main themes that are discussed below: the pessimism felt by referees towards the Respect Campaign given their continued experiences; the continuation of poor behaviour amongst players, coaches, spectators and parents and the lack of support they were receiving from the actual County FA used in this case study research.

Pessimism

The need for the Respect Campaign prompted an interesting debate amongst the participants. Whilst not necessarily agreeing with the purpose of its introduction, each referee understood that the FA and County FAs had to be seen to be acting in both recruiting, but more importantly, retaining referees. Referring to reasons behind why a number of referees were leaving the sport, Andy (ex-level 1 referee) stated how the extent of 'physical and verbal abuse was a wake-up call for football because it highlighted the worrying trend of officiating at the grassroots level'.

Although those who had experienced professional football like Andy felt that the Respect Campaign had improved the referee-player relationship at that particular level, not surprisingly most of the focus amongst the participants was on grassroots officiating and the need to retain and recruit as many referees as possible. Reflecting on their experience of youth and adult grassroots football, many of the participants questioned the effectiveness of the campaign in trying to achieve stakeholder behaviour change towards the referee. For participants like John (level 4 referee), little has changed at the grassroots level:

The Respect Campaign has not made an ounce of difference at the local level. Referees are coming in to the system and are starting at Sunday league level which is the worst possible place as Sunday league clubs have not got to grips with the message of the campaign.

In fact, these pessimistic views of the extent to which the campaign can alter behaviour were frequently shared, with Jason (level 5 referee) alluding to wider societal issues regarding the perceptions of youth and respectful behaviour:

I honestly do not think the Respect Campaign has had any positive input into the game whatsoever. There are no actual rules to it. It is just trying to introduce something that should have been there in the first place. Referees at the grassroots level are in the worst position than at the top level. We are dealing with kids off the streets, who for 90 minutes each week are playing football and we are expected to control them. So they have no discipline outside of football at home, school/college, with the police and for 90 minutes we are expected to police and command respect from them, even though there is no respect there to start with.

Views and experiences like these directly question the intention of ‘respect’ as a public information campaign due to little change since its implementation for referees in this sample. Across the data were clear breaches of the Respect protocol, with many participants facing verbal abuse, and some facing the threat of physical harm. In illustrating this latter point, Thomas (level 5 referee) referred to the numerous incidents of abuse he continued to receive despite the introduction of the Respect Campaign:

I had to abandon a game recently because two players were threatening to knock me out. In the majority of games there are at least two incidents where my decisions are aggressively questioned. Listening to myself, I wonder why I actually continue putting myself through it.

In their analysis of the intention of referees to quit the game, Dell *et al.* (2014) also highlighted abuse as a key factor in determining whether a referee would cease officiating. A number of referees in their sample felt anxious and vulnerable and questioned their personal well-being and motivation to continue through the physical and verbal intimidating behaviour they faced on a regular basis. Reflections like this were not uncommon in our own data, with David (level 6 referee) also describing:

Last season I had to abandon a game because one team's players threatened to knock me out. I was getting loads of abuse off the players and I generally switch off when this happens, but the abuse was quite threatening and it worried me enough to call the game off. That experience was upsetting but I vowed to not let it make me stop.

The continuation of abuse despite the Respect Campaign does not just occur with male referees, however, as Katie (level 7 referee) also explained how at the end of one particular match she 'was surrounded by one team as well as their parents. I was only 15 and had just passed my refereeing badge, but fortunately the other team's manager got me out of the situation'. This presents a significant problem for County FAs; a problem acknowledged by a youth league secretary and a level 7 referee himself, Gareth, who responded that very little has changed:

The abuse referees receive at the youth level has definitely caused them to stop. As youth league secretary, we take on about 20 referees each season, comprising of mostly young people and in my experience after five years we will only have five of them remaining. This is a pattern that has continued even with the introduction of Respect.

This testimony equates to a 75% dropout and provides the reality of refereeing at the grassroots level. If this is replicated across the UK then it poses significant problems for the FA in retaining referees. As argued by Dell *et al.* (2014, p. 1), 'attrition or loss in the number of referees that exceeds the number being replaced thus presents a serious challenge to the future of the game'.

Behaviour

As suggested earlier, as football has developed so has the amount of media coverage. For those referees operating at youth and adult grassroots level, a consistent finding across the data was the leniency shown to elite players on issues such as foul and abusive language that are easily detectable by the amount of cameras at these matches. There appears to be a perception that the punitive measures available to referees, such as removing players from the field of play, are implemented inequitably at either end of the football spectrum. This inconsistency in applying such policy tools not only undermines a 'top-down' approach towards behaviour change, but also appears to present mixed messages to footballers and stakeholders at the grassroots level. For those referees at the grassroots level, this then has an impact upon their ability to control a Saturday or Sunday match, with Lloyd (level 4 referee) explaining:

I have heard it countless times 'Rooney did that or Gerrard got away with that and I have done exactly the same thing'. The problem with referees at level 4, 5, 6 and 7 is that they *have* to take action else they will lose control of the game and ultimately the respect of those players they are likely to come into contact with again at some future fixture.

Responses like this by Lloyd (and others) highlight problems with the Respect Campaign as similar outcomes are expected from very different levels of the game. Other participants, such as Jason (level 5 referee), however, were a bit more reflective in how they approach their refereeing:

You will not ever get rid of swearing, but by dealing with it at the elite level it should go some way to helping those thousands of referees at grassroots football. If it is being dealt with at an elite level then the players on a Sunday morning do not have a leg to stand on.

Across the data, a more serious and consistent comment from those refereeing at the grassroots level was the behaviour of parents. Although the broad involvement of parents in youth sports is noted as generally positive, parental behaviour is especially problematic in relation to winning and competitive success (Elliott and Drummond 2014). Underpinned by emotional and reactionary behaviour, parents have been noted to exert frustrations at officials, and many parents appear to be unsure in terms of how they should behave during

sport events (Harwood and Knight 2009). Within grassroots youth football, many of the referees are often minors themselves and are often alone in carrying out their duty. At this level of football, the behaviour of parents is noted as a particular problem, with harassment and intimidation cited as primary reasons for referees to consider dropping out. This appears to be more acute at the mini-soccer level, given the close proximity of the referee to parents on a relatively small pitch, where perceived mistakes are exposed more (Nutt 2007). For some participants, such as Katie (level 7 referee), the Respect Campaign should make this a more targeted aspect to improve the overall environment of playing and watching football:

The success of the Respect Campaign depends on a change of culture amongst parents. I have refereed many children's games and you get parents on the side lines swearing at you as well as swearing at their own children to do something.

Likewise, Michael (level 5 referee) supported the views of most young grassroots referees by suggesting:

The campaign needs to do more work on youth football with parents. Parents need to learn that referees are learning the game as well as the players and it is unlikely that they will be the next Mike Dean or Howard Webb. They tend to get referees who are just starting out and they have to realise it is just as important that they understand referees need to learn different types of scenarios. For me and other referees that I speak with, the players and parents do not grasp that.

In addition, parents and officials have expressed concerns over minors (under 16s) refereeing mini-football games as many referees lack the experience and authority to deal with problems that may emerge on the field of play. In particular, the consequences of failing to deal with aggression between players have been noted as underpinning a lack of respect towards young referees (Nutt 2007).

Despite some concerns, however, some referees were reflective of the process that the campaign is trying to achieve. Chris (level 3 referee), for example, outlined:

Referees cannot expect it to work overnight, but it needs to work at all levels. It is no good it working at the professional level but not at the grassroots level because at the grassroots level players are learning from their role models and picking up the mostly bad behaviours of these players.

Lloyd (level 4 referee) shared similar thoughts:

With the introduction of refereeing academies we are seeing more fluent refereeing styles because of the way referees are being trained but I think it is going to take years to really start becoming effectively implemented.

Supporting views like this, research on the interventions imposed as part of the Respect Campaign were found by Brackenridge *et al.* (2011) to be having a positive impact, with the FA reporting that from 2008 to the end of the 2010/11 season, the number of referees had increased by more than 6,000 (FA 2012).

Even though the Premier and Football League does not escape criticism at times for the players behaviour towards referees, it is recognised by those that have recently operated at this level that the introduction of referees addressing players and clubs before the season starts helps create a human touch where changes to rules are explained and the concerns of players and coaches can be addressed. In fact, some lower ranked referees actually suggest that this type of approach would also help the referee-player relationship at the youth and adult grassroots level. For example, Chris (level 6 referee) illustrated:

Even Sunday league clubs have a pre-season a few weeks before the season starts. It would be easy for a County FA to contact each registered club and arrange a training night for a local referee to meet with the players to discuss any changes to the rules and the expectation of the FA towards referees for the forthcoming season. I think referees would support this approach as it is likely to make their jobs a lot easier once the season starts.

Likewise, Jason (level 5 referee) suggested:

It would be useful for referees to highlight their expectations over the coming season and gives us a chance to remind teams and players that if certain things happen then the County FA will be implementing fines and lengthy bans. It might seem a bit draconian but at least players and clubs would then know what to expect and the shock factor of a match-day scenario when a match is bordering on being abandoned has already been taken care of.

Support

As this article has so far indicated, the main focus to measure the success of the Respect Campaign for all participants is at the youth and adult grassroots level, where abuse remains an unwelcome feature of their experience as a referee. These experiences were also supported

by data released by the FA in November 2013 highlighting that between July 2012 and November 2013, 975 adults (including players and managers) were charged with improper conduct towards match officials (Forde 2013). In 2012, the FA had reported that although serious cases of assault had decreased by 15%, the number of incidents of improper conduct towards referees had actually risen by 25%. These figures have led to some County FAs, such as Manchester, actually publishing the details of teams that have been charged with failing to control spectators and players. Indeed, from January 2014, the FA started a pilot scheme across 10 County FAs focusing on the use of educational courses for those individuals who have been found guilty of non-violent misconduct charges, such as aiming abuse at match officials (Forde 2013).

Across the data was a recurring theme that the FA and County FAs need to be stronger with clubs and players that fail to adhere to the Respect Campaign and support referees more effectively than they currently do. Steve (level 5 referee), for example, argued:

It is up to the County FAs to come down hard on players that do not behave properly and give them lengthy fines and/or bans so that lessons get learned very quickly that this behaviour will not be accepted. When word gets round that this is happening, the experience of refereeing will be more enjoyable for thousands of referees up and down the country.

Similar views were shared by Gareth (level 7 referee):

Every referee does their job to their best of their ability, so in return you would expect the County FA to support and act upon any report you provide. In my position in youth football, I have come across many occasions where the County FA has found no case to answer or has gone against a referee at a personal hearing. Teams need to be frightened of falling foul of the FA and at the moment they are not.

The narrative presented here should concern the FA and County FAs as referees at the junior levels of grassroots football feel a bit isolated in the support they feel they should be receiving. This is despite Webb (2014) outlining how referee tutors deliver training and education within County FAs and grassroots mentors offer guidance and support to those who are newly qualified. In fact, it is not just level 7 referees who raise this point; even ex-level 1 referees recognise the lack of support given to their more junior colleagues. Robert

(ex-level 1 and currently a referee coach), for example, argued how the County FA used as the case study for this article:

...has not got a great reputation in supporting referees. It is one cultivated themselves and their approach needs to be that they will not tolerate this and then stick to it because at the moment they make noises and then back away.

As suggested earlier, better consideration by those within the FA and County FA is needed towards the anxiety and stress grassroots referees face in their match day experience. For many referees in our sample, it was clear that the actual training and skills acquired as part of the referee qualification process did not adequately prepare them for the difficult situations they had since encountered. A number of participants also made reference to the need for County FAs to provide educational sessions to players, coaches, clubs and parents, rather than just charge clubs for the use of barriers that are part of the campaign at the grassroots level. Andy (ex-level 1 referee) argued: 'clubs should earn them, such as through attending a course on the Respect Campaign. Just handing them out has a limited impact, but if a club representative attended a workshop then this would be a good idea', whilst Jason (level 5 referee) stated:

The FA need to create a scheme where a club representative attends some workshops about the Respect Campaign and thus becomes responsible for filtering this information back through his/her club. The FA can then respond by saying a club has not been up to the respect standard and can either warn them or fine them. If clubs start to get fined, I think attitudes will change.

Conclusion

Effective and successful public information campaigns have been noted as being dependent on the capacity to capture the attention of the right audience, to present a clear message, to influence the beliefs or understanding of the audience and to create the contexts for desired social outcomes (Weiss and Tschirtart 1994). Behaviour change, however, is neither a likely nor a necessary early outcome of mass media or public information campaigns that raise more awareness of a particular policy. Rather, a valid outcome is a positive change in any of

the antecedent variables, such as beliefs, social norms or intentions. In their analysis of the Respect Campaign, for example, Brackenridge *et al.* (2011) highlighted the positive change it had on a number of stakeholders' attitudes. Yet, a change in beliefs and attitudes, or the raising of awareness of the need to act 'respectfully' does not necessarily translate into a long-term change in behaviour, particularly in relation to long-standing culturally embedded phenomena, such as abuse directed towards football referees.

The Respect Campaign appears to be affected by similar issues found in other campaigns designed to change behaviour within a large population and for a relatively low financial outlay. For example, public health and physical activity campaigns intended to influence health-related social norms have been noted as having difficulty capturing a change in behaviours that are often entrenched (Randolph and Viswanath 2004). Whilst individuals reported the need to engage in more regular physical activity, and indicated a positive intention to do so, evidence suggested that this did not translate into practice (Cavill and Bauman 2004).

Although our sample was relatively small, we suggest similarities with regard to the Respect Campaign, which as an information campaign appears to be a soft policy instrument that is not consistently supported by a range of stronger and more punitive tools (e.g fines and suspensions of clubs, players and parents) at a local level. Whilst we are not recommending a particular approach, the FAs have the option to implement policy instruments that may make it compulsory to at least refrain from abusive behaviours in football. By applying the more punitive tools at their disposal more consistently, the FA may wish to consider ways to integrate the Respect Campaign with the current existing policies and programmes that are compulsory for clubs to affiliate with the FA, and/or access and utilise funding. Instead, the campaign appears to be caught between attempts to persuade the footballing community to change behaviour being implemented through a top-down structure with the desired outcome

of achieving bottom-up behaviour change. Yet, bottom-up tools that are used to compliment the information campaign, such as parent workshops, are reactive in nature rather than proactive - i.e. they occur after abusive behaviour has been enacted rather than preventing it in the first place. Whatever the policy instrument of choice, and the approach taken towards implementation, a visibly more consistent approach appears to be required.

In addition to recommending a more consistent use of the already existing tools available to the FA at both elite and grassroots levels, there are also other options that may be considered if the FA is to truly achieve the aims and objectives of the Respect Campaign. As Cavill and Bauman (2004) suggested, mass media campaigns are only effective if the target audience is understood more clearly prior to dissemination, and that the subsequent campaign is tailored to specific groups of stakeholders. It may be advisable that the FA invests in consultation to understand why players, parents, coaches and other stakeholders engage in disrespectful behaviour towards referees, which may reveal future implementation of the Respect Campaign. In addition, establishing which media outlets are likely to be used by the target group is key to ensure that the message delivered by mass information campaigns reaches the target audience more effectively.

Whilst it is accepted that the Respect Campaign is in its infancy, there is a clear need for its impact on referees to be monitored effectively across all levels of the game. For the majority of our participants, County FAs should support referees more strongly when dealing with misconduct charges against clubs and players. A number of referees felt that within their own cases, the FA and County FA did not effectively utilise the tools at their disposal in the form of dealing with improper and abusive behaviour which subsequently makes their future experience of officiating more vulnerable. For many referees, particularly those involved in youth and adult grassroots football, the concerns they had before the introduction of the Respect Campaign still remain. In addition, the campaign is directed at both the grassroots

and elite levels with the same messages, but the tools that support the campaign instrument are utilised in different ways. This has the potential to create a somewhat paradox given the propensity of the media and elite level stakeholders to routinely question and criticise referees with little recourse.

There is also the realisation that those referees coming into the game (particularly those aged under 18) need more effective training in order to prepare them for circumstances in which they are likely to experience. At present, new recruits are given a set of rules that they need to learn, but do not gain any experience in how to apply them under pressure. One future possibility could be for junior referees to shadow a more experienced referee to see how they adapt to ‘real-life’ match scenarios. This approach would then allow inexperienced referees to see how challenging behaviour on and off the field is handled. It is also important for County FAs and for individuals working with referees at the grassroots level to understand the signs of performance-related stress, and when it is present, address it.

¹ For the list of referee classifications see page 15:

<http://www.thefa.com/GetIntoFootball/Referee/NewsAndFeatures/2009/~/media/Files/PDF/Get%20into%20Football/Referees/NewlyQualified.ashx/NewlyQualified.pdf>

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