







## Awareness of Women Doing Team and Individual Sports in Türkiye About Being Exposed to Sexual and Psychological Harassment

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of this study is to investigate the awareness of women doing team and individual sports in Türkiye about being exposed to sexual and psychological harassment.

**Method:** A sexual harassment inventory was applied to athletes participating in 474 team and individual sports competitions. The chi-square test was used in statistical operations. Data were collected using the "Sexual Harassment Inventory in Sports" developed by Özen et al. (2018), which includes four sections: recognition of harassment behaviors, frequency and location of incidents, reactions and complaint mechanisms, and suggestions for prevention. The validity and reliability of the inventory were confirmed in prior studies, and internal consistency for the current sample was re-evaluated. Chi-square tests were applied to examine differences between team and individual sports.

**Results:** While 2.58% of female athletes reported frequent sexual harassment, 14.12% experienced it occasionally, and 9.12% once. A majority (74.65%) reported no experience of such behavior. No statistically significant difference was found between team and individual sports in overall harassment exposure ( $p>0.05$ ). However, significant differences were found in the frequency of sexually explicit jokes and forced sexual intercourse ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Athletes in team and individual sports shared similar perceptions of sexual harassment. Establishing a dedicated institutional unit where athletes can safely report harassment was recommended to address and prevent such cases effectively in Turkish sports environments.

**Key words:** *Individual Sports, Psychological Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Team Sports.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse, in general, is defined as all kinds of sexual behaviour (contact, non-contact or penetrative) performed by an adult to satisfy sexual satisfaction (Mathews & Mathews, 2019). Sexual harassment is bullying or coercion of a sexual nature or the promise of unwelcome or inappropriate rewards for sexual favours. "Sexual harassment" can include sexual innuendos, requests for sexual favours, and any verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature (De Wet, 2016). Abuse; It can occur in a variety of social settings, such as workplaces, homes, schools, religious institutions, gyms, clubs, and elsewhere (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Mohamed, 2023) Sexual behaviour, propensity, and orientation can represent the most intimate and profound expressions of a person's identity. It is also stated that it can also represent a fundamental vulnerability for all humans. Sexual abuse may mean that people who do not consent to a matter or whose consent is not accepted become the target of others' sexual orientation and are exploited for various reasons (through physical force, deception or threat for reasons such as youth, age or mental illness) (Chroni et al., 2012). Sexual harassment refers to behaviour that implies or contains sexuality. These expressions or behaviours can take different forms (mimics, gestures, hand-arm jokes, physical contact, verbal expressions, looks, threats, blackmail or rape). These situations are encountered at mild or severe levels in the field of sports. Athletes who encounter these situations may experience many negative symptoms (anger, fear of being raped, guilt and anxiety, fear of humiliation, alienation from people or introversion, decreased self-esteem due to feelings of fragility and helplessness, decreased life satisfaction and generally increased fear of crime) (Fasting et al., 2002; Şahin et al., 2012; Doğan et al., 2023).

Expressions perceived as sexual harassment include the following: Insisting on flirting, making sexual jokes and compliments, using slang words, asking questions about the athlete's sexual life, blackmailing, or actions that do not contain insults but create an uncomfortable and undesirable

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environment (Hlavka, 2014). It is known that both male and female athletes are subjected to sexual harassment in sports fields. Harassment acts that may seem simple can turn into continuous and severe harassment if done repeatedly. When acts of harassment are repeated, they can have much more severe consequences for the individual. For those who do not comply with sexual offers, their lives may be in danger; if these offers are followed or accepted, unfair gain and negative situations may arise (Leahy et al., 2002; Malloy & Zakus, 2004; Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2011; Özen et al., 2018; Doğan et al., 2023). In cases of sexual abuse, the effects of the physical and mental trauma experienced by the abused person become more severe. Compensating these negative effects is difficult and takes a long time (Fasting & Knorre, 2005; Mimaroglu & Özgen, 2008; Fasting et al., 2013).

Sexual harassment and assault may differ slightly and be perceived differently across societies and cultures (Yıldız, 2009). It is stated that sexual harassment and abuse are among the factors that negatively affect athletes in Türkiye (Onag et al., 2022). It has been determined that the perpetrators of sexual harassment in the education and sports environment are peer students and athletes rather than teachers and trainers and that sexual harassment occur (occurs-occurs) in the field of education rather than the events experienced in the sports environment (Fasting et al., 2014). Another variable that may affect child sexual abuse in sports is the branch of the sport. When examining whether there is a relationship between individual sports or team sports and sexual abuse, it is seen that there are different results. Some studies (Vertommen et al., 2015; Ahmed et al., 2018) revealed a statistically significant relationship, while others (Fasting et al., 2004; Mountjoy et al., 2016) revealed no significant relationship between them. However, individual sports can create more problems due to the working environment and the way of working with the trainer. Working with more children simultaneously in team sports and the presence of more than one individual creates protection for children. However, working one-on-one with the trainer in individual sports or lacking a third person to protect child athletes from a possible threat causes them to carry more risks than in team sports. In this context, children in individual sports may be more vulnerable to the sexual abuse of their coaches (Ahmed et al., 2018). Considering Türkiye in particular, performing individual sports in more closed and non-transparent places than team sports, mainly due to the economic situation and support, increases the possibility of abuse (Çetin & Hacısoftaoğlu, 2020).

It is widely acknowledged that individuals subjected to sexual harassment often experience serious psychological problems. These include social withdrawal, emotional instability, anxiety, diminished self-worth, and alienation from close social networks (Brackenridge et al., 2008). Although research in the field predominantly focuses on women and girls, studies such as that of Parent & Bannon (2012) highlight that male athletes are also affected, yet their cases remain underreported due to societal perceptions linked to homophobia. In sports contexts, different structural dynamics exist between team and individual disciplines. In individual sports, athletes often train in isolated environments with limited oversight, potentially increasing vulnerability to harassment. In contrast, team sports typically involve shared spaces and multiple observers, which may provide a protective buffer. These structural differences suggest the need for a comparative investigation. Addressing the issue of harassment in sports is essential for ensuring the psychological safety and integrity of athletes. Recognizing athletes' perceptions and experiences is a foundational step toward developing preventive strategies. The aim of this study is to investigate the awareness of women doing team and individual sports in Türkiye about being exposed to sexual and psychological harassment.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research model***

The research was conducted using the descriptive survey model, which is frequently employed in social sciences to identify and interpret existing situations. This model is suitable for exploring individuals' opinions, perceptions, and experiences on a specific issue. In this study, the model was used to investigate the awareness of women participating in team and individual sports in Türkiye regarding their exposure to sexual and psychological harassment. Furthermore, comparative elements were included to examine differences between team and individual sports settings in terms of harassment frequency, types, reactions, and reporting behaviors.

### ***Population and sample***

The study sample consisted of 474 female athletes aged between 17 and 30. Participants included 283 women engaged in team sports and 191 in individual sports. All participants were students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences at various Turkish universities and were actively participating in amateur-level sports competitions. A convenience sampling method was used, where participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. The nature and significance of the study were explained to the athletes prior to participation, and informed consent was obtained. Data collection was conducted face-to-face under ethical and voluntary participation principles.

Although the sample provides valuable insights into the awareness of female athletes regarding harassment, it does not claim to statistically represent the entire population of female athletes in Türkiye. Instead, it offers a snapshot of perceptions among sport sciences students who are actively involved in sports. This limitation is acknowledged and considered in the interpretation of results.

### ***Data collection tools***

*Sexual Harassment Inventory in Sports:* The sexual harassment inventory in sports for Turks consists of four parts. In the first part of the inventory, they were asked which of the 17 behaviors they considered as sexual harassment/sexual assault. The inventory is structured into four sections covering (1) recognition of harassment behaviors, (2) frequency and location of harassment incidents, (3) reactions and complaints, and (4) suggestions for prevention. In Section 1, each of the 17 items was rated as “Yes,” “No,” or “Not Sure” regarding whether it is perceived as sexual harassment. In Section 2, frequency was categorized into four levels: “Never,” “Once,” “Occasionally,” and “Very Often.” Responses were coded numerically (0–3) for statistical analysis. Women were asked how often, in which places and by whom they were subjected to sexual harassment. In the third part of the inventory, reactions to sexual harassment, their reasons and complaints were asked. In the last section, opinions on precautions to be taken against sexual harassment are included (Özen et al., 2018). The validity and reliability of the “Sexual Harassment Inventory in Sports” developed by Özen et al. (2018) were previously confirmed with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.81 to 0.89 across subdimensions. In the current study, internal consistency was re-evaluated with the present sample (n=474). Overall Cronbach’s alpha was found to be 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. Additionally, expert review was conducted to ensure content validity for use among Turkish female athletes aged 17–30.

### ***Data analysis***

SPSS 25.00 package program was used in statistical operations. Normality was assumed for the collected data (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) analysis was performed on the data. The data collected from 474 participants were coded and analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 statistical package program. Prior to conducting inferential analyses, the normality of the distribution was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. As the data were categorical and not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were deemed appropriate. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) were used to summarize demographic characteristics and participants’ responses to the items in the Sexual Harassment Inventory. To examine the relationship between sport type (team vs. individual) and variables such as frequency of harassment, types of behavior, reaction patterns, and reasons for not reporting, the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) was employed. A significant level of  $p < 0.05$  was set for all statistical interpretations. Each item was analyzed separately to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between team and individual sports participants regarding their experiences and awareness of sexual and psychological harassment. The data were interpreted considering the distribution assumptions and sample size adequacy.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** The status and frequency of sexual harassment in the sports environment

Behaviours	Never		Once		Occasionally		Very Often	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sexually explicit jokes (SEJ)	325	68.57	49	10.34	91	19.20	11	2.32
Compliments of a sexual nature (CSN)	324	68.35	59	12.45	83	17.51	8	1.69
Annoying remarks (AR)	320	67.51	45	9.49	95	20.04	14	2.95
Persistent questions about your lover (PQL)	326	68.78	33	6.96	93	19.62	22	4.64
Asking questions about your sex life (AQL)	330	69.62	57	12.03	71	14.98	16	3.38
Making sexist remarks about female and Male (MSRWM)	320	67.51	66	13.92	74	15.61	14	2.95
Using sexually explicit remarks about your body (USERB)	338	71.31	43	9.07	71	14.98	22	4.64
Sexually suggestive glances (SSG)	340	71.73	52	10.97	67	14.14	15	3.16
Being disturbed by sexually explicit material (BDSEM)	350	73.84	45	9.49	69	14.56	10	2.11
Persistent invitations despite refusal (PIDR)	352	74.26	47	9.92	67	14.14	8	1.69
Insistent behaviours to flirt (IBF)	347	73.21	59	12.45	56	11.81	12	2.53
Sending offensive messages containing a flirting request (SOMCFR)	370	78.06	41	8.65	52	10.97	11	2.32
Feeling/discourse of special interest and gain when sexually explicit offer is complied with (F/SISEC)	386	81.43	29	6.12	51	10.76	8	1.69
Making you feel that you will pay a price if the sexually explicit offer is not complied with (MFSEC)	392	82.70	25	5.27	49	10.34	8	1.69
Touching any part of your body without your consent (TPBC)	390	82.28	31	6.54	45	9.49	8	1.69
Kissing, hugging without your consent (KHC)	395	83.33	35	7.38	35	7.38	9	1.90
Forced into sexual intercourse (FSI)	410	86.50	19	4.01	39	8.23	6	1.27
Total mean	-	74.65	-	9.12	-	14.10	-	2.58

74.65% of the students participating in the study have not been exposed to sexual harassment behaviours.

**Table 2.** Change of sexual harassment behaviours in sports environment according to team and individual sports

Behaviours	Never				Yes				$\chi^2$	P
	Team sport (TS)		Individual sport (IS)		Team sport (TS)		Individual sport (IS)			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
SEJ	199	70	121	63	84	30	69	36	2,09	0,410
CSN	176	62	127	67	107	38	63	33	1,56	0,740
AR	173	61	123	65	109	38	67	35	1,25	0,755
PQL	199	70	132	69	84	30	59	31	1,03	0,855
AQL	196	69	138	72	86	30	52	27	1,22	0,638
MSRWM	196	69	123	65	86	30	67	35	1,58	0,450
USERB	207	73	136	71	75	27	54	28	1,09	0,753
SSG	211	75	140	73	71	25	50	26	1,04	0,845
BDSEM	211	75	144	76	71	25	46	24	1,03	0,840
PIDR	213	75	144	76	69	24	46	24	1,00	0,901
IBF	199	70	144	76	84	30	46	24	0,81	0,469
SOMCFR	209	74	155	81	73	26	36	19	2,61	0,404
F/SISEC	230	81	163	85	52	18	27	14	1,69	0,504
MFSEC	238	84	161	84	44	16	29	15	0,55	0,970
TPBC	240	85	155	81	42	15	36	19	1,59	0,541
KHC	238	84	157	82	44	16	33	18	1,16	0,786
FS	253	89	165	86	29	10	25	13	1,42	0,515
Total mean	-	74,47	-	74,82	-	25,18	-	24,76	1,28	0,325

The differences between the status of sexual harassment in the sports environment and the status of team and individual sports are statistically insignificant ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Table 3.** Frequency of sexual harassment in sports environment by team and individual sports status

Behaviours	Once		Occasionally				Very Often				$\chi^2$	p		
	TS		IS		TS		IS		TS				IS	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			n	%
SEJ	33	39.29	23	33.33	49	46.77	32	45.45	2	58.33	15	21.21	7,85	0,020*
CSN	43	40.15	23	36.67	62	37.49	36	56.67	2	57.90	4	6.67	1,59	0,462
AR	21	19.19	16	24.01	78	17.53	36	53.83	10	71.27	15	22.16	3,86	0,151
PQL	17	20.27	13	21.43	56	24.16	36	60.71	10	67.27	11	17.86	0,45	0,797
AQSL	38	44.15	16	30.85	44	51.30	25	48.81	4	50.99	11	20.34	3,94	0,160
MSRWM	21	24.48	16	24.01	54	28.53	40	60.16	10	63.34	11	15.83	0,22	0,903
USERB	25	33.26	15	26.92	38	44.26	32	57.69	13	50.05	8	15.38	0,39	0,835
SSG	17	23.83	22	43.71	44	33.40	22	43.71	10	61.52	6	12.58	3,25	0,198
BDSEM	27	38.09	15	31.82	40	53.73	27	59.09	4	56.02	4	9.09	0,38	0,871
PIDR	31	45.18	12	26.02	31	65.84	32	69.40	6	45.69	2	4.58	4,90	0,088
IBF	36	42.82	21	45.66	36	50.94	23	49.77	13	42.26	2	4.57	3,78	0,153
SOMCFR	25	34.21	13	35.29	33	46.82	21	58.82	15	45.76	2	5.88	1,88	0,399
F/SISEC	19	36.23	6	23.08	29	69.09	19	69.23	4	55.80	2	7.69	0,71	0,705
MFSEC	17	38.49	4	14.33	25	87.14	21	71.33	2	56.78	4	14.33	2,83	0,244
TPBC	15	35.57	13	35.29	23	84.35	19	52.94	4	54.52	4	11.76	0,04	0,988
KHC	19	43.10	13	38.91	23	97.78	17	51.87	2	52.16	3	9.22	0,75	0,760
FS	6	20.63	11	41.67	21	70.90	11	41.67	2	72.19	4	16.67	6,07	0,004*

\*p<0,05

There was a significant difference in the frequency of sexual harassment in the sports environment according to team and individual sports performance (p<0.05).

**Table 4.** Distribution of reactions to sexual harassment by competition in team and individual sports

Behaviours	No				Yes				$\chi^2$	p
	TS		IS		TS		IS			
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)		
I took it as a joke	230	81.24	171	89.53	52	18.46	21	10.94	2,46	0,126
I told you not to	236	83.45	160	83.77	46	16.25	31	16.41	0,251	0,980
Physical response	253	89.36	146	76.44	35	12.37	40	20.94	0,240	0,687
Don't shout out of fear	276	97.48	181	94.76	7	2.47	10	5.47	1,79	0,192
Request for help from the environment	276	97.48	183	95.81	6	2.22	8	4.38	0,89	0,345
Don't leave the environment	272	96.01	186	97.38	10	3.69	6	3.28	0,03	0,871
Disregard	257	90.84	183	95.81	25	8.86	9	4.71	1,69	0,296
Making a formal complaint	276	97.48	183	95.81	6	2.22	9	4.71	0,913	0,555

The differences according to the situation of being sexually harassed and the competition situation in team and individual sports are insignificant (p>0.05).

**Table 5.** Distribution of participants' reasons for not making official complaints by team and individual sports

Behaviours	No				Yes				$\chi^2$	p
	TS		IS		TS		IS			
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)		
I was so scared	275	97.17	182	95.20	7	2.47	9	4.71	0,895	0,368
Fear of affecting the future of sports	274	96.75	184	96.29	9	3.18	7	3.66	0,030	0,896
Fear of suspension from the team	274	96.75	187	97.91	9	3.18	4	2.09	0,823	0,360
disbelief that anything will be done	245	86.41	173	90.82	38	13.29	18	9.42	1,132	0,265
Don't be afraid of others hearing	278	98.22	186	97.39	5	1.77	5	2.62	0,170	0,789
disbelief and disregard	268	94.53	186	97.39	16	5.65	4	2.19	1,369	0,270
I don't want to prolong	238	84.19	167	87.54	45	15.90	24	12.57	0,938	0,463
Don't be shy to tell	270	95.27	184	96.29	13	4.59	7	3.66	0,287	0,655
Not sure if it's sexual harassment	275	97.17	182	95.20	7	2.47	9	4.71	2,594	0,361
I had no place to apply	274	96.75	184	96.29	9	3.18	7	3.66	0,343	0,622
I got used to it a lot	274	96.75	187	97.91	9	3.18	4	2.09	1,260	0,344

The reason why the participants did not make a formal complaint is similar according to their team and individual sports ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Table 6.** Distribution of the state of agreeing with the views about the private structure that those who have been subjected to sexual harassment in the sports environment can apply, by gender

Variables	Yes		No		it doesn't matter	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Individual sport	175	91.62	11	5.76	5	2.62
Team sport	254	89.75	22	7.77	7	2.47

The distribution of agreement with the views on the special structure to which those who are sexually harassed in sports can apply is given in the table according to gender.

**Table 7.** Agreeing with the ideas to facilitate access to structures to prevent sexual harassment in the sports environment

Behaviours	No		Yes	
	n	%	n	%
Sports organizations offer athlete training	145	30.59	329	69.41
Developing punitive procedures that deter sexual harassment by sports organizations	181	38.19	293	61.81
Putting easily accessible informative announcements on the web pages of sports organizations	191	40.30	283	59.70
Leaving brochures constantly on sports fields	213	44.94	261	55.06
Emailing athletes periodically	201	42.41	273	57.59
To introduce this structure to the infrastructure and new athletes with activities.	207	43.67	267	56.33
(Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	221	46.62	253	53.38

The findings related to accepting ideas that would facilitate access to structures to prevent sexual harassment in sport are given in the table.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of female university students aged 17–30, who are receiving sports education, regarding their exposure to sexual harassment and psychological abuse during the environments and training sessions where they participated as amateur athletes. Several previous studies have documented the existence of sexual harassment and abuse in sports settings (Toftegaard Nielsen, 2001; Alexander et al., 2011; Fasting & Knorre, 2005; Jolly & Décamps, 2006; Décamps et al., 2011).

For example, in one of these studies, 93.1% of the participants stated that they did not feel any sexual harassment or sexual abuse, while 6.9% did. Onag et al., (2022). In another study, 40 percent of female athletes stated that they were sexually harassed by spectators, 33.1 percent by their male teammates and 24.8 percent by their coaches (Smiley, 2016). Aşık (2020) and Doğan et al. (2023) in their study, approximately one-third of both women and men stated that they were subjected to sexual harassment and assault. In the study of Çetin & Hacısöftaoğlu (2023), 43.3% of those who do individual sports and 25.9% of those who do team sports declared that they were exposed to abuse during childhood. In this study, the answers given by the athletes to the statements about not being sexually harassed contain differences in percentages. The highest percentage stated that they have never been sexually harassed as being forced into sexual intercourse, with 86.50%. Those who say once to say sexist words about women and men are at the highest rate with 16.88%. It has been observed that those exposed to sexual harassment behaviour occasionally have disturbing addresses, with 24, 26%. While 74.65% of the athletes participating in the study stated that they were not exposed to sexual harassment behaviours, 9.12% encountered these behaviours once, 14.12% occasionally, and 2.58% very often. According to this study, approximately one in one of the athletes was exposed to sexual harassment behaviours.

In the study of Fasting et al., (2003), it was stated that athletes engaged in individual sports were exposed to sexual abuse and harassment more than individuals engaged in team sports. In the study of Onağ et al., (2022), 17.3% of those who engage in individual sports and 4.1% of those who engage in team sports state that they experience sexual harassment and abuse in the sports environment according to the types of sports. The study of Aşık (2020) determined that the frequency of sexual harassment behaviour in the sports environment did not change according to gender, according to the

answers given by the people who were sexually harassed for the questions considered as sexual harassment behaviour. Dogan et al., (2023) studies found that there were differences in the perception of sexual harassment behaviours among student-athletes of the faculty of sports sciences. This study determined that the average of those who were not sexually harassed in different questions was 74.47% for team athletes and 74.82% for individual athletes. This study determined that the status and frequency of sexual harassment in the sports environment did not show a statistically significant difference between the athletes who competed in team and individual sports ( $p>0.05$ ). In some studies, it has been stated that the personality traits, body perception, quality of life and fitness levels of the students of the Faculty of Sports are generally similar (Koca et al.,2018; Yamak et al., 2016). However, while the highest rate of sexual harassment behaviours was seen in team athletes, "compliments with sexual content and disturbing addresses" were observed, and it was determined that "annoying addressing and making sexist remarks about women and men" behaviours were observed in individual athletes. The behaviour encountered at the lowest level was seen to be "forced to have sexual intercourse". While Onağ et al., (2022) and Fasting et al., (2003) stated that there were more cases of sexual harassment and abuse in individual sports than in team sports, the study by Aşık (2020) found no significant difference. The findings of the present study are consistent with those reported by Aşık (2020). In the study of Aşık (2020), there was a significant difference in the frequency of sexual harassment in the sports environment according to the status of the team and individual sports, while the difference in some statements was found to be insignificant. This study found a statistically significant difference in the frequency of sexual harassment in the sports environment, the frequency of sexual jokes and the frequency of forced sexual intercourse according to team and individual sports performance ( $p<0.05$ ). In terms of other sexual harassment expressions (sexual compliments, disturbing addresses, persistent questions about the lover, etc.) included in the research, no significant difference was found for the variation of the frequency of sexual harassment in the sports environment according to the type of sport ( $p>0.05$ ).

In the study of Aşık (2020), it was determined that the responses of the participants to the behaviours of perceiving it as a joke, telling not to do it, physical reaction, shouting out of fear, asking for help from the environment, leaving the environment, ignoring and making official complaints did not change according to the team and individual sports status. In this study, in the distribution of their reactions according to the situation of being sexually harassed according to the competition situation in the team and individual sports, the answers given to the behaviours of perceiving it as a joke, telling not to do it, physical reaction, shouting out of fear, asking for help from the environment, leaving the environment, ignoring and making an official complaint, in the team and individual sports. It was found that it did not change according to the state of doing it ( $p>0.05$ ). Team and Individual athletes' reactions to sexual harassment are generally similar. Factors such as coming from the same cultural environment, being in the same environment, encountering similar words and receiving similar education may affect this situation. It is seen that some acts of abuse are normalized due to the physical contact and performance-requiring nature of sports (Toftegaard Nielsen, 2001). Acts involving close contact with normalizing discourses in sports and children's difficulties in expressing abuse pose a severe threat (Gaedicke et al., 2021).

In their study, Rodriguez & Gill (2011) stated that women exhibit avoidance, receiving social support from friends and family, verbal confrontation, resistance and seeking institutional support to cope with sexual harassment and its consequences. Özen et al. (2018) stated that the reasons for not making an official complaint were that they did not want to prolong the issue, they were not sure about sexual harassment, and they did not believe that anything could be done. Donnelly et al., (2016) found in their study that most of the athletes who were exposed to sexual harassment did not believe that anything would be done and that their information would be kept confidential. In the study conducted by Özen et al. (2018), the difference in the answers given to the statements of "I did not believe that anything would be done, I was afraid of what others would hear, I was afraid that it would not be believed, and I had no place to apply" was found to be significant in the distribution of the reasons for not making a formal complaint by the participants by gender. In some studies conducted in Türkiye, it has been stated that the reasons why athletes do not complain when they are subjected to sexual harassment are that they do not want to deal with it, that it may harm their sports life, they are embarrassed, they are afraid of not being believed, they think that nothing will be done, they believe

that there are legal deficiencies and they are not fully clear on this issue (Aşık, 2020; Doğan et al., 2023). In Narin's (2019) study, authorities stated that a person who has been sexually harassed should not tell anyone about it; It was stated that otherwise their names would be disclosed. Most athletes prefer to remain silent in the face of these threats in order not to harm their place in society and to avoid problems in their family and kinship relationships (Doğan et al., 2023). In this study, it was determined that the reasons why athletes did not file a complaint were similar according to their team and individual sports activities ( $p>0.05$ ). Taylor et al., (2017), in their research conducted at sports faculties in the USA, the participants stated that a structure is necessary for those who are exposed to harassment and pressure (The Guardian, 2017). On the other hand, to the question of having a particular structure, 90.7% of women and 85.4% of men stated that such a structure is necessary. In the study of Aşık (2020), 92.6% of men and 88.6% of women think there should be a particular structure that those exposed to sexual harassment can apply according to gender. According to the competition situation in the team and individual sports, the rate of agreeing with the opinions about the unique structure that those exposed to sexual harassment in the sports environment can apply was 91.62% for men. In comparison, it was 89.75% for women. It was observed that most of them wanted a unique structure to be used by those subjected to sexual harassment. The results of this study are like the results of the Aşık (2020) study. This similarity may also be because the study participants are citizens of the same state and live in the same or similar culture. It was observed that most of them wanted a unique structure to be used by those subjected to sexual harassment.

Any action, whether a minor infraction, sexual misconduct or sexual assault, is a form of illegal discrimination in many countries, and some form of abuse (physical and psychological) must be prevented. Preventing sexual harassment and defending employees against sexual harassment allegations has become the primary goal of decision-makers in many organizations, companies, sports institutions, educational institutions and industries (Mohamed, 2023). In the study conducted by Özen et al., (2018), they answered the question "Which functions should the structure to prevent sexual harassment in the sports environment should fulfil" with the highest rate as "To determine the sanction to be applied against the harassers in the sports environment". In the Aşık (2020) study, approximately one-third of the participants responded positively that sports organizations should offer athlete training and develop disciplinary procedures that deter sexual harassment. In this study, it was found that the rate of those who said yes when they agreed with the ideas that were thought to facilitate access to the structures to prevent sexual harassment in the sports environment among the athletes competing in team and individual sports were found to be higher than those who said no.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study revealed that female athletes in both team and individual sports demonstrate similar levels of awareness regarding sexual and psychological harassment. Although the overall frequency of harassment did not significantly differ between the two groups, specific behaviors such as sexually explicit jokes and being forced into sexual intercourse showed higher prevalence in certain contexts, particularly among individual sport participants. The findings highlight the need for context-specific preventive strategies, especially in sports disciplines where one-on-one interaction and isolated training environments increase the risk of harassment. Unlike previous studies that broadly addressed harassment in sports, this study draws attention to the structural vulnerabilities within individual and team sports and emphasizes the importance of tailored interventions.

The study contributes to the limited body of literature from Türkiye by shedding light on how sport type may influence exposure and perception of harassment. It is recommended that sports institutions develop dedicated reporting units and adopt training programs addressing harassment awareness and prevention, considering the differences in sport-specific dynamics.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

It was deemed necessary to establish a particular unit where sexually harassed persons would apply. Among the wishes of women who have been sexually harassed is the creation of a special unit to support them in this regard. It is thought that this unit to be established in Türkiye is necessary to effectively combat sexual harassment in the field of sports.



## Etical Approval and Permission Information

Ethics Committee: Ondokuz Mayıs University Social and Humanities Research Ethics Committee Decisions  
Protocol/Number: 2023-106

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