

Is Burnout a Determinant of Moral Disengagement in Team and Individual Sports?

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the relationship between moral disengagement and burnout, the level of prediction, and differentiation by different variables. In the present study, in which the relational scanning model among the quantitative research models was used, 530 elite athletes were involved. The athlete burnout scale (ABQ) and moral disengagement in sports scale (MDSS-SF) were used to collect data. The data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation analysis, regression analysis, t-test, and ANOVA. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the burnout level of the athletes was positively related to moral disengagement and the level of burnout was a predictor of moral disengagement in sports. It was found that there was no significant difference between burnout and moral disengagement levels of team and individual sports athletes, that the moral disengagement level of male athletes was significantly higher than that of female athletes, and that male team athletes' level of burnout in sports was significantly higher than that of female team athletes. Moreover, the burnout-in-sports score of athletes having 12 years or longer sportive experience in individual branches was significantly higher than that of athletes having 7-11 years and that of athletes having a minimum of 6 years of experience. In this study, it was concluded that athletes' level of burnout in sports increased the level of moral disengagement, that male athletes had a higher level of moral disengagement, and that long experience in sports increased the burnout among individual branch athletes.

Keywords: Sports, Athlete, Athlete burnout, Moral disengagement, Team and individual sports

Takım ve Bireysel Sporlarda Tükenmişlik Ahlakdan Uzaklaşmanın Belirleyicisi midir?

Öz

Araştırmada elit düzeydeki takım ve bireysel sporcuların sporda tükenmişlik ve ahlaktan uzaklaşma düzeyi arasındaki ilişkiyi, yordama düzeyini ve çeşitli değişkenlere göre farklılaşma durumunu ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Nicel araştırma modellerinden ilişkisel tarama deseninin kullanıldığı araştırmaya 530 elit sporcu katılmıştır. Araştırmada sporcu tükenmişlik ölçeği (ve sporda ahlaktan uzaklaşma ölçeği (SAUÖ-KF) kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Person Korelasyon, regresyon analizi, t testi ve ANOVA'dan yararlanılmıştır. Analizler sonucunda sporcuların tükenmişlik düzeyindeki artışın, ahlaktan uzaklaşma düzeyi ile pozitif yönde ilişkili olduğu, sporda tükenmişlik düzeyinin ahlaktan uzaklaşmanın bir yordayıcısı olduğu saptanmıştır. Takım ve bireysel sporcuların sporda tükenmişlik, ahlaktan uzaklaşma düzeyleri arasında anlamlı farklılık olmadığı, erkek sporcuların ahlaktan uzaklaşma düzeyinin kadın sporculardan anlamlı düzeyde yüksek olduğu, erkek takım sporcularının sporda tükenmişlik düzeyinin kadın takım sporcularından anlamlı düzeyde yüksek olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca bireysel branşlarda en az 12 ve üzeri yıl spor deneyimi olan sporcuların sporda tükenmişlik puanlarının 7-11 yıl, en az 6 yıl spor deneyimi olanlardan anlamlı düzeyde yüksek olduğu bulgulanmıştır. Araştırmada sporcuların tükenmişlik düzeyinin, ahlaktan uzaklaşma düzeyini arttırdığı, erkek sporcuların daha fazla ahlaktan uzaklaşma düzeyine sahip olduğu, bireysel branş sporcularının spor yaşındaki artışın tükenmişlik düzeyini arttırdığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Spor, Sporcu, Sporcu tükenmişliği, Ahlakdan uzaklaşma, Takım ve bireysel sporlar

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INTRODUCTION

The burnout concept was defined by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974 as a state of exhaustion stemming from unfulfilled desires, a sense of failure, and a depletion of energy (Freudenberger, 1974). Burnout is also delineated as a negative self-perception, a sense of being desperate, the exhibition of negative attitudes toward others, and physical fatigue. Moreover, these factors result in mental, emotional, and physical consequences among individuals (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). From a psychological perspective, burnout manifests in individuals as decision-making difficulties, unhappiness, reluctance, insomnia, and irritability (Salvagioni et al., 2017). In terms of health implications, it is associated with resistance to infections, chronic pain, and insomnia (Giorgi et al., 2017). Behaviorally, burnout is known to precipitate conditions such as absenteeism, decreased attendance, subpar performance, and avoidance of action (Rössler, 2012). While all of these effects may not manifest simultaneously, it is possible to observe one or more of them concurrently. However, their manifestation is not expected to be uniform across all individuals. Although a general classification of burnout is challenging considering its psychological, health, and behavioral effects, researchers classify it as mild, moderate, severe, and extreme. In a mild state of burnout, mild headache and fatigue are observed, while extreme burnout can lead to more severe issues such as aggression and even suicide attempts (Guitart, 2007, as cited in Edú-Valsania, Laguía, and Moriano, 2022).

Maslach and Leiter (2016) state that burnout adversely affects both the individual experiencing it and the broader environment. For instance, a decline in a person's performance in the workplace leads to an overall reduction in job success averages. On the other hand, according to the emotional contagion theory, people can involuntarily imitate each other's facial expressions and movements. It is common for people who share the same environment to feel sadness, anger, and exhaustion collectively. Based on this theory, scientists argue that burnout can spread among people who coexist in the same setting, analogously emotional states (Herrando ve Constantinides, 2021).

The concept of burnout has gained prominence, with an increasing number of studies exploring its effects on individuals' social and societal lives. A review of the national literature reveals that various researchers have attempted to elucidate this concept through diverse definitions. Özyurt (2004) interprets burnout as "a state of mind where an individual feels emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted as a result of events occurring over time and causing pain to the individual", while Dalkılıç (2014) characterizes it as "a state of mind where an individual feels emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted". Despite living under identical conditions, the manifestation of burnout may vary among individuals due to personal factors. This condition, which does not emerge abruptly, evolves gradually over time. This condition is initially enigmatic and can be revealed by following the psychological, behavioral, and physical symptoms (Namlı and Demir, 2019b). In the context of burnout, one may observe psychological manifestations such as sense of being restrained, anger, agitation, impatience, discomfort, and energy depletion, along with physical symptoms including stomachache, weakness, headaches, muscle tension, weight loss, elevated cholesterol levels, tension, and sleep disorders.

Additionally, domestic disputes, crying jags, and aversion to work can also be seen (Tümkiye, 2000). Burnout syndrome can be experienced by any individual, regardless of age group or industry. Sports, which contain a high level of interaction, are among these sectors. The conditions such as intense training, competition, stress, and the pressure to succeed can cause an individual to feel burnout. The athletes, who are naturally in constant interaction, can deprave by exhibiting the psychological, behavioral, and physiological symptoms of burnout toward their opponents or teammates.

Kavussanu (2008) expressed that within the realm of sports, moral disengagement can be observed since individuals may exhibit positive behaviors such as encouraging their teammates, increasing motivation, or supporting the opponent in need, as well as exhibiting negative behaviors such as injuring opponents, lying, or tending toward provoking a fight. According to Boardley and Kavussanu (2011), moral disengagement is the effort made by an individual to normalize socially unacceptable behaviors as acceptable. The individual inclined toward moral disengagement initiates the psychosocial maneuvers, which are called the “moral disengagement mechanism”, to relieve the pressure on him/her (Gürpınar, 2015).

When athletes are subjected to burnout syndrome, they may exhibit attitudes and behaviors indicative of moral disengagement, in addition to the psychological, physical, and behavioral symptoms typically associated with this condition. Burnout syndrome can adversely affect the performance of athletes, as well as initiate moral disengagement behaviors. This could lead to disciplinary actions specific to their sport, exclusion from games, and even detrimental effects on their athletic career.

Given the significance of performance enhancement for elite athletes, who acquired their branches as a profession, it is vital to investigate whether the burnout syndrome could trigger their tendency to moral disengagement in sports. The study objective was to examine the relationship between burnout levels and moral disengagement levels of athletes. In addition, the study aimed to investigate the differences in burnout and moral disengagement levels of athletes according to their gender, branch, and years of sports experience, and to ascertain whether the level of burnout predicts the level of moral disengagement. Since there is no similar research in the existing literature, the present study is of specific importance and is anticipated to serve as a reference for future studies.

METHODS

This section provides information about the research model, participants, data collection tools, and data analysis.

Study Design

This quantitative study adopted the relational scanning pattern. This pattern is used for studies aiming to reveal a previous or current situation as is or was (Karasar, 2006) and to determine the presence or level of covariance between two or more variables (Cohen et al., 2000).

Participants

The involvement criteria were defined as actively participating in activities of the relevant federations, being registered with the relevant federation for a minimum of six years, and actively engaging in sports. Within this context, criterion sampling was employed. Criterion sampling may consist of criterion or criteria meeting a series of criteria predetermined by the researcher (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2011).

In the process of determining the sample size for the study, a power analysis was conducted using the “G. Power-3.1.9.2” software. Using the effect width of .25 and significance level of .05, it was predicted that a power level of 80% would be achieved with a sample of 398 athletes. Considering the risk of participants submitting incomplete or incorrectly filled scales, 558 athletes were reached. Incomplete and incorrectly filled 28 scales were excluded from the analysis. Within this context, 530 elite athletes actively doing sports in the federation of relevant branches were involved in the study. The participants from individual sports branches constituted 51.3% (n=272) of the total, whereas team athletes constituted the remaining 48.7% (n=258). Regarding gender distribution, 32.6% (n=173) of the participants were female, and 67.4% (n=357) were male. The mean age of the participants was 20.54±2.13.

Ethical Approval

The studies were approved by the Erzurum Technical University research ethics committee (28.06.2019).

Data Collection Tools

Via Google Forms, the data were collected online by using the “Athlete Burnout Questionnaire” and “Moral Disengagement in Sports Scale”.

Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ): The scale was originally developed by Raedeke and Smith (2001) and later adapted into Turkish by Keleşek et al. (2016). It comprises 15 items, with a 5-point Likert style, and includes 12 reverse items. It is structured into three sub-dimensions: Reduced Sense of Accomplishment, Emotional/Physical Exhaustion, and Devaluation. The focus of this study is to examine the general burnout levels. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the general burnout questionnaire is .82, while its sub-dimensions have coefficients of .78, .80, and .79 respectively. For the purposes of this research, the general burnout score was utilized. CFA” (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) was used to test the fit of the scale to the study group. The fit index value was found to be $\chi^2= 111.43$, $sd= 44$, $RMSEA=.07$, $NFI=.90$, $CFI=.94$, $IFI=.90$, $PNFI=.95$, $GFI=.91$. Accordingly, it can be stated that the fitness of structural validity of the scale to the study group was proven (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Athlete Burnout Questionnaire Sample Items “ I don’t achieve much in sports, I am exhausted from the mental and physical demands of the sport, I feel successful in sports”.

Moral Disengagement in Sports Questionnaire – Short Form (MDSS-SF): Developed by Boardley and Kavussanu (2008) and adapted into Turkish by Gürpınar (2015), this scale consists of 8 items and a single dimension. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of this scale was .72.

The scale has a 7-point Likert style and no reverse items. CFA was used to test the fit of the scale to the study group. The fit index value was found to be $\chi^2 = 71.17$, $sd = 33$, $RMSEA = .07$, $NFI = .92$, $CFI = .95$, $IFI = .94$, $PNFI = .90$, $GFI = .92$. Accordingly, it can be stated that the fitness of structural validity of the scale to the study group was proven (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Moral Disengagement in Sports Questionnaire Sample Items “When athletes insult each other, it doesn't really hurt anyone, Bending the rules is a way to equalise the balance, An opponent who exhibits animalistic behaviour can be treated badly”

Data Analysis

Since the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the dataset were within the range of ± 1 , the parametric tests were conducted for data analysis (Büyüköztürk, 2017). Within this context, the independent samples t-test was used to compare paired groups. Pearson’s Correlation test was utilized to ascertain the relationship between the groups. A correlation coefficient ranging from .01 to .29 indicated a low level of relationship, .30 to .70 indicated a moderate relationship, .71 to .99 indicated a high level of relationship, and 1.00 indicated an excellent relationship (Köklü, Büyüköztürk and Çoklu, 2006). The prediction was determined using linear regression analysis, whereas one-way variance analysis was used in comparison of more than 2 groups. Before the linear regression analysis, the fitness of data to regression was assessed. In this regard, the multicollinearity was tested using Pearson’s Correlation test and it was established that there was no multicollinearity issue. Moreover, after confirming that the VIF value was lower than 10, the Durbin-Watson value was lower than 2, and the tolerance coefficient was lower than 1, regression analysis was applied (Hines and Montgomery, 1990). The threshold for statistical significance was set at .05.

FINDINGS

This section provides the results and interpretations of the data analyses conducted in accordance with the objective of the study.

Table 1. Results of correlation analysis between athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports

	N	\bar{x}	Sd		ABQ	MDSS-SF
Athlete’s Burnout	530	25.39	8.30	r	1	.260
				p	-	.00*
Moral Disengagement	530	22.24	8.28	r	.260	1
				p	.00*	-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 1 presents the results regarding Pearson’s correlation analysis conducted between athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports. Accordingly, the results indicate a significant positive correlation at a low level ($r = .260$, $p < .05$).

Table 2. Regression analysis on the role of athlete burnout in determining moral disengagement in sports

Scale (n=530)	R	R ²	R ² _{ch}	F	df	B	β	t	p
Constant						8.587		7.693	.00*
ABQ	.532	.283	.28	208.006	1/528	.602	.532	14.422	.00*

*p<.05; ** p<.01

Table 2 shows that athlete burnout predicted moral disengagement in sports. The regression analysis showed that the model established was significant ($F_{(1,528)}=208.006$, $p<.01$) and explained 28% of the variance ($R=.532$, $R^2=.283$). Examination of the beta coefficient in parallel with the obtained significance demonstrated that Athlete Burnout was a positive predictor of moral disengagement in sports ($\beta=.532$, $t=7.693$; $p<.05$).

Table 3. Independent sample t-tests results on athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports according to athlete branches

	Branches	N	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Athlete's Burnout	Individuals	272	26.06	9.17	1.916	.05
	Team	258	24.69	7.23		
Moral Disengagement	Individuals	272	21.87	8.83	-1.056	.29
	Team	258	22.63	7.67		

*p<.05

As seen in Table 3, the levels of athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports were examined using independent samples t-tests by their branches. The results revealed no significant difference between the levels of athlete burnout ($t_{(528)}= 1.916$, $p>.05$) and moral disengagement in sports ($t_{(528)}= -1.056$, $p>.05$) among team athletes and individual athletes.

Table 4. Independent samples t-tests between athlete burnout and moral disengagement according to gender

	Gender	N	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Athlete's Burnout	Female	173	25.71	9.20	.603	.54
	Male	357	25.24	7.84		
Moral Disengagement	Female	173	20.68	7.69	-3.035	.00*
	Male	357	23.00	8.46		

*p<.05

Table 4 presents the results of the independent samples t-tests conducted between athlete burnout and moral disengagement by gender. The results indicated a significant difference between the scores of genders regarding moral disengagement in sport. Accordingly, the results showed that the moral disengagement level of male athletes in sports ($\bar{x}=23.00$) was significantly higher than that of female ($\bar{x}=20.68$) athletes ($t_{(528)}= -3.035$, $p<.05$).

Table 5. Results of independent samples t-tests comparing the team and individual athletes according to gender

		Branches	N	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Athlete's Burnout	Individuals	Female	103	26.92	10.14	1.197	.23
		Male	169	25.55	8.52		
	Team	Female	70	19.55	7.73	-3.452	.00*
		Male	188	23.28	9.17		
Moral Disengagement	Individuals	Female	103	23.92	7.33	-1.032	.30
		Male	169	24.97	7.19		
	Team	Female	70	22.35	7.39	-.355	.72
		Male	188	22.73	7.78		

*p<.05

Table 5 presents the results of the independent samples t-test comparing the athlete burnout and moral disengagement levels of individual and team athletes in sports by gender. The findings revealed that athlete burnout level of male team athletes (\bar{x} =23.28) was significantly higher than that of female (\bar{x} =19.55) team athletes ($t_{(528)} = -3.452, p < .05$).

Table 6. Results of ANOVA test comparing the groups (team and individual athletes)

		Experience (years)	Groups	N	\bar{x}	F _(2,269)	p	Differences
Athlete's Burnout	Individuals	≥6	a	74	21.98	8.822	.00*	c*>b>a
		7-11	b	116	27.09			
		12≤	c	82	27.47			
	Team	≥6	a	61	23.88	1.123	.32	-
		7-11	b	102	24.38			
		12≤	c	95	25.53			
Moral Disengagement	Individuals	≥6	d	74	23.40	1.448	.23	-
		7-11	e	116	21.10			
		12≤	f	82	21.86			
	Team	≥6	d	61	22.85	1.599	.20	-
		7-11	e	102	23.50			
		12≤	f	95	21.56			

*p<.05

Table 6 presents the results of a one-way variance analysis conducted to compare the athlete burnout and moral disengagement levels of individual and team athletes by their years of sports experience. As a result of the analysis, there was a significant correlation between athlete burnout and years of experience in sports ($F_{(2,269)} = 8.822, p < .05$). Accordingly, the mean athlete burnout score of athletes with 12 years or more experience in individual sports branches (\bar{x} =27.47) was significantly higher than those having 7-11 years (\bar{x} =27.09) or a minimum of 6 years (\bar{x} =21.98) of sports experience.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the burnout and moral disengagement levels of individual and team athletes by gender, branch, and sports experience. At the same time, the degree to which athletes' burnout levels and moral disengagement levels predicted each other was examined.

Given the results achieved, a positive and strong relationship was found between athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports. This implies that the higher the level of athlete burnout, the more likely the athletes were to morally disengage from their sports activities. It was reported that an increase in the level of burnout may cause individuals to exhibit moral disengagement behaviors, which can include criminal acts (Bandura, 2004). Furthermore, athletes experiencing burnout may resort to actions such as deceiving referees or distorting the truth for personal gain (Gürpınar, 2015). Burnout includes chronic fatigue, high level of energy loss, and low resistance level, and it covers the period of moral disengagement, arguing in social relationships, depression, pessimism, and uneasiness. Additionally, the increase in burnout might cause individuals to develop negative attitudes toward both the environment and themselves (Naktiyok and Karabey, 2005). The professionalization of sports among elite athletes intensifies the pressure they experience, eventually contributing to burnout. This pressure arises from rigorous training schedules, adherence to sports dynamics, and strict life rules (Isoard- Gautheu et al., 2015). As burnout levels escalate, individuals may disregard inappropriate behaviors and even normalize them, ultimately resulting in moral deterioration. (Bandura, 2004). Moral disengagement is the ignorance and legitimization of behaviors, which are considered a crime, by an individual (Gürpınar, 2015). In this sense, these findings align with the existing literature.

The study found that athlete burnout predicted moral disengagement in sports and the established model was significant. It was determined that athlete burnout explained moral disengagement in sports by 28%. Furthermore, the positive and significant relationship between athlete burnout and moral disengagement suggests that as athlete burnout levels increase, moral disengagement in sports also rises.

The study revealed no significant difference between mean athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports among team and individual athletes. Accordingly, one can say that team and individual athletes have similar levels of burnout and moral disengagement in sports. A possible reason for this is that both team and individual athletes share a similar desire to win, in addition to multifaceted and adequate training programs that are specific to their branches. It is emphasized that both individual and team athletes should perform disciplined and conscious training to attain success (Biçer, 2018). Hence, each branch necessitates its unique training methodologies. These pieces of training should be multifaceted, planned, and suitable for the requirements of the discipline. An essential factor for the team and individual athletes is to perform sufficient training in a planned manner with the desire to win (Dündar, 2003). Isoard-Gautheu et al. (2015), however, stated that because of the dynamics of team sports, team players might experience burnout at a higher level due to the desire to have more time during team games. On the other hand, the literature reports that individual athletes may have a higher level of burnout. For instance, as reported by Lin and Lin (2016), one of the factors increasing the burnout of athletes is that athletes overly focus on individual success and winning the game. Individual athletes' level of burnout may further increase since they do not have partners as in team sports or they have a lack of communication with trainers (Pires et al., 2016). Individual athletes may feel that the burden of pressure on themselves gradually increases. Athletes may be under intense pressure stemming from emotional and psychological factors related to their performances and disciplines. This pressure can lead to a performance decline, ultimately

resulting in severe burnout and feelings of exhaustion (Çavuşoğlu et al., 2015). Moreover, moral disengagement is defined as considering unethical behaviors as insignificant and convincing oneself that the behavior of the individual is accurate (Bandura, 2004). Moreover, the reasons for moral disengagement also include blaming others and attributing personal failures or mistakes to others (Gürpınar, 2015). Within this context, it can be inferred that both team and individual athletes in this study were similar in terms of the level of moral disengagement in sports such as trivializing misconduct, endorsing wrongful actions, and blaming others.

The present study found no significant difference between male and female athletes' burnout levels. Concordantly, one can say that female and male athletes have similar athlete burnout levels. This may be attributed to the similar competitions at analogous levels and comparable levels of training. Sucuoğlu and Kuloğlu (1996) asserted that the gender factor was not one of the determinant factors for burnout. Despite the research results, some studies reported that women experience burnout more intensely (Maslach, 1986), whereas some others reported that males exhibit higher levels of burnout (Murat, 2000; Örmən, 1992, Turan and Paktaş, 2021). Despite cultural and traditional norms in our country, which associate women with less strength and participation than men in sports (Emir et al. 2015), despite the inequality they experience (Avcı et al. 2016), the subjection to various negative consequences over time (Kavasoğlu and Yaşar, 2016), and the consideration of being disadvantaged (Sarı and Bulut, 2020), it was observed that the elite female and male athletes participating in the present study had similar burnout levels. This suggests a shift in Turkish culture, transcending gender biases and viewing sports as a gender-neutral competition. Furthermore, numerous studies revealed that male athletes had a higher moral disengagement in sports compared to their female counterparts. Specifically, male athletes are more prone to trivialize unethical behaviors and justify wrongful actions. This discrepancy may arise because male athletes are more likely to use aggressive language, bend rules for victory, and engage in fewer dishonest behaviors than female athletes. Moreover, Boardley and Kavussanu stated that athletes tried to show the vulgar language more innocent by comparing it to offensive behaviors, and male athletes became depraved more than female athletes did. Long et al. (2006), carried out a qualitative study on young elite rugby players, and a male rugby player in this study expressed that he would kill the opponent in the next game if his teammate was fouled by an opponent player and the opponent was not fined. This extreme reaction suggests that the male rugby player trivialized the severity of his potential actions to justify his moral disengagement. Studying athletes' moral disengagement and locus of control, in corroboration with the results achieved, Tsai et al. (2014) reported that male athletes' level of moral disengagement in sports was higher than that of female athletes.

In addition to all these, the individual and team athletes' levels of burnout and moral disengagement in sports were examined by gender, and a difference was found in the athlete burnout level. Accordingly, the athlete burnout level of male team athletes was found to be significantly higher than that of female team athletes. This difference can be attributed to female athletes' higher level of emotional development, higher level of ability to move in concert with the team, and higher level of mental strength when compared to male team athletes. Moreover, it can be claimed that, when compared to male team athletes, female team

athletes have stronger emotional communication with their teammates and it might account for their less negative attitudes toward their respective sports. It is thought that when compared to female team athletes, male team athletes have a higher perception of legitimizing inappropriate behavior upon the courage and trust of their male teammates. Additionally, it is conjectured that male athletes are more inclined to believe that their teammates instigate them into misconduct and are more prone to attributing blame to their teammates than female team athletes. Tutkun et al. (2010) specified that individual athletes are more independent and have more advantages when compared to the athletes, who are playing in teams, since they have the freedom to make their own decisions during the games and their decisions would affect only their game achievements. This could potentially explain why team athletes experience exhaustion. Differing from the study results, Güvendi (2020) reported that the athlete burnout levels of males participating in individual branches were significantly higher than those of females in individual branches. In a study, Akbulut (2018) determined that moral disengagement levels of team and individual athletes in sports were not affected by gender. From this perspective, it can be inferred that the levels of moral disengagement in sports among male and female athletes were not affected by their participation in team and individual branches and they had similar moral disengagement levels in sports. It is speculated that females participating in individual or team sports exhibit similar tendencies as males in attributing failure to others and asserting that others coerced them into failure. Contrary to the aforementioned findings, Yıldız (2019) found that male athletes had a higher level of moral disengagement in sports when compared to females. Namlı and Demir (2019b) reported that male athletes had higher moral disengagement tendencies in sports when compared to female athletes. Sarıkol (2021) concluded that the average level of moral disengagement in sports among female athletes was significantly higher than that of male athletes. However, the average levels of moral disengagement in sports among team and individual athletes were similar. Ökten (2009) reported that the moral disengagement level of females in sports was lower and it was due to the position and responsibility of women in society.

Finally, the level of athlete burnout significantly changed with the years of experience for individual athletes in sports. Accordingly, the athletes having 12 years or more experience in individual branches had a significantly higher athlete burnout average when compared to those with 7-11 years and a minimum of 6 years of experience in individual branches. Given this finding, one can say that athlete burnout levels escalated with an increase in years of experience in individual sports. This might be because, in individual branches, the athletes are assessed over their individual performances, and with advancing age, they may feel cognitive and physical exhaustion. Moreover, the reason for exhaustion might be the factors that diminish an athlete's performance, such as agility, flexibility, and speed. Similar to these results, Özcoşan (2018) reported that the burnout levels of athletes having sports experience of 8-11 years were significantly higher than those of athletes having 1-3 and 4-7 years of experience. Contrary to these findings, Güvendi (2020) determined that the athletes doing sports in individual branches for 13-17 years had significantly higher athlete burnout levels when compared to those having sports experience of 8-12 and 18 years. Furthermore, Kuzu (2019) specified that there were significant differences in athlete burnout levels by the years of experience for team athletes, with those having shorter sports experience exhibiting lower

burnout levels compared to those with longer years of experience. Akbulut (2018) researched boxers and taekwondo athletes and found that the individual athletes having similar years of experience in sports had similar athlete burnout levels. No significant difference was found in moral disengagement scores of individual and team athletes in sports. Accordingly, it can be stated that the years of experience had no effect on the levels of moral disengagement in sports for participants engaged in individual and team sports. This is consistent with the findings of Sarikol (2021), who found no significant difference in the level of moral disengagement in sports by the years of experience in sports. However, diverging from these research findings, Yıldız (2019) found that the level of moral disengagement in sports increased with increasing years of experience. Boardley and Kavussanu (2011) emphasized that for the athletes doing sports in team branches, the increasing years of experience in sports decreased the tendency of moral disengagement in sports.

In the light of findings achieved, it was discovered that an increase in the level of athlete burnout precipitated moral disengagement. It was ascertained that both team and individual athletes exhibited similar levels of athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports. It was observed that female and male athletes had comparable levels of athlete burnout, while male athletes demonstrated significantly higher moral disengagement levels in sports when compared to female athletes. Furthermore, it was found that male athletes participating in team sports had significantly higher athlete burnout levels in comparison to female athletes in the same category. However, the levels of moral disengagement in sports were similar across genders in both team and individual branches. In this study, it was concluded that an increase in the years of experience in individual branches elevated the level of athlete burnout, and moral disengagement in sports didn't affect the level of moral disengagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the present study was carried out using the scanning method, only the current situation was reported. The authors recommend examining the levels of athlete burnout and moral disengagement in sports in depth by using a qualitative analysis method and a larger sample size.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation of the present study is its cross-sectional design, suggesting that longitudinal research would yield more convincing results.

Conflict of Interest: There is no personal or financial conflict of interest within the scope of the study.

Statement of Contribution of Researchers: Researchers contributed in equal proportions

Information on Ethics Committee Permission

Name of Board: The studies were approved by the Erzurum Technical University research ethics committee.

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