

The purpose of this presentation is to explore the perceptions of how professional footballers define bullying. More specifically, this presentation seeks to explain what professional footballers perceive bullying to be and to what extent bullying in football differs from teasing, victimisation and banter?

The study's approach was influenced by the transcendental, existential and empirical branches of phenomenology, and focused on the essences of participants' perceptions and experiences. Utilising a similar inductive, themed approach via interviews, has been shown to be effective in exploring the causes of bullying and for ensuring participants are happy to divulge information about bullying in sport.

Guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) individual semi-structured interviews ($M_{Duration} = 44.10$, $SD = 10.81$) were conducted with 18 professional footballers ($M_{Age} = 19.83$, $SD = 2.96$) from three Premier League and Championship football clubs. Due to the need for a homogenous sample within IPA research, a purposive approach was adopted in order to reflect convergence and divergence in the participants' accounts.

The findings from this study revealed several key superordinate themes in relation to bullying such as the 'bullying act' and the 'bully and victim', as well as related superordinate themes such as 'the dividing line', 'the football environment' and 'banter and teasing'.

A phenomenological approach has enabled a more contextual understanding of bullying that has not been possible from previous research methods in sport, whilst providing recommendations for coaches highlighting challenges with identifying this behaviour.