



Analyzing the Alexithymia Scores of University Students Who Do and Do not Do Sports

İlhan GÖZEN ^{1A}, Yahya Gökhan YALÇIN ^{2B},
Ali Osman KIVRAK ^{2C}, Banu DEMİR ^{2D}

1 Gazi University, Institute of Health Sciences, Ankara, Turkey
2 Selçuk University Faculty of Sports Sciences, Konya, Turkey
Address Correspondence to G. Yalçın : e-mail: gyalcin@selcuk.edu.tr

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A:Orcid ID: 0000-0002-4682-967X B:Orcid ID: 0000-0003-0769-5469 C:Orcid ID: 0000-0003-4699-0401 D:Orcid ID: 0000-0002-9885-5669

Abstract

This study is conducted to analyze the differences in the alexithymia scores of university students who do and do not do sports. In total, 365 university students participated voluntarily in the study. 189 (106 men and 83 women) of them were licensed for at least 2 years in a team or individual sports branches, and 176 (98 men and 78 women) of them did not do sports. In order to reach the data of the study, the personal information form which is developed by researchers, and the Toronto alexithymia scale with 20 questions developed by Bagby et al. in 1994 (2) and adapted into Turkish by Güleç et al.(10) have been used. According to the results of the research, no significant differences were found in the total alexithymia scores and the sub-dimensions of Difficulty in Recognizing Emotions, Difficulty in Expressing Emotions, and Extraverted Thinking in accordance of the gender of university students who do and do not do sports.

Keywords: Alexithymia, athlete students, university students

Spor Yapan ve Yapmayan Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Aleksitimi Puanlarının İncelenmesi

Özet

Bu çalışma, spor yapan ve yapmayan üniversite öğrencilerinin aleksitimi puanlarındaki farklılıklarını araştırmak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Çalışmaya takım ya da bireysel spor dallarında en az 2 yıl boyunca lisanslı olarak spor yapan 189 (106 erkek ve 83 kadın) ve spor yapmayan 176 (98 erkek ve 78 kadın) olmak üzere toplam 365 üniversite öğrencisi gönüllü olarak katılmıştır. Araştırmanın verilerine ulaşmak için araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen kişisel bilgi formu, Bagby ve arkadaşlarının 1994 yılında geliştirdiği, Güleç ve arkadaşlarının Türkçe uyarlamasını 2009 yılında yaptığı 20 soruluk Toronto aleksitimi ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonucuna göre spor yapan ve yapmayan üniversite öğrencilerinin cinsiyetlerine göre toplam aleksitimi puanları ve Duyguları Tanımada Güçlük, Duyguları İfade Etmede Güçlük, Dışa Dönük Düşünce alt boyutlarında anlamlı farklılıklara rastlanmamıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Aleksitimi, sporcu öğrenciler, üniversite öğrencileri

INTRODUCTION

Alexithymia has been translated into our language as the absence of words for emotions. Although it was initially put forward to explain the symptoms seen in psychosomatic patients, it is emphasized that it is frequently seen not only in these patients but also in other mental and physical diseases. The most distinctive features of people who suffer from alexithymia are that they have difficulty recognizing their emotions and expressing them. They have difficulties in their emotional functioning and interpersonal relationships. They look like they came from another world. They have trouble making connections between feelings and thoughts and expressing them. As a result of the studies, alexithymic features and symptoms are grouped under four main headings: difficulty in recognizing, distinguishing, and expressing emotions, lack of daydreaming, operational thinking, and eccentric cognitive structure (5).

Introduced by Sifneos in 1973, alexithymia is defined as difficulties in identifying and expressing one's own emotions (14, 18). Alexithymia is demonstrated as difficulty in identifying feelings and distinguishing between bodily sensations of emotional arousal and feelings, difficulty in expressing one's feelings to others, and manifested by limited processes and extroverted cognitive style. (19). It has been reported that heart rate, respiratory effort, temperature, itching, pain, fatigue, hunger, thirst, satiety, and emotional touch are observed as alexithymic symptoms (7).

Although there are not many studies on alexithymia, the available data show that alexithymia can cause many neuropathological conditions and decrease the success rates of individuals who do sports. In another study, Barlow et al. reported that there is a relationship between alexithymia and the probability of sports accidents in healthy athletes (3). It has been found that risk-taking behavior in high-risk sports activities is closely related to alexithymia (16). In a study, it was determined that female athletes who do high-risk physical activities such as skydiving and mountaineering in their free time are more alexithymic than women who do not do risky

sports and women who do risky sports professionally (6).

It has been determined that athletes who have difficulty in defining and expressing their emotions are more likely to experience emotions and take more risks (3).

It can be thought that sport, which is used as a socialization tool, can also be used as a tool that can prevent the development of the individual's alexithymic personality traits and prevent the person from feeling lonely. This research was carried out in order to observe the changes in the alexithymia scores of university youth through sports and to shed light on the results to be obtained by other researchers.

METHOD

This study was approved by Selcuk University Sports Sciences Ethics Committee

(Approval number: 2021-109)

Working Group:

A total of 365 university students voluntarily participated in this study. Their mean age was $\bar{x} = 22.23 \pm 1.82$, and 189 of them were actively engaged in sports, and 176 of them were not. In addition, besides the personal information form developed by the researchers, the Toronto alexithymia scale with 20 questions developed by Bagby et al. in 1994 and adapted into Turkish by Güleç et al. in 2009 was applied to the participants.

Analysis of Data:

The data obtained from the participants were transferred to the SPSS 13.0 program, and it was determined whether there were missing and incorrect data entries. After the data analysis, the total scores of alexithymia in participants were calculated, and parametric tests were preferred since the data obtained did not deviate excessively from the normal distribution. Descriptive statistical analysis was made for the demographic information of the students participating in the research, and independent groups t-test was used for two independent groups.

FINDINGS

In the marketing literature, value is evaluated by the ratio of the perceived utility to the perceived sacrifice as a result of the consumption of a product or service by the consumer (48). Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived value as the general assessment of a product's utility in relation to what the consumer pays for and receives for a product (67). It draws attention as being the most important structure in understanding consumer behavior, especially in the service industry (31). While some researchers in the literature evaluate perceived value from a single dimension, others claim that it is more complex (13) and state that it is multi-dimensional (8,30,60). This is

the second reason for the unclarity about perceived value. According to Sheth et al. (1991), perceived value consists of social, emotional, functional, epistemic, and conditional value dimensions (57). According to Sweeney and Soutar (2001), it is a three-dimensional structure with functional, social, and emotional dimensions (60). According to Grönroos (1997), it is two-dimensional, cognitive, and emotional (30). Boksberger & Melsen (2011) investigated perceived value in terms of societal, transaction-specific, and end-state values (12). Details of the value investigated in three contexts are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. "The general nature of perceived value" (12).

	Gender	N	Average	SS	t	p
Difficulty in Recognizing Emotions	Female	83	15.42	5.55	-212	.712
	Male	106	15.63	6.12		
Difficulty in Expressing Emotions	Female	83	12.83	3.82	-601	.419
	Male	106	13.02	3.73		
Extroverted Thinking	Female	83	19.87	3.20	-415	.617
	Male	106	21.68	3.41		
Total Alexithymia	Female	83	51.07	9.64	-573	.533
	Male	106	52.18	10.83		

No significant difference was found in the total alexithymia scores of university students engaged in sports ($t = -.573$, $p > .05$). Moreover, the average differ by gender in difficulty in recognizing emotions ($t = -.212$, $p > .05$), difficulty in expressing emotions ($t = -.601$, $p > .05$) and extraverted thinking ($t = -.415$, $p > .05$).

Table 2. The t-test table of the total and sub-scales of the students who do not sport

	Gender	N	Ortalama	SS	t	p
Difficulty in Recognizing Emotions	Female	98	16.47	4.62	.985	.162
	Male	78	16.05	6.11		
Difficulty in Expressing Emotions	Female	98	11.04	3.82	-0.22	.970
	Male	78	11.01	3.41		
Extroverted Thinking	Female	98	20.11	2.95	1.921	0.73
	Male	78	23.12	3.22		
Total Alexithymia	Female	98	50.24	9.63	-.121	.912
	Male	78	50.83	11.12		

No significant difference was found in the total alexithymia scores of university students who did not do sports ($t = -.121$, $p > .05$). Moreover, the mean score of difficulty in recognizing emotions ($t = -.985$, $p > .05$), difficulty in expressing emotions ($t = -.022$, $p > .05$) and extraverted thinking ($t = 1.921$, $p > .05$) differed by gender.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, no significant difference was detected in the scores of alexithymia and subscales of university students who do sports. When it comes to other studies conducted on this subject, different results have been encountered. Özdemir et al.,(2011) in their study on orienteering athletes, did not find a significant difference according to their gender. In the studies conducted by Batıgün and Büyükşahin (2008) and Ünal (2005), no significant difference was found between the alexithymic scores of the athletes and their genders. In their study, Tingaz and Güvendi (2020) did not find any significant differences in the scores of alexithymia and subscales according to the gender of athlete students studying at the Faculty of Sport Sciences (20).

Zekioğlu et al. (2014) in their study examining the alexithymia and emotional intelligence levels of people who do sports, detect that there was a difference between men and women in the total scores of alexithymia and in the sub-dimensions of Difficulty in Expressing (23) Emotions and Extraverted Thinking and that the mean scores of women were lower than the scores of men in these two sub-dimensions. Demir (2018) found in his study that the alexithymia scores of disabled athletes were higher than those of disabled individuals who do not do sports (8).. It can be suggested that the reason for higher alexithymia scores in disabled athletes compared to non-athletes may be related to higher depression, anxiety, and psychological stress (9). In the literature review on the subject, there are studies that show similarities with the results obtained in this study, as well as studies that do not show parallelism with the results obtained.

No significant difference was found in the scores of alexithymia and subscales of university students who do not do sports. Unal (2005) did not find any difference between the alexithymic scores of male and female students in his study on a group of university students (21). In their research Batıgün and Büyükşahin (2008) in accordance with this subject, looked at the alexithymia scores of the participants in terms of the gender variable and conclude that there was no significant difference.(4) There are also studies in the international literature reporting that there is no significant difference between gender and alexithymic scores (11, 13, 22).

Although the limited number of studies related to our topic and the unclarity of the results, the

available literature in general shows that there is an intense relationship between alexithymia and exercise. While Manfredi and Gambarini. (2015) reported a relationship between alexithymia and exercise addiction (12). Allegrè et al. (2007) found more pronounced alexithymic features in expert swimmers who previously trained 22 hours a week compared to amateur swimmers who trained 6 hours a week (1). Price and Bundesen (2005), on the other hand, observed that parachute athletes showed more alexemitic characteristics than other athletes (17).

As a result, although there is no statistical difference in the alexithymic scores of the athletes as a result of the research, the monitoring of alexithymic features in athletes requires a comprehensive investigation of the subject. It is thought that the evaluation of sportive activity with physiological, social, and psychological concepts will make an important contribution to the development of the individual and society.

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