

# Examining the Empathetic Tendency Levels of the Athletes Dealing with Team and Individual Sports

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the empathetic tendency levels of the athletes dealing with team and individual sports, and to specify whether there is a statistically significant difference concerning gender and sports experience variables. In total, 524 volunteer athletes (232 males and 292 females) participated in the study, whose ages ranged between 15 and 27. The "Empathy in the Sports Environment (ESE)" scale, which was developed by Erkuş and Yakupoğlu (2001), was used in the study for the data collection. The SPSS 22.0 package program was used in the analyses of the data. The Independent Samples T test was employed for the paired comparisons, and the Spearman's rho correlation analysis for determining the relations among the variables. The significance level was accepted as  $p < 0.05$  in the evaluation of the results. As the conclusion of the study, it was determined that there was statistically no significant difference between the athletes dealing with team and individual sports concerning the emotional empathy dimension; however, it was determined that the athletes dealing with team sports gained higher scores in the prediction dimension; it was found that the emotional empathy scores of the female athletes were higher for the gender variable and male athletes had higher scores concerning the prediction dimension. Considering the sports experience dimension, it was determined that the higher the years of experience, the higher the levels of emotional empathy and prediction.

**Key Words:** Empathy, team athlete, individual athlete

## INTRODUCTION

In the sports environment, particularly during the sports competitions, it is conceivable that the empathetic skills of the athletes are efficient in the sports branch. Particularly in the team sports, the athlete's use of empathetic skills towards the team mates, trainer, and the opponents can be an important factor in predicting his/her possible behaviors, in forming the team spirit, and thus, in the team success. It is not wrong that the sense of team unity of the athletes, who have high level of empathetic skills, is high as well. Considering the fact that the teams with a high sense of team unity will be more successful, it is suggested that the empathy levels of the athletes constituting the team should be improved (9).

There are different definitions of empathy today. These are mostly defined as looking from the

perspective of the interlocutor by putting oneself into the shoes of him/her, and the process of understanding his/her thoughts accurately, feeling it and conveying it to him/her; it is generally discussed under two titles as the cognitive and emotional empathy (8, 14, 15, 23, 12, 11).

It is stated that empathy is one of the basic human characteristics that contributes to harmony. Therefore it is inevitable that empathy is used in all aspects of life (5). Empathy is both a cognitive and an emotional process and it is employed by imagining oneself in the position of another and remembering his/her similar experiences. Empathy also produces reactions appropriate to these sharings of emotions and thoughts (like helping the ones in need) (6).

Empathy is a verbal response reflecting the motive behind the emotions and emotional content

of the speech. Not being used much in the daily life, empathy is one of the most difficult components of communication skills that should be learned and comprehended (26). Empathy can also be defined as being objectively aware of emotions and opinions of others as well as their various meanings, and representatively experiencing the emotions and opinions of them (6).

The studies conducted to measure the empathy skills and tendencies of individuals are generally based on a certain listing of empathetic reactions (1). In other words, individuals might be in harmony with the society since they can show empathy, or similarly, they might have developed their sense of empathy since they can comply with the society. However, whatever the direction of the relationship, the fact that there is a relationship between the empathy and certain variables emphasizes the importance of empathy in our daily life (10).

As is understood from the studies conducted on this field in the literature, empathy makes important contributions to the level of the relationships among individuals. In this context, it can be stated that the higher the emphatic approach implemented in the sports environment the higher it will contribute to success. In this study, which was conducted in the light of these pieces of information, initially, answers were sought for the questions, is there a difference between the empathic tendencies of athletes dealing with team or individual sports?, and do the gender and sports experience have any influence on the empathetic tendency?

## METHOD

This is a descriptive research study aiming at determining the empathetic tendency levels of athletes dealing with team and individual sports. Additionally, in this study, the differences were examined concerning gender and sports experience variables. In total, 524 volunteer athletes (232 males and 292 females) participated in the study, whose ages ranged between 15 and 27. Branch distributions of the participants are given below. The "Empathy in the Sports Environment (ESE)" scale, which was developed by Erkuş and Yakupoğlu (2001), was used in the study for the data collection. The ESE, which was comprised of 16 items, is a four pointlikert scale and it is evaluated under two dimensions as emotional empathy and prediction (cognitive) dimensions. The Cronbach alpha values concerning the sub-dimensions were determined as, respectively, .72 and .79. The least possible score to

be gained from the emotional empathy sub-dimension was 5 and the highest score was 20, while the least value was 11 and the highest was 44 for the prediction dimension.

The SPSS 22.0 was used in the analyses of the research data. The Independent Samples T test was employed for the paired comparisons, and the Spearman's rho correlation analysis for determining the relations among the variables. The significance level was accepted as  $p < 0.05$  in the evaluation of the results.

**Table 1.** Branch Distribution of Participating Athletes

Branch	n	%
Football	123	23.5
Volleyball	224	42.7
Basketball	57	10.9
Tennis	37	7.1
Athletics	26	5.0
Ping pong	15	2.9
Badminton	10	1.9
Handball	32	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## FINDINGS

The comparison of the empathy levels of team and individual athletes are given in the Table 2. It was determined that there was statistically no significant difference concerning the emotional empathy sub-dimension ( $p > 0.05$ ). It was also determined that there was statistically significant difference in favor of the athletes dealing with team sports for the prediction dimension ( $p < 0.05$ ).

In general, when the average scores were examined, it was determined that the average scores of the emotional empathy and prediction dimension were high.

The comparison of the empathy levels of the research group concerning the gender variable is given in Table 3. It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference in favor of the females in the emotional empathy sub-dimension, while there was statistically significant difference in favor of the males concerning the prediction dimension ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The relationship between the sports experience and the empathy levels of the research group is given in Table 4. Accordingly, it was determined that there was a positive and weak relationship between the sports experience and prediction dimension. In other words, the higher the sports

experience of the individuals, the higher their empathy tendency levels.

**Table 2.** Comparison of the empathy levels of athletes dealing with team and individual sports

	Branch	N	Mean	Sd.	t	P
Emotional Empathy	Team sports	412	17,33	2,59	1.451	.147
	Individual sports	112	16,92	2,87		
Prediction Dimension	Team sports	412	31,06	4,94	2.405	.017
	Individual sports	112	29,78	5,22		

**Table 3.** The comparison of the empathy levels of the research group concerning the gender variable

	Gender	N	Mean	sd	t	p
Emotional Empathy	Male	232	16.93	2.50	-2.499	.013
	Female	292	17.51	2.76		
Prediction Dimension	Male	232	31.60	4.48	3.318	.001
	Female	292	30.15	5.34		

**Table 4.** The relationship between the sports experience and the empathy levels of the research group.

	Emotional Empathy	Prediction Dimension
Sports Experience	r	.092*
	p	.035
		.265**
		.000

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this study, which was conducted to examine the empathy levels of the athletes dealing with team and individual sports, the relationships were also examined concerning the gender variables and sports experiences of the athletes, and the obtained results are discussed in this part.

While there was statistically no significant difference concerning the branch status in the emotional empathy sub-dimension, it was determined that the athletes dealing with the team sports had higher scores in the prediction (cognitive empathy) dimension. Additionally, when the average scores were examined, it was determined that the average scores of the emotional empathy and prediction dimensions were high. Therefore, it can be stated that the empathy tendencies of the participant athletes are high. When previous studies conducted on athlete groups are examined, it is generally stated that the empathy behaviors of athletes are high (9, 25, 24, 17, 16, 27, 2, 21).

It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference in favor of the females in the emotional empathy sub-dimension, while there was

statistically significant difference in favor of the males in the prediction dimension. When the studies are examined in the literature, it is stated that the females have higher emotional and general empathy tendency levels (4, 17, 19, 13, 20, 22, 9, 25, 16, 27, 24, and 2). In a recent study, it was stated that the level of empathic tendency of senior field hockey athletes was also higher in female athletes (18). However, there are findings indicating that empathic tendency does not differ in terms of gender variable (3). This result might have emerged from the fact that females give more emotional reactions to events compared to males.

It was concluded that, the higher the sports experience of the research group, the higher the emotional and cognitive empathy tendency levels. When the studies in the literature are examined, it is observed that there are findings indicating that the cognitive empathy increases with the sports experience (7, 16, and 27).

As the conclusion, it was determined that there was statistically no significant difference between the athletes dealing with team and individual sports concerning the emotional empathy dimension; however, it was determined that the athletes dealing

with team sports gained higher scores in the prediction dimension; it was found that the emotional empathy scores of the female athletes were higher for the gender variable and the male athletes had higher scores concerning the prediction dimension. Considering the sports experience dimension, it was determined that the higher the years of experience, the higher the levels of emotional empathy and prediction.

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