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ARAŞTIRMA

Açık Erişim

The Association Between Sports Character and Mental Well-Being

Sportif Karakter ve Mental İyi Hali Arasındaki İlişki

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ABSTRACT

This research was executed in order to reveal the relationship between the sportive character and mental well-being of students studying in sports sciences. The research was developed in compliance with the correlation survey and causal comparative models. The obtained data were reached by convenience sampling method. Participants consist of 299 athlete students (n = 100 female; n = 199 male), studying at Artvin Çoruh University, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, and Kütahya Dumlupınar University. The "Sports Character Scale", which was adapted into Turkish, and the "Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale", which was developed to evaluate the well-being of athletes, were used to gather data in the study. In the analysis of the data, first and foremost, the link between the character of the athlete and mental well-being was examined by network analysis. In addition, multiple regression analyses were conducted to ascertain the predictive role of sports character on mental well-being. At the conclusion of the analysis of the data, integrity and sportspersonship significantly predicted mental well-being positively and antisocial attitude negatively. These variables explain approximately 24% of the total variance of mental well-being. On the other hand, compassion and fairness included in the regression were not predicted significantly. In general terms, it can be stated that sports character is an important component of mental well-being. In future research, the explanation of the irrelevant results in the link between sports character and mental well-being should be examined thoroughly.

Article Information

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ÖZET

Bu araştırma spor bilimlerinde okuyan öğrencilerin sportif karakteri ile mental iyilik hali arasındaki ilişkiyi ortaya koymak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırma ilişkisel tarama ve nedensel karşılaştırma modeline göre desenlenmiştir. Elde edilen verilere uygun örnekleme yöntemiyle ulaşılmıştır. Katılımcılar Artvin Çoruh Üniversitesi, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım Üniversitesi ve Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören 299 sporcu (n=100 kadın; n=199 erkek) öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplamak için Türkçe'ye uyarlaması yapılan "Sports Character Scale" ile sporcuların iyi oluş düzeylerini ölçmek amacıyla geliştirilen "Warwick-Edinburgh Mental İyi Oluş Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde öncelikle Sporcu karakteri ile mental iyi oluş arasındaki ilişki network analizi ile incelenmiştir. Ayrıca sporcu karakterinin mental iyi oluş üzerindeki yordayıcı rolünü belirlemek için çoklu regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Verilerin analizi sonunda Mental wellbeing'i; integrity ve sportspersonship pozitif yönde ve antisocial attitude ise negatif yönde anlamlı yordamaktadır. Bu değişkenler mental wellbeing toplam varyansının yaklaşık %24'ünü açıklamaktadır. Diğer taraftan, regresyona dâhil edilen compassion ve fairness ise anlamlı yordamamaktadır. Genel itibarı ile sportif karakterin mental iyi oluş için önemli bir faktör olduğu belirtilebilir. Sonraki araştırmalarda sports character ve mental wellbeing arasındaki ilişkide anlamsız çıkan sonuçların nedenleri detaylı bir şekilde incelenmelidir.

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INTRODUCTION

Well-being is one of the basic concepts in the positive psychology approach that focuses on the positive aspects of human nature. Researchers who adopt the positive psychology approach consider well-being from different perspectives. One of these perspectives is the concept of subjective well-being, which considers well-being as a combination of the overall satisfaction of individuals with life, as well as the fact that the positive emotions experienced by the individual are more than negative ones (Diener, 2000). On the other hand, psychological well-being, which approaches well-being from a different perspective, addresses well-being in terms of individuals living a functional life beyond just being satisfied with their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Ryff, 1995). As a matter of fact, researchers criticized the concept of subjective well-being as being pleasure-oriented and proposed the concept of psychological well-being and stated that psychological well-being is a level of well-being beyond happiness (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Therefore, it has been observed that both well-being concepts are incomplete at some point. From this point of view, the concept of mental well-being has emerged to eliminate deficiencies.

Mental well-being has a structure that combines subjective and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2002). Therefore, mental well-being emphasizes the importance of having functional lives that individuals can enjoy on the road to happiness. In this context, mental well-being represents the positive perception of individuals regarding themselves, developing safe and warm relationships with others, being satisfied with themselves even if they are aware of their own limitations, acting autonomously and independently, shaping the environment to provide their needs and wishes, having a purpose and meaning in life, being aware of their capacity, and striving to develop this capacity (Keyes et al., 2002). Furthermore, the World Health Organization (2004) defines mental well-being as the ability of individuals to be productive and useful in business life, to be aware of their own skills, to overcome the stressful situations they face by making the right decisions, and to contribute society by fulfilling their social duties. As it can be understood from the definition, it is important for individuals to build up their strengths as well as cope with stressful situations in life. In this direction, individuals with high mental well-being levels strive to develop their own capacities, lead a purposeful and meaningful life, perceive themselves positively, have safe and close interpersonal relationships, and adapt to the environment to provide their own needs (Kjeldal, 2015). For these reasons, it is pointed out that mental well-being is more than the absence of symptoms and disorders of mental illness (Cates et al., 2015). Moreover, mental well-being appears to be associated with many psychologically positive traits such as empathy (Shanafelt et al., 2005), optimism (Conversano et al., 2010), and self-esteem (Makikangas & Kinnunen, 2003). In line with this information, it can be said that athletes with high mental well-being have many psychologically compatible features and effective stress coping skills both in their inner world and in their relationships with their teammates, coaches, competitors, and social environment.

The beneficial role of physical exercise has been confirmed by the results of various research studies. It is also inevitable that sport has a positive impact on mental well-being. It is acknowledged that sport has a preventive effect on physical and psychological problems and strengthens health and mental well-being (Cramer et al., 1991; Lubans et al., 2016; Szabo, 2003). On the other hand, being able to perform high performances in sports usually requires more training and if these structures are weak, particularly in young athletes, it can lead to poor academic performance, insufficient sleep, social isolation, more stress, increased anxiety, reduced time spent with family, and multiple stress factors that can increase the risk of burnout (Brenner et al., 2019) and as a result, mental well-being may be adversely affected.

At the present time, it is also acknowledged that character is a sophisticated and versatile concept. In fact, this concept is sometimes even used synonymously with the word personality (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). According to Jakubowski (2013), character means "carving, processing", which takes its basic meaning from the Greek basis word "charassein", and is expressed as truth, unconditional acceptance. According to the Turkish Language Association (2022), character is defined as the unique structure of an individual, the main symptom that distinguishes them from others, and the superior main feature, self-structure that determines the behavior patterns. According to Stolls and Keller (2000), character is the behavioral form of concepts such as demonstrating the right behavior and humanity in relation to our virtues.

A number of studies in sports have conceptualized character from a moral perspective. For example, Arnold (1999) stated that moral character includes a life in harmony with virtues such as justice, honesty and compassion. Shields and Bredemeier (1995) defined character in sports as having personal virtues such as fairness, compassion, integrity, and sportspersonship. In addition, the excessive desire or ambition to win, which is created or exists for various reasons in the personality of the athlete, not only causes the athlete to move away from sports morality (Türksoy-Işım et al., 2019) but also has an important effect on the character, which is defined as the attitudes and behaviors that people develop in order to hold on to life, and as the qualities that make an individual different from the other (Cevizci, 2003).

Sports or physical activity is an area that constantly emphasizes its favorable effects on societies and character. The idea that competitive sports improve character in a positive way has been going on since Ancient Greece (Bredemeier & Shields, 2006). In modern history, the idea that sport builds character comes from 19th century England. In 19th century England, playgrounds were believed to be the training ground for the discipline essential to produce leaders in adulthood, and that physical activity was a crucial social experience influencing behavior and values. The fundamental virtue that the British endeavored to instill in young people through sports was the sense of integrity and justice. It was thought that following the rules, respecting the opponent, not cheating, and learning how to be a good winner and loser could help with good character development (Robbins, 1996; aktaran İmamlı & Ünver, 2018). However, when it comes to the individual decision-making process is, a number of moral deficiencies and negative situations related to the character are also observed in this area. Some studies claim that the changes that sport creates in character are positive, while others argue that these effects may be adverse (Josephine Institute Center for Sports Ethics [JICSE], 2006). For instance, it brings about anti-social behaviours such as match-fixing, racism, illegal substance abuse, etc., and moral problems arise when the motivation to win is involved (Jang, 2013). In addition, according to Kleiber and Roberts (1981), sport is accepted as a medium for learning values such as sportspersonship, cooperation with negotiation and resolving moral conflicts, teammates, teamwork, fairness, team loyalty, submission r, and esponsibility for the greater good (Jang, 2013). In addition, British Doctor Michael Turner points out that 75% of the athletes in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics consumed doping (Tarakçıoğlu & Doğan, 2013). Ekici (2013) remarks to the significance of the situation with the events that took place in different dates and countries in his study on the problem of match-fixing, which is one of the issues that arise in sports fields and that includes people from almost all walks of life and that leads to the occurrence of large illegal lobbying. It has been observed that sports can have many positive and negative effects on character structure. However, the circumstances in which the individual experiences whether the sport will have a positive or negative effect on the character are shaped in the shadow of individual factors. Nevertheless, the

popular view is that sports build or support character (Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001; Sage & Kavussanu, 2007).

The sports character consists of a series of distinguishable components. It is probably impossible to have a complete list of these components, as each psychological quality, capacity, or process can influence moral responsibilities and behavior of a player. However, it is relatively easy to identify a number of apparent and significant components of character from a sporting point of view. It is aimed to draw the attention of trainers, families and athletes by examining the researches made for planning or revisions on the participation of the youth in sports with the trainer and parent training programs under five subdimensions such as fairness, anti-social attitude, sportspersonship, justice, and integrity (Jang, 2013). Among these subtopics, fairness is the attitude that the athletes should behave equally according to the rules of the game and adhere to these rules (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Secondly, antisocial attitude is defined as “behavior intended to harm or disadvantage another individual” (Kavussanu, 2006). Thirdly, sportspersonship is one of the character traits and consists of knowing the rules and standards of behavior in sport (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995), it is about choosing the moral attitudes when competing. Sportsmanship includes etiquette such as winning with courtesy, losing with dignity, and being polite to opponents and referees (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Fourthly, justice involves empathizing or feeling towards others and is explained by adhering to the rules of the game and the spirit of the rules while competing (Hoffman, 2000; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Finally, integrity is synonymous with behaviorally satisfying ethical intentions. An attitude of integrity, or the act of implementation, is a quality of character that is clearly related to sports and such actions are characterized by individuals who behave according to their own beliefs, even if they are considered negatively by coaches, teammates, or fans (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995).

Therefore, the character of the athlete is also shaped by values such as being fair, honest, social, and compassionate due to the large audience they are in contact with, and while the high level of these values will help to fight the problems that may arise in the sports fields, the beginning of the professionalization process or the long sports life to progress regularly and efficiently, it also strengthens the assumption that it can also affect well-being positively, otherwise, it will cause negative results.

In sports life, it is substantial for the development and performance of athletes to clarify the interaction between the character structure of the athletes and their mental well-being. When the literature is examined, there is not any scientific research has been found that directly reveals the relationship between athlete character and mental well-being. In conclusion, this study aims to examine the relationships between athlete character and mental well-being in university students.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and ninety-nine university students ($n = 100$ female, 33.4%; $n = 199$ male, 66.6%) studying in the sports science departments of three public universities (Artvin Çoruh University, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, and Kütahya Dumlupınar University) in the 2020-2021 academic year participated in the research. The ages of participants varied from 18 to 32 with a mean age of 21.72 years ($sd=2.02$). 57 (19.1%) of the participants were in the first year, 66 (22.1%) were in the second year, 97 (32.4%) were in the third year, and 79 (26.4%) were senior students.

Ethical Statements

Prior to the start of the study, permission to conduct research was obtained from Artvin Coruh University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Date: 26.08.2020, number: E.8669).

Data Collection Tools

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale. Developed by Tennant et al. (2007) to measure the mental well-being of individuals in England, the scale, which adapted into Turkish by Keldal (2015), consists of 14 items and has a 5-point Likert-type answer key. The total internal consistency coefficient of the one-dimensional scale is ,89 of the Turkish version. The minimum score can be obtained from the scale is 14, while the maximum is 70. The scale is scored as 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=agree, 5=totally agree. All items of the scale are positive. High scores on the scale indicate high mental (psychological) well-being. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was calculated from the data obtained from 348 people and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .89. The test reliability of the scale was conducted on 124 participants and the correlation coefficient was found to be .83.

Sports Character Scale. The personal information form developed by Jang (2013), adapted into Turkish by Görgüt and Tuncel (2017), and prepared by the researchers was used as a data collection tool in the study. Consisting of 27 items, the Sports Character Scale includes five sub-dimensions: integrity, anti-social, compassion, sportspersonship, and justice. A five-point Likert-type rating was used in the scale, which was classified as “Totally Agree” (5), “Agree” (4), “Partly Agree” (3), “Disagree” (2), “Strongly Disagree” (1). The total item correlation values of the scale vary between .33 and .67. It was determined that Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients of the sub-dimensions were 0.81 for integrity, 0.78 for anti-social, 0.76 for compassion, 0.78 for sportspersonship, and 0.84 for the justice.

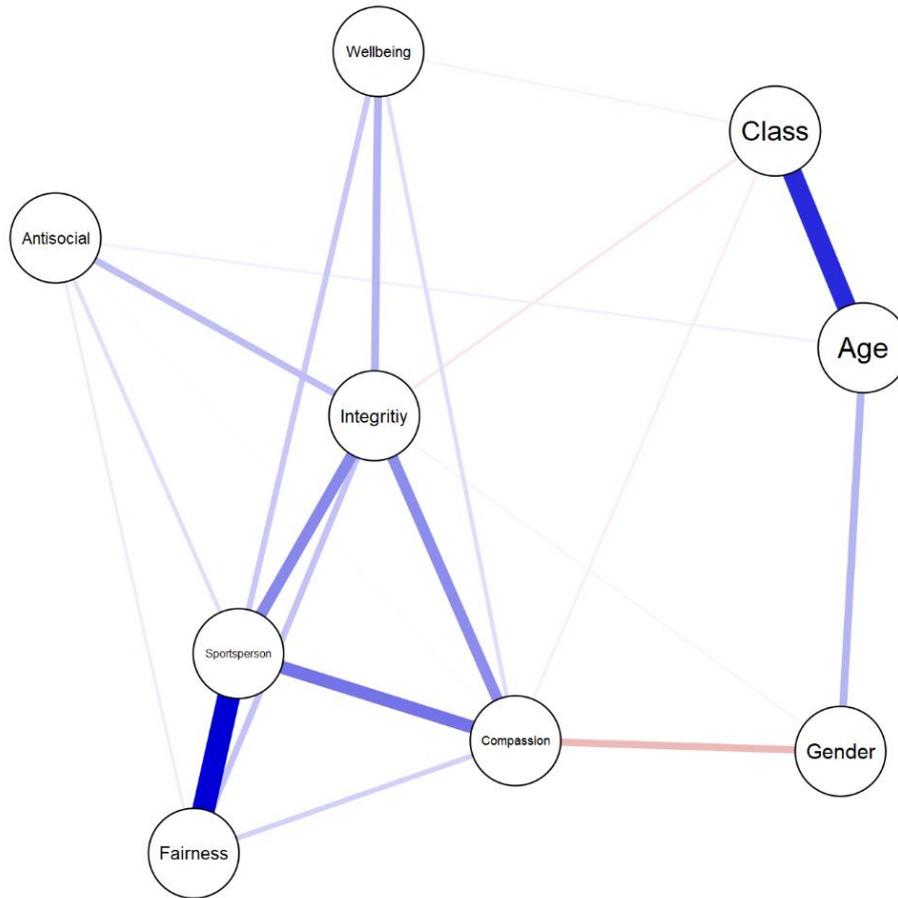
Procedure

The sampling was done according to the convenience sampling approach. No incentives were given and voluntary participation was emphasized. Data were collected online and only volunteers were asked to participate. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. The relationship between sportive character and mental well-being was analyzed by network analysis. In addition, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive role of sports character on mental well-being.

RESULTS

First and foremost, network analysis was executed in the study to illustrate the link between variables. The findings are presented in Figure 1.

As it can be seen in Figure 1, mental well-being has the strongest relationship with integrity. It is also understood that it has relations with sportspersonship and compassion. It can be stated that their relations with other dimensions are weak.



Regression Analyses

First of all, the assumptions of multiple regression analyzes were examined. The normal distribution of the variables was checked with skewness and kurtosis values. The skewness values range from -.88 to .04 and the kurtosis values range from -1.28 to .40. According to these values, the data can be considered as normally distributed. Multiple regression analyzes were performed with mental well-being as the dependent variable and sports character dimensions as the independent variable (Table 1).

Tablo 1. Summary of multiple regression analysis for variable predicting mental wellbeing

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE_B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i> ₍₅₋₂₉₈₎
Integrity	.330	.095	.265	3.488**		
Antisocial	-.205	.081	-.139	-2.544*		
Compassion	.172	.136	.095	1.268	.239	18.45**
Sportspersonship	.645	.280	.234	2.303*		
Fairness	-.072	.428	-.015	-.168		

Not: * *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01, dependent variable = mental wellbeing

When Table 1 is examined, it is observed that the multiple regression model established for the prediction of mental well-being of sportive character is significant, [*F* (5,298) = 18.45, *p* < .01]. Integrity (β = .265, *p* < .01) and sportspersonship (β = .234, *p* < .05) predicted mental well-being positively and antisocial

attitude ($\beta = -.139, p < .05$) predicted negatively. These variables explain approximately 24% of the total variance of mental well-being. Compassion and fairness included in the regression were not predicted significantly.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to clarify the relationship between sportive character and mental well-being. It is discussed in line with the results presented below. In the study, the link between the sportive characters and mental well-being of university students studying in sports sciences was examined. According to the findings, it was unearthed that the model established for the prediction of mental well-being of sportive character is significant. Integrity and sportspersonship predicted mental well-being positively and antisocial attitude predicted negatively. These variables explain approximately 24% of the total variance of mental well-being. Compassion and fairness included in the regression were not predicted significantly. This significant relationship between sports character and athlete mental well-being was also supported by the results obtained in different studies.

The idea that sport creates character can be considered as true in some respects; however, which side the direction of character will be is indefinite (İmamlı & Ünver, 2018). Argument of Peterson and Seligman (2004) that integrity is a character strength and virtue that contributes to mental health, psychological well-being and interpersonal effectiveness supports the current research. In this context, integrity can be associated with personality and attitudinal qualities that imply better mental health, psychological well-being, stress protection and effective social functioning. On the other hand, winning and losing in sports contribute to character development in two different ways (Martens, 1982). On the one hand, the emphasis on winning forces some athletes to cheat by breaking the rules and to behave in ways they consider inappropriate off the court. On the other hand, when a player resists the temptation to cheat or engage in other immoral behavior despite the high value placed on winning, integrity improves and moral lessons become more valuable. Along with this, it can be said that exhibiting the right behavior contributes positively to well-being.

It is also stated that sport is a very powerful social experience and will have positive effects on character development under the right conditions (Bredemeier ve Shields, 2006). According to the current research data, it is demonstrated that there is a significant negative relationship between mental well-being and antisocial attitude. Antisocial behaviors are actions intended to harm or disadvantage another individual (Kavussanu & Boardley 2009; Tazegül, 2014). In their research, it was determined that sports training influenced the personalities of the students, there was a decrease in the scores of the neurotic personality dimension, and an increase in the scores of the extraversion, agreeableness, and responsibility dimensions. On the other hand, although the idea that sport builds character is an embraced idea in the world of sport, there is also evidence that competitive sports have negative effects on character development. It is emphasized that competition can create moral problems, reduce prosocial behavior and increase antisocial behavior (Lemyre et al., 2002; Kavussanu et al., 2006). Considering that sport does not automatically produce a moral character, it has great significance to prevent pro-social and antisocial behaviors, especially in young athletes, in terms of proper character development and positive impact on mental well-being.

According to Abad (2010), one of the main features of sportsmanship is fair play. Martens (2013) suggests that many athletes who score high on sensation-seeking measures may be predisposed to engage in risky and unsportspersonlike behaviors. Stress and sportspersonship parameters have been the subject of

research using different samples and variables since it is known that the stress situation, that negatively affects well-being can be reduced to the desired level and sportspersonship behaviors can be improved through physical activities and exercises. The same studies confirm the current research data and show that sports have a positive effect on the sportspersonship parameter (Mendez et al., 2015; Mathner et al., 2010; Yalız-Solmaz & Bayrak, 2006). For instance, not shaking hands after the match, criticizing the sport, being a bad winner or loser, and not giving a hundred and ten percent during the match are examples of behaviors that can be considered unsportspersonlike (Abad 2010). In line with the negative examples given, well-being cannot be expected to be positive.

In conclusion, there are few studies in the literature on the relationship between the concepts of character and mental well-being of the athlete. As a result of the increase in negative psychological factors and thus the deterioration of mental well-being in parallel with the ever-growing global and commercial sports environment, it is important to examine the character of the athlete and the factors affecting the character development. It is considered that planning the athlete development process as a long-term education and training program and increasing the awareness of the trained manpower in the field of sports psychology and in the current research will contribute positively to the process.

Limitations

While the results of the current study contribute to the understanding of the relationship between the sportive character of the athletes and their mental well-being, they also have some limitations. First of all, the findings obtained within the scope of the research were collected with self-report measurement tools. Secondly, the research was carried out only with the participation of university students studying sports sciences. In this respect, the research findings only give information about university students.

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Author Contribution

This study was conducted by all the authors working together and cooperatively. All of the authors substantially contributed to this work in each step of the study.

Conflict of Interest

It has been reported by the authors that there is no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Statement

The study was approved by the Artvin Coruh University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on February 28, 2020 (No: # E.8669 / 2020-2-28). In addition, consent forms were obtained from all participants included in the study.

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