

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Empathy trend of student-athletes in Turkey: Ardahan example**

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**The aim of the study is to analyze empathy tendencies among students who are involved in sporting activities at Ardahan Province. In accordance with this aim, this study has been conducted through the survey modelling of quantitative research methods. For the data analysis, T-Testing and ANOVA were applied. According to the obtained findings, it is detected that there is a significant difference in the ability of empathy in accordance with the duration of playing sports. The ability for empathy of those who play sports for 1 to 2 years is lower than the others. Along with this, the 9<sup>th</sup> question has the maximum value within the scale with the average value of 4.1089. The minimum value, on the other hand, belongs to the 12<sup>th</sup> question with the value of 3.586. The general average of the scale is within the level of *agree* with the value of 3.8215. Therefore, it can be said that the perception and level of empathic tendency is high. As a result, it would be accurate to claim that the empathic tendency levels of student-sportspeople in the province of Ardahan are relatively high and that the age of the participants is the determinant factor in their empathic behavior.**

**Key words:** Sports, empathy, fairplay, sportsmanship.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Empathy, defined as putting the self in somebody's shoes, is a crucial variable in effective and healthy communication among individuals and is generally divided into two as cognitive and emotional empathy (Eisenberg and Miller, 1987; Eisenberg and Strayer, 1987; Smith et al., 1989). Empathy is the behavior by which the person can get the correct understanding of the other person's feelings and thoughts by putting himself/herself in place of the other person. Yet, there are many theoretical features behind this seemingly simple

definition. Describing empathy as a "gentle form of existence", Rogers (1983) asserts that empathy can only be achieved by those self-confident people who will not get lost as entering into the strange and absurd world of the others and who can easily return to their own world at any time (Rogers, 1983). According to Rogers' definition, empathy refers to the process in which a person places himself/herself within the position of the other person and in this way s/he looks at things from his/her perspective, and appropriately understands, feels, and conducts this

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situation back to the person (Dökmen, 2006). Sport is a social phenomenon that finds participation and audience from all variations of ages and professions in the world (Öztürk, 1997). Today, international achievements in sports have become highly crucial for daily life and morale of the society (Açıkada and Ergen, 1990: 21). The excitement and relief that the sports provide for people mark a privileged position for sports.

If we take closer look at why empathy is so crucial, we come to the conclusion that our needs and motivations impact our judgments and perceptions. Therefore, the audience, though desperately, wants their favorite team to win and in this case, for example, the audience intends to see that the ball, which is declared to be “outside” by the referee, to be “inside”. In this case, the audience is on behalf of perceiving and interpreting everything in favor of their favorite team they support (Özbaydar, 1983). Therefore, excessive love, passion and ignorance prevent today’s people to stop their feelings and desire to win. In this case, a distorted fanaticism emerges. Thus, sports cease to be a means and become a cause to win (Erdem, 2000). In the atmosphere of sports, there is a high level of excitement and stress for spectators and athletes. This environment creates a dangerous area by leading the low-educated fan groups to fanaticism (Efe, 2001). During this above-mentioned atmosphere of excitement, the psychological state of athletes, coaches, referees, spectators and sportsmen is often ignored. Since success becomes the sole goal and focus of the whole process, elements such as fair play, olympism, psychology and sporting virtue can often be violated. Essentially, empathy would provide enhancing both the quality and pleasure of sports when the audience put themselves in the place of athletes, coaches and referees who train day and night; when the coaches put themselves in the position of referees, athletes and spectators; and when the referees put themselves in place of athletes, coaches and spectators (Öztürk et al., 2004). Developing the concept of empathy in the sports environment and developing social reactions to a peaceful state is extremely significant.

### **Purpose of the study**

The aim of the study is to analyze empathy tendencies among students who are involved in sporting activities at Ardahan Province. Within this context, the research is limited to the public schools located in Ardahan provincial center and affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in order to render detailed and comprehensive assessments.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research method**

While this study has been conducted through the survey modelling

of quantitative research methods, during this process, a 5-point Likert scale has been applied as the data collection tool. While the quantitative research method, which is frequently utilized within scientific studies, aims to obtain objective, valid and reliable information, it also enables the representation of findings through their numerical values (Özsoy and Madran, 2010: 191; Kuş, 2012: 105; Ekiz, 2003: 47). With the survey modelling, through which the detailed data is obtained from large groups (Büyükoztürk et al., 2017: 97), a profile is aimed to be constructed by using the words and numbers (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016: 54). In addition, the relationship between the different characteristics of the research group can be examined in this process (Fraenkel et al., 2012: 121).

### **Population and sampling**

The population of this study consists of secondary education students who have been schooled at Ardahan Province. The institution whose duties and responsibilities are undertaken to manage the general schools, technical and vocational schools between primary and higher education institutions. The method of simple random sampling has been applied to reach a sufficiently large research group over this population. According to this method, a completely random, unbiased, simple and independent selection is carried out within the universe (Balci, 2016: 74; Kaya and Şahin, 2013: 24). Therefore, the research group of the study consists of 505 secondary school students who are educated in Ardahan provincial center and selected through the method of simple random sampling. Demographic characteristics of these students are presented by being visualized in Table 1.

### **Data collection tool**

“A Study Developing Empathy Scale in The Sports Situations (ESSS)” developed by Erkuş and Yakupoğlu (2001) was utilized. The confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis are conducted in order to prove the structural validity and reliability of the scale with the current research data since the scale was developed by Erkuş and Yakupoğlu through the data obtained from secondary school students.

### **Data analysis**

In accordance with the aim of the study, the obtained data have been analyzed via SPSS 22 program at 95% confidence interval range. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, average, standard deviation) have primarily been utilized in this process. Then, it is assessed whether the data reveal normal distribution before the relationship tests in-between groups or not, and thereafter, the parametric testing techniques of T-Test and ANOVA analysis are conducted because the data reveal normal distribution. The values obtained from the results of the normality test are presented in Table 2.

## **RESULTS**

In this part of the study, in accordance with the aim of the research, the findings attained through various analysis methods are presented by visualizing them via numerical data and the results have been interpreted separately (Table 2). As Table 2 is examined, it is identified that the 9<sup>th</sup> question has the maximum value within the scale with the average value of 4.1089. The minimum value, on the

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample group.

Demographic characteristics		n	%
Age	14.00	39	7.7
	15.00	123	24.4
	16.00	162	32.1
	17.00	147	29.1
	18.00	28	5.5
	19.00	5	1.0
	20.00	1	0.2
Gender	Male	267	52.9
	Female	238	47.1
Duration (year)	1-2	309	61.2
	3-5	49	9.7
	6-8	107	21.2
	9 and above	40	7.9
Grade	5.00	1	0.2
	9.00	148	29.3
	10.00	151	29.9
	11.00	140	27.7
	12.00	65	12.9
Education level of the father	Primary	177	35.0
	Secondary	233	46.1
	Associate	40	7.9
	Graduate	40	7.9
	Masters	11	2.2
	Doctorate	4	0.8
Education level of the mother	Primary	262	51.9
	Secondary	188	37.2
	Associate	19	3.8
	Graduate	19	3.8
	Masters	11	2.2
	Doctorate	6	1.2
Monthly income (TL)	0-499	84	16.6
	500-999	49	9.7
	1000-1499	92	18.2
	1500-1999	53	10.5
	2000-2499	62	12.3
	2500 and above	165	32.7

Data collection tool.

other hand, belongs to the 12<sup>th</sup> question with the value of 3.586. The general average of the scale is within the level of Agree with the value of 3.8215. When Table 3 is examined, it is revealed that there is a significant difference in the ability of empathy in accordance with the

duration of playing sports. The ability for empathy of those who play sports for 1-2 years is lower than the others. Since there was a student from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, s/he was included in the upper grade. Since the number of the participants from the age range of 19 and 20 was low,

**Table 2.** Arithmetic means and standard deviations of the expressions in empathy scale.

Expression	N	Min	Max	a.ave.	s.s	Factor loads (sole factor)
Question 1	505	1.00	5.00	4.0178	1.27774	0.551
Question 2	505	1.00	5.00	3.8970	1.13795	0.446
Question 3	505	1.00	5.00	3.7465	1.16459	0.470
Question 4	505	1.00	5.00	4.0832	1.13083	0.426
Question 5	505	1.00	5.00	4.0297	1.25242	0.624
Question 6	505	1.00	5.00	3.8713	1.10790	0.482
Question 7	505	1.00	5.00	3.7941	1.35297	0.548
Question 8	505	1.00	5.00	3.8297	1.16952	0.408
Question 9	505	1.00	5.00	<b>4.1089</b>	1.18774	0.526
Question10	505	1.00	5.00	3.5941	1.19836	0.522
Question11	505	1.00	5.00	3.7386	1.27203	0.455
Question12	505	1.00	5.00	<b>3.5861</b>	1.18397	0.492
Question13	505	1.00	5.00	3.5901	1.20362	0.580
Question14	505	1.00	5.00	3.6297	1.15449	0.680
Question15	505	1.00	5.00	3.6851	1.19268	0.564
Question16	505	1.00	5.00	3.9921	1.13561	0.519
General Average				3.8215		

they have been analyzed as 18 and above. Due to the small number of fathers and mothers with post-graduate degrees was low, they have been combined as post-graduates.

## DISCUSSION

The research results are discussed within the light of the data in the current literature and evaluations regarding the levels of empathy attitude of the students are presented. Empathy, as a means of embodying another individual's states, may be particularly potent in situations that involve the trained human body in motion. Sports and performing arts are prime areas where embodiment is manifested and can be assessed (Sevdalis and Raab, 2014). While sports may seem like an unusual place to look for examples of empathy, ultra-running provides a few clear examples of how empathy leads to success (Hanold, 2011).

Empathy has a powerful impact that directs people from egoist orientation to prosocial behavior (Hoffman 2001). The studies have proven that empathy is a powerful factor in directing prosocial behavior (Kavussanu et al., 2009; Sezen and Yıldırım 2012; Sevdalis, Raab, 2014). Empathy is a skill that can be developed through education (Dökmen 1990). Rogers (1975) emphasizes that empathic skills can be learned through education and that empathy can be learned from empathic people. Based on the idea that the empathic behaviors of the coaches would be reflected on the sportspeople, the coaches have great responsibilities for

the development of their empathy skills and prosocial behaviors. Indeed, the researches that have been conducted support this situation (Hodge and Lonsdale, 2011; Bolter and Kipp, 2016; Chen et al., 2016). When people are taught humane communicative skills, and their prejudices and fears are pointed out, empathy becomes easier. In this way, their confidence in their healing skills develops and they become someone who is free from anxiety and whose presence is healing for others (Davis, 2005).

Sport performance is one of the main areas for the study of empathic tendencies because the right conditions are created. The individual can put effort or perceive actions that are evaluated, among others, through experiments with the help of neurophysiological measurements. Numerous recent scientific studies have investigated the bond between the empathic function and sport performance (Emery et al., 2009; Gano-Overway et al., 2009; Kontra et al., 2012; Lorimer and Jowett, 2009). Adler, one of the leading pioneers of the empathy studies, quotes the sentences of an English writer, whose name he does not precise, and reveals the essence of the concepts of social emotion and social interest by stating "seeing with the eyes of another, hearing with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another" (Barret, 1981). In sports, these concepts form high-level abstract concepts and athletes who possess these characteristics will be able to exhibit prosocial behaviors towards both to their competitors and friends in such a way that suits sports ethics. Sports, morals and empathy are processes that interact with each other (Sezen 2009a). Indeed, Sezen (2009b)'s study shows that there

**Table 3.** The demographic characteristics and T-test and ANOVA results of the expressions.

		n	a. ave.	t/F	p
Gender	Male	267	3.7921	6.097	0.317
	Female	238	3.8611		
Age	14	39	3.7772	1.493	0.203
	15	123	3.9609		
	16	162	3.8218		
	17	147	3.7398		
	18	34	3.7665		
Duration (Year)	1-2	309	3.6895	8.632	0.000*
	3-5	49	4.0047		
	6-8	107	4.0234		
	9 and above	40	4.0957		
Education level of the father	Primary	177	3.7475	1.838	0.160
	Secondary	233	3.8013		
	Graduate	95	3.8927		
Education level of the mother	Primary	262	3.7595	2.641	0.072
	Secondary	188	3.8634		
	Graduate	55	4.0023		
Grade	9	149	3.7183	1.887	0.131
	10	151	3.7299		
	11	140	3.8870		
	12	65	3.8968		
Monthly income (TL)	0-499	84	3.8653	.719	0.609
	500-999	49	3.8112		
	1000-1499	92	3.8716		
	1500-1999	53	3.8526		
	2000-2499	62	3.6573		
	2500 and above	165	3.8356		

is an increase in the empathy levels of prospective physical education teachers who receive fair play education. Greif and Hogan (1973) assert that there are five dimensions of moral development as moral knowledge, socialization, empathy, autonomy and moral judgment, and that moral behavior can be explained by these dimensions.

As the research findings are assessed, it is detected that within the context of empathy tendencies, the 9<sup>th</sup> question has the maximum value within the scale with the average value of 4.1089. The minimum value, on the other hand, belongs to the 12<sup>th</sup> question with the value of 3,586. The general average of the scale is within the level of Agree with the value of 3.8215. Therefore, it can be said that the level of empathic tendency is above average. When the results of the study are analyzed,

only a significant difference has been detected in terms of duration of performing sports. There is no statistically significant difference in terms of age, gender, fatherly and motherly education levels, grade and income level. But in sports-related research, male and female participants appear to differ with regard to empathy. Specifically, one study compared empathic tendencies in the course of a sports-based intervention program whose aim was to create opportunities for prosocial development: Female participants obtained significantly higher scores compared to male participants on the perspective-taking subscale of Davis (1980)'s Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Brunelle et al., 2007).

In the results of the studies of Aydın (1996), Karakaya (2001), Duru (2002) and Uygun (2006), it is observed that women's empathic skills are more advanced than men.

While these studies do not cast parallels with our study, they exhibit parallelism with the works of Kolayış and Yiğiter (2010). Dökmen (2005: 14–16) explains the fact that empathy skills in women are more developed than the empathic skills of men with the concept of “female sensitivity”. As a result, the following results were obtained in the light of the derived findings:

- (i) According to the findings, there was a significant difference in empathy ability according to the duration of sports. Those who do sports for 1-2 years have lower empathy ability than others.
- (ii) However, the 9th Question has the highest value in the scale with an average of 4,1089; the lowest value has the 12th question with 3,5861.
- (iii) The overall average of the scale is at the level of I agree with 3.8215.
- (iv) Therefore, it can be said that the perception and level of empathic tendency is high.
- (v) As a result, the empathic tendency levels of student athletes in Ardahan province are relatively high.
- (vi) It would not be wrong to say that their age is decisive in the form of empathetic behavior.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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