



# Moral Disengagement in Sports: A Study on Young Turkish Athletes

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## Abstract

Ethics in sports are the rules that comply with the spirit of sports and should not be forgotten and very important by all stakeholders. Athletes, coaches, managers, spectators, referees, sports media and many people are the subject of ethical rules in sports. The aim of this study was to investigate moral disengagement attitudes of participants studying at School of Physical Education and Sports and practising active sports. Totally, 310 active athletes (235 male, 75 female) were taken part in this research. Data was gathered through Moral Disengagement in Sport Scale-Short version which was developed by Boardley and Kavussanu (5) and translated to Turkish Language by Gürpınar (19). In evaluation part for questionnaires answered by participants, Kolmogorov Smirnov normality test, T-Test and One Way ANOVA tests were used. According to the results, it was statistically determined that there were not significant differences on age, branches and training years ( $p>0,05$ ); but there were significant differences on analyses done for gender and participants' mothers' education level ( $p<0,05$ ). In the light of the obtained results, the importance of increasing sports ethics education and fair-play awards at an early age was emphasized. Fair-play samples should be increased and good behaviours in sports should be seen more.

**Key words:** ethics, ethics in sports, disengagement in sports, athletes

## Sporda Ahlakdan Uzaklaşma: Genç Türk Sporcular Üzerine Bir Araştırma

### Özet

Sporda etik, sporun ruhuna uygun, unutulmaması gereken ve tüm paydaşlar tarafından çok önemli kurallardır. Sporcular, antrenörler, yöneticiler, seyirciler, hakemler, spor medyası ve birçok kişi sporda etik kurallara tabidir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Yüksekokulunda öğrenim gören ve aktif spor yapan katılımcıların ahlaki uzaklaşma tutumlarını incelemektir. Bu araştırmaya toplam 310 aktif sporcu (235 erkek, 75 kadın) katılmıştır. Veriler, Boardley ve Kavussanu (5) tarafından geliştirilen ve Gürpınar (19) tarafından Türkçe'ye çevrilen Sporda Ahlaki Ayrılma Ölçeği-Kısa versiyonu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar tarafından yanıtlanan anketlerin değerlendirme kısmında Kolmogorov Smirnov normalite testi, T-Testi ve Tek Yönlü ANOVA testleri kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlara göre yaş, branş ve eğitim yılları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık olmadığı tespit edildi ( $p>0,05$ ); ancak cinsiyete ve katılımcıların annelerinin eğitim düzeyine göre yapılan analizlerde anlamlı farklılıklar bulunmuştur ( $p<0,05$ ). Elde edilen sonuçlar ışığında spor etiği eğitiminin ve fair-play ruhuna uygun davranışların erken yaşta artırılmasının önemi vurgulanmıştır. Fair-play örneklerinin artırılması ve sporda iyi davranışların bu örnekler ile birlikte artırılması önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** etik, sporda etik, sporda etikten uzaklaşma, sporcular

## INTRODUCTION

Many of the ethical rules about life in a rapidly developing and changing world are also invisible and indifferent. This is in parallel with many values that change in schools, universities, and in many areas of sports as well as in many branches.

The concept of ethics comes from the Greek word "ethos", expresses the meaning of character and behaviour (22). The word ethics originated from the word 'Ethice', which means the science of truth and wrong, which means behaviour, attitude and attitude appropriate to custom, ceremony (28).

Ethics can be defined as a whole of principles used by individuals during their behaviour or can be defined as personal criteria that an individual uses when distinguishing between right and wrong (25, 7).

Ethics is, first of all, the research and understanding of a life to be desired. With a broader perspective, what to do or not to put in place all the activities and objectives; knowing what to want or not to know what to own or not to have (3).

The task and function of ethics is to give people a systematic approach to raise awareness about ethical depth in their actions, to seek for a good life in general and to make decisions about ethical situations, or to support them with ethical grounding and ways of thinking in doing what is right and fair (13).

Undoubtedly, it is a fact that ethics appears in every field. It can come up with various names in various fields. This means that there are kinds of ethics as meta ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics (2, 9).

Meta Ethics; the main purpose of this type of ethics is not to set precise rules about ethics, but to examine and analyse the current situation. Evaluating these results by thinking about the concluded events constitutes the main subject of meta ethics (14). The ethical judgements and value judgements in our lives are based on whether they are verifiable and on what basis they are verified (15).

Normative Ethics; it plays the role of a guide. It shapes individual how to behave, how to live, how to participate in actions. This type of ethics is also provides information about what is beneficial what is not, what is useful, what is not, what to do and

not do, what goals to progress and how to progress it (8).

Applied Ethics; It is about creating criteria for discussion of ethical problems occurring in specific areas and applying these criteria in human behaviour (1). One form of applied ethics is the application of normative theories of ethics to certain controversial issues. In these cases, the ethical adopts a defensible theoretical structure and then applies the theory and derives normative recommendations (10).

There is no single ethics in human life because it is versatile and it is common for every area of our lives to have a unique ethics. For example, business ethics, scientific ethics, daily ethics, marriage ethics, etc. As an ethics, sports are in parallel and indirectly to all of these, just like every day, ordinary life. Its important distinction is that its structure that intrinsically ethical. Principles and characteristics that determine sports also determine this ethic or way of living (12).

Although sports and ethics are considered as separate fields, it can be mentioned that there is a very meaningful relationship between these two fields that has been ignored so far. Because the common starting point of both fields is the existence of rules system that regulates the relations between individuals. These two fields organize human relations and activities within the system of rules. Both concepts emerged as a result of interactions and interactions between individuals (24).

Sport and ethics can both be considered as a system of rules. It is not possible to evaluate the actions of players in competitions without sports rules. No rule-free sports competition can be considered, and the act of abiding by the rule is fed by the ethical judgements of the athletes apart from the sports rules. The meaning of written sports rules is thanks to the ethical behaviours that the athletes will demonstrate (17).

In the concept of ethics, there is sensitivity to individual needs and differences, responsibility for personal behaviour, interest in other people, honesty and commitment to Fair Play. When we look at the ethical values in sports, Fair-Play concept covers the high and universal values of individuals. Human reaching high values is the last step of being human (21).

Fair-Play is a philosophical thought, in the efforts of the athletes to remain patient, conscious

and consistent in the difficult situations during the competitions, not to accept the disadvantages in the equality of opportunity, not to take advantage of the disadvantages of the opponent, to see the opponent as an individual who has equal rights with him for the realization of the game and not the enemy (30).

The basis of sports is competition. The aim of sports is to win. But the Fair-Play spirit is required to win in an ethical framework (11). The idea of winning at any cost is incompatible with the spirit of Fair-Play. It is natural to aim to win, to want to be the best. However, all these must be in a noble competitive framework (16).

Recently, ethical discussions have started to be discussed more than sports. Undoubtedly, it is the sports branches that are based on superior individual success (31). In this direction; there is thinking of "I have to win at all costs" and "Losing is the end of everything". Such an approach considers any bad attempts (game fixing, doping, violence, etc.) to success as usual (26).

Whichever level and form we participate in sports (athletes, coaches, managers, referees, spectators, etc.) in a discipline, everyone should pay attention to be honest, virtuous, respectful and tolerant and the requirements of the concepts of honour must be fulfilled. In this context, to adopt the fair-play concept expressed in formal and informal style and to act accordingly will protect athletes from possible dangers and adopt the concept of honour for humanity in addition to community education (6).

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research population is 310 students (235 male; 75 female), the sample is students studying at Physical Education and Sports Teaching, Sports Management, Coaching Education, Recreation Departments at School of Physical Education and Sports, Dumlupinar University and practising any sports as active athletes.

In the research, personal information form and the Moral Disengagement in Sport Scale-Short developed by Boardley and Kavussanu (5), and translated Turkish language by Gurpinar (19) was used. The scale consisting of 8 items and 7 Likert-type (1= totally disagree, 7= totally agree). The scale was explained before applying to the sample group and the participants were provided to fill the scale in line with the voluntary participation principle. The scale was explained before applying to the sample

group and the participants were provided to fill the scale with the voluntary participation principle.

## Statistical Analysis

The data obtained from the participants in the study were evaluated in the SPSS 22.0 statistics package program. Kolmogorov Smirnov normality test was applied to the data to decide which statistical analysis method to use and it was observed that the variables showed normal distribution ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, it was decided to use the parametric tests as T-Test and One Way ANOVA. The margin of error in the study was accepted as .05.

## RESULTS

**Table-1.** Distribution of Demographic Information of the Sample Group

FACTOR	VARIABLE	f	%
Gender	Female	75	24,2
	Male	235	75,8
	<b>Total</b>	310	100
Age	20 years old or younger	171	55,2
	21 years old or older	139	44,8
	<b>Total</b>	310	100
Branch	Team Sports	229	73,9
	Individual Sports	81	26,1
	<b>Total</b>	310	100
Training Year	1-3 years	69	22,3
	4-6 years	68	21,9
	7-9 years	85	27,4
	10 years or more	88	28,4
	<b>Total</b>	310	100
Education Level of Mother	Primary School	218	70,3
	High School or higher	92	29,7
	<b>Total</b>	310	100

Table 1 gives the distribution of the personal information of the individuals participating in the research. According to the data, it is seen that 75.8% of the participants in the sample group are "male" (N= 235) and 24.2% are "female" (N=75). When the age groups of the sample group are evaluated, it is seen that the participants who are in the age range of "20 years and under" with a rate of 55.2% and those who are in the age group of "21 years and over" with a rate of 44.8% are included in the study. 22.3% of the participants have "1-3 years" 21.9% have "4-6 years" 27.9% have "7-9 years" 28.4% "10 years and more" training experience. In addition, 70.3% of mothers of the participants are primary school graduates, while 29.7% of the mothers of the participants are at the level of high school or higher.

**Table-2.** T-Test Analysis for Scores of Participants' Moral Disengagement in Sport According to Gender

	Gender	N	X	Ss	t	p
Moral Disengagement in Sport	Female	75	22,94	8,952	2,904	0,004*
	Male	235	26,08	7,873		

p<0,05

When the data in Table 2 are examined, it was found that the participants' tendency to moral disengagement in sport showed statistically significant difference according to gender [t(308)= 2,904; p<.05].

**Table-3.** T-Test Analysis for Scores of Participants' Moral Disengagement in Sport According to Age

	Age	N	X	Ss	t	p
Moral Disengagement in Sport	20 years old or younger	171	24,50	8,076	-1,803	0,073
	21 years old or older	139	26,33	9,539		

p<0,05

In Table 3, when the tendency of the participants to moral disengagement in sport by age, no significant differences were found between moral disengagement in sport and age [t(308)= -1,803; p>.05].

**Table-4.** T-Test Analysis for Scores of Participants' Moral Disengagement in Sport According to Branch

	Branch	N	X	Ss	t	p
Moral Disengagement in Sport	Team Sports	229	25,76	9,207	1,637	0,103
	Individual Sports	81	24,08	7,419		

p<0,05

In Table 4 as a result of the T-Test in order to determine the difference between moral disengagement in sport and branches of participants, no significant difference was found [t(308)= 1,637; p>.05].

**Table-5.** ANOVA Analysis for Scores of Participants' Moral Disengagement in Sport According to Training Years

	Training Years	N	X	SS	F	p
Moral Disengagement in Sport	1-3 years	69	23,73	7,661	1,278	0,282
	4-6 years	68	26,05	9,022		
	7-9 years	85	25,04	8,531		
	10 years or more	88	26,27	8,795		

p<0,05

In Table 5, when the tendency of the participants to moral disengagement in sports according to their training year was compared, no statistically significant differences were found [F(3-306)= 1,278; p>0,05].

**Table-6.** T-Test Analysis for Scores of Participants' Moral Disengagement in Sport According to Education Level of Participants' Mothers

	Education Level of Mother	N	X	Ss	t	p
Moral Disengagement in Sport	Primary School	229	24,54	8,698	-2,411	0,017
	High School or Higher	81	27,17	8,793		

p<0,05

Statistically significant difference was found in Table 6 when the participants' tendency of moral disengagement in sports was compared according to the mother's education levels [t(308)= -2,411; p<.05].

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, which is thought to be an example for research on moral disengagement in sports, the level of tendency to moral disengagement in sports was studied at School of Physical Education and Sports of Dumlupinar University.

When Table-2 is examined, statistically significant difference was found between genders of the participants and tendency of moral disengagement in sports in favour of male participants. (p<0,05). It is thought that the reason of male participants who are actively engaged in sports have a tendency moral disengagement in sports more than female athletes who are actively doing sports may be due to the fact that male athletes do not have a problem in stretching the rules by showing some unethical behaviours in order to win. Ozturk (23) determined that male participants tend to have moral disengagement in sports more than female participants as similar to this result of the research.

According to the results obtained in the analysis made according to the age variable, although the participants in the active sport, who are in the older age, have higher tendency to moral disengagement in sports, this result was not found statistically significant. It can be thought that the reason why older participants have higher tendency to moral

disengagement in sports is related to the trying of some illegal behaviours when there is a decrease in sports performance compared to the participants in the lower age group. In their study, Tsai, Wang and Lo (29) observed that as the age of the participants increased, there was a difference in the tendency to moral disengagement in sports.

Comparing the tendency to moral disengagement in sports according to the branches of the participants, there was no statistically significant difference between the branch variable and the tendency to moral disengagement in sports, although the participants who were actively involved in team sports had higher scores than those who were competing in individual sports. It is thought that this result may be due to the fact that the behaviours performed by the athletes in a larger crowd in team sports and that some immoral behaviours cannot be observed. Boardley and Kavussanu (4) found that football and rugby athletes' tendency to moral disengagement in sports is higher than that of other branch athletes in support of this result of our study.

According to the training age of the participants, when the tendency to moral disengagement in sports is examined, although the scores of the participants who are between 1-3 years of training in their branch are lower than the others, there is no statistically significant difference. It is thought that this situation may be related to the fact that the athletes with a training year of 1-3 years attach great importance to some ethical principles and that they have not suffered some value losses yet.

Comparing the levels of moral disengagement in sports according to the mother's education levels of the participants, statistically significant difference was found in favour of the candidates with higher mother education levels. In support of this result, Gurpinar (18) determined that as the level of education increases, the sub-dimension of protecting to win fairly increases.

In the light of all these results, examples of ethical behaviour in sports should be increased, and ethical behaviours should be gained through training at very young ages by giving the necessary importance in sports as in all life. The necessity of rejection of the idea that everything is permissible in the path of victory should be emphasized and the need to respect the opponent and congratulate the opponent when it is lost. Instead of the examples of

aggression and violence in sports in education curricula, fair-play samples should be increased and good behaviours should be seen and increased in sports.

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