

**Examination of Sexual Violence, Emotional Status and Loneliness Level in Professional Athletes**

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**Abstract**

This study aims to examine the level of sexual violence, mood, and loneliness level in professional athletes. A total of 195 athletes, 85 men, and 110 women, from different sports branches (Athletics, Basketball, Volleyball, Football, Fitness, Tennis, Boxing), with an average age of  $24.04 \pm 4.96$  and a mean age of  $2.27 \pm 0.993$ , participated in the research. "The Profile of Mood States (POMS)" scale was used to determine the emotional states of the athletes, and the "UCLA Loneliness Scale" was used to determine their loneliness level. To determine the level of sexual violence of the athletes, the questions prepared by the researcher by scanning the relevant literature were applied. Frequency analysis, t-test, and Kruskal Wallis test were used to evaluate the data. As a result, it has been determined that professional athletes participating in the research were exposed to sexually explicit words and that their teammate or another athlete has been exposed to sexual violence. It has been determined that the level of loneliness differs significantly according to the gender variable. It was found that the level of loneliness is high in male athletes. Depression-Dejection and Anger-Hostility levels were found to be high in female athletes. It is seen that the level of loneliness decreases as the age of sports increases. It was determined that there was a negative significant relationship between loneliness and vigor-activity mood. It is a remarkable finding that when the loneliness value increases in athletes, the "vigor-activity" mood value decreases.

**Keywords:** Athlete, Sexual Violence, Loneliness, Mood.

**Profesyonel Sporcularda Cinsel Şiddet, Duygu Durumu ve Yalnızlık Düzeyinin İncelenmesi**

**Öz**

Bu çalışma, profesyonel sporcularda cinsel şiddet, duygu durum ve yalnızlık düzeylerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Farklı spor dallarından (Atletizm, Basketbol, Voleybol, Futbol, Fitness, Tenis, Boks) 85'i erkek, 110'u kadın olmak üzere toplam 195 sporcu, yaş ortalaması  $24.04 \pm 4.96$ , yaş ortalaması  $2.27 \pm 0.993$ , araştırmaya katılmıştır. Sporcuların duygu durumlarını belirlemek için "Duygu Durumu Profili (POMS)" ölçeği ve yalnızlık düzeylerini belirlemek için "UCLA Yalnızlık Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Sporcuların cinsel şiddet düzeylerini belirlemek için araştırmacı tarafından ilgili literatür taranarak hazırlanan sorular uygulanmıştır. Verilerin değerlendirilmesinde frekans analizi, t-testi ve Kruskal Wallis testi kullanılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, araştırmaya katılan profesyonel sporcuların cinsel içerikli sözlere maruz kaldıkları ve takım arkadaşlarının veya başka bir sporcunun cinsel şiddete maruz kaldığı tespit edilmiştir. Cinsiyet değişkenine göre yalnızlık düzeyinin anlamlı düzeyde farklılaştığı tespit edilmiştir. Erkek sporcularda yalnızlık düzeyinin yüksek olduğu bulunmuştur. Kadın sporcularda Depresyon-Depresyon ve Öfke-Düşmanlık düzeyleri yüksek bulunmuştur. Spor yaşı arttıkça yalnızlık düzeyinin azaldığı görülmektedir. Yalnızlık ile dinçlik-aktivite duygu durumu arasında negatif yönde anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu belirlendi. Sporcularda yalnızlık değeri arttıkça "şiddet-aktivite" duygudurum değerinin düştüğü dikkat çekici bir bulgudur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Cinsel Şiddet, Duygu Durumu, Sporcu, Yalnızlık.

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## Introduction

Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. According to the study, 1 out of every 5 women in the world reported that they were sexually abused, while this rate was observed to be higher. 1 in 13 men in the world reports that they were sexually abused as a child (Becker, 2016). It is a work used in Turkey as well as the country where it was used in childhood. The abuse and accidents that will be committed by a person in Turkey within a year have been examined, and it has been tried to rank according to the types of abuses. In terms of research, it is unused at more than 51% use (Korkmazlar et al, 2010).

It is seen that the studies on sexual abuse in the field of sports are limited for a long time. In particular, research in this field began to be studied intensively in the mid-1980s. There is a need for more intensive research in the sports environment. Because in the sports environment and in the field of sports, it seems that those who benefit from the appearance and its prevalence are not very well informed. There is a need to disseminate research on sexual violence against girls and women, especially in the sports environment (Fasting, 2005). Sexual harassment and abuse in sports stem from abuses (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2008; Tomlinson and Yorganci, 1997), sexual harassment and abuse can be targeted at any athlete regardless of age, sports ability, gender, nationality, race or ethnicity, social class, education level, sexual orientation or disability (Fasting et al, 2004; Gunduz et al, 2007). Sexual harassment and abuse are perpetrated in all sports and at all levels, (Fasting, et al, 2004; Timpka et al. 2014) with the prevalence of both forms higher in elite sports (Fasting et al, 2010; Vertommen et al. 2015) and the violence poses a real problem in sports (Mountjoy et al, 2016).

Mood person as pervasive and persistent tone of emotion. Mood, like anger and joy, contains it and can be observed by others while experiencing it in its own way. Mood generally affects the way a person perceives, interprets and conducts human relations with other people's behavior. It is thought to naturally affect one's social life (Argus et al., 2004). Emotions and performance are relationships, and emotions take shape according to how individuals achieve their goals. The mood varies according to the person, the environment and the task undertaken. The emotion-performance relationship is reciprocal. Emotions affect performance. However, changes in time and results cause the individual's emotional content and intensity to change. It is based on the evaluation of optimal (where we use the energy we have effectively) and non-functional (where we do not use the energy we have effectively) interaction to predict performance (Robazza et al, 2008). The attempts to control emotions and towards the individual are optimally based on the understanding given by the individual and the idea of meta-experience that causes certain emotions (Hanin, 2003). It is stated that emotions cause physical, cognitive, and motivational changes in athletes and that there is a decrease or increase in performance as a result of these changes, and the effects of emotions vary according to the

characteristics of the sports branch and the task to be performed (Jones, 2012). Positive thinking is a cognitive process that helps individuals have hopeful images of the future, develop optimistic ideas, finds appropriate solutions to problems, make positive decisions and bring a general perspective to life (Bekhet and Zauszniewski, 2013). Studies are showing that optimism and positive thinking reduce the effects of stress, anxiety, and depression (Ahangarzadeh et al. 2017; Nikmanesh and Zandvakili, 2015; Zandvakili et al. 2014).

Since loneliness is a difficult and complex experience (visible and intangible), it is often confused with other similar concepts (singleness, isolation, etc.) (Wright, et al. 2006). Loneliness can also be defined as a concept in which the individual cannot provide enough satisfaction in her social relations and has difficulty in maintaining her individual relations positively (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Although loneliness is a feeling that can be experienced by people of all age groups, it is experienced more commonly and intensely, especially during adolescence (Qualter et al., 2015). Malekian et al. (2015) stated that doing physical activity during adolescence will balance, prevent and cure mental disorders that cause loneliness in individuals. In addition, female athletes reported that they experienced less loneliness than non-athletes (Yousefi & Hassani, 2012; Samiei et al., 2012).

Violence is seen as a problem in sports fields with its different dimensions, including physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence. It is observed that people become lonely due to other factors such as social and individual violence and technological developments. The level of sexual violence was tried to be determined by asking questions about sexual violence based on the experiences, observations, feelings, and thoughts of professional athletes. The fact that previous studies did not reveal sexual violence, loneliness, and emotional state in athletes from a holistic perspective, and the few and limited studies in this field increase the importance of this study. This research was conducted to examine the level of sexual violence, mood, and loneliness in Professional athletes.

## **Method**

This study was conducted to examine the level of sexual violence, mood, and loneliness in professional athletes. The average age of the athletes participating in the research is  $24.04 \pm 4.96$ , the average age of sports is  $2.27 \pm 0.993$ , sports branches Athletics (n: 9), Basketball (n: 39), Volleyball (n: 59), Football (n: 32), Fitness (n:19), Tennis (n:22), Boxing (n:15), 85 men, 110 women, a total of 195 athletes participated. To determine the level of sexual violence of the participants, a literature review (Bulut, 2012; Kılıç, 2019) was conducted and questions were prepared by the researcher. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale is .645. In addition, the "The Profile of Mood States (POMS)" scale was used to determine the emotional states of the athletes, and the "UCLA Loneliness Scale" was used to determine their loneliness level. During the current research, it has been acted within the framework of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive".

### ***The Profile of Mood States (POMS)***

It was developed to quickly and reliably identify and evaluate mood swings, situational and short-term changes. The scale was developed by McNair, Lorr and Droppleman (1971). As a result of the random ordering of the questions that make up the scale, certain questions are grouped under 6 different moods. These states are: "tension-anxiety", "depression-grief", "anger-aggression", "vigor-activity", "fatigue-inertia" and "confused-surprise". The scale, which has 5 likert types, consists of 65 items. Mood profile total score is obtained by subtracting the “vigor-activity” subscale score from the sum of the other five subscale scores. High scores on the five subscales and the scale indicate a higher mood disorder. The validity and reliability study of the scale in Turkey was conducted by Selvi et al. (2011).

### ***Ucla Loneliness Scale***

The loneliness scale was developed by Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980) for adults in clinical and non-clinical groups. The scale consists of 20 items (8 inverted and 12 straight) (sample item, “I feel excluded from the group”). Each item is evaluated on four graded scales . The high score obtained from the scale indicates that the individual's loneliness level is high. The validity and reliability study of the scale in our country was conducted by Demir (1989). Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .96, and the correlation coefficient obtained from the test-retest method applied with five-week intervals was found to be .94.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data obtained after the study were analyzed using the SPSS 22 package program with the help of a statistician. In the evaluation of the data, frequency analysis, Crosstab, and t-test analyzes were applied.

## **Findings**

Table 1

Examination of Sexual Violence in Athletes Participating in The Study

<b>Questions</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Have you been exposed to sexual harassment/violence?	Never	179	91.8
	Rarely/ Sometimes	15	7.7
	Anytime	1	0.5
What kind of sexual harassment/violence have you been exposed to?	Verbal abuse	69	35.4
	Touching private areas	46	23.6
	Rape	46	23.6
	Caress/kiss	22	11.3
	Voyeurism	12	6.2
Who was the perpetrator of sexual harassment/violence?	Other (dating, friend, etc.)	78	40.0
	Coach	53	27.2
	Spectator	19	9.7
	Teammate	13	6.7
	Club Managers	13	6.7
	Physical Education Teacher	10	5.1
	Family	9	4.6

Has your teammate or other athlete been subjected to sexual harassment/violence?	Yes	131	67.2
	No	64	32.8
If yes, who was the perpetrator of sexual harassment/violence?	Other (dating, friend, etc.)	132	67.7
	Coach	29	14.9
	Physical Education Teacher	15	7.7
	Family	7	3.6
	Spectator	6	3.1
	Teammate	3	1.5
Do you feel like a sexual object in sports environments?	Yes	28	14.4
	No	167	85.6

p<0.05

As seen in Table I, the rate of exposure to sexually explicit words was 35.4%, touching private areas was 23.6%, and the rape rate was 23.6%. When asked about the perpetrator of sexual violence, the other (dating, friend, etc.) option was found to be 40%, the coach was 27.2%, and the audience was 9.7%. The rate of being exposed to sexual violence by a teammate or another athlete of the athletes was determined as 67.2%. It is a remarkable finding that the rate of the option stating that a teammate or another athlete has been exposed to sexual violence is high.

Table 2

Examination of Loneliness and Mood Profile Sub-dimensions of the Athletes Participating in the Research by Gender Variable

	Gender	N	Ort	sd	t	p
<b>Loneliness Total Score</b>	Male	110	15,100	4,056	-2,346	,020*
	Female	85	16,435	3,787		
<b>Depression-Dejection</b>	Male	110	16,418	13,045	,363	,717
	Female	85	15,741	12,724		
<b>Tension-Anxiety</b>	Male	110	13,772	6,214	,692	,490
	Female	85	13,129	6,711		
<b>Anger-Hostility</b>	Male	110	15,963	9,768	1,209	,228
	Female	85	14,188	10,673		
<b>Confusion-Bewilderment</b>	Male	110	6,118	4,538	-,122	,903
	Female	85	6,200	4,792		
<b>Fatigue-Inertia</b>	Male	110	7,118	4,803	-1,868	,063
	Female	85	8,494	5,458		
<b>Vigor-Activity</b>	Male	110	22,309	5,844	-1,120	,264
	Female	85	23,235	5,573		

p<0.05

As seen in Table II, it was determined that the level of loneliness of the athletes participating in the research differed significantly according to the gender variable (p<0.05). It is seen that the average loneliness level of male athletes is higher than that of female athletes. When the mean values of the mood profile sub-dimensions Depression-Dejection and Anger-Hostility were analyzed according to the gender variable, it was determined that the Depression-Dejection and Anger-Hostility mood were higher in female athletes.

Table 3

Analysis of Loneliness and Mood Profile Sub-dimensions in Athletes Participating in the Research

		Age	Sport Age	Loneliness	Depression-Dejection	Tension-Anxiety	Anger-Hostility	confusion-bewilderment	Fatigue-Inertia
<b>Loneliness</b>	r	,063	-,169*						
	p	,383	,018						
	N	195	195						
<b>Depression-Dejection</b>	r	-,066	-,220**	,484**					
	p	,359	,002	,000					
	N	195	195	195					
<b>Tension-Anxiety</b>	r	,029	-,054	,385**	,776**				
	p	,692	,456	,000	,000				
	N	195	195	195	195				
<b>Anger-Hostility</b>	r	,060	-,077	,372**	,774**	,843**			
	p	,401	,286	,000	,000	,000			
	N	195	195	195	195	195			
<b>Confusion-Bewilderment</b>	r	-,073	-,200**	,361**	,830**	,733**	,682**		
	p	,309	,005	,000	,000	,000	,000		
	N	195	195	195	195	195	195		
<b>Fatigue-Inertia</b>	r	-,066	-,208**	,416**	,767**	,763**	,736**	,628**	
	p	,361	,004	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	195	195	195	195	195	195	195	
<b>Vigor-Activity</b>	r	-,025	,101	-,311**	-,329**	-,071	-,163*	-,233**	-,131
	p	,732	,161	,000	,000	,324	,023	,001	,067
	N	195	195	195	195	195	195	195	195

p<0.05

As seen in Table III, a negative significant relationship was found between the loneliness level of the athletes and the sports age variable ( $r=-,169^*$ ). It can be said that as the age of sports increases, the level of loneliness decreases. There is a significant difference between the level of loneliness and the sub-dimensions of mood ( $p<0.05$ ). A positive and significant relationship was found between loneliness and depression-dejection, tension-anxiety, confusion-bewilderment, and the fatigue-inertia mood states. When the loneliness values of the athletes increase, it is seen that the mood values of depression-dejection, anger-hostility, confusion-bewilderment, and fatigue-inertia also increase. It was determined that there was a negative significant relationship between loneliness and vigor-activity mood. It is a remarkable finding that when the loneliness values increase in athletes, the "vigor-activity" mood value decreases.

### Discussion

In the study conducted to examine the level of sexual violence, mood, and loneliness in professional athletes;

Athletes' exposure to sexually explicit words was found to be 35.4%, touching sexual areas 23.6%, and rape rate 23.6%. When asked about the perpetrator of sexual violence, the other (dating, friend, etc.) option was found to be 40%, the trainer was 27.2%, and the audience was 9.7%. The rate

of being exposed to sexual violence by a teammate or another athlete of the athletes was determined as 67.2%. It is a remarkable finding that the rate of the option stating that a teammate or another athlete has been exposed to sexual violence is high (Table I). In a study on the sexual harassment perceptions and experiences of athletes in Turkey, it was found that female athletes were asked questions about their sexual life (76%), sexist jokes about their bodies (66%), praise or comments (71%) while showing sexually explicit materials (70%), asked repeated unwanted dating offers (51%) and obscene glances (72%) to male athletes are seen as sexual harassment behaviors. While 27% of male athletes stated that they were exposed to sexual harassment in the locker rooms, 26.3% of female athletes stated that they were exposed to sexual harassment in sports fields (Özen et al, 2018). In some studies on violence, undesirable physical contacts, sexually explicit jokes, compliments, materials (e-mail, letter, message), persistent offers, disturbing uninterrupted glances, and some gains if the sexual offer is complied with, or the costs related to sports life if not followed. It reveals that athletes, especially female athletes, have experienced sexual harassment (Auweele et al., 2008; Fasting et al, 2007). In a study examining physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence in athletes, it was determined that the choice of the trainer was higher after the option of other (dating, friend, etc.) as the perpetrator of sexual violence. It has been determined that male athletes are more exposed to economic violence, while female athletes are more exposed to physical and psychological violence (Bastug et al.2021). In another study on sexual harassment in sports, it was determined that athletes were most exposed to sexual harassment by their trainers, and those female athletes were exposed to sexual harassment and abuse more often than men (Yıldız, 2009).

It was determined that the loneliness levels of the athletes participating in the study differed significantly according to the gender variable ( $p<0.05$ ). It was found that the mean value of loneliness of male athletes was higher than that of female athletes. When the mean values of the mood profile sub-dimensions Depression-Dejection and Anger-Hostility were analyzed according to the gender variable, it was determined that the Depression-Dejection and Anger-Hostility mood were higher in female athletes (Table II). In the literature, studies are showing that depression levels are high in women and individuals living alone (Singh and Misra, 2009; Aylaz et al., 2012; Gerst-Emerson et al., 2014; Polat and Karasu, 2020).

A negative significant relationship was found between the loneliness level of the athletes and the age of sports. It is seen that the level of loneliness decreases as the age of sports increases. Sports age shows how long the athlete has been doing the sports branch he/she is doing. It is known that sports environments increase socialization. We can say that the reason why loneliness decreases as the sports age increases, is the athletes who socialize in sports environments feel the loneliness at a low level. A significant difference was found between the level of loneliness and the sub-dimensions of mood ( $p<0.05$ ). A positive and significant relationship was found between loneliness and depression-dejection, tension-anxiety, confusion-bewilderment, and the fatigue-inertia mood states.

When the loneliness level of the athletes increases, it is seen that the mood states of depression-dejection, anger-hostility, confusion-bewilderment, and fatigue-inertia also increase. It was determined that there was a negative significant relationship between loneliness and vigor-activity mood. It is a remarkable finding that when the level of loneliness increases in athletes, the value of the “vigor-activity” mood decreases (Table III). Many studies have found a positive correlation between loneliness and depression (Kabátová et al, 2016; Domènech-Abella et al., 2017; Grover et al., 2018; Polat and Karasu, 2020). These research findings support our study.

As a result, it was determined that professional athletes were exposed to sexually explicit words, private areas were touched, a teammate or another athlete was exposed to sexual violence, and the answer to the question of the perpetrator of sexual violence was highly other (dating, friend, etc.) and coach. The high rate of athletes who state that their teammate or another athlete has been exposed to sexual violence is a remarkable finding. The level of loneliness differs significantly according to the gender variable. It is seen that the average loneliness value of male athletes is higher than that of female athletes. It was determined that the mean values of Depression-Dejection and Anger-Hostility mood were higher in female athletes. A negative significant relationship was found between loneliness and sports age. It is seen that the level of loneliness decreases as the age of sports increases. A positive and significant relationship was found between loneliness and depression-dejection, tension-anxiety, confusion-bewilderment, and the fatigue-inertia mood states. When the loneliness value of the athletes increases, it is seen that the mood states of depression-dejection, anger-hostility, confusion-bewilderment, and fatigue-inertia also increase. It was determined that there was a negative significant relationship between loneliness and vigor-activity mood. It is a remarkable finding that when the loneliness value increases in athletes, the "vigor-activity" mood value decreases. The data obtained at the end of this research can give a preliminary idea about the sexual violence and harassment in the field of sports in Turkey and, accordingly, measures to prevent them.

### **Statement of Researchers' Contribution Rates**

Both authors contributed equally at all stages of the research.

### **Conflict Statement**

The authors do not have a statement of conflict regarding the research.

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