

Women's Judging

Women's Artistic Gymnastics Judges' Sources of Stress

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Stress has been found to be a predictor of poor performance and dropout not only among athletes and coaches, but for officials as well. In general, however, the sport stress literature has focused on athletes with very few studies examining the antecedents and consequences of anxiety in the case of sport officials. Moreover, our current knowledge about the anxiety associated with sport officiating is based predominately on information provided by male officials involved with team sports.

Gymnastics, in contrast to most team sports, is a non-contact, closed-skilled sport with seemingly high cognitive demands. It is a sport where no interaction between athlete and judge is permitted and judges, in comparison to umpires and referees, are responsible for rating performance as well as enforcing the rules of the competition.

The purpose of this article is to report the results from a large-scale exploratory project conducted on the determinants of anxiety responses among women's gymnastics judges. In obtaining information on this issue both quantitative ratings and open-ended responses were examined.

Subjects

647 women's gymnastics officials, from Regions I-VIII, participated in this study. The mean age of the officials was 38.6 9.3 years while the average hours spent per month in judging-related activities to be 44.6 39.8 hours. All levels of judging were represented with 13 percent classified as brevet, 11 percent as elite, 33 percent as Level 10, 11 percent as Level 9, 11 percent as Level 8, 15 percent as Level 7, and 6 percent as Level 5.

Procedure

The gymnastics officials were administered via mail a multi-section questionnaire which was completed and returned to the USA Gymnastics office in Indianapolis. The 39 potential sources of stress, and were generated from a review of the stress literature on athletes, coaches, previous studies of officials in sport, and telephone interviews with current certified brevet and elite level women's gymnastics judges. The responses to the items were scored on a four point scale with 0 = Does Not Contribute to 3 = Strongly contributes. Subjects respond based on the following question: "How much do the following contribute to the stress you perceive while judging a gymnastics meet?"

Following the ratings for each of the 39 potential sources of stress, each judge was given an opportunity to share their own source of stress by responding to the following open-ended question: "Are there any other sources of stress in your job as a gymnastics official?" Three independent raters organized and reduced the responses provided by the judges into general themes or categories.

Results

Perceived Sources of Stress

The 39 sources of stress were subjected to a factor analysis which resulted in eight factors. Those eight dimensions as well as representative items which supported each factor are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Factors	Representative Items
Meet increasing standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping up with skill advancements in the sport. • Keeping up with rule changes in the sport.
Career demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict between officiating and family/social demands. • Time pressures associated with meet schedules.
Abuse from coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse and/or negative confrontations with coaches. • Personality clashes with coaches.
Concerns about judging performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to accurately see gymnasts performance errors. • Fear of insufficiently scoring a routine.
Relationships with other judges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition and jealousy between judges. • Personality clashes with other judges.
External factors at meets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of reinforcement for good officiating. • Post-meet security problems.
Conflict with USA Gymnastics Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality with USA Gymnastics staff members. • Verbal abuse and/or negative confrontations with USA Gymnastics staff members.
Confrontations with spectators and athletes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse and/or negative confrontations with spectators. • Verbal abuse and negative confrontations with gymnasts.

The mean level of stress (and standard deviation) was determined for each factor. As shown in Figure 1, meeting the increasing standards associated with maintaining one's judging rating and the impact of the demands of the job on the individual's life in general were perceived to be the most salient sources of stress.

Personally Experienced Sources of Stress

When we classified the additional personally experienced determinants of stress among this sample of judges, eight themes emerged, namely Meet Disorganization, Conflicts/Disagreements, Judging Standards/Regulations, Judging Assignments, Fears Associated with Judging, Travel, Physical Ailments, and Miscellaneous. Each of the themes was defined and the exemplary quotes were selected to support each theme. The resultant categories, definitions, percentages of responses classified in each category and exemplary

quotes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Categories/Definitions/Percent of Responses	Exemplary Quotes
<p>Difficulties Transpiring Within a Meet</p> <p>Problems that occur within a meet which include being rushed, scheduling difficulties, lack of judges, and difficulties with individuals attending the meet to include parents, coaches, and spectators.</p> <p>(23.4%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clubs not prepared to host an efficiently run meet, waiting over one hour for printouts to check scores, scores entered wrong, runners too young/immature, no real seating for parents/judges. ● Meet disorganization (not starting on time, too many gymnasts in session, etc.) ● Coaches who are not ready.
<p>Conflicts/Disagreements Between Judges</p> <p>Problems that occur while judging meets in terms of the interaction between judges.</p> <p>(19.8%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Political behavior of referees and other judges. ● Put down by other judges. ● Other high level Brevet judges laying stress on those of us at the lower level. ● Disagreeing with more experienced judges.
<p>Judging Standards/Regulations</p> <p>Problems with rules that are enforced and costs related to testing, certification, and uniforms.</p> <p>(15.5%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The recertification for Level 10 judges (who have been judging for more than 10 years) is much too complicated (written only). It's very frustrating to have to keep re-testing. We need to learn the new rules and practice them not memorize rules which are forgotten after testing. Should be able to use notes while testing. Testing and judging are not the same. ● Meeting active status requirements.
<p>General Difficulties Experienced As A Judge</p> <p>General conflicts/problems that arise as a judge which include last minute meet time changes, long hours, the selection process, and judging unexpected events.</p> <p>(14.4%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Late meet information and/or changes from meet (i.e., change in start time and number of sessions). ● Judging multi-session compulsory meets. ● Fear of rejecting an assignment for an important meet.
<p>Fears Associated With Judging</p> <p>Judges who fear they possess a lack of experience, low confidence, and are not prepared for the meets.</p> <p>(10.5%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of experience. ● Having been an official for a short amount of time. ● Fear of missing something. ● Fear of begin way off on a score.

Travel

Travel arrangements including meals, car pooling, and roommates.

(7.1%)

- Attempts to force people to car pool.
- Per diem or serving meals.
- Incompatible roommates when traveling (i.e., talkers and TV. watchers) can make it hard for me to get enough sleep.
- Driving with people who break the rules of the road.

Physical Ailments

Physical problems that occur or interfere with judging due to illness or fatigue.

(3.7%)

- Personal fatigue/jet lag.
- Overtiredness.
- Hunger, due to long meets with infrequent breaks or no breaks between sessions.

Miscellaneous

(5.6%)

- Gymnasts trying skills they are not prepared for.
- Near misses.
- Being male in a primarily female organization.

Discussion

In general, the findings suggest that women's gymnastics judges found aspects of their meet experiences to be low to moderately stressful. An examination of the variability in responses indicate, however, that several of the identified stressors were potent for a number of the sampled judges. Further, the present results reveal that women's gymnastics judges have little difficulty in indicating what causes them to be anxious at meets. Providing evidence for the validity of the findings, there was consistency in the results when judges' sources of stress were examined via quantitative ratings or a qualitative method. When contrasting responses to the quantitative items versus the open-ended questions, the factors "Abuse from coaches" and "Confrontation with Spectators/Athletes" did not appear to be personal sources of stress for the judges. The few judges who reported problems with spectators and coaches indicated that the incidents occurred primarily at the college level.

The anxiety literature indicates that stress can be costly in terms of task execution. For example, past studies have shown that stress negatively impacts people's capacity to attend to task-relevant stimuli and quickly and correctly integrate the information processed. Such changes in a judge's attentional capabilities would be detrimental to the accuracy of her routine scores.

Research has also show that anxiety is negatively related to how much individuals enjoy an activity. Not surprisingly, it has also been found that chronic stress is the major contributor to burnout. Consequently, we would expect to see a high dropout rate among officials who regularly feel anxious at gymnastics meets.

Finally, experiencing high levels of anxiety on some regular basis leads to a number of serious health consequences (e.g., impairment of the immune system). It should not be necessary that any judge increase her likelihood of illness as a result of her judging responsibilities.

The findings of this project tell us that, although the mean level is not especially high, competition-related stress occurs among women's gymnastics judges. This is a crucial step to

formulating specific strategies for countering the contributors to stress among judges.

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