Playing Against Crime: Does Sport Impact on Anti-Social Behaviour?

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Introduction

Recent figures have demonstrated there has been a rise in various crimes across England and Wales (Elkin 2019).

The sporting environment accommodates between 8% and 21% of variance in antisocial behaviours (Rutten et al., 2007; Rutten et al., 2008).

It is proposed that sport is beneficial as it:

- Provides learning and social opportunities (Agnew & Petersen, 1989; Lawson, 2005)
- Teaches coping skills
- Teaches how to obey rules and authority
- Teaches how to cooperate (Spruit et al., 2018).

Conflicting research exists about whether sport is beneficial (Hartmann & Depro, 2006 ; Morris et al., 2003), or detrimental (Begg et al., 1996 ; Miller et al., 2007; Rutten et al., 2011).

The sport being individual or team is a moderating factor for antisocial behaviour (Ewing et al., 1996; Rutten et al., 2007; 2011).

Despite increased investigation, gaps in the literature are present:

- The impact of combat sports are under-researched (Jenkins & Ellis, 2011).
- Existing research examines adolescent delinquency from participants residing outside of the UK(Begg et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2007; Rutten et al., 2011; Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Morris et al., 2003)

The crime age profile identifies that 18-20 is the peak age people participate in antisocial behaviour (Landersø et al., 2017). Therefore, investigations are sought after to assist in lowering the peak.

Aims

This study aimed to further the literature relating to antisocial behaviour and sport and investigate how sport influences young adults in the UK.

Three hypotheses were put forth:

1. There will be no significant difference in antisocial behaviours between those who do not participate in sport and those who do
2. There will be a significantly higher tendency for individuals participating in team sports to commit antisocial behaviours.
3. There will be a reduced tendency to commit antisocial behaviours amongst experienced participants.

Method

Design and Analysis

A 3x3 between-subjects design was utilised with sport type (martial arts, no sport and football) and experience (experienced, inexperienced and no experience) being the two factors.

A 3x3 MANOVA was administered subsequently followed by an ANOVA and post hoc tests.

Participants

54 young adults aged between 18 and 21 years old. There were 18 participants in each condition (football, no sport and martial arts). Experience ranged between one and 17 years.

Materials

One self-report obtained demographic information (age, sex, type of sport and experience).

The second self report was the Subtypes of Antisocial Behaviour (Burt & Donnellan, 2009). This 32-item self-report explores the regularity of committing social and physical aggression and rule breaking behaviours.

Procedure and Ethics

The self-reports were distributed to Facebook and Reddit pages. Before completing the self-reports participants read an information sheet and signed informed consent. Upon completion, participants were debriefed.

Ethical approval was obtained from UCFBs Ethics Committee (ref: UCFBREC19W013).

Results

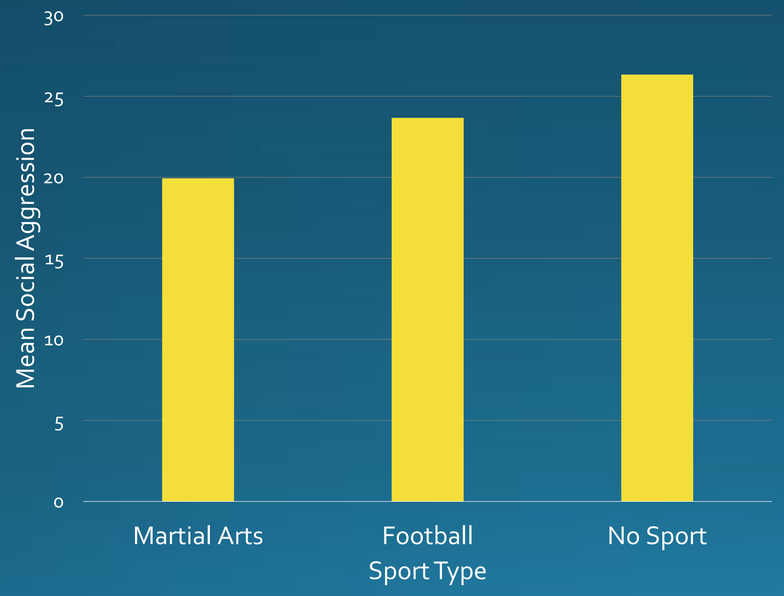
No main effect of sport type or experience and no interaction.

Sport type had a main effect on social aggression but not physical aggression or rule breaking.

Experience and the interaction of sport and experience did not impact any antisocial behaviour.

Martial arts participants scored significantly less socially aggressive behaviours than football and no sport.

Figure 1: The mean social aggressions scores recorded for the different sport types.



Discussion

The first hypothesis was supported, whereas, the third hypothesis was not supported. The second hypothesis was only partially supported.

Sport did not significantly impact antisocial behaviour but there was a significant effect on social aggression. Martial artists are less socially aggressive than football and no sport participants.

Possible explanations for the findings relate to team climate (Benson et al., 2017), moral atmosphere (Bortoli et al., 2012) and the presence of cliques (Bagwell et al., 2000; Verkooijen et al., 2007).

The crime-age profile is universal across societies, groups and time (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983). The profile would state results are due to participants reaching peak age to commit antisocial behaviours. Therefore, sport is inadequate as a limiter.

Nature or nurture?

Heritability may account for between 50% and 60% of antisocial behaviours (Mednick et al., 1984; Brennan & Mednick, 1993).

Some state that the influence of the environmental is negligible (Jacobson, 2006), Thus, findings are due to biology and not the sport.

Strengths:

- The sample size meets the necessary demands of the target power
- Matched sample design helps limit individual differences
- The study advances literature relating to sport and antisocial behaviours by examining young adults and UK populations

Limitations:

- Does not investigate prosocial behaviours so unable to comprehensively identify possible benefits
- Lack of time scale on the self-report so behaviours could have been committed prior to sport participation
- Not all moderators controlled for such as impulsivity and intelligence which impact the crime-age profile (Loeber et al., 2012)

Conclusion

Research supplies insight into rates of young adults and antisocial behaviour from urban areas of the United Kingdom.

Sport does not impact physical aggression or rule breaking but may have implications for social aggression. Martial artists commit less socially aggressive behaviours than no sport and football groups.

Findings imply that group dynamics in team sport are a detriment to social aggression.

Levels of experience do not influence rates of antisocial behaviours.

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