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Level of Aggressive Behavior Among Iraqi League Football Clubs and Its Relationship with League Results and Standings

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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Level of Aggressive Behavior Among Iraqi League Football Clubs and Its Relationship with League Results and Standings

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Abstract

Football is a high-intensity competitive sport, and it often leads to the appearance of different manifestations of aggressive behavior in the green rectangle. In order to address this phenomenon, the present study aims to assess the level of aggressive behavior among the players of the Iraqi league clubs for the 2023–2024 season, and to analyze the correlation of these behaviors with the results achieved by those clubs. The study adopted a descriptive method to adapt it to the nature of the research. The sample included (400) players randomly selected from among (20) clubs, representing (57%) of the total perceived population. To collect data, the Aggressive Behavior Scale (SPSS) was used, where a statistical analysis of (378) valid models was performed through the SPSS program. Statistical processing showed that there were statistically significant differences between clubs in dimensions (attack, verbal aggression, and rejection), where the calculated values of (F) were (5.722, 6.417, and 5.742), respectively. These differences were found to be tilted in favor of the clubs that were at the bottom of the league standings (i.e., those that scored higher levels of aggression). On the other hand, the results showed no statistically significant differences in dimensions (suspicion, speed of excitement, and indirect aggression). The discussion concluded that the players of the top clubs had high levels of technique and maximum psychological strength, allowing them to control emotions and reduce aggressive behavior compared to defensive teams. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between aggressive behavior and the club's rating and results.

Keywords: Football, Sports Psychology, Aggressive behavior, Players

1. Introduction

Aggressive behavior in sports psychology is one of the issues that has attracted a lot of attention in recent times, due to the increased intensity of clubs in sports competitions, where the increase in aggressive behaviors in stadiums has raised concerns about their repercussions on players, clubs, and the sports system in general (Allawi, 1998). There are many factors that influence this behavior (Rateb, 2000), where the frenzied desire to win plays a critical role in fueling the aggressive tendencies of athletes

in an effort to outperform competitors (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). Recent research also suggests that competitive anxiety related to the team's position on the leaderboard increases the likelihood of violent clashes (García-Calvo et al., 2021; Smith & Richards, 2023). In football, for example, the pressure to win generates strong physical friction, while the tense atmosphere in professional leagues and the psychological pressures arising from the requirements of professionalism contribute to the increased pace of aggressive behaviour (Qarqour, 2021).

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The causes of aggression extend to external factors, as provocations and ridicule from the masses create a hostile environment that motivates players to violence (Hajjaj, 2002). The media focus on physical altercations and intense confrontations can also lead athletes to adopt similar behaviors (Al-Khouli, 1996). In the digital age, these pressures have been compounded by social media platforms that have subjected players to constant stress, reflected in their performance on the field (Zhao & Wang, 2022). In addition, psychological factors such as personality traits and feelings of frustration emerge as the main drivers of aggression (Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2007). Given the intense nature of football, it is necessary to distinguish between tactical aggression that seeks to disrupt play within the legal framework and aggressive aggression aimed at harming the opponent (Peterson et al., 2025).

The dominance of the desire to prevail over the values of fair play can lead teams to adopt aggressive tactics (Husman & Silva, 1984). Refereeing decisions sometimes provoke anger and feelings of injustice in players, generating retaliatory reactions to restore a sense of control (Allawi, 1998).

Aggressive behaviour has serious consequences, especially an increased risk of injuries that can end a player's career, as well as negative psychological effects such as high levels of anxiety and stress, which affect mental health and the ability to enjoy sport. As a result, contemporary psychological preparedness programmes focus on developing psychological toughness and emotional regulation as preventive mechanisms (Müller & Fischer, 2024; Al-Harbi, 2022). In addition, repeated aggression tears at the fabric of teamwork and leads to internal conflict and bullying, threatening team cohesion (Rateb, 2000; Hussein et al., 2022). Here, the importance of the study lies in studying the forms of aggressive behavior and its relationship with the results of the Iraqi league clubs.

Research Problem: The research problem revolves around the negative impact of aggressive behavior on player development and team results, especially in a game that relies on physical strength and direct contact, such as football. Through field observation and practical experience in the Iraqi League, researchers have observed an increase in aggressive behaviors, where players seek to possess the ball violently under the weight of competitive pressure and the urge to win, which marginalizes the principles of sportsmanship (Hajjaj, 2002). Therefore, the authors sought to study the relationship between forms of aggressive behavior and the ranking of teams in the Iraqi league in order to develop appropriate solutions to address this negative phenomenon that affects players and teams.

Research objectives: Identify differences in levels of aggressive behavior based on the ranking of teams participating in the Iraqi Premier Football League.

Research hypothesis: The research suggests a statistically significant correlation between the dimensions of aggressive behaviour and the overall ranking of clubs in the Iraqi League.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research methodology

A descriptive survey method was adopted to be the most appropriate for the nature of the research problem (Abdul-Jabbar et al., 2025; Fayyad et al., 2025, Fayyad et al., 2026).

2.2. Research, population and sample

The total population consisted of (700) players from (20) Iraqi League clubs for the season (2023–2024). A random sample of (387) players (57% of the population) was selected. The sample was classified into three distinct levels (See Table 1):

- **Superior Classification:** (6) Teams.
- **Average rating:** (8) Teams.
- **Last Standing:** (6) Teams.

2.3. Data collection tools

The information was collected from the official records of the Iraqi Football Association, the scientific literature and the Aggressive Behaviour Scale.

2.4. Aggressive behavior scale

The questionnaire prepared by Saeed Jassim (2002), which consists of (28) phrases, was used in seven areas::

1. Hate (Elements 2–5)
2. Attack (Items 6–8)
3. Emotion Speed (Items 9–12)
4. Right to doubt (Clauses 13–16)
5. Verbal aggression (clauses 17–21)
6. Rejection (clauses 22–24)
7. Indirect aggression (points 25–27)

2.5. Evaluation and validity

The maximum score on the scale is (26), with the exception of items (1) and (28) that act as validation tests. Five specialists confirmed the validity of the scale with a pass rate of (80%). Reliability was

Table 1. Distribution of teams by classification grouping.

No.	Top-Ranked Teams	No.	Mid-Ranked Teams	No.	Bottom-Ranked Teams
1	Al-Shorta SC	7	Newroz	15	Al-Karkh
2	Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya	8	Al-Talaba	16	Al-Qasim
3	Al-Zawraa SC	9	Al-Hudood	17	Al-Karkh
4	Al-Najaf SC	10	Naft Maysan	18	Karbala
5	Zakho SC	11	Al-Naft	19	Amanat Baghdad
6	Duhok	12	Al-Minaa	20	Naft Al-Wasat
		13	Al-Kahrabaa		
		14	Erbil		

demonstrated by the retest method, resulting in a mean coefficient of (0.83). The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, where the central limit theory justified the use of parametric tests due to the large sample size ($N = 378$ valid questionnaires).

2.6. Main experience (application of the scale)

After completing the procedures of the scientific foundations of the scale used in the study, after conducting the exploratory experiment and completing all the procedures of the study. The main experiment was conducted on a sample of the original population, which are (387) players. The authors and the assistant team distributed the forms to the players of the Iraqi league clubs and urged them to answer all the statements of the scale before submitting them.

2.7. Statistical analysis

Data were processed and analyzed statistically using the statistical package SPSS v.26 (Ali et al., 2022; Hammoud et al., 2024; Khalaf, Abdul-Jabbar, & Ali, 2025). To verify the nature of the data distribution before using the parametric statistical tests represented by the Analysis of Variance (F) test, the researchers relied on the central limit theorem. This statistical indicator states that when the sample size is large (more than 30 individuals), the sample distribution of the averages automatically approaches the normal distribution. Since the sample size under the statistical analysis in this research is considered very large, adding (378) figures, the normal distribu-

tion condition is justified, which justifies the safe and highly reliable use by researchers of parametric tests.

3. Results

An analysis of variance (F-test) was performed to compare the dimensions of aggression between the three levels of the team (See Table 2).

A subsequent analysis using the law of least significant difference (LSD) has located these differences.

4. Discussion

The statistical results showed significant and significant differences between the three groups studied, with the most disciplined teams standing out, registering the lowest levels of aggressiveness compared to the intermediate and back teams (based on the superiority of their low arithmetic averages). The authors attribute the distinction that has been shown to increase skill and technical level acting as a natural inhibitor of aggressive behavior, as elite players have a greater ability to manage difficult situations and control their emotions.

These conclusions are consistent with what Amin et al. (2020) propose, according to which improving athletic character and promoting positive self-esteem effectively contribute to reducing aggressive behavior in football players. This discipline in forward clubs is also attributed to the high “psychological toughness” of their players, as recent studies (2025) confirmed that there is a close inverse correlation between psychological toughness and aggressiveness, since the more a player is able to absorb the pressure of

Table 2. Variation in the dimensions of aggressive behavior.

No.	Dimension	Calculated (F)	Table F	Importance
1	Hate	3.12	3.59	Not important
2	Attack	5.72	3.59	Importance
3	Excitation speed	2.56	3.59	Not important
4	Doubt	1.73	3.59	Not important
5	Verbal aggression	6.41	3.59	Importance
6	Rejection	5.74	3.59	Importance
7	Indirect assault	2.14	3.59	Not important

Table 3. Meaning of mean differences (LSD analysis).

Dimension	Comparison	It means teams	LSD Value	Importance
Attack	Upper vs. middle section	12.76	8.74	Importance
	Up vs. Down	9.59	8.74	Importance
	Medium vs. Lower	3.17	8.74	Not important
Verbal anger.	Upper vs. middle section	12.73	12.48	Importance
	Up vs. Down	15.13	12.48	Importance
	Medium vs. Lower	2.4	12.48	Not important
Rejection	Upper vs. middle section	9.85	8.74	Importance
	Up vs. Down	14.21	8.74	Importance
	Medium vs. Lower	4.36	8.74	Not important

competition, the less willing he will be to resort to aggressive behaviors.

However, this does not eliminate the existence of a “tendency to aggression” as an innate instinctive tendency, which Freud affirmed as an instinctive and destructive predisposition common to all human beings, regardless of their levels or cultures.

In terms of detailed analysis of the dimensions (aggression, verbal aggression, rejection), Table 3 revealed clear statistical differences between the groups. Using a test (minimum significant difference (LSD) to determine the direction of these differences, it was found that the superiority of the first group (the introductory team) was lower in aggressiveness compared to the second and third groups. The researchers argue that laggards tend to show greater aggressiveness, while the relationship between technical superiority and self-control reflects a complex interrelationship: on the one hand, the psychological stability resulting from victories provides a calm environment that reduces stress (aggressiveness as a resultant effect), and on the other, a high mental focus and self-control give these teams a tactical advantage that protects them from being drawn into secondary conflicts that can cause loss or expulsion (reduction of aggressiveness as a reason for success).

Due to the nature of football based on physical contact, the ability of advanced teams to transform “aggressive aggression” into “aggressive or tactical aggression”, which seeks to possess the ball within the legal framework without the intention of harming, which raises efficiency and discipline in performance, is highlighted. This is supported by the opinion of (Abdelkader Zainal, 1996) that the results of matches have a radical impact on the behaviour of players, as the aggressiveness of the losers increases compared to the winners, especially in decisive matches that provoke severe pressure and emotions.

In conclusion, the researchers believe that the aggressive energy levels of most athletes may be similar, but the fundamental difference lies in the mechanisms of response and expression of this energy. While some manage to direct it positively, others cannot control it under the same pressure. Thanks to their advanced

physical and skill level, players in the Iraqi League show a great ability to “transcend” this energy and discharge it legally, driven by their concern for their image in the eyes of the public. This confirms the view (Al-Mahash, 1979) that the athlete selection process should be based on moral and voluntary traits, especially the trait of “self-control” These characteristics can be developed through long preparation programs.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions:

- Levels of aggression vary depending on league results; teams ranked below show higher levels of aggression, verbal abuse, and rejection.
- The psychological flexibility and technical prowess of large teams act as a deterrent against uncontrolled aggression.
- The desire to win, coupled with intense pressure, often leads to intense physical struggles that can lead to unintentional aggressive behaviors.

6. Recommendations

1. Mandatory appointment of sports psychologists to train players in emotional control during high-stakes matches.
2. Implement awareness programs on fair play and sportsmanship for both coaches and players.
3. Organizing workshops through disciplinary committees dedicated to lower-ranking teams on the “psychology of accepting defeat.”
4. Design skill exercises that simulate high-pressure combat situations that require containment.
5. Promote a culture of fair competition and ethical handling of both victory and defeat.

Author’s declaration

Conflicts of interest

None

We confirm that all tables and figures in this article are ours and written by the researchers themselves.

Ethical-clearance

This manuscript approved by the Scientific Committee of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences for Women, University of Baghdad, Iraq, on (2024/10/01).

Author's contributions

All contributions to this study were carried out by the listed authors. Othman Adham Ali contributed to the study design, supervision of the research procedures, and final revision of the manuscript. Ameer Jaber Mushref contributed to data collection, organization, and implementation of the experimental program, as well as drafting the manuscript. Ameer Jaber Mushref contributed to data collection, implementation of the experimental procedures, and preparation of the initial draft of the manuscript. Amira Sabri Hussein contributed to data organization and analysis. Ahmed Khalid Awad contributed to reviewing, editing, and finalizing the manuscript.

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Roles of each researcher in the research

Othman Adham Ali was responsible for the conceptualization of the research idea, study design, supervision of the research procedures, interpretation of the results, and final revision of the manuscript. Ahmed Khalid Awad participated in data collection, organization, and implementation of the experimental program, and contributed to drafting the manuscript. Ameer Jaber Mushref contributed to data collection, implementation of the experimental procedures, and preparation of the initial draft of the manuscript. Amira Sabri Hussein assisted in data organization, statistical processing, and interpretation of results.

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Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Appendix 1. Aggressive behavior scale

No.	Statement/Item	Yes	No
1	I am willing to answer all questions honestly and truthfully.		
2	I feel a sense of relief when I insult people I dislike.		
3	I harbor resentment toward those who compete with me for something I desire.		
4	I enjoy seeking revenge against those who harm me.		
5	I resent and hold grudges against individuals who refuse to help me.		
6	I respond to aggression with even greater aggression.		
7	I initiate physical strikes when I sense an altercation brewing.		
8	If I do not fight, I will never obtain what is rightfully mine.		
9	I flush with anger when I fail to achieve a particular goal.		
10	I lose my temper over the slightest annoyances.		
11	I nearly cry if I am reprimanded for something I did not do.		
12	I become enraged quickly if people do not believe me when I am telling the truth.		
13	I lose my temper easily if a friend makes a joke that I find offensive.		
14	People describe me as being suspicious.		
15	I feel that others are suspicious of my behavior.		
16	People only help one another to serve their own mutual interests.		
17	I speak harshly to those who annoy or provoke me.		
18	I speak to others in a rough manner when they fail to understand me.		
19	If someone insults me, I retaliate in kind.		
20	My sharp tongue makes others fear me.		
21	Responding with kindness to the mistreatment of others helps reform them.		
22	I exhibit rebellious behavior towards individuals I dislike.		
23	I refuse to accept a supervisor favoring a colleague over me.		
24	I am characterized as being highly argumentative.		
25	I yell at home over trivial matters when I am distressed.		
26	I forcefully strike nearby objects with my hand if I make a mistake in a given situation.		
27	I tarnish the reputation of my adversaries in front of others.		
28	I am certain that I have answered all statements clearly.		

مستوى السلوك العدواني لدى أندية الدوري العراقي لكرة القدم وعلاقته بنتائج وترتيب الدوري

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المستخلص

تعد كرة القدم رياضة تنافسية عالية الشدة، وغالبًا ما تؤدي إلى ظهور أشكال مختلفة من السلوك العدواني داخل المستطيل الأخضر. ومن أجل معالجة هذه الظاهرة، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تقييم مستوى السلوك العدواني لدى لاعبي أندية الدوري العراقي لموسم 2023-2024، وتحليل علاقة هذه السلوكيات بالنتائج التي حققتها تلك الأندية. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي بما يتناسب مع طبيعة البحث. شملت العينة (400) لاعب تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا من بين (20) ناديًا، ممثلين نسبة (57%) من مجتمع الدراسة الكلي. ولجمع البيانات، تم استخدام مقياس السلوك العدواني (SPSS)، حيث أُجري تحليل إحصائي لـ (378) نموذجًا صالحًا باستخدام برنامج SPSS. أظهرت المعالجة الإحصائية وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الأندية في أبعاد (الهجوم، العدوان اللفظي، والرفض)، حيث كانت القيم المحسوبة (F) على التوالي (5.722، 6.417، و5.742). وقد مالت هذه الفروق لصالح الأندية التي تقع في أسفل ترتيب الدوري (أي التي سجلت مستويات أعلى من السلوك العدواني). ومن ناحية أخرى، أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في أبعاد (الشك، سرعة الاستثارة، والعدوان غير المباشر). وخلصت المناقشة إلى أن لاعبي الأندية المتصدرة يتمتعون بمستويات عالية من المهارة الفنية والقوة النفسية القسوى، مما يمكنهم من التحكم في انفعالاتهم وتقليل السلوك العدواني مقارنة بالفرق الدفاعية. وبالتالي، توجد علاقة مباشرة بين السلوك العدواني وترتيب النادي ونتائجه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كرة القدم، علم النفس الرياضي، السلوك العدواني، اللاعبون