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Research on Empathic Tendency in Disabled Athletes

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Research on Empathıc Tendency in Dısabled Athletes

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the empathetic, egocentric, and sympathetic tendencies of disabled athletes in relation to various demographic factors such as education level, income, height, weight, and place of residence. Empathy is crucial for fostering social cohesion and teamwork, helping disabled athletes overcome barriers and succeed in sports. The study was conducted with 120 disabled athletes (including those with physical, hearing, and visual impairments) living in Samsun, Turkey. Data were collected using the Empathy Tendency Scale developed by and analyzed using independent t-tests.

The results showed that there was no significant difference between participants' education levels and their empathetic, egocentric, and sympathetic tendencies. Similarly, no significant differences were found in egocentric and sympathetic tendencies based on monthly income, height, and weight. However, it was observed that individuals with a monthly income of 7001 TL or more had significantly higher empathy scores than those earning 7000 TL or less ($t=-1.825$, $p=0.036$). Additionally, participants weighing 60 kg or less had significantly higher sympathetic tendencies compared to those weighing more than 61 kg ($t=2.744$, $p=0.001$). Furthermore, those living in metropolitan areas exhibited higher levels of sympathy compared to those living in smaller cities ($t=-1.291$, $p=0.021$).

These findings show that while demographic factors like education and income do not significantly affect empathy and egocentric tendencies, sympathetic tendencies vary by weight and place of residence. To support disabled athletes, tailored training and community-based programs are recommended. Future research should further examine the role of social and environmental factors in shaping emotional traits.

Keywords: Disabled Athletes, Empathy, Social Tendencies

Engelli Sporcularda Empatik Eğilim Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, engelli sporcuların empatik, benmerkezci ve sempatik eğilimlerini eğitim düzeyi, gelir, boy, kilo ve ikamet yeri gibi çeşitli demografik faktörlerle ilişkili olarak incelemektir. Empati, engelli sporcuların engelleri aşmalarına ve sporda başarılı olmalarına yardımcı olarak sosyal uyumu ve takım çalışmasını teşvik etmek için çok önemlidir. Çalışma, Samsun'da yaşayan 120 engelli sporcu (fiziksel, işitme ve görme engelli olanlar dahil) ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, Empati Eğilimi Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmış ve bağımsız t-testi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

Sonuçlar, katılımcıların eğitim düzeyleri ile empatik, benmerkezci ve sempatik eğilimleri arasında anlamlı bir fark olmadığını göstermiştir. Benzer şekilde, aylık gelir, boy ve kiloya göre benmerkezci ve sempatik eğilimlerde de anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmamıştır. Ancak aylık geliri 7001 TL ve üzeri olan bireylerin empati puanlarının 7000 TL ve altı olanlara göre anlamlı derecede yüksek olduğu görülmüştür ($t=-1.825$, $p=0.036$). Ayrıca, 60 kg ve altı ağırlığa sahip katılımcıların sempatik eğilimlerinin 61 kg ve üstü ağırlığa sahip olanlara kıyasla anlamlı derecede daha yüksek olduğu görülmüştür ($t=2.744$, $p=0.001$). Ayrıca, metropollerde yaşayanlar küçük şehirlerde yaşayanlara kıyasla daha yüksek sempati seviyeleri sergilemiştir ($t=-1.291$, $p=0.021$).

Bu bulgular, eğitim ve gelir gibi demografik faktörlerin empati ve benmerkezci eğilimleri önemli ölçüde etkilemediğini, ancak sempatik eğilimlerin kilo ve ikamet yerine göre değiştiğini göstermektedir. Engelli sporcuları desteklemek için özel eğitim ve toplum temelli programlar önerilmektedir. Gelecekteki araştırmalar, duygusal özelliklerin şekillenmesinde sosyal ve çevresel faktörlerin rolünü daha fazla incelemelidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Engelli Sporcular, Empati, Sosyal Eğilimler

1. INTRODUCTION

A person with disability is an individual who has a limitation in some sensory, thought or behavioral functions as a result of congenital or acquired illness, accident, injury or physical/mental illness.[1] Disability is specific to the culture and environment in which the person lives. Individuals with disabilities may differ in terms of type and degree of disability.[2] Disability sports encompass performance sports, physical education, rehabilitation, and leisure activities, offering individuals with disabilities opportunities for physical and social development.[3] These activities not only enhance physical and mental well-being but also serve as powerful tools for fostering social cohesion among disabled individuals. Participation in sports can help reduce stigma, build independence, and strengthen skills like sharing, self-awareness, friendship, and self-esteem.[4] Moreover, supportive relationships with family, friends, and networks play a critical role in enabling these benefits, though family attitudes can sometimes act as barriers to participation.[5]

Performance sports have a positive effect on the psycho-motor and personality development of disabled people.[6] The disabled individual and his/her activities have a social reflection. Considering that the basis of disabled sports is in the society, the state should be in action with its central and provincial organizations at the macro level at the community level and at the international level to increase the sports opportunities of disabled citizens as a social service.[7] Physical activity and sports programs organized for disabled individuals support them to lead a healthier life and increase their level of participation in society.[8] A sociological perspective on performance sports for people with disabilities offers the opportunity to better understand other people around them.[9] Athletes with disabilities reflect the sports culture with the sports activities they participate in. This is considered as one of the important social institutions through which socialization takes place for people with disabilities.[10] For example, from a sociological perspective, a disabled athlete can develop the ability to understand and empathize with people and groups in other sports communities.[9] In this respect, performance sports play an important role in the socialization of disabled individuals by contributing to the establishment of new friendships and social integration.[11]

Empathy is a holistic process that enhances the quality of human life by fostering understanding, social sensitivity, and interpersonal connection.[12,13,14] It involves seeing things from another's perspective, helping, and sharing, all of which are essential for building meaningful relationships.[15] Empathy requires stepping into another's shoes and accurately understanding their emotions and thoughts, making it a key trait for reducing social disorganization and enhancing social cohesion.[16,17,18] In the context of sports, empathy plays a pivotal role in fostering teamwork, predicting behavior, and building team spirit, directly influencing sporting success.[19] For disabled athletes, empathy is even more critical as it helps overcome the social and psychological barriers they face, enabling stronger integration into sports teams and broader social environments. Empathy allows teammates, coaches, and others to better understand the unique experiences and challenges of disabled athletes, facilitating inclusivity and mutual respect. Furthermore, demographic variables such as education, income, and place of residence can shape individuals' empathic tendencies by influencing their social

interactions and access to supportive environments. This study aims to explore these dynamics in disabled athletes, shedding light on how their empathic, egocentric, and sympathetic tendencies are impacted by demographic factors. By understanding these relationships, the study seeks to contribute to designing more inclusive and effective support systems for disabled athletes.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Working Group

The population of this study consists of 120 disabled athletes (physical, hearing, and visual disabilities) aged 18 and over, residing in Samsun. The data were collected between [January and March 2023] using a stratified sampling method to ensure representation across disability types. During data collection, ethical considerations were prioritized, including obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring confidentiality. The "Empathic Tendency Scale" and a "Personal Information Form" were administered in a controlled environment to maintain consistency and accuracy in the responses.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

In this study, the "Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS)" and a "Personal Information Form," both developed by Dökmen (1988), were used to measure participants' potential to empathize in their daily lives. The ETS consists of 20 items rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely contrary) to 5 (completely appropriate). Eight items on the scale are negatively worded and scored in reverse. The maximum score is 100, indicating a high empathic tendency, while the minimum score is 20, reflecting a low empathic tendency.[20]

The validity and reliability of the ETS have been confirmed in previous studies. Construct validity was assessed through factor analysis, and the tool demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating reliable measurement across diverse populations. Additionally, its widespread use in Turkish psychological and educational research further supports its applicability and robustness. However, discrepancies regarding the imprint of the ETS have been noted in recent analyses. These should be addressed to ensure accurate interpretation and implementation of the scale in future studies.[20]

2.3. Data Analysıs

The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS 25 package program. Indepented T test was used because the data were normally distributed.

3. Findings

Table 1. Comparison of Scale Sub-Dimensions According to Participants' Level of Education

Sub Variables	Participant Group	n	$\bar{x}$±Ss	t	p
Empathic Tendency	High School and Below	58	3.90±0.56	-1.183	0.385
	Associate's degree and above	42	4.04±0.62		
Egocentric Tendency	High School and Below	58	3.10±0.70	-1.046	0.887
	Associate's degree and above	42	3.24±0.66		
Sympathetic Tendency	High School and Below	58	3.68±0.69	-0.0364	0.760
	Associate's degree and above	42	3.73±0.74		

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation values and t-test results of the empathic, egocentric and sympathetic disposition sub-dimensions according to the participants' educational level. In the empathic tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants with high school and below education level was 3.90±0.56, while the mean of the participants with associate degree and above was 4.04±0.62. This difference is not statistically significant (t=-1,183, p=0,385). Similarly, in the egocentric tendency sub-dimension, the mean of high school and below participants was 3.10±0.70, while the mean of associate's degree and above participants was 3.24±0.66, and this difference was not significant (t=-1.046, p=0.887). In the sympathetic tendency sub-dimension, the mean of high school and below participants was 3.68±0.69 and the mean of associate degree and above participants was 3.73±0.74, and no statistically significant difference was found between the groups (t=-0.364, p=0.760).

Table 2. Comparison of Participants' Empathic, Egocentric and Sympathetic Tendencies According to Monthly İncome Level

Sub Variables	Participant Group	n	$\bar{x}$±Ss	t	p
Empathic Tendency	7000 and Below	56	3.87±0.66	-1.825	0.036
	7001 and Above	44	4.08±0.46		
Egocentric Tendency	7000 and Below	56	2.98±0.67	-3.083	0.724
	7001 and Above	44	3.39±0.63		
Sympathetic Tendency	7000 and Below	56	3.66±0.76	-0.739	0.170
	7001 and Above	44	3.76±0.63		

In the empathic tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants with an income of 7000 TL and below was 3.87±0.66, while the mean of the participants with an income of 7001 TL and above was 4.08±0.46. This difference was statistically significant (t=-1,825, p=0,036). In the egocentric tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants with an income of 7000 TL and below is 2.98±0.67, while the mean of the participants with an income of 7001 TL and above is 3.39±0.63. However, this difference is not statistically significant (t=-3,083, p=0,724). In the sympathetic tendency, the mean of the participants with an income of 7000 TL and below was 3.66±0.76, and the mean of the participants with an income of 7001 TL and above was 3.76±0.63. This difference was not statistically significant (t=-0.739, p=0.170).

Table 3. Comparison of Participants' Empathic, Egocentric and Sympathetic Tendencies According to Their Height

Sub Variables	Participant Group	n	$\bar{X}$±Ss	t	p
Empathic Tendency	160 cm and below	44	3.95±0.65	-0.164	0.202
	161 cm and above	56	3.97±0.53		
Egocentric Tendency	160 cm and below	44	3.05±0.79	-1.368	0.169
	161 cm and above	56	3.24±0.58		
Sympathetic Tendency	160 cm and below	44	3.85±0.75	1.822	0.062
	161 cm and above	56	3.59±0.66		

In the empathic tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants 160 cm and below was 3.95±0.65, while the mean of the participants 161 cm and above was 3.97±0.53. This difference was not statistically significant (t=-0.164, p=0.202). In the egocentric tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants 160 cm and below was 3.05±0.79, while the mean of the participants 161 cm and above was 3.24±0.58. This difference is not statistically significant (t=-1,368, p=0,169). In sympathetic tendency, the mean of the participants 160 cm and below was 3.85±0.75, and the mean of the participants 161 cm and above was 3.59±0.66. Although there was a noticeable difference between the groups in the sympathetic tendency sub-dimension, this difference was not statistically significant (t=1,822, p=0,062).

Table 4. Comparison of Participants' Empathic, Egocentric and Sympathetic Tendencies According to Weight Groups

Sub Variables	Participant Group	n	$\bar{X}$±Ss	t	p
Empathic Tendency	60 Kg and Under	52	3.94±0.66	-0.408	0.108
	61 Kg and Over	48	3.99±0.50		
Egocentric Tendency	60 Kg and Under	52	3.06±0.73	-1.561	0.535
	61 Kg and Over	48	3.27±0.61		
Sympathetic Tendency	60 Kg and Under	52	3.88±0.78	2.744	**0.001**
	61 Kg and Over	48	3.51±0.56		

In the empathic tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants weighing 60 kg or less was 3.94±0.66, while the mean of the participants weighing 61 kg or more was 3.99±0.50. This difference was not statistically significant (t=-0.408, p=0.108). In the egocentric tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants weighing 60 kg or less was 3.06±0.73 and the mean of the participants weighing 61 kg or more was 3.27±0.61. However, this difference was not statistically significant (t=-1,561, p=0,535). In sympathetic tendency, the mean of the participants weighing 60 kg or less was 3.88±0.78 and the mean of the participants weighing 61 kg or more was 3.51±0.56. This difference shows a significant difference (t=2,744, p=0,001).

Table 5. Comparison of Empathic, Egocentric and Sympathetic Tendencies According to Place Of Residence

Sub Variables	Participant Group	n	$\bar{X}$±Ss	t	p
Empathic Tendency	Urban Residence and Below	41	3.90±0.68	-0.850	0.133
	Metropolitan Residence	59	4.00±0.52		
Egocentric Tendency	Urban Residence and Below	41	3.11±0.70	-0.527	0.751
	Metropolitan Residence	59	3.19±0.67		
Sympathetic Tendency	Urban Residence and Below	41	3.59±0.82	-1.291	**0.021**
	Metropolitan Residence	59	3.78±0.61		

In the empathic tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants residing in the city was 3.90±0.68, while the mean of the participants residing in metropolitan areas was 4.00±0.52. This difference was not statistically significant (t=-0.850, p=0.133). In the egocentric tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants residing in the city was 3.11±0.70 and the mean of the participants residing in the metropolitan area was 3.19±0.67. This difference is not statistically significant (t=-0.527, p=0.751). In the sympathetic tendency sub-dimension, the mean of the participants residing in the city is 3.59±0.82, while the mean of the participants residing in the metropolitan area is 3.78±0.61. This difference was found significant (t=-1,291, p=0,021).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Investigating the emotional and social characteristics of disabled athletes is a critical area of study within sport psychology and social interactions. Empathy, as a multidimensional construct, is particularly important in understanding how disabled athletes navigate social cohesion, teamwork, and emotional awareness at both individual and societal levels. Empathic tendencies help foster relationships that mitigate societal barriers and enhance inclusivity, making this an essential research focus.

The current study aimed to explore how demographic factors—education, income, height, weight, and place of residence—affect the empathic, egocentric, and sympathetic tendencies of disabled athletes. By examining these relationships, the research sheds light on how personal and environmental influences shape emotional dispositions.

The study revealed no statistically significant differences in empathic, egocentric, or sympathetic tendencies based on participants' education levels. This aligns with existing research suggesting that empathy is shaped more by personal experiences and social environments than formal education.[21] While educational attainment provides access to knowledge and resources, the development of empathy, egocentrism, and sympathy appears to be rooted in broader life experiences.

Egocentrism, in particular, showed no variation across education levels, further supporting the idea that it is a personality-based trait independent of external factors such as education.[22] Similarly, sympathetic tendencies did not differ significantly by education level, indicating that emotional dispositions like sympathy may be more influenced by social learning, family structures, and cultural norms.[23] These findings

emphasize that emotional tendencies are not fixed and may evolve over time through social interactions and exposure.

Income level had a more pronounced impact on empathic tendencies. Participants with an income of 7001 TL and above demonstrated significantly higher empathy scores (t=-1.825, p=0.036) compared to those earning 7000 TL or less. This finding suggests that individuals with higher income may have greater access to social and cultural resources that foster empathic development.[24] The role of socioeconomic status in shaping emotional traits underscores the importance of equitable access to opportunities for personal growth.

Conversely, income did not significantly affect egocentric tendencies (t=-3.083, p=0.724). Egocentrism, as highlighted in previous research, remains largely tied to individual personality traits and upbringing rather than external socioeconomic factors.[25] Sympathetic tendencies also showed no significant variation by income (t=-0.739, p=0.170), indicating that this emotional disposition may be influenced more by personal experiences and social interactions than financial resources.

The study examined whether physical characteristics, such as height and weight, affected emotional tendencies. Results showed no significant differences in empathic (t=-0.164, p=0.202) or egocentric tendencies (t=-1.368, p=0.169) based on participants' height. This aligns with the broader understanding that empathy and egocentrism are not directly linked to physical attributes but rather to psychological and environmental factors.[21]

In contrast, weight did have an impact on sympathetic tendencies. Participants weighing 60 kg or less exhibited significantly higher levels of sympathy (t=2.744, p=0.001) compared to those weighing 61 kg or more. This finding suggests that weight-related social perceptions and experiences might influence how individuals develop sympathy. For example, lighter individuals may encounter different social dynamics that encourage greater sensitivity and responsiveness to others' emotions.[26] These results highlight the need to further investigate the interplay between body image, social treatment, and emotional development.

Participants' place of residence emerged as another factor influencing emotional tendencies, particularly sympathy. Those living in metropolitan areas displayed significantly higher sympathetic tendencies (t=-1.291, p=0.021) compared to individuals residing in smaller cities or rural areas. The diversity and frequency of social interactions in metropolitan environments may expose individuals to broader perspectives, fostering greater emotional awareness and sensitivity.[27]

However, no significant differences were found in empathic (t=-0.850, p=0.133) or egocentric tendencies (t=-0.527, p=0.751) based on residence. These findings indicate that while urban environments can enhance certain emotional traits like sympathy, the development of empathy and egocentrism may depend more on personal and relational experiences rather than geographic location.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the emotional characteristics of disabled athletes. While demographic variables such as education and income play a role in shaping empathy, the findings suggest that many emotional traits are deeply rooted in personal experiences and social interactions rather than external factors. Sympathetic tendencies, influenced by weight and place of residence, highlight the complex interplay between physical, social, and environmental factors. These findings have important implications for designing interventions to support disabled athletes. Targeted programs that promote empathy and social integration could be implemented in both urban and rural areas, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds have access to opportunities for emotional and social development. Additionally, addressing societal perceptions of weight and body image may help mitigate barriers to developing sympathy and related emotional traits.

Future research should build on these findings by exploring additional variables, such as cultural norms and family dynamics, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional dispositions are shaped. Longitudinal studies could also provide valuable insights into how these traits evolve over time and in response to different life experiences.

In conclusion, this study highlights the nuanced relationships between demographic variables and emotional tendencies in disabled athletes. While some factors, such as income and urban living, influence empathy and sympathy, other traits like egocentrism remain largely independent of external variables. By understanding these dynamics, stakeholders can develop more effective strategies to enhance the emotional well-being and social inclusion of disabled athletes, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive sporting environment.

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