

# Female Spectatorship and Unsportsmanlike Conduct at Football Stadiums: Case Study from the Czech Republic

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## Abstract

Football is the most popular team sport in the world. It is entertainment, primarily for men, but nowadays, it can be said that the number of women at football stadiums is steadily increasing. Given the long history of spectator sports events consumption, it is not a surprising fact that there have also been serious manifestations of spectator aggression. The paper aims to analyze the relationship between women visitors' verbal and other expressions of their violent behavior on an example of SK Slavia Prague football club. Primary data were collected by a questionnaire survey mainly at the Eden stadium and other selected Czech football stadiums in 2015/16 and 2016/17 seasons. A total of 120 respondents (aged  $25.01 \pm 10.20$  years old) participated in this research, and all of the respondents were attending the matches in a stand of home team supporters. We state that there are correlations between women visitors' verbal and other expressions of their violent behavior; e.g., the surveyed respondents had no experience with demolishing stadiums and other riots. The respondents also consider it to be the most serious activity at 82.58%. The racism display noted similar results. We state that the results are adequate for women visitors.

**Key words:** football, negative phenomena, women, questionnaire, violence

## INTRODUCTION

Football has become a social and sporting phenomenon, especially in the last few decades, entering the distinctive scene of mass culture as an attractive form of spectator experience. The European Championship semi-final match in France (2016) between Iceland and England was watched by 99.8% of the adult population of Iceland. The World Cup in Russia (2018) was watched by more than 3.5 billion viewers, more than half of the world's population aged four and over. In this context, the dynamic interrelationships between sport and society are reflected, bringing issues such as the widening gap between recreational leisure sport and elite high-performance sport. In particular, passive spectator consumption of sport has taken on a mass character in recent decades. This corresponds to a situation in which the majority of the population does not actively participate in sport and their contact with sport is only in the form of spectatorship. Thus, passive spectator consumption of sport fills the leisure time of a significant part of the population regardless of national borders or socio-cultural formations (Slepička et al., 2010).

On the other hand, we have to state that football fan behavior has been a significant cause for concern throughout Europe, especially in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Substantial disturbances at football matches have also been witnessed in the Czech Republic, Greece, Denmark, Austria, and Eastern Europe (Frosdick & Marsh, 2005). In recent years, the issue of football hooliganism has become the subject of intense media, political and academic interest. Unfortunately, frequently ignorance and misunderstanding of football hooliganism determine preview on it. It is essential to distinguish hooligans from other people

who are interested only in football and watch football matches. This study is related to some previous interpretations of investigations concerning Slavia Prague football visitors. Some authors identify three major groups: football spectators, football fans, and football hooligans (Mareš et al., 2004). However, a more frequently used form of categorization distinguishes fans from supporters/ultras (Antonowicz et al., 2020; Doidge & Lieser, 2018; Hodges, 2016; Kossakowski et al., 2018; Scholz, 2016; Yusoff, 2016). Football offers a show full of physical clashes of opponents with distinctive features of aggression and primarily attacking the audience's emotions (Slepička, 1990). The researchers carried out on the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic/Czech Republic territory in the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium did not distinguish the audience in various sports, let alone individual visitors to football matches. The term spectator was incorrectly used for all visitors. Alternatively, there was only a division into fans, spectators, and problematic spectators. We have to say that such a division is insufficient. It is crucial to distinguish, e.g., hooligans from other people interested only in football and watch football matches. At the beginning of the new millennium, the academic community began to distinguish individual visitors. In this context, it is possible to use the most common division and identify four major groups: inactive spectators, football fans, supporters, and hooligans (Sekot & Smolík, 2009). Each group is characteristic and has its specificities. To better understand the negative phenomena, it is desirable to know which persons occur at football stadiums and how they behave.

a) *Inactive (objective) spectators*. In this group, there are four subgroups: (1) irregular visitors of the football matches; frequently is a special type of fashion and snobbery, (2) fans of the other clubs, not teams that are currently playing a football match, (3) observers, coaches or other football players from other clubs, and (4), women (especially older ages), who attend the match as the accompanying persons of her partners. Heitmeyer & Peter (1998) characterize this type of spectator "consumer-oriented fan." They sit in the stand or seeks a quiet spot on the terraces and wants to see a good football game. Mareš et al. (2004) state that they are passive observers of the game, not affected by the two teams' rivalry, and thus the game looks absolutely neutral. They are not interested only in football matches, but they visit other sports games and other sports. Often, they are not identified with a particular club and do not wear its symbols, such as a scarf, jersey, cap, etc. The spectator is not always present at the football stadiums, but the football match watches via the internet, television, etc.

b) *Classical football fans ("normal")*. These are the individuals who attend football games. They regularly have a relationship with their club, often because the stadium is located relatively close to their residence. A fan has certain expectations for the development of the match, identifies with the team, and therefore takes its success, or lack of it, personally. Football is usually the only popular sport for a football fan. Fans' identification is presented mainly by clothing, jerseys, club scarves, caps, T-shirts, flags, badges, etc. The football fan has been characterized by division into "we" (supporters club) and "they" (fans of other clubs; Slepička, 1990). A football-oriented fan attends every match and decks out in his team's colors (Heitmeyer & Peter, 1998). These fans can be found mostly on the main grandstands and sometimes even be swayed by the loud cheering and support, sometimes with racist overtones. We note that this group of spectators is usually not involved in other manifestations of spectator violence, except for throwing random objects on a pitch.

c) *Supporters (ultras)*. This is a highly homogeneous group of fans who strive for the most spectacular development of the match while avoiding direct conflict, violence, and vandalism. They are bearers of choreography in the game, supporting the use of fireworks, banners, and singing (Sekot, 2013). They greatly enjoy every game and are interested in club life. We can find them behind the goals (ends) on the side stands during the match, designed chiefly for standing. Almost every fan is dressed in the club jersey, T-shirts, or owns at least a scarf of his favorite team.

d) *Hooligans (rowdies)*. The term hooligan was coined in the 1890s as an alternative to a ruffian. Now readily applied to the wild and unruly football fan of the 1960s, the term and the on-screen images of undisciplined toughs rekindled a Victorian-style moral panic vocalized by the Conservative Party and fanned by the press (Frosdick & Marsh, 2005). Football hooligans come together in small groups mainly consisting of young, militantly oriented supporters. They come to football stadiums and their surroundings with the primary objective cause conflict or fighting with other similar groups opposing teams. These groups (gangs) have their own names, which are defined against unorganized groups and other groups. Some of these parts are very well organized and do not unite only club rivalry and hatred of the enemy groups, but also political, racial, religious, national, regional, or social motives. Hooligans, unlike fans, often do not identify with a football club but only with their group (Mareš et al., 2004).

Although it is primarily a male pastime, female fans can also be found at football stadiums and are proud of it (Ben-Porat, 2009). The omission of female fans could result from their much smaller presence in stadiums and the fact that male scientists are more interested in fandom research (Jakubowska et al., 2020). In 2019, the Women's World Cup was attended by an average of almost 22,000 people and watched on television by almost a billion people worldwide. Nowadays, we can state that the number of women in football stadiums is constantly increasing, and female fans support their team even in outdoor matches. There is a proof. In 2022, a world record has been broken in women's football when 91,553 fans turned up to watch Barcelona beat Real Madrid at Camp Nou. The previous record was 90,185 for the 1999 World Cup final where the US and China faced off (Thomson, 2022). Some clubs provide women with better prices for match tickets, and in the case of an outdoor match, women do not pay for transportation (Yusoff, 2017). If a woman is knowledgeable and understands football, she is more respected among men and can contribute to an intelligent conversation. On the other hand, in the identical situation, a female fan may feel uncomfortable as some fans will let her know that as a woman, she can never understand football (Berg et al., 2014; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). Some female fans are dressed in jerseys or wear scarves and in rare cases use the colors of their favorite team on their face to indicate who they are rooting for. Some women wear tight-fitting clothes at football matches and have to face sexist innuendos afterwards (Sveinson & Hoeber, 2015). In the Czech Republic, football matches are mainly attended by men, but the number of women is gradually increasing – 9% of women in the 1990s (Slepička, 1990), 19% of women a decade later (Slepička et al., 2010) and 20% of women nowadays (Scholz, 2018). Approximately 19% of women attend football matches in England (Pope, 2012). On the other hand, we have to state that women's football strives to build a stable platform in terms of fan interest. However, while an increase in gate receipts can help its long-term sustainability, there is limited proof in the academic literature on the factors influencing spectator demand in women's football (Valenti et al., 2020). Pope (2012) divides female fans into two groups, namely (1) passionate, enthusiastic fans and (2) cool fans. The first group includes female fans who attend every match of their team, engage in cheering at the stadium, use the internet to get information from the club, etc. The second group of female fans does not spend as much time watching the game or thinking about football during the week and are not as influenced by the game results. Rather, they enjoy the match in front of the TV screen or the internet.

We have to state that women are often overlooked in academic research (Pope, 2016). The process of women attending football stadiums, the so-called 'feminization' of stadiums, is a desirable process for empirical investigation from a sociological perspective (Pope, 2017). Currently, there is no research that focuses on women's unsportsmanlike behavior worldwide. If any data is available, it is not fully explored as is the case with the male population. There are many studies focusing, for example, on image issues in women's football (Harris, 2005), sports fans from a

female perspective (Sveinson & Hoerber, 2015), etc. McGee (2017) conducted research on 2,729 visitors. Many women attend all home games but do not feel safe at away games due to excessive alcohol consumption, problems with flares, smoke bombs, standing during the game, etc. Toffoletti (2017) describes and analyses female sports fans from a feminist perspective, more specifically using transnational feminism. According to the author, this perspective allows observing the diversity of female fandom and taking into account the different socio-cultural contexts in which specific categories of fans operate (ethnicity, race, sexuality, etc.).

## METHODS

The aim of the paper is to analyze the behavior of women and their opinions, which are mostly related to violent behavior at selected football stadiums in the Czech Republic (mainly SK Slavia Prague). Slavia is the oldest football club in the Czech league (est. 1892) and this team has a number of championships (Özaydın, 2021). On the other hand, Slavia had struggled with financial troubles, mainly at 2013/2014 season and was only one step to be in the second league. From the season 2018/2019, Slavia won three titles in a row.

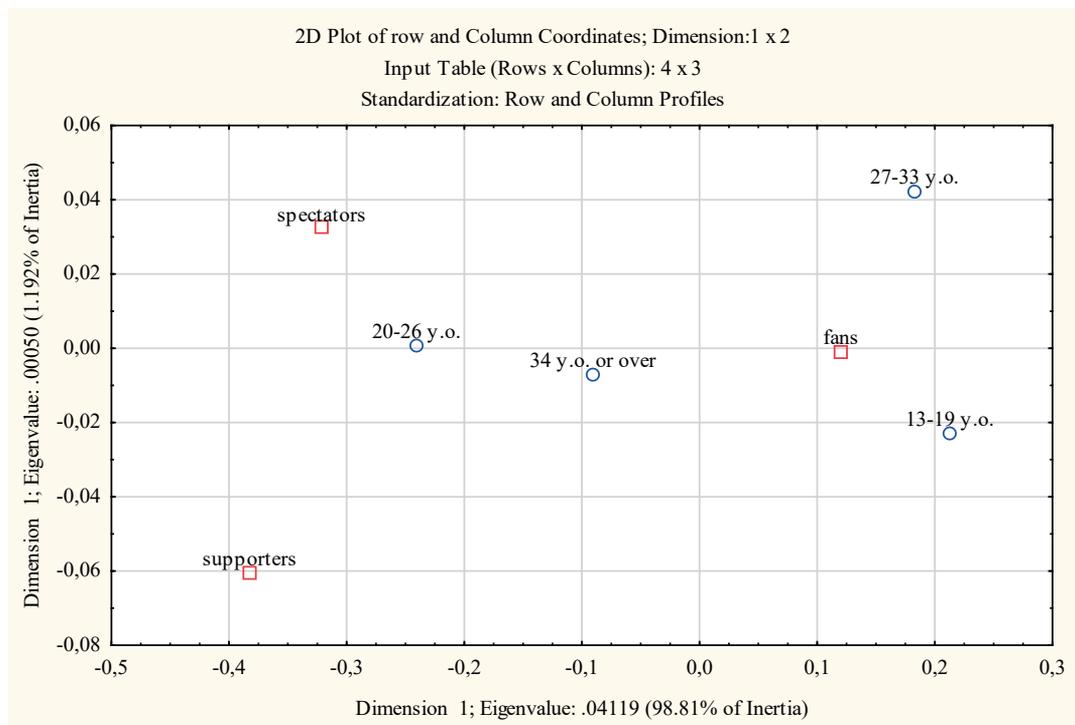
The chosen method of data collection was a questionnaire survey. Primary data was used, which was collected by questionnaire survey technique in the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 seasons. The questionnaire contained 29 questions; some of them were scaled, where the respondent could rate on a Likert scale individual manifestations from the least serious to the most serious. The respondent had to rate each manifestation with a score, (1 – least severe manifestation and 5 – most severe). However, most of the questions were closed-ended with multiple choice. All respondents attended football matches of the club SK Slavia Prague and watched them from the area behind the goal (the Kop). This part of the stands was chosen because all groups of visitors to football matches are represented there. The stand of the stadium for the home fans and supporters is called "Tribuna Sever", with a capacity of 3,065 seats. It consists of 5 sectors each with 25 seats in 28 rows. The end is mostly filled up to 2/3rds, and sold out during matches against attractive away teams, e.g., Sparta Prague, Plzeň, Ostrava and European teams, e.g., Barcelona, Inter Milan, Dortmund, Sevilla, Chelsea, Feyenoord etc. The selection of the respondents was based on a predetermined key; e.g., seats 1, 3, 5, 7 in the first row, seats 2, 4, 6, 8 in the second row, etc. The sampling consists of 720 respondents; 592 men, 120 women and 8 respondents who did not wish to specify their gender. In this research, we focus on women only ( $25.01 \pm 10.20$  years). It was a random selection. Because it is not easy to organize empirical research in a stand, the administrators tried to behave in a user-friendly way. All the respondents were informed about the research and anonymity of the questionnaire. The respondents were willing to participate in the research and were even entertained filling out the questionnaires before the match started. Once they had answered the inquiries, each of them received a small Slavia club badge. They also had the opportunity to contact the interviewer via the email stated on the questionnaire list and inform themselves about the research results.

The paper uses quantitative research and mathematical and statistical methods, specifically correspondence analysis (CA). Using the graphic tools of the CA, it is possible to describe an association of nominal or ordinal variables and to obtain a graphic representation of a relationship in multidimensional space – it is easier to understand for the readers. The analysis provides further evidence that there are dependencies between variables. CA is a multivariate statistical technique. It is conceptually similar to principal component analysis but applies to categorical rather than continuous data. In a similar manner to principal component analysis, it provides a

means of displaying or summarizing a set of data in a two-dimensional graphical form (Zámková & Prokop, 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As far as the individual groups of female football visitors are concerned, we can state that in the Slavia Kop the most frequent age group was 20–26 years old, the most frequent age group of female fans was 13–19 years old, and the age range of the ultras was 34 years and older. No respondents were in the group of female hooligans. We are aware that in the article, we present only summary results for visitors; however, we believe that it is essential to state the age difference between the individual groups (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Age composition of each group of female respondents.

More than 3/4 of the respondents (76.67%) were single, 15.00% were married or in a registered partnership, another 5.00% were divorced. We state that the results mimic the societal situation where the current trend is to delay the consummation of marriage until later in life. More than 1/3 of the respondents (38.33%) lived with their parents. Further, more than 1/3 of the respondents (35.00%) lived with their partners or spouses, and 11.67% of the respondents lived with their children, and another 10.00% of the respondents lived alone. More than 3/4 of the respondents (80.00%) were from a complete family. An equally important fact that is often mentioned in connection with the atmosphere in football stadiums is the educational attainment mix of the female respondents. We can observe that the highest number of responses was noted for secondary education with a high school Maturita examination (35.00%). Almost 1/5 of the respondents (18.33%) had completed vocational training and obtained an apprenticeship

certificate and another 1/6 of the respondents (16.67%) had received a university diploma. More than 1/10 of the female viewers (13.33%) received only primary education. Further, 13.33% of the female respondents did not wish to give their answers. It can be noted that more than one-tenth of the female respondents did not want to indicate their educational attainment is relatively high. Nevertheless, the respondents who chose this answer were in the age range of 13–14 years, i.e., they had not yet completed compulsory schooling. Therefore, these educational characteristics should be interpreted in the light of the fact that some of the respondents were primary school students at the time of the survey. Thus, in these cases, they did not have completed education (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Participation in selected activities during the match (%).

<b>marital status</b>					
single	married	divorced	no answer		
76.67	15.00	5.00	3.33		
<b>living conditions</b>					
with parents	partner/spouse	with children	alone	no answer	
38.33	35.00	11.67	10.00	4.00	
<b>education level</b>					
elementary school	high school-Maturita examination	high school-apprenticeship certificate	university	no answer	
13.33	38.34	18.33	16.67	13.33	
<b>occupation</b>					
student	manager	waitress/bartender	clerk	others	no answer
40.00	6.67	5.00	5.00	30.00	13.33
<b>life satisfaction</b>					
satisfied	rather satisfied	rather dissatisfied	very dissatisfied	no answer	
55.00	43.33	1.67	0.00	0.00	
<b>economic situation</b>					
very satisfied	satisfied	rather dissatisfied	dissatisfied	no answer	
26.67	35.00	10.00	10.00	18.33	

Female students dominated the most common “occupation” among the respondents (40.00%). The other occupations were manager (6.67%), waitress/bartender, and clerk (identical 5.00%). More than 1/2 of the respondents (55.00%) were satisfied with their current life, and the other 43.33% were rather satisfied. Regarding the subjective assessment of their own economic situation, 35.00% of the respondents were satisfied, and another 26.67% were very satisfied. One tenth of the respondents (10.00%) was very dissatisfied; the same value was recorded for the response rather dissatisfied (Table 1).

More than 3/4 of the respondents (84.39%) never knowingly brought an object that could be used as a weapon. Only 15.61% of the female respondents reported that they sometimes brought an object that could be used as a weapon into the stadium. Focusing on objects, these were mainly knuckle dusters, pyrotechnics, folding umbrellas, or empty plastic bottles. These, when filled with water and capped, could cause injury if the object was hit.

A significantly high value (88.03%) was recorded for respondents who had never assisted with pyrotechnics. From our own experience, however, we must state that they are women who can easily carry pyrotechnics to the stadium, as their checks at the turnstiles are not so thorough (the authors attended hundreds of football matches in the Czech Republic, England, Italy, Spain,

Slovakia, and women are not given enough attention stadiums). Pyrotechnics are tucked into handbags. It is often hidden in intimate games, where the organizers are not allowed to reach.

More than 2/3 of the respondents (69.09%) occasionally used vulgar language as far as vulgarity is concerned. Vulgar expressions were mainly addressed to referees and also to the former president of the FAČR (Football Association of the Czech Republic, hereafter FAČR), the current vice-president of the FAČR, and the former chairwoman of the FAČR Central Commission of Referees.

Regarding alcohol consumption, we noted that more than 1/2 of the respondents (57.88%) did not consume alcohol mainly because they arrived at the match by motor vehicle.

As expected, we observed that all respondents (100.00%) had never participated in stadium demolition. Almost the same value (96.97%) was obtained for acts of racism. As far as, for example, racist chants are concerned, the situation is more favorable if we compare the beginning of the 1990s, when dark-skinned players started to appear in the Czech top competition. In recent years, however, dark-skinned players have started to appear much more frequently in Czech football stadiums. They have become significant reinforcements for their clubs and fan favorites (O. Doorley, A. Sima, I. Traoré, Y. Sor, etc.). For this reason, these racist chants are only sporadic, but for example the chant “jude Slavie” is always heard during the derby with Sparta. International organizations and fan groups are trying to eradicate racism from football completely through various projects and banners during matches (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Participation in selected activities during the match.

	<b>always</b>	<b>sometimes</b>	<b>never</b>
Carrying objects into the stadium with the purpose to use them as a weapon	0.00	15.61	84.39
Assisting with pyrotechnics during a football match	0.76	11.21	88.03
Vulgar language during a football match	8.94	69.09	21.97
Alcohol consumption before or during the match	15.76	26.36	57.88
	<b>often</b>	<b>sometimes</b>	<b>never</b>
Participation in the demolition of the stadium	0.00	0.00	100.00
Participation in racist acts	0.00	3.03	96.97
Booing at the referee during a football match	13.48	41.06	45.46
Booing at Slavia Prague during a football match	0.00	11.36	88.64
Booing at an opponent during a football match	15.00	50.91	34.09
Booing at the former president of the FAČR and other officials during the match	13.48	32.12	54.39
	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>-</b>
Running onto the pitch	8.18	91.82	
Throwing an object into the playing area	3.03	96.97	

Regarding booing, more than 1/2 of the respondents (50.91%) occasionally booed and another 15.00% of the respondents were frequently booing. The most common reasons were players lying down on the field of play, delaying playing a standard situation, and passing constant passes in their own half when the team was trying to maintain a hopeful result. Almost 1/10 of the respondents (8.18%) had the experience of running into the playing area. After the historical promotion of Slavia Prague to the Champions League (2007), most of the Kop supporters celebrated this special moment on the pitch directly with the players after the match. Only 3.03% of the respondents threw the object on the playing field. This was most often done when the head or sideline referee made an incorrect call or when celebrating an opposing player's goal in front of the home crowd. The football pitch was often littered with empty or full beer cups, soft plastic

drink bottles, small coins, strobes, smoke bombs, and lighters. We can therefore conclude that the referees' actions could, in some cases, have become the instigator of violent clashes, even in cases where they themselves acted in violation of the football rules (Table 2).

The most severe activities are considered to be stadium demolition (82.58%), racism in the stands (71.36%), physical aggression against police and organizers (61.21%), and physical aggression against fans of the opponent in the stadium (59.70%). We observe that these are serious acts and agree with the highest marks. The booing was unanimously identified as the least serious activity (73.49%). More than 1/3 of the respondents (38.94%) considered the use of pyrotechnics as the least serious problem and conversely almost 1/4 of the respondents (24.24%) rated this activity with the highest possible mark. Some respondents reported that there is a risk of burns when handling pyrotechnics, but no case of burns has been recorded so far in Slavia. We agree that some matches (Sparta Praha, Viktoria Plzeň, Baník Ostrava) had to be interrupted due to the indiscipline of some people, but after a few minutes, the matches continued. Never has a match against Slavia been abandoned due to pyrotechnics. The majority of respondents thought that pyrotechnics clearly and always belonged to football and they could not imagine football matches without them. We believe that as long as pyrotechnics are controlled (Bengals, not bangers), Czech football should not go down the path of banning them. It could pick up information about safe pyrotechnics developed in Denmark and allow their use in Czech stadiums. As far as the vulgar chanting of the whole Kop or individual vulgarisms are concerned, we can say that we have achieved approximately the same results. The vulgarisms stem from the referee's wrong verdict, delay of the game, and celebration of the opponents' goals in front of the Tribuna Sever stand. Regarding the hooligan clash outside the stadium, more than 1/3 of the respondents (42.12%) expressed that it was a very serious problem and rated it with the highest mark, i.e., 5. Some respondents were upset that the club was associated with these fights. On the other hand, 25.30% of the respondents did not find any problem in an arranged clash outside the stadium. On the other hand, if an opponent's fan is dressed in a jersey and scarf and meets a hooligan, he may not be worried. Interviews with Slavia supporters and hooligans have confirmed that true hooligans are highly disciplined, they know what aspects of the culture are, and they will not beat up another team's supporters. For women, this rule is doubly true. Almost 1/2 of the female respondents (48.79%) believed that throwing objects (lighters, beer cups, coins, etc.) on the field was the most serious activity. Almost 1/2 of the female respondents (44.09%) perceived running onto the playing field as the most serious activity (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Female respondents' comments on individual activities (%).

Activities	1	2	3	4	5
firing of pyrotechnics	38.94	20.15	15.15	1.52	24.24
vulgar chants in the stand	37.42	26.36	19.54	3.03	13.64
individual vulgar expression	39.70	20.45	20.30	7.58	11.97
physical aggr. against rival fans at the stadium	0.76	8.18	1.52	29.85	59.70
physical aggr. against police and riot police	7.42	10.45	3.03	17.88	61.21
arranged hooligan fight outside the stadium	25.30	3.03	6.06	23.49	42.12
throwing object to the pitch	3.79	11.97	14.24	21.21	48.79
demolishing the stadium and other riots	0.00	1.52	6.82	9.09	82.58
racism display	3.03	1.52	6.06	18.03	71.36
booing the referee/rival players/club	73.49	12.88	11.36	1.52	0.76
pitch incursion	16.51	6.06	15.15	18.18	44.09

Note: 1 – the least serious expression; 2 – less serious; 3 – neutral; 4 – more serious; 5 – the most serious expression

However, there are several limitations in the submitted article. First, our research cannot be generalized, and no in-depth analysis was performed. We were only interested in Czech football clubs. We would like to investigate other major international football clubs in other countries and compare these data with the results of an elite Czech football club. We suppose that a comparison of other countries would be desirable. Furthermore, in our future research, we aim to investigate the implementation of preventive measures, including thorough personal examinations and football visitors if there is any correlation. Finally, we would like to focus on qualitative research to complement the quantitative findings. In our opinion, such extended results based on in-depth screening would gain significant value in affecting the international field of female fanhood issues.

## CONCLUSION

The authors' interest and the fact that there is not enough up-to-date information on this issue motivated this article. The aim of this paper was to analyze the behavior of women and their opinions concerning behavior and violence in football stadiums in the Czech Republic. The research shows that the most common profile of female respondents is of single marital status (76.67%) with a high school education (38.34%) and living with a spouse (35.00%). The most common was a student (40.00%) who was satisfied with her life (55.00%) and economic situation (35.00%). We also identified that there were correlations between the verbal and other expressions of the study subjects and their violent behavior. None of the respondents participated in the destruction/demolition of the stadium and vandalism and rioting in the stadium was considered by 82.58% of the respondents as the most serious manifestation of violent behavior. The female respondents surveyed had no experience of stadium vandalism. Similar results were obtained for racism. Furthermore, 61.21% of female respondents identified police aggression and riots as the most severe activity, and almost the same value (59.70%) was noted for aggression among fans. On the other hand, 73.49% of the visitors said that booing was the least problem.

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