

2013

## Situational and Personal Determinants of Corruption in Sport

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### Recommended Citation

Gracz J. Situational and Personal Determinants of Corruption in Sport. *Balt J Health Phys Activ* 2013; 5(1): 59-69. doi: 10.2478/bjha-2013-0006

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### Keywords

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### Abstract

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**Word count:** 3.407

**Tables:** 1

**Figures:** 7

**References:** 20

**Received:** January 2013

**Accepted:** February 2013

**Published:** March 2013

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## Introduction

Description and research of reasons for corruption in sport in psychological categories requires outlining several general basic concepts. The first one is related to psychology itself, which may be considered as a science dealing with activities of a man and a man as a subject of these activities. A man always acting in a definite situation becomes, therefore, a distinguished part of the said situation [1]. Such an idea of the subject of psychology makes a basis for defining the problems of psychology of sport, which deals with the description, explanation, forecasting, and also supporting or, as a need arises, correcting the action of a man in the sport situation [2].

For the purposes of the present paper a sport situation is considered as making a part of professional sport, in which both the situational dimensions and the properties of sports people are subject to psycho-social regulation of a particular kind [3]. The concept of psychosociality means that the dimensions of the sport situation are an intrinsic property of an individual, constituting the so-called mental reality and, at the same time, the property of the environment making a "social reality". Thus, the activity of sport people is always considered as a resultant of their mental features and the specific dimensions of the sport situation.

The point of view presented here complies with the assumptions of the Magnusson and Endler interactive psychology [4], thus being also related to pathological activities in sport, inclusive of sport corruption. It may be represented by the following formula:

$$\text{corruption activities} = f(\text{sport situation dimensions} \times \text{mental feature of an individual})$$

According to the above formula, sport corruption depends on two variables, namely the sport situational dimensions and mental features of sport people. Let us briefly characterize both these variables.

## Social-Situational Aspects of Sport Corruption

An analysis of the psycho-social dimensions of a competitive sport situation may, in our opinion, improve an understanding of some of the mechanisms of corruptive actions in sport. Among the above mentioned situational dimensions usually the maximization of the action, social acceptance, long-lasting training, competition, and motor activity are mentioned [5]. Taking into account, as before, that all human actions, inclusive of the corruptive ones, have their psycho-social aspect and, according to the paradigm of interactive psychology, belong at the same time to the social and psychological reality, it might be expected that the dimensions of a competitive sport situation mentioned above may be significantly decisive to the manner of formulation and realization of sport goals. In other words, a man subject to the pressures aimed at maximizing his/her activity, subject to social appraisal converting itself to rewarding the successes and punishing the failures, and forced to competing with other people endeavouring after victory and, additionally, conscious of large effort aimed at his/her training, which is typical of competitive sport, may come to the conviction that the end justifies the means. This is the case of all the sport people and must not be considered as a new phenomenon, appearing in recent years.

According to historical data, already in the distant past sports competition was not free from corruption. Even in past times sport had its mercantile dimensions. What other opinion might be drawn knowing that the winners from Olympus, apart from olive branches and wreath obtained rich prizes? In Athens it was 500 drachmas, in other cities they were free of taxes or obtained maintenance until the end of their lives, together with their families. They obtained houses or significant offices. According to sources, some Olympic victories were won by fraud. Eupolos from Thesallia and Kalippos from Athens were punished with fine for bribery of their competitors. Damomikos from Eliada paid his competitors thus ensuring his son's victory in wrestling. The Ephesians bought over Sotades, the run winner, in order to incline him to acknowledge their town as his home city, etc. [6]. Further similar examples may be cited.

Without depreciating importance of ancient athletics contests, it should be noted that endeavours to the sport and life success, manifesting itself by maximization of action and the will to be better than others, are one of the reasons for moral relativism in competitive sport, irrespective

of the epoch. Moreover, it should be remembered that sport is like the extra-sport reality surrounding it. Meantime, according to the opinion of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development from 1999 [7], every third company pays bribes in order to achieve tax exemption or prolongation of loan repayment, with an average amount of the bribe reaching up to 2.5 per cent of the company's yearly income. Among the areas of public activity where corruptive actions have been disclosed there are many social life environments and domains, inclusive of sport [c.f. 7, 8, 9]. Hence, the corruption dimensions of competitive sport situation are, in many cases, intensified by the current extra-sport social context [c.f. 10].

In an attempt to specify sport situations the most susceptible to corruption, based on the most frequent information related thereto in the media, one might mention the following [c.f. 11]:

- agreeing the competition result beyond the sports field, occurring mainly in team competition (commonly called "selling the game");
- making a bet for a result agreed before the competition. This may occur in the case of any competitions being a subject of a professional bookmaker bet;
- handing over bribes to the persons responsible for assigning sports events to particular organizations (such an objection was raised to several members of the International Olympic Committee who received benefits for supporting the towns soliciting organization of the event); situations typical of the other fields of the economic life (e.g. the situation of the former chairman of the Polish Volleyball Association, who was blamed for omission of settlement of the State subvention);
- unclear criteria of assigning sports licences (a licensing system is obligatory among others in football or cinder-track racing) although legal regulations might indicate another decision.

A question arises if appropriate legal instruments exist to enable recognizing and penalizing such phenomena, taking account of the sport corruption specificity, or if proper mechanisms exist that could prevent such situations [c.f. 12, 9]. Nevertheless, such a question is rather aimed at other domains dealing with the sports corruption phenomenon. Hence, let us focus on its psychological-subjective aspects.

### **Psychological-Subjective Aspects of Sport Corruption**

According to the previously presented paradigm of interactive psychology, the final effect of our action is similarly or even mainly determined by subjective variables other than the situational ones [1]. In other words, a man with his/her individual features is the subject of actions undertaken by him/herself, although his/her goals and tasks are always realized in a definite situation. Hence, without much risk, one may assume that an individual's mental features, among others his needs, motivation, attitudes, and values are decisive for the final choice of sport goals and tasks, inclusive of the ones of sport-corruptive character.

Up to now we have mainly focused on the discussion of the social-situational conditions of sport corruption. At present let us attempt to disclose its psychological-subjective aspects. Disregarding O.P. Zięba's thesis [13] that human nature is corruptibilis, let us review psychologists' opinions on the subject. One of them assumes that everyone has a potential possibility of being a saint or sinner, an altruist or egoist, an honest person or offender. Ultimately, these are the conditions we are subject to that are decisive for the real choice among these options. It should be noticed, however, that our capabilities may spontaneously turn to our disadvantage [14]. The last statement may be illustrated by a catalogue of benefits and losses that may be caused by our potential capabilities or properties. Let us present some of them below [c.f. 14 ].

Tab. 1. Benefits and losses that may be caused by our potential capabilities or properties

No	The properties	Advantage	Loss
1.	The need of safety	the feeling of life stability and health	experience of hazards
2.	The need of affiliation	the action in community	conformism and alienation
3.	The need of love	experience of affections	envy and vengeance
4.	The motive of achievements	good working, innovative approach	fear of defeat, desire to beat others
5.	Self-appreciation	pride in achievements	feeling of incompetence
6.	Memory	ability of avoiding former errors	feeling grudge, ponderings over former unpleasant incidents
7.	Speech	communication, receiving and exchanging information	spreading rumours and lies, curses
8.	Intellect	understanding the deepest truths	deformation of reality, in which the wrong becomes the right

Another attempt of human nature classification was presented by McGregor [15]. In his opinion in the human nature classification there are two theories: “X” and “Y”. According to the “X” theory, people are lazy, irresponsible, unambitious and inclined to wrong from nature. On the other hand, the “Y” theory assumes the opposite, saying that human nature is creative, full of energy, and intrinsically motivated to good activity. A key theory with a view to understanding the psychological mechanisms of corruption may be, in our opinion, the theory of attitudes or, particularly, of the sport activity attitudes [14, 16].

In general, attitude is defined as a relatively constant readiness of an individual to react in a compact and consequent manner with respect to other people and situations. The readiness is visible, first of all, in the judgments and activities with regard to the sphere of the values and social rules that guide people [17]. The structure of attitude includes three components: the cognitive, emotional, and action ones. In other words, attitude, inclusive of the corruptive one, is a resultant of the knowledge of the attitude object, i.e. the **object** the attitude is referred to, the valence with regard thereto (the emotional relationship “+” or “-”) and a definite manifested action (of a verbal or motor type). On the other hand, the **subject** of the attitude is the human being having it. Attitudes impose clear dynamism and direction of our activity. Thanks to the knowledge on attitudes, one might, in our opinion, not only better understand the psycho-social aspects of sport corruption but also make attempts to restrain and counteract it. The problem, however, would require a separate and more comprehensive discussion. Here, based on the above mentioned theory of attitudes, we can only state that the sources of corruptive actions in sport may be derived, among others, from the lack of a reliable and internalized knowledge on the life and sport values in emotional ambivalence that favours moral relativism and dishonesty of the sport people that is visible in the tolerance of or even admiring the trickeries in everyday life and sport.

The description of psychological mechanisms of corruption provided by Tyszka [18] may serve as a relevant exemplification of the discussed theory of attitudes with respect to psycho-social aspects of sport corruption. The description includes several types of social behaviour well suited to the sport corruption reality. According to the above cited author, the well-known set phrases make a good reference to the subject, as, for example, “the occasion makes a thief”, “a man is known by the company he keeps”, “a piece today better than a goose tomorrow”, “he that will steal a pin will steal a better thing”, “when in Rome do as the Romans do”. Let us make attempt to discuss all of the above mechanisms with regard to sport. Hence, saying that “the occasion makes a thief” we assume that there are some social environments distinguished by a high risk, in which the people are subject to corruption temptations to a higher degree. Taking into account a specific motivation to achievements and the dimensions of the competitive sport situation, such environments are generated by people dealing with sport and are a result of the present day principles of competitive sport. Another expression, “a man is known by the company he keeps”, says that the company of the persons of doubtful reputation and a specific freedom in handling

money may be conducive to the fact that sports people acting in the circle of unclear gratifications and fees gradually lose their sensitivity to moral deterioration. They apparently identify themselves with the existing system thus becoming a part of it. This favours a false morality – take when the occasion arises and do not ask. Another proverb says “a piece today better than a goose tomorrow”. In the environment of sport people the present is clearly preferred. This is certainly due to the temporary character of a sports career or circumstances and a relatively young age of sports people. The proverb “he that will steal a pin will steal a better thing” formulates another type of criminal social behaviours. The formula indicates the risk of familiarizing with growing corruption. Sport people exposed to temptations at first begin to succumb to them only to a small degree, ending with more significant trickeries. According to Tyszka [18], the power of the principle is based on one of important motivations of human being, i.e. the motivation to reduce cognitive dissonance. This might be considered as an initial slight infringement of honesty and its more and more important violation afterwards.

The author cited above also makes reference to another known saying “when in Rome do as the Romans do”. Many experiments of social psychology show the power of the environment influence on an individual [14]. In sports activity the influence and pressure exerted on an individual is commonly known, particularly in sport ensembles where an integrated activity based on social decentration arises. It is manifested by resignation from one’s own ambition in favour of the ensemble. In the case of sport corruption such a community life may lead to misconditioned solidarity. Such an effect is intensified by the fact that a sport situation is the so-called strong situation, i.e. distinguished by permanent and repeatable rules [19], thus being conducive to irregular connections, friend groups and illegal arrangements. In result the sport environment becomes a hermetic system that hardly accepts outsiders distinguished by different thinking [20]. Hence, in order to be promoted and to achieve the expected benefits one must adopt the values and style characteristic of the environment, which unfortunately often includes corruption practices too.

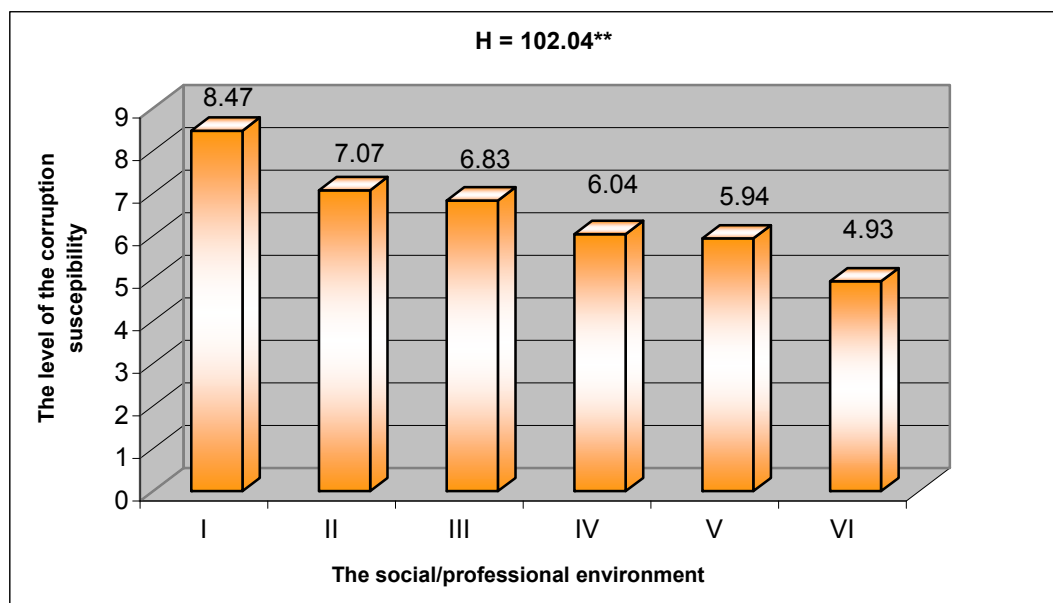
### **From the Research Front**

The above presented theoretical analysis of selected psycho-social aspects of sport corruption may incline to an attempt of empirical verification of some of them. Such research has been conducted, and its results are presented below.

Among the controlled aspects there are, among others, problems of corruption susceptibility of the sport environment against a background of the other social environments, differentiation of corruption among various sport disciplines and kinds of sport, and significance of selected factors conducive to corruption in sport. Moreover, the data are presented that depict significance of particular dimensions of a competitive sport situation with respect to the level of sport corruption and differentiation of susceptibility to corruptive behaviours in various groups of sports people.

The studies have been carried out with the method of competent judges. The group of the judges included 66 persons, among them students of extramural courses and academic teachers of the University of Physical Education.

Let us begin the discussion of the collected results with evaluation of corruption susceptibility of the sport environment against a background of other professional environments. The relevant data are shown in Fig. 1.

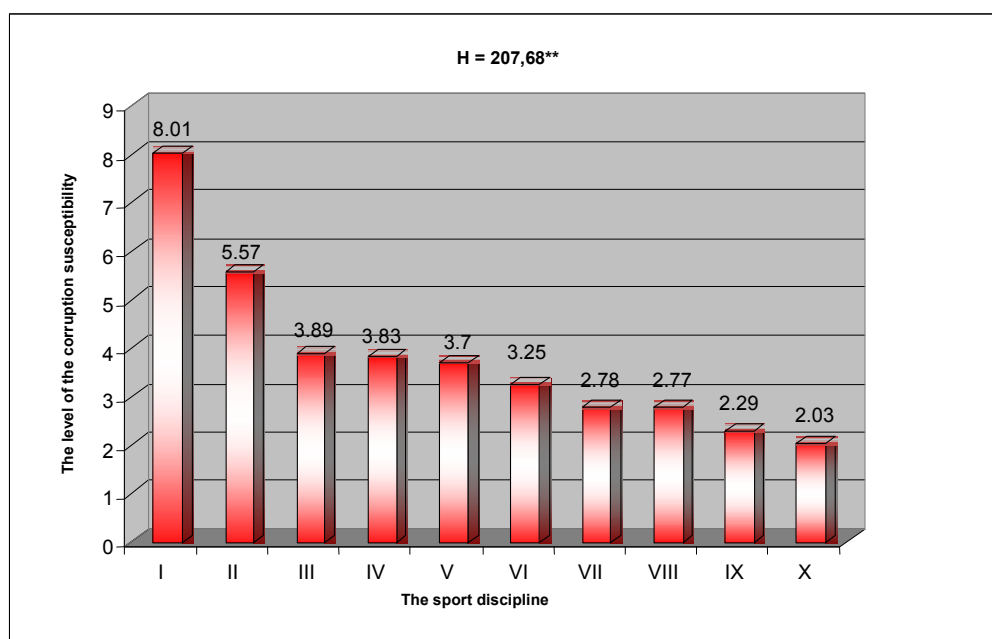


I – the political environment  
 II – the medical environment  
 III – the juridical environment  
 IV – the sport environment  
 V – the clerical environment  
 VI – the economic-business environment

Fig. 1. Corruption susceptibility in terms of the social/professional environment

As it can be seen the sport environment, in compliance with the opinion of the inquired people, does not belong to the most susceptible to corruption. The results collected for the political, medical, and clerical environments exceed the data obtained for the sport one. Such a condition may be considered as comparable to the data presented by Kojder [7].

Distribution of the corruption susceptibility level among particular sport disciplines is shown in Fig. 2.

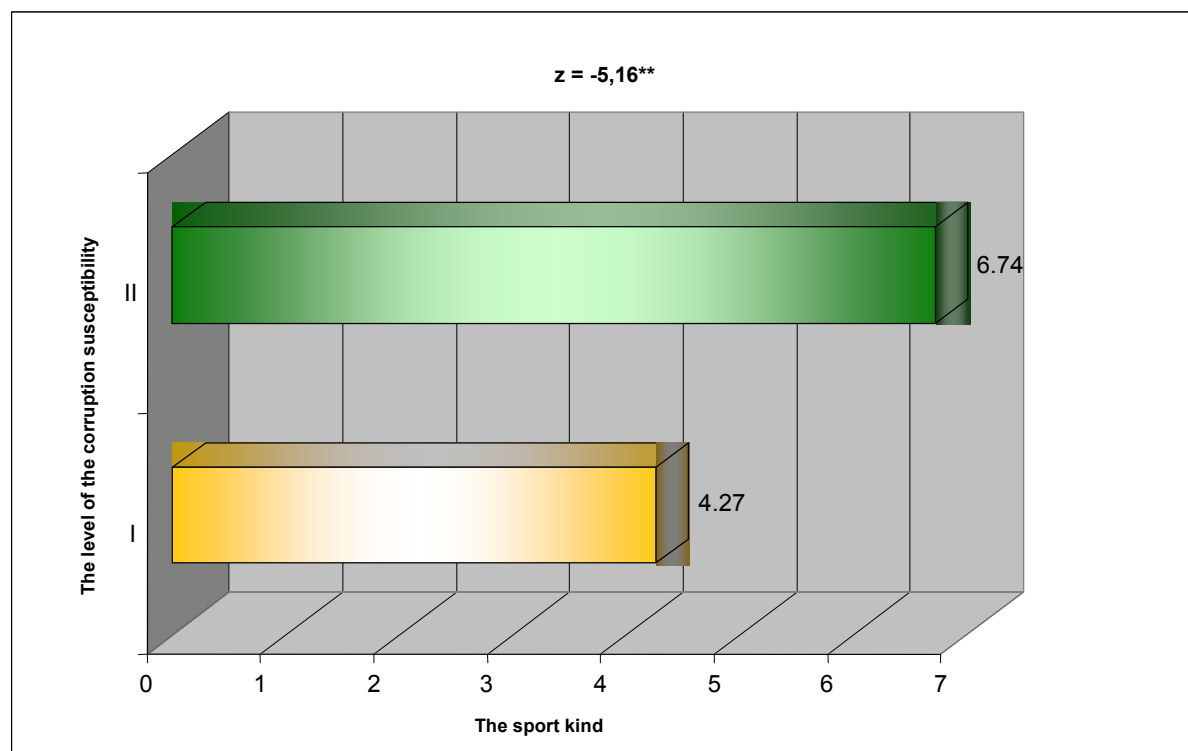


I – football  
 III – basketball  
 II – boxing  
 IV – cycling  
 V – handball  
 VI – others (acrobatics, hockey, volleyball)  
 VII – winter sports  
 VIII – athletics  
 X – swimming  
 IX – tennis

Fig. 2. Corruption susceptibility in terms of the sport discipline



According to a common social judgment, the highest level of corruption susceptibility is assigned to football that predominates the other sport disciplines in this disgraceful field. The meaning of the difference may be depicted by high variability of the tested feature ( $H=207.7^{**}$ ). The other disciplines of high evaluation of corruption susceptibility are boxing and basketball. The lowest susceptibility levels are assigned to athletics and tennis. It should be noticed that the collective disciplines are particularly susceptible to corruption (Fig. 3). The difference between them and individual sport disciplines is statistically significant ( $z = -5.16^{**}$ ).

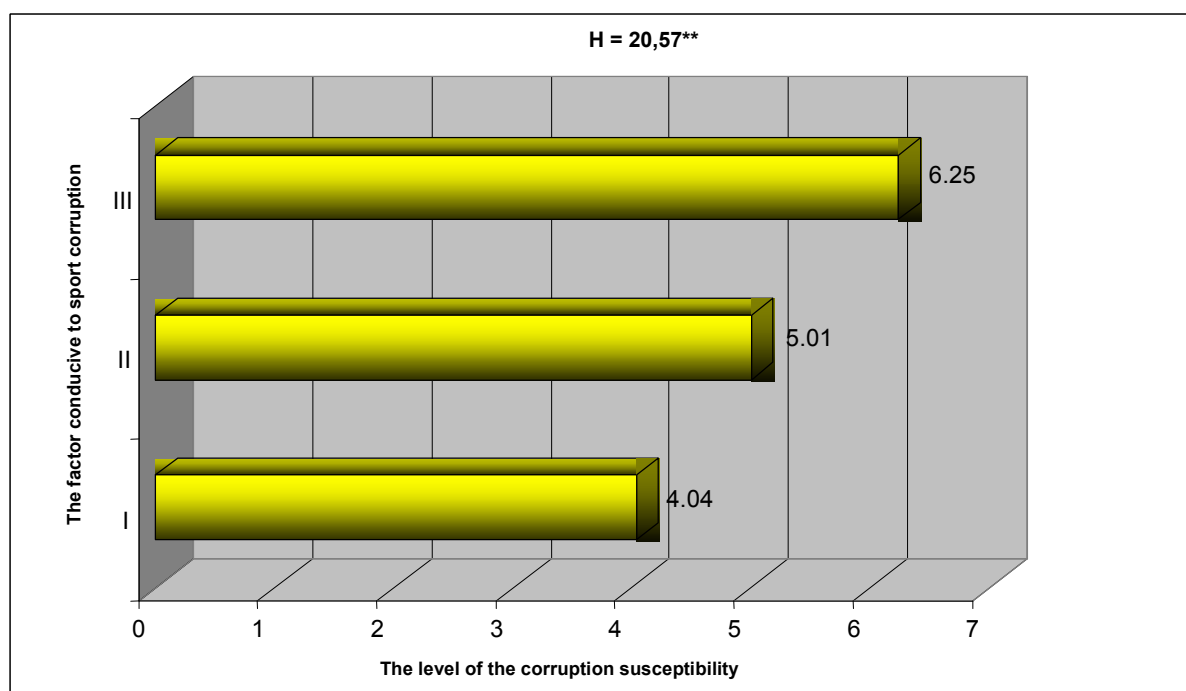


I – individual sport disciplines

II – collective sport disciplines

Fig. 3. Corruption susceptibility in individual and collective sport disciplines  $z = -5.16^{**}$

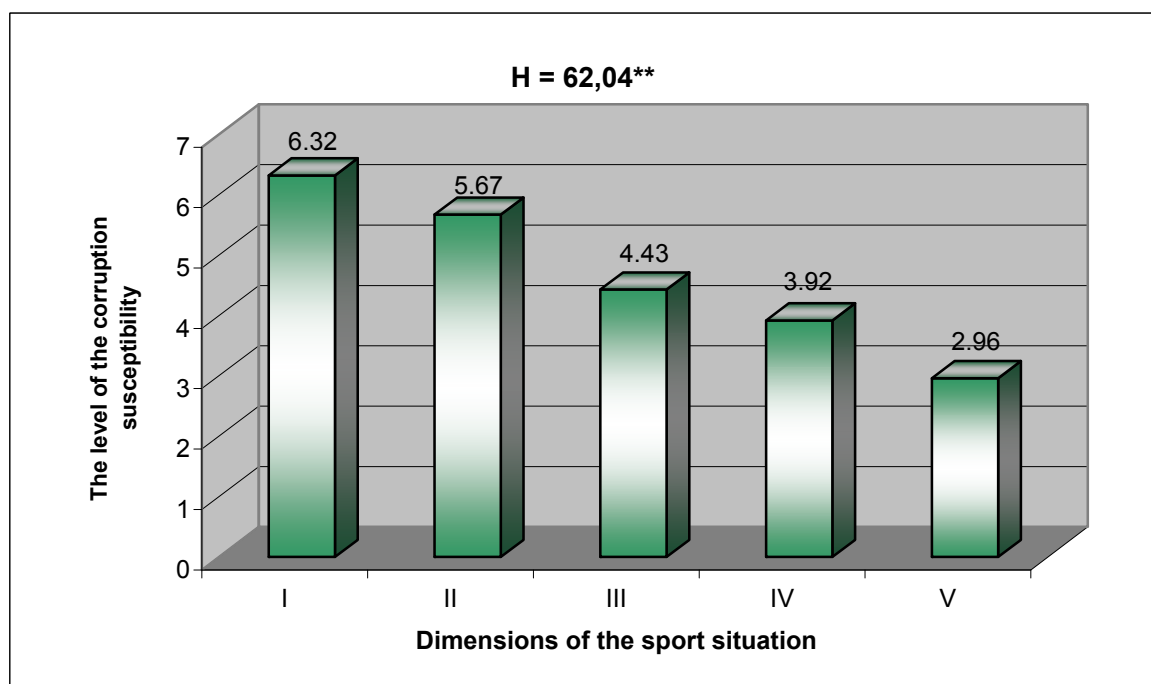
The investigated people have been inquired for the meaning for corruption susceptibility of such significant factors of the reality of present day competitive sports as its organization system, the sphere of ideas and values of the present day sports, and individual features of sports people. It was found (Fig. 4) that sports people's individual features have been considered as the most decisive for sport corruption. The next factor was the sport organization system, while the sphere of sport ideas and values was considered as the slightest reason for it.



I – the system of sport ideas and values II – the organization system III – sport people's individual features

Fig. 4. The factors conducive to sport corruption

An analysis of the dimensions of a competitive sport situation, taking into account their corruptive meaning (Fig. 5), enabled stating that sport corruption is caused to the highest degree by the pressure of social receipt, the requirement of maximization and the need of competing. It may be considered that such an approach to corruption conditions is related to the former analysis of the prototype of a competitive sport situation.



I – pressure of social receipt

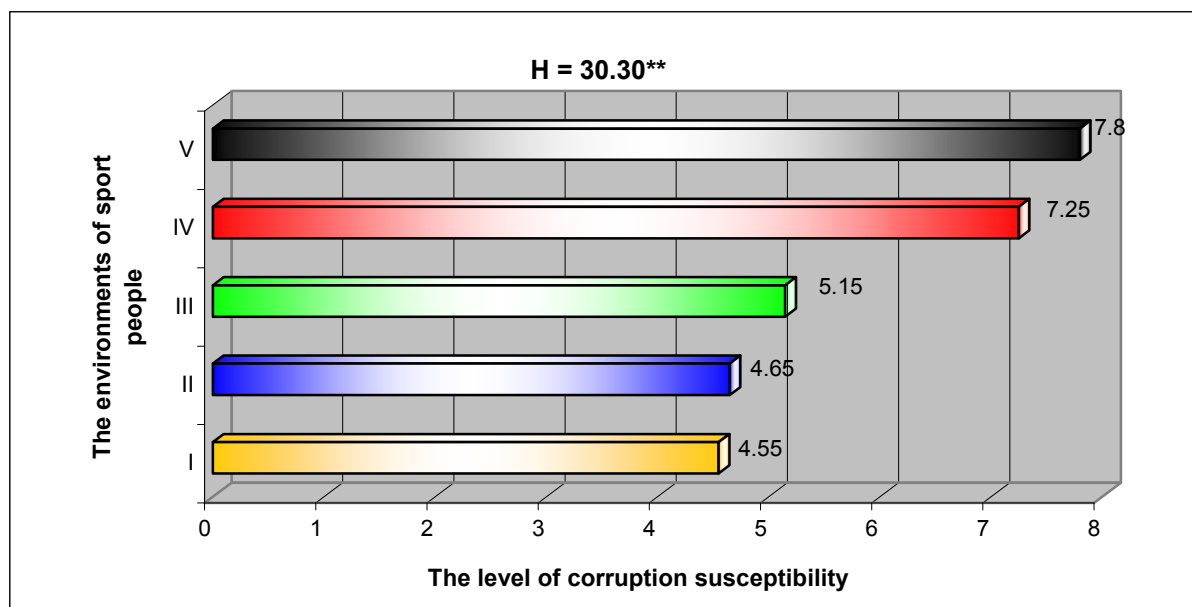
II – requirement of action maximization

III – competition

IV – training duration and difficulty

V – intensive motor activity

Fig. 5. Dimensions of the sport situation promoting corruption in sport

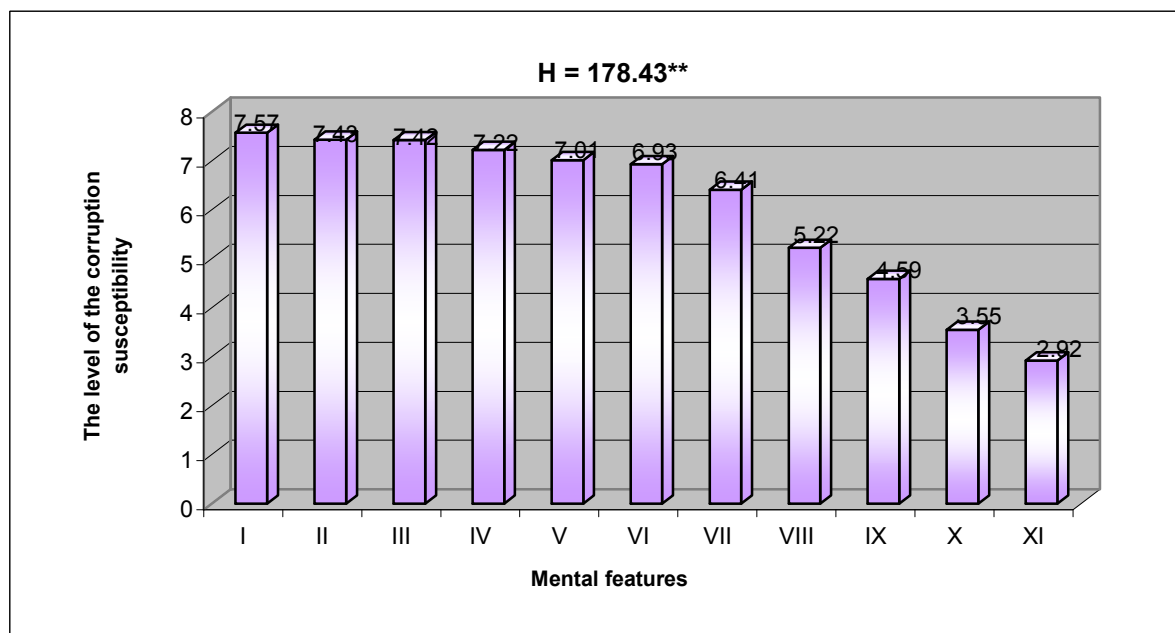


I – competitors II – coaches III – sponsors IV – sport activists V – judges

Fig. 6. Susceptibility to corruption in selected environment of the sports people

The meaning of the “human factor” for sport corruption has been discussed above. It is illustrated in Fig. 6. It presents an appraisal of corruption susceptibility levels of particular environments of sports people. At the foremost position in this negative classification there are sport judges, further positions belonging to activists and sponsors. The most moderate evaluation is assigned to coaches and competitors. Such a condition is confirmed by some available opinion sources related to the subject [20, 11].

The last among the considered questions is related to selected mental features of the sport people that are conducive to corruption. The relevant data are shown in Fig. 7.



I – eager for sport success  
II – eager for success in life  
III – desire of easy living  
IV – desire of avoiding life defeats

V – compliance with illegal arrangements  
VI – desire for avoiding sport defeat  
VII – conviction that sport should give benefits  
VIII – unconcerned morality in sport

IX – relativism in sport fair-play ethics  
X – the lack of knowledge on sports ethics rules  
XI – the lack of knowledge on sports law rules

Fig. 7. Mental features of sports people that are conducive to corruption

Results presented in Fig. 7 allow stating that a higher level of sport corruption susceptibility is promoted by individual eagerness for sport and life success, the desire of easy living and avoiding life defeats, and compliance with illegal arrangements. The lack of knowledge on the sports law and fair-play ethics rules affects the corruption susceptibility level to a less degree. Such a result may give evidence of predomination of the emotional-motivational over the cognitive factor in evolution of the corruption attitude in sports. Hence, the collected data may indicate the priority of educational action as more efficient in preventing the problem. In result one might say that rather the emotional-motivational than the knowledge sphere should be considered as a focus of possible interaction. To summarize let us formulate several general conclusions.

## Conclusions

Specific situational dimensions arising in competitive sport may offer facilities for sport corruption.

The level of inclination to corruption is significantly differentiated among particular sport kinds and disciplines.

Among the basic individual features of sports people that might promote the corruptive behaviour one may mention the need of success, the desire of easy living and a fear of sports and life defeats.

Any attempts of an efficient diagnosis and prevention of the phenomenon of corruption in sport besides penalization should be made with consideration of the psycho-social aspects.

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