

Research Article / Özgün Araştırma

THE EFFECT OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON GYM, INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of Covid 19 pandemic on gym, indoor (such as home) and outdoor sports.

In this study, the number of visitors and percentage (%) values to the sports centers for February 2019, 2020, and 2021 and June 2019, 2020, and 2021 were compared to understand the effect of Covid 19 pandemic on gyms. While the universe of the research is composed of 579 sports centers in Istanbul, the sample of the research is 231 sports centers according to the 95% confidence interval and 5% sensitivity calculation. The simple random sampling method was used in the sample selection of the data. The literature of the study was obtained by using the content analysis method with academic publications and research reports that can light on the subject.

The findings we obtained in Istanbul show that the gyms experienced a high rate of member loss during the Covid 19 process. The situation in gyms in different countries is similar to Istanbul. Studies evaluate this loss of members in gyms as a tendency towards indoor and outdoor sports.

The Covid 19 pandemic has caused a change in sports habits all over the world, as in our country. It has been a period when indoor sports activities increased with telephone and computer applications, and applications such as Strava and Zwift, both indoor and outdoor sports turned towards a more enjoyable direction. For this reason, it is important for the sports industry to follow the direction of sports.

Keywords: Covid 19, gym, indoor sports, outdoor sports

COVID 19 PANDEMİSİNİN SPOR SALONU, KAPALI VE DIŞ MEKÂN SPORLARINA ETKİSİ

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Covid 19 pandemisinin spor salonu, kapalı (ev içi) ve dış mekân sporlarına etkilerini araştırmaktır.

Bu çalışmada, Covid 19 pandemisinin spor salonlarına etkisini anlayabilmek için 2019, 2020 ve 2021 şubat ayları ile 2019, 2020 ve 2021 haziran aylarına ait spor merkezlerine yapılan ziyaretçi sayıları ve yüzde (%) değerleri karşılaştırılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini İstanbul'da bulunan 579 spor merkezi oluştururken araştırmanın örneklemini %95 güven aralığı ve %5 duyarlılık hesaplamasına göre 231 spor merkezi oluşturmaktadır. Verilerin toplandığı örneklem seçiminde basit rastgele örneklem yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya ait literatür veriler konuya ışık tutabilecek akademik yayınlar ve araştırma raporları ile içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak elde edilmiştir.

Verilerin analizi sonucunda İstanbul ilindeki elde ettiğimiz bulgular Covid 19 sürecinde spor salonlarının yüksek oranda üye kaybı yaşadığını göstermektedir. Farklı ülkelerdeki spor salonlarındaki durum İstanbul ile benzerlik göstermektedir. Yapılan çalışmalar spor salonlarındaki bu üye kaybını ev içi ve dış mekân sporlarına yönelme olarak değerlendirmektedir.

Covid 19 pandemisi ülkemizde olduğu gibi tüm Dünya'da spor alışkanlıklarının değişmesine sebep olmuştur. Telefon ve Bilgisayar uygulamaları ile ev içi spor etkinliklerinin arttığı, Strava ve Zwift gibi

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uygulamalar ile de hem ev içi hem de açık hava sporlarının daha eğlenceli bir yöne doğru yöneldiği bir dönem olmuştur. Bu sebeple sporun yönünü takip etmek spor endüstrisi açısından önem taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Covid 19, spor salonu, ev içi sporları, dış mekân sporları

1. INTRODUCTION

In many countries of the world, governments issued epidemic control decisions at the beginning of 2020 to prevent the spread and transmission of the highly contagious SARS-CoV-2 virus. This new virus caused COVID-19, a respiratory disease that can cause a variety of health problems and lead to death. Although the measures taken differed between countries, the common goal was to slow the spread of the virus (Schweizer et al., 2021). The results were enormous restrictions on the private life of citizens and led to far reaching changes in mobility, purchasing behavior and the environmental impact of the entire population (Mohammad et al., 2020). Faced with the increasing number of cases, for example, as in Turkey, the German Government has published increasingly stricter policies. Events expected to attend 1,000 people were banned from 12 March 2020, and recreational facilities, including all tourism-related facilities, were closed to the public from 16 March. On March 22, the social distance rule was followed. The lockdown of sports infrastructure has significantly reduced opportunities for leisure physical activity and shifted people's physical activity outdoors to public green spaces (Schweizer et al., 2021). While the Covid 19 pandemic process and bans negatively affected sports centers in our country as well as all over the world, they caused some changes in sports activities. While this change creates great economic losses for sports centers, interest in outdoor sports, which are safer for people, has increased (Ulusoy, 2021). During mobility restrictions, an increase of approximately 300% in outdoor recreational activities compared to the 3-year average was demonstrated in Oslo, Norway (Venter et al., 2020). In Germany, similar effects are demonstrated by search query data from Google Trends (Google Trends 2020) for outdoor recreation keywords such as "Fahrrad" (cycling) or "Wandern" (hiking). For these terms, the search query in May 2020 was 40% higher than the average of the last 3 years (Schweizer et al., 2021).

Understanding these changes in space and time patterns of physical activity is important because there are strong indications that outdoor activities in public green spaces such as forests and parks are an important strategy for tackling COVID-19 and related outbreak control decisions (Samuelsson et al., 2020). When group sports activities are prohibited, people may feel limited to sedentary indoor activities that result in increased sitting associated with a potential reduction in physical exercise and a higher risk of chronic disease or deteriorating physique (Owen et al., 2010). As a preventive measure, exercise during isolation at home or outside is recommended (Chen et al., 2020). While exercising does not reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19, a healthy and fit body can cope with an infection more successfully (Bloch et al., 2020). Outdoor activities have been proven to be beneficial not only for

physical but also for mental health (Kahlmeier et al., 2017). Increased greenery is associated with a lower probability of psychological distress and other positive mental health outcomes, particularly with physical activity as a tool for stress reduction (Engeman et al., 2019). This shows that access to public green spaces also increases individuals' resilience to cope with crises such as a pandemic (Samuelsson et al., 2020).

Similarly, the United Nations, in its statement published in 2020, stated that as a result of the global epidemic of COVID-19, sports halls, stadiums, pools, dance and fitness studios, physiotherapy centers, parks and playgrounds were closed. For this reason, many individuals find that they are unable to actively participate in regular individual or group sports or physical activities outside of their homes, resulting in shortened activity time, longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns, as well as worse eating habits, which can lead to weight gain and physical fitness. indicated that it caused loss. The World Health Organization recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week. The benefits of such periodic exercises have been noted to be very beneficial, especially in times of anxiety, crisis, and fear. Therefore, in the context of the pandemic, the lack of access to regular sports or exercise routines may be a sociological problem. The potential loss of family or friends from the virus and the impact of the virus on a person's economic well-being and access to food will exacerbate these effects.

In recent years, physical activity has been increasingly supported by various fitness apps, and the user base of such apps is growing rapidly (Ang, 2020). With the help of a smartphone or other GPS device, anyone can track their geographic data and upload it to online platforms like social media or fitness apps. These voluntarily submitted data have great potential as useful management tools by providing location and time information (Norman et al., 2019). An application can serve as an indicator for visitor numbers in nature parks and urban green spaces (Hamstead et al., 2018) and thus provide robust data for measuring the frequency of outdoor sports activities such as cycling, running, or hiking.

The Covid 19 pandemic has caused some changes and habits to change in the field of sports, as in every field. The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, especially in the field of individual sports.

2. METHODS

In this study, the number of visitors to the sports centers and the percentage (%) values for the months of February 2019, 2020, and 2021 and June 2019, 2020, and 2021 were compared. While the population of the research consists of 579 sports centers in Istanbul, the sample of the research consists of 231 sports centers according to the calculation of 95% confidence interval and 5% sensitivity. Simple random sampling method was used in the selection of the sample from which the

data were collected. Ethics committee approval is not required for the research due to the method of data collection. The literature data of the study were obtained by using content analysis method with academic publications and research reports that can shed light on the subject.

3. RESULTS

In this study, the data on gyms starts with the data of 2019, when there was no pandemic, and includes the three-year period with the pandemic. The information of the entrances to the gyms in Istanbul is presented in Table.1. Accordingly, the total number of visitors to the gyms in February 2019 was 1.304.500, in February 2020 1.357.984 and in February 2021 835.750. It was observed that 1,100,998 visits were made to sports centers in June 2019, 653.190 in June 2020 and 705.230 in June 2021. Although there was a 4.10% increase in the number of visitors compared to the previous year before the bans that started in March 2020, there was a 40.67% loss of visitor entry between the months of June after the bans. In February 2021, the number of visitors reached 38.46% less than in the previous year, while June 2021 showed an increase of 7.96% compared to the previous year.

Table 1. Number of visitors in June and February by years

	2019	2020	2021
February	1.304.500	1.357.984	835.000
June	1.100.998	653.190	705.230

4. DISCUSSION

The findings about the gyms we have obtained show that the gyms have experienced significant loss of members after Covid 19. The literature and research reports similarly mention that gyms all over the world experience great member losses, and employment problems arose along with it. According to Ihrs Global Report (2020) data, while America had approximately 40,000 health clubs with annual revenue of 35 billion dollars before the epidemic, at the end of 2020, the industry lost 20.4 billion dollars in revenue and reported that about 6,400 clubs were closed.

While nearly 500,000 gym industry workers were laid off due to COVID 19 (Harrison Co.research report, 2020), 58% of trainers lost some or all of their income (Personal Trainer Salary Survey, 2020).

The Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA, 2020), in their studies investigating the effects of Covid 19 on the Fitness industry;

- It will take time for the industry to recover from the negative effects of Covid 19
- 72% of companies believe that there will be no normalization until 2021 and beyond

- They emphasized that the vaccine is of great importance for fitness centers to be active again.

Timpka (2020) stated that athletes, sports clubs and points of participation in sports are very negatively affected by pandemic processes such as Covid 19, and that effective countermeasures should be taken for such situations.

According to Global Mobile Consumer Trends (2020) reports;

- During the pandemic process, gym and fitness studios are closed and there is a trend towards digital.
- It has been stated that worldwide, the rate of downloading Health and Fitness applications on mobile devices has increased by 46%.

The increasing use of fitness applications, especially on mobile devices, increased indoor sports habits, while avoiding the danger of Covid 19 and continuing sports habits. The Strava program, which is an internet service that includes social networking features and is used especially for outdoor sports and provides data flow especially through smart watches and phones, has also been a rising value during the Covid 19 process. According to Strava blog (2020) official information;

- Global activity rates have increased significantly, breaking the platform record with over 30 million weekly uploads in May 2020.
- More than 1.1 billion events have been uploaded to Strava in the last 12 months, representing a 33% increase over the previous year.
- Strava expanded its network with approximately 2 million new athletes every month throughout 2020.
- Community members have shared over a billion events with over 400 million photos.
- Despite marathons being cancelled, Strava has loaded hundreds of thousands of 26.2 miles of runs – 3x more marathons run alone in 2020 than in 2019.
- Athletes active on Strava in both 2019 and 2020 increased their activity frequency by over 13%.
- While the loadings made in running, cycling and indoor trainings increased by 1.5-2 times, the loadings of outdoor walks increased by 3 times. Walking has also been the most important new activity for cyclists on the platform between April and June.
- More than one million athletes participated in Strava's monthly 5K competition in May, making it the largest single event ever.

Zwift (<https://zwiftinsider.com/2020/>), a multiplayer online cycling and running training program that allows users to interact, train and compete in a virtual world, announced on their official account that their subscriber base grew by 270% at the end of November. Also, they stated that they have signed the highest rate of activities to date.

5. CONCLUSION

In line with the data obtained, after the Covid 19 pandemic process and bans, sports centers all over the world experienced great visitor losses, as in the example of Istanbul. This situation causes great economic losses especially for the fitness sector and paves the way for the employment problem. Ensuring maximum hygiene conditions with vaccination is important for the sports centers to return to normal.

It is seen that people who do not go to gyms but want to do sports after Covid 19 have turned their direction to outdoor sports that can be done individually, to indoor treadmill or bicycle, however, walking, jogging, and cycling sports have increased significantly through mobile applications such as Strava. As in every field, a period has emerged in the field of sports, in which digital life progresses and sports activities are carried out in a competitive and entertaining environment, both at home and in the open air, through programs. It will be important for the sports industry to act in accordance with this changing structure and to prevent employment problems that may occur.

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