

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPORT ENGAGEMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERFORMANCES OF FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN THE PANDEMIC PERIOD: EXAMPLE OF THE REGIONAL AMATEUR LEAGUE

A RELAÇÃO ENTRE O ENGAJAMENTO ESPORTIVO E OS DESEMPENHOS PSICOLÓGICOS DOS JOGADORES DE FUTEBOL NO PERÍODO PANDÊMICO: EXEMPLO DA LIGA REGIONAL DE AMADORES*

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between sport engagement and psychological performances of football players during the pandemic period. 179 players, who were selected randomly from 758 active players participating in trainings in 30 football teams joining leagues in the 4th region of Turkish Football Federation regional amateur league, participated in the study voluntarily. In the study, as a data collection tool, personal information form, sport engagement and psychological performance scales were used. In order to collect data, the Google Forms platform was preferred in order to maintain social distance during the pandemic period. During the data collection period, information and questionnaires about the study were forwarded to the participants through social networks. SPSS 22 statistical package program was used to analyze the data. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the scores of football players from the scales are presented as $X \pm Sd$. In order to reveal the relationship between the scores obtained from the scales, Pearson product moment correlation analysis (r) was applied. As a result, it was determined that the sport engagement and psychological performance levels of the regional amateur league players participating in the study during the pandemic period were above average. When the sub-dimensions of psychological performance were examined, it was found that they were at the level of special attention. While there was no relationship between sport engagement and psychological performance total score and self-confidence sub-headings, negative correlations were found between negative energy and attention control, and a low level positive correlation was found between the sub-headings of visualization and imagery control, motivation level, positive energy and attitude control. It is thought that this is due to the fact that the pandemic period does not seem to end soon and the league competitions to be played in this period are postponed indefinitely.

Keywords: Pandemic, Football, Sport Engagement, Psychological Performance.

Resumo: O objetivo deste estudo é examinar a relação entre o envolvimento esportivo e os desempenhos psicológicos dos jogadores de futebol durante o período pandêmico. 179 jogadores,

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que foram selecionados aleatoriamente entre 758 jogadores ativos que participaram de treinamentos em 30 times de futebol que se juntaram às ligas da 4ª região da liga regional amadora da Federação Turca de Futebol, participaram do estudo voluntariamente. No estudo, como ferramenta de coleta de dados, foram utilizados formulários de informações pessoais, engajamento esportivo e escalas de desempenho psicológico. A fim de coletar dados, a plataforma Google Forms foi preferida para manter a distância social durante o período pandêmico. Durante o período de coleta de dados, informações e questionários sobre o estudo foram encaminhados aos participantes através de redes sociais. O programa de pacote estatístico SPSS 22 foi usado para analisar os dados. A média aritmética e o desvio padrão das pontuações dos jogadores de futebol das escalas são apresentados como $X \pm Sd$. A fim de revelar a relação entre as pontuações obtidas nas escalas, foi aplicada a análise de correlação de momento do produto Pearson (r). Como resultado, foi determinado que o envolvimento esportivo e os níveis de desempenho psicológico dos jogadores da liga regional amadora que participaram do estudo durante o período pandêmico estavam acima da média. Quando as sub-dimensões de desempenho psicológico foram examinadas, verificou-se que elas estavam no nível de atenção especial. Embora não houvesse relação entre o envolvimento esportivo e a pontuação total do desempenho psicológico e as sub-títulos de autoconfiança, foram encontradas correlações negativas entre energia negativa e controle de atenção, e uma correlação positiva de baixo nível foi encontrada entre as sub-títulos de visualização e controle de imagem, nível de motivação, energia positiva e controle de atitude. Pensa-se que isto se deve ao fato de que o período pandêmico não parece terminar logo e as competições da liga a serem disputadas neste período são adiadas indefinidamente.

Palavras-chave: Pandêmico, Futebol, Engajamento Esportivo, Desempenho Psicológico.

INTRODUCTION

In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, which negatively affected daily life in 2020, states took many restrictive measures, including curfew, and canceled many organizations (Hellewell et al. 2020). As a result of these restrictive measures, sports activities, as well as many sectors, have been negatively affected in many ways. Undoubtedly, it is known that one of the sports branches most affected during the pandemic period is football.

In this context, in the Coordination Meeting on Coronavirus held on 03/19/2020, it was decided that all sports events including football were temporarily postponed to a later date (TFF, 2020a). However, later on, Turkish Football Federation decided to start football matches gradually (TFF, 2020b).

Niemann (2019) stated that football is a sport that requires physical contact and the risk of getting the Covid-19 virus may be higher than other low-contact sports. The fact that the intense pandemic period has not yet ended increases the getting infectious status of football players, and it is thought that the loss of physical and psychological performances of football players will create great pressure on football players, changes their sport engagement and affect their psychological performances.

The concept of engagement of people with physiological and psychological needs (Cüceloğlu, 1992) is thought to have an important place in their feelings, attitudes and behavior towards their work. Engagement has 3 characteristics: Firstly, it is a very strong desire for that thing; secondly, it loses control from time to time, and lastly, it is persistent against the addicted thing (Shaffer et al. 2000). Engagement is also described as a plus condition that occurs with vitality, internalization and devotion (Schaufeli et al. 2002). In the studies on sport engagement, it is seen that sport engagement is defined as enthusiasm, trust, vigor, devotion and similar definitions. (Hodge, Lonsdale, & Jackson, 2007; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Raedeke, 2007; Kelecek, Kara and Aşçı 2017).

As can be understood from these expressions, engagement can be expressed as a phenomenon that is shaped by different mental states and directs the individual to exhibit a certain physical and psychological behavior towards a goal.

Being at a perfect level physically is not enough alone to increase the sportive success to the highest levels. One of the internal factors of athletes is psychological factors. The training that athletes perform as a training process to optimize their physical and mental strength, technical and tactical capacities against physical and psychological loads (Türkyay and Gökbel, 2020), and their psychological preparation for competitions are one of the most important factors for success in sports. The psychological capacity of the athlete should be taken into consideration as much as the physical aspect. Therefore, it can be thought that sport engagement is related to meeting psychological needs before, during and after a sportive performance.

In the literature review made in line with this information, it was seen that many researchers focused on the concepts of sport engagement and psychological performance (Kelecek and et al., 2017; Yamaner and et al, 2019) (Arısoy and Pepe, 2020; Gürer et al., 2018).

As in all sports branches, it is thought that it is important to investigate and determine the status of engagement and psychological performance interaction during the intense pandemic period in football, which is one of the most popular sports branches in the world. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between sport engagement and psychological performances of football players during the pandemic period.

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

In the study, a method for descriptive survey and correlational survey aiming to reveal the current situation was used. Descriptive survey models are a research approach that aims to describe a past or present situation as it exists. On the other hand, correlational survey models are research models aiming at determining the existence and/or degree of co-variation between two or more variables (Karasar, 2004).

Forming Volunteer Groups

The population of the study consists of 179 players, who were selected randomly from 758 active players participating in trainings in 30 football teams joining leagues in the 4th region of Turkish Football Federation regional amateur league.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Football Players

	Variables	N	%
Age	17-21 years	22	12.3
	22-26 years	105	58.7
	27 and over	52	29.1
Education	Secondary education	32	17.9
	Undergraduate	128	71.5
	Postgraduate	19	10.6
Sport Age	1-3 years	14	7.8
	4-6 years	10	5.6
	7-9 years	44	24.6
	10 years and over	111	62.0
Marital Status	Single	159	88.8
	Married	20	11.2

When Table 1 was examined, it was determined that according to age groups of the football players participating in the study, 12.3% of them were 17-21, 58.7% of them were 22-26, and 29.1% of them were 27 and over years old; according to their education level, %17.9 of them had secondary education degree, %71.5 of them had undergraduate degree, and 10.6% of them had postgraduate degree; according to sport age, 7.8% of them had 1-3 years, % 5.6 of them had 4-6 years, 24.6% of them had 7-9 years, and 62.0% of them had 10 and over years.

Data Collection Tools

In order to collect data, the Google Forms platform was preferred in order to maintain social distance during the pandemic period. During the data collection period, information and questionnaires about the study were forwarded to the participants through social networks. As a data collection tool in research, personal information form, sport engagement and psychological performance scale were used.

Personal information form

It contains 4 questions in order to learn the age, educational status, sport age information and marital status of the football players participating in the study.

Sport Engagement Scale (SES):

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) was adapted into Spanish and developed by Gullien and Martinez-Alvarado (2014) for athletes, and its adaptation studies into Turkish culture were done by Sırgancı et al. (2019). It was structured in 15 items and 5-category likert type measuring sport engagement. It was stated that with the scale, the engagement of the athletes can be examined one-dimensionally based on their total score, as well as in three sub-dimensions such as vigor, dedication and absorption. The Cronbach Alpha reliability of the scale was calculated respectively as 0.79, 0.80, 0.82, and 0.91 for the “vigor”, “dedication”, “absorption” sub-dimensions and the whole scale (Sırgancı et al, 2019). In this study, an evaluation was made on the total score.

Psychological Performance Scale

The scale was developed by Loehr J.E. (1982) and its translation into Turkish, reliability and validity studies were done by Erman et al (2002). There are 7 sub-dimensions consisting of 42 questions that aim to measure the level of psychological skills of athletes, including self-confidence, negative energy, attention control, visualization and imagery control, motivation level, positive energy and attitude control. A score of 6-19 from each subtitle is expressed as “special attention”, a score between 20-25 is expressed as “the need for improvement” and a score between 26-30 is expressed as “very good skill”. In other words, as the scores get higher, the performance level gets higher (Loehr, 1982). Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale in the study was found to be .87. Internal consistency coefficient for sub-dimensions was found to be .62 for self-confidence, .47 for

negative energy, .61 for attention control, .55 for visualization and imagery control, .59 for level of motivation, .55 for positive energy and .60 for attitude control (Erman et al., 2002).

Data Analysis

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normality of the data obtained. The skewness and kurtosis distributions according to the statistical periods are given in Table 2.

Table 2. The results of the skewness-kurtosis test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of the scale scores of the football players

The scales	N	Skewnes s	Kurtosi s	Kolmogorov- Smirnov
Sport Engagement Total	179	.213	1.835	.005
Psychological Performance Total	179	.008	-.696	.000
Self-confidence	179	.067	-.780	.001
Negative energy	179	-.045	-.006	.000
Attention control	179	-.797	1.086	.000
Visualization and imagery control	179	.991	1.500	.000
Level of motivation	179	.368	-.391	.000
Positive energy	179	.310	-.315	.000
Attitude control	179	.385	.140	.000

When the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results were examined, it was found that the deviations from normality of football players' sport engagement, subtitles of the psychological performance scale and total scores were found to be significant ($p < 0,05$) (Table. 2). In the literature, while George and Mallery (2016) explained that the values of skewness and kurtosis between ± 1 are ideally also acceptable, Demir et al. (2016) stated that when these values are in the ± 2 range, this is a suitable situation in terms of normality. In line with this information, parametric statistical analysis tests were used. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the scores of the participants from the scales were presented as

$X \pm Sd$. In order to reveal the relationship between the scores obtained from the scales, Pearson product moments correlation analysis (r) was applied.

FINDINGS

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the scores the players got from the scales

The scales	N	Min	Max	X±SD
Sport Engagement Total	179	15.00	75.00	47.56±9.01
Psychological Performance Total	179	74.00	158.00	113.58±17.91
Self-confidence	179	7.00	14.88±4.39	14.88 ± 4.39
Negative energy	179	10.00	17.27±3.02	17.27 ± 3.02
Attention control	179	10.00	18.39±3.09	18.39 ± 3.09
Visualization and imagery control	179	6.00	15.95±4.39	15.95 ± 4.39
Level of motivation	179	8.00	16.15±4.19	16.15 ± 4.19
Positive energy	179	8.00	15.63±4.31	15.63 ± 4.31
Attitude control	179	6.00	15.29±4.65	15.29 ± 4.65

The average of the sport engagement of the football players participating in the study was found to be 47.56±9.01. When the sub-dimensions of the psychological performance scale were examined, it was determined that self-confidence was 14.88±4.39, negative energy was 17.27±3.02, attention control was 18.39±3.09, visualization and imagery control was 15.95±4.39, motivation level was 16.15±4.19, positive energy was 15.63±4.31, attitude control was 15.29±4.65 and the total level of psychological performance was 113.58±17.91 (Table 3).

Table 4. The relationship between football players' sport engagement and their psychological performance

The scales		Psychological Performance	Self-confidence	Negative Energy	Attention Control	Visualization and Imagery	Motivation	Positive Energy	Attitude Control
Sport Engagement Total	r	.106	.066	-.455**	-.493**	.385**	.227**	.258**	.161*
	p	.158	.381	.000	.000	.000	.002	.000	.031
	n	179	179	179	179	179	179	179	179

** p<0.001 * p<0.005

In table 4, while no relation was determined between the players' sport engagement, psychological performance total score ($r=.106$, $p=.158$) and self-confidence ($r=.066$, $p=.381$), which is from psychological performance subtitles, low level of negative correlation between negative energy ($r= -.455$, $p=.000$) and attention control ($r= -.493$, $p=.000$), and a low level of positive correlation was determined between visualization and imagery control ($r=.385$, $p=.000$), motivation level ($r=.227$, $p=.002$), positive energy ($r=.258$, $p=.000$) and attitude control scores ($r=.161$, $p=.031$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As the football was exposed to some restrictions during pandemic period in our country, trainings and competitions could not be held for a certain period of time, so it is thought that the quality of football decreased and people's views on football changed. It is thought that there were great changes in factors such as work ethic, sports engagement and athlete psychology among football players during this period.

In line with the findings obtained from football players; when Table 3 was examined, it was determined that the level of sport engagement of the players participating in the study was above average. In the literature review made by the researchers, Siyahtaş et al, (2020) reported that athletes engaged in individual and team sports have a high level of sport engagement. Similarly, according to Kelecek and Göktürk (2017) female footballers, according to Kelecek and Koruç (2018) football players, according to Sivrikaya and Biricik

(2019) elite skiers and according to Yamaner et al, (2019) sports science students who play football have a high level of sport engagement. It is thought that the above average level of sport engagement of the players participating in this study is due to the decrease in the energy and excitement they felt in their sports life due to both moral and financial difficulties they experienced during the pandemic period.

Again, it was determined that the sub-dimensions of the psychological performance level totals of the football players participating in the study were above the average and its sub-dimensions were at the level of special attention (Table 3). In the literature review made by the researchers, Arisoy et al. (2020) found that before returning to football in the Covid 19 priod, the psychological performances of football players were high, negative energy, one of the sub-dimensions, was at the level of special attention, and the other sub-dimensions were at the level of need for development. Karataş (2016) found in his study that the psychological performance levels of teachers working in special education schools are at medium level. In the study conducted by Yalçın (2013) on primary school teachers, it was found that the general psychological performance levels of the teachers were at a good level. In his study, Sucan (2012) found that negative energy and attention control, which are sub-dimensions of individual and team athletes' psychological performance, were at the level of special attention, and the other sub-dimensions were at the level of need for development. It is thought that the situation obtained in this study is due to the fact that the fear of getting pandemic can affect both physical and psychological performances of the athletes negatively in this epidemic, which could not be controlled during the pandemic period,

In Table 4, while there was no relationship between sport engagement and psychological performance total score and the sub-heading of self-confidence, negative correlation was found between negative energy and attention control, and a low level positive correlation was found between the sub-headings of visualization and imagery control, motivation level, positive energy and attitude control.

In the literature review made by the researchers; a low level of negative correlation between sport engagement and burnout (Kelecek and Göktürk 2017), a high level of positive correlation between sport engagement and mental toughness (Peke, 2020). In addition, a moderately positive correlation was reported between psychological performance and anxiety (Arisoy and Pepe, 2020), decision-making and personality traits (Güvendi et al, 2018), life satisfaction (Sucan, 2012) and burnout (Tekin, 2011).

Psychological factors affecting performance consists of characteristics such as motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, personality, attention, concentration, assertiveness,

determination, persistence, and self-control (Wittig Arno, 1984). The athlete's personality, goals, self-confidence, motivation and ability to cope with stress, anxiety level, attention, concentration, assertiveness, determination, are psychological factors that affect auto-control performance. According to the studies, reasons such as excessive tension, insufficient concentration, insufficient motivation, negative thoughts, insufficient self-confidence and inability of the athlete to cope with stress negatively affect the performance (Ekstrand et al, 2003).

Despite the negative feelings and thoughts of football players due to the pandemic, their sport engagement with the hope that the competitions will start can be considered as an indicator that they are still experiencing the situations like visualization and imagery, motivation, positive energy and attitude control. In addition, it is thought that the negative relationship between football players' sport engagement and negative energy and attention control is due to the lack of necessary precautions during training in the football sport they are dealing with and the risk of being infected at any time because it is a contact sport, and this negatively affects their psychological performance.

As a result, it was determined that the sport engagement and psychological performance levels of the regional amateur league players participating in the study during the pandemic period were above average. When the sub-dimensions of psychological performance were examined, it was found that it was at the level of special attention. While there was no relationship between sport engagement and psychological performance total score and self-confidence sub-dimensions, negative correlations were found between negative energy and attention control, and a low level positive correlation was found between the sub-dimensions of visualization and imagery control, motivation level, positive energy and attitude control. It is thought that this situation is due to the fact that the pandemic period does not seem to end soon and the league competitions to be played in this period are postponed indefinitely.

SUGGESTIONS

During the pandemic period:

- Athletes can be supported by working with sports psychologists to increase the success of athletes and to increase their psychological performance.
- Players in larger sample groups can be included in the study and their sport engagement and their psychological performance levels can be examined.

- Sport engagement and psychological performances of football players in professional football teams can be examined.
- Sport engagement and psychological performance levels of athletes interested in other team sports can be examined.
- Sport engagement and psychological performance levels of female footballers can be examined.

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