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To what extend the rate of injuries effects the level of national football?

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Objectives: Football is one of the most popular sports activities in Turkey and active number of players and spectators is increasing everyday so does the injuries. The data and statistics about injuries provides important epidemiological information and gives an idea about the level of football of that country. Based on these data a systematic injury prevention strategy can be established. In FIFA World Cup 2002 and in the past UEFA cups, Turkish National Team and first division teams had successful results but from that time there is a significant decrease in our team's performance in last three years. Our primary aim in this study was to take a picture of the injuries in Turkish professional football league and to establish a baseline database to be compared and be used in future and asses the medical part of the setback of our teams performance in last three years to define latest preventative measures.

Methods: A comprehensive injury report form was developed based on UEFA's principles and model. The seasons between 2004 and 2006 in Premiere and second Turkish League was evaluated. The physicians of the participating teams were asked to fill the injury forms and report them. The anthropometrical data, previous medical history, attendance and individual exposure of the player, details of injury is recorded on injury form. The definitions of injury types are taken from a study by Hagglund et al. The incidence of injury was given as injuries per match and training and injuries per 1000 hours.

Results: A total of 779 injuries from 1264 players were reported which is equal to 19.8 injuries per 1000 hours including matches and training. When we categorize the injuries by match and training per 1000 hours it was 17.3 and 21.2 respectively. Non-contact injuries was 69% of all injuries. The re-injury rate was 13.3% and thigh, ankle and knee was common sites involved. We found that nearly 60% of injuries were mild ones resulting absence from football less than one week.

Conclusions: Optimum training programs, upgrading player's heath condition and education about injury prevention and rearranging preventative policies is apart of today's football. The injury report from Turkish elite football is very demanding. This is the first time in literature that the incidence of injury in training is higher than in matches, which clearly indicated a need for correctly designed training programmes and a review of entire training cultures. Different from the literature non-contact injury rate is significantly higher in our study. The high ratio of non-contact injuries suggested a need to upgrade preventive measures. From lessons learned based on the first injury analysis an effective control is initiated and specific endurance and stretching programs, warm up and down exercises and new treatment strategies are discussed intensively and will be applied as soon as possible. Based on these conclusions the set back of our teams' performance could be particularly related with these high rates of injuries and it could be said that level of football of a country is related with injuries rates. We hope this study could play a part in developing our own injury prevention strategy for tomorrow's football. Another analysis will be performed two years later and the results of it and the teams' performance will define whether we are successful or not.