

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Athletes' Psychological Resilience: An Examination of Gender and Sport Type

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of emotional intelligence (EI) on psychological resilience (PR) and how this relationship varies in terms of gender and sport type. The research involved 354 student-athletes aged between 17 and 27, who are actively participating in sports clubs at various universities. Among the participants, 151 are female and 203 are male, with an average age of 21.31 years (SD = 2.71). Data were collected using the "Personal Information Form," the "Emotional Intelligence Scale," and the "Child and Youth Psychological Resilience Scale." Path analysis revealed that EI has a positive and significant effect on PR. Additionally, it was found that male athletes have higher levels of PR compared to female athletes, and team athletes exhibit higher PR than individual athletes. The interaction between gender and EI was also found to be significant, with this effect being more pronounced in female athletes. These findings suggest that EI is an important factor in enhancing athletes' PR, and that this effect may vary according to gender and sport type.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Resilience, Gender Differences, Sport Type

Introduction

Nowadays, cognitive factors in the context of sports hold significant importance (Ubago-Jiménez et al., 2019). In the competitive realm of sports, the ability to regulate emotions (Dağ & Sarı, 2019) can influence athletic performance (Ubago-Jiménez et al., 2019). Goleman (1995) defines EI as the capacity to control one's own emotions, understand the emotions of others, and translate these emotions and thoughts into actions. The concept of EI is crucial for both amateur and professional athletes (Erbektaş et al., 2017), as athletes experience considerably higher levels of anxiety and stress during competitions, with emotional intensity far surpassing that of everyday life. Moreover, athletes frequently encounter psychological pressures during competitions—such as spectator expectations, adverse influences, and the impact of opponents—which necessitate that they manage their own emotions and comprehend those of others in order to achieve success (Yanar, 2017; Güler & Erhan, 2022). The primary objective of this study is to examine whether gender and sport type have moderating effects on the relationship between EI and PR.

Connor et al. (2003) and Dencla et al. (2020) defined PR as the ability to effectively adapt to significant challenges or to cope with stress. PR is a critical construct that not only enhances athletic performance and fosters valuable life skills (Mcmanama et al., 2021) but is also essential for building endurance—namely, for confronting challenges and demonstrating positive adaptation—which is crucial for athletes to achieve high levels of performance (Collins & Macnamara, 2012). When young athletes are able to adapt positively to the stressors inherent in their sport, they demonstrate an improved ability to respond to setbacks, obstacles, and failures (Galli & Gonzalez, 2014), transform challenges into opportunities for personal growth (Day & Wadey, 2017), and attain both athletic success (Remes et al., 2016) and psychological well-being (Nezhad & Besharat, 2010). In particular, increasing PR in young athletes is of paramount importance, as such efforts contribute not only to their athletic achievements (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012) but also to their overall personal development. Consequently, this study is regarded as significant because it focuses on young athletes and aims to elucidate the relationship between EI and PR in this population. Furthermore, by examining the moderating effects of gender and sport type on the relationship between EI and PR, this research is expected to make a valuable contribution to the literature.

Athletes' mental resilience is positively and strongly associated with both EI and PR (Nicholls et al., 2009). It has been reported that, in both male and female athletes, increases in EI are accompanied by increases in mental resilience (Tavrah et al., 2016). In particular, female athletes have been found to exhibit higher levels of EI compared to male athletes; this enhanced EI is associated with a superior ability to evaluate emotions, regulate affect, and overall higher emotional competence (Yıldız et al., 2021; Austin et al., 2005; Yeniad, 2019). In individual athletes, EI has been shown to positively influence mental resilience (Orhan & Karagözoğlu, 2021), an effect that is believed to stem from the fact that individual athletes assume full responsibility for themselves, compete in isolation, and must confront challenges alone (Salar et al., 2012; Bahadır & Adiloğulları, 2020). Moreover, it has been suggested that an improvement in skiers' mental skill capacities is accompanied by an increase in EI (Azimkhani, 2014), and that combat sport athletes exhibit higher levels of PR compared to

team sport athletes (Reche-Garcia et al., 2020). In the context of sports, EI has been found to affect performance and psychological skills both directly and indirectly (Dağ & Sarı, 2019); athletes with high EI tend to demonstrate their performance more effectively (Petrides & Furnham, 2000), and according to Cowden (2016), EI contributes positively to athletes' mental resilience.

It is hypothesized that in this study, EI will have a positive effect on PR, and that this relationship will be moderated by gender and sport type. The research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

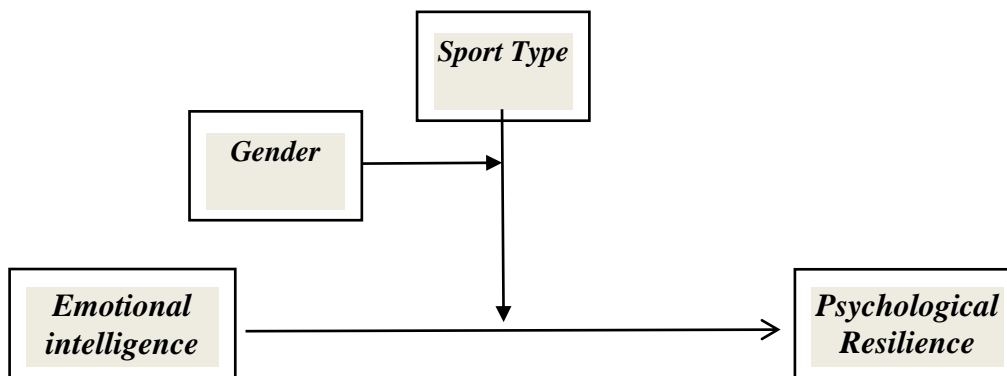


Figure 1. Research Model

Material and Method

Study Group and Procedure

This study was conducted with 354 student-athletes aged between 17 and 27 who were actively involved in university sports clubs. Participants were included in the study on a voluntary basis. Among the participants, 151 (42.7%) were female, and 203 (57.3%) were male, with a mean age of 21.31 (SD = 2.71). Prior to the commencement of the study, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university's ethics committee, and the data collection process was carried out online via Google Forms. All participants were informed about the study, and their voluntary participation was explicitly stated in written form. Data collection was facilitated through communication with team coaches from various universities. Demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Batman University with the decision dated 31/10/2024 and numbered 08/19.

In the study, the sample size was determined using the R software, and a power analysis was conducted with the pwr package. With a 99% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.01$), 95% power ($1-\beta$), a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.10$), and 3 independent variables ($u = 3$), the calculation indicated that at least $N = 232$ participants were required. Based on this recommendation, the ideal number of participants for the study was determined to be 354.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Participants' Personal Information

		N	%
Gender	Female	151	42.7
	Male	203	57.3
Sport Type	Individual sports	133	37.6
	Team sports	221	62.4
Sporting Experience	1-2 years	75	21.2
	3-4 years	124	35
	5-6 years	89	25.2
	7 years or more	64	18.1
Total		354	100

Data Collection Tools

The data for the study were collected using the "Personal Information Form," the "Emotional Intelligence Scale," and the "Child and Adolescent Psychological Resilience Scale."

Emotional Intelligence Scale

To assess the EI levels of the participants, the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Lee & Kwak, (2012) and adapted into Turkish by Kayihan & Arslan, (2016) was used. The scale consists of 20 items and 3 factors (Emotional Understanding, Emotional Facilitation, Emotional Regulation). A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was used for each of the 20 items. The reliability coefficients for the internal consistency of the scale were calculated as follows: Emotional Understanding = 0.79, Emotional Facilitation = 0.73, and Emotional Regulation = 0.85.

Child and Adolescent Psychological Resilience Scale

To measure the PR of the participants, the 12-item Child and Adolescent Psychological Resilience Scale developed by (Liebenberg et al., 2013) and adapted into Turkish by (Arslan, 2015) was used. The scale follows a five-point Likert format, ranging from "Completely Describes Me (5)" to "Does Not Describe Me at All (1)." Higher scores indicate a higher level of resilience. The reliability coefficient for the internal consistency of the scale was calculated as 0.89.

Data Analysis

After the data were transferred to a computer environment, the necessary assumptions for the analyses were examined. To check whether the data met the univariate normality assumption, the skewness and kurtosis values were calculated. The reference range for skewness and kurtosis values was set to ± 2.00 for all data in the study (George & Mallery, 2019). To determine the significance of the variables in the study, standardized factor values (Standardized β) and their corresponding z-values were used. The bootstrap technique was applied to confirm whether the relationships between variables were statistically significant (Preacher & Selig, 2012). In this study, 5,000 resampling iterations were performed, and the analysis was calculated with a 95% confidence interval (MacKinnon et al., 2004).

For the statistical analysis of the data obtained for the study, SPSS and R software packages were used. Additionally, for the multiple regression analysis conducted in R, the “lavaan,” “semPlot,” and “pwr” packages were employed.

Findings

The correlations for the variables and additional descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1. It was determined that all relationships between the variables in the current study were statistically significant and that the skewness and kurtosis values fell within the recommended reference values, thus meeting the univariate normality assumption (see Table 1).

Table 1. Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Sd.	1	2	3	4
1.Gender	--	--	--			
2.Sport Type	--	--	-0.9	--		
3.Psychological Resilience	3.81	0.80	0.352**	-0.214**	--	
4.Emotional Intelligence	3.55	0.68	0.283**	-0.350**	.431**	--
Skewness	--	--	--	--	-.929	-.874
Kurtosis	--	--	--	--	.244	.952

Note: N = 354; Sd.= Standard deviation; **p< .01, *p<.05.

To determine the causal relationship between EI and PR among student-athletes, a path analysis was conducted using the "lavaan" package. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Path Analysis Results

Variables	B	Sd.	CR(z)	p	%95 CI	
					LL	UL
Direct Effects						
EI → PR	0.255**	0.063	4.022	<.001	0.131	0.379
G → PR	0.220**	0.047	4.658	<.001	0.127	0.312
ST → PR	-0.250**	0.042	-5.916	<.001	-0.333	-0.167
Interaction Effects						
ST × G → PR	0.024	0.043	0.559	.576	-0.061	0.109
ST × EI → PR	0.053	0.059	0.902	.367	-0.062	0.169
G × EI → PR	-0.152*	0.060	-2.527	.012	-0.270	-0.034
ST × G × EI → PR	-0.099	0.058	-1.712	.087	-0.212	0.014

Note: N = 354; *p < .05, **p < .01, β: Standardized effect. EI = Emotional Intelligence, PR = Psychological Resilience, G = Gender, ST = Sport Type. Gender is coded as 0 = Female, 1 = Male. Sport Type is coded as 0 = Individual Sport, 1 = Team Sport.

Upon reviewing Table 2, a positive and statistically significant relationship was found between EI and PR (b = 0.255, p < .001), indicating that individuals with higher EI exhibited higher levels of PR. The main effect of gender on PR was found to be significant (b = 0.220, p

< .001), with male athletes demonstrating higher levels of PR compared to their female counterparts. However, the interaction between sport type and gender did not have a significant effect on PR ($b = 0.024$, $p = .576$). Similarly, the interaction between sport type and EI did not significantly impact PR ($b = 0.053$, $p = .367$). In contrast, the interaction between gender and EI was found to be statistically significant ($b = -0.152$, $p = .012$), suggesting that the influence of EI on PR differed by gender, with the effect being stronger for females than for males (Figure 1). When examining the three-way interaction, it was determined that the interaction between sport type, gender, and EI did not significantly affect PR ($b = -0.099$, $p = .087$).

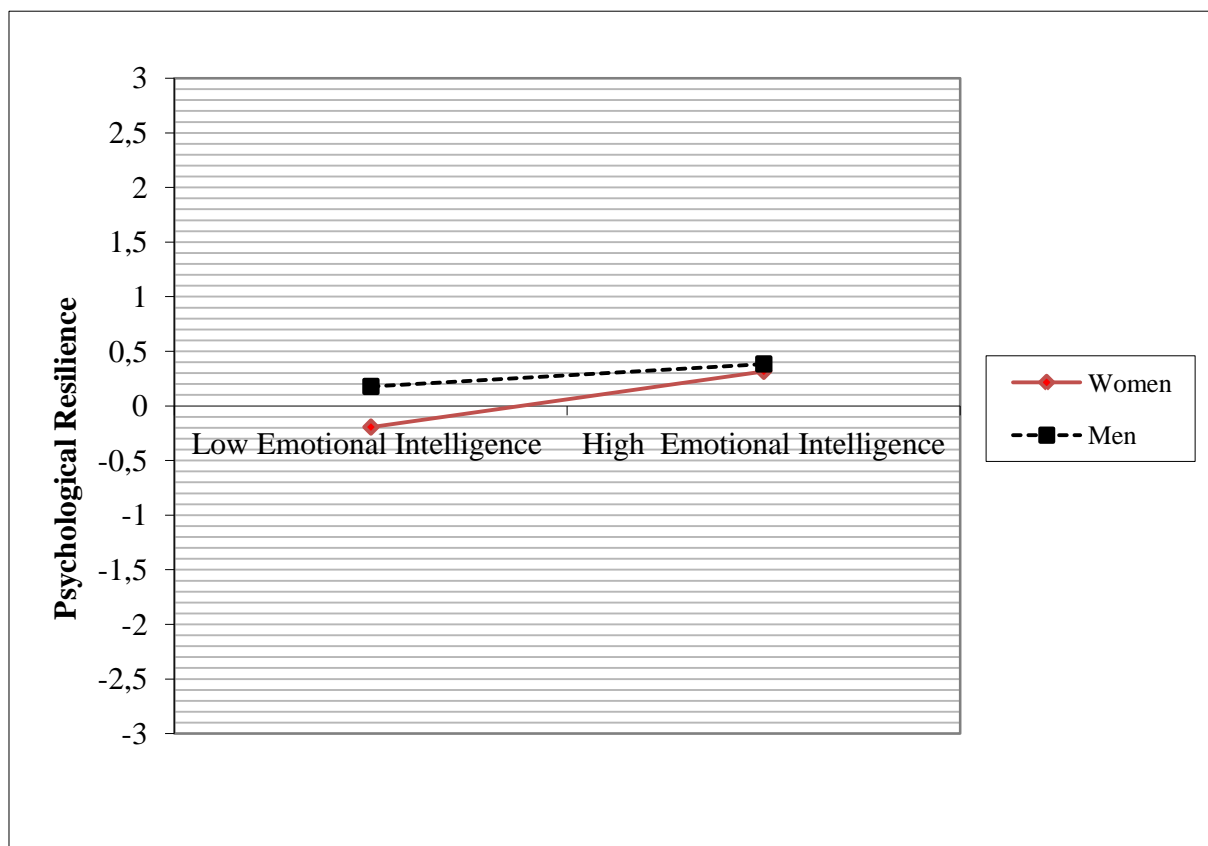


Figure 1. Visualizing the Gendered Effects of EI on PR

Additionally, a negative and statistically significant relationship was found between sport type and PR ($b = -0.250$, $p < .001$), indicating that team athletes have lower levels of PR compared to individual athletes. The overall explanatory power of the model was calculated to be $R^2 = 0.350$, meaning that the independent variables accounted for 35% of the variance in PR.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the impact of emotional intelligence, gender, and sport type on PR in student-athletes. The findings particularly highlight the determining role of EI on PR. The positive effect of EI on PR is consistent with previous studies and suggests that EI enhances individuals' ability to cope with stress (Akbari & Khormaiee, 2015; Kökçam et al., 2022). Young athletes with high EI are better able to recognize their own emotions, which allows

them to identify negative emotional states such as stress and anxiety early and develop strategies to cope with them (Abualruz et al., 2024) . Additionally, athletes with high EI not only understand, manage, and use their own emotions but also those of others, helping them cope with stress, maintain high motivation, and build positive relationships with teammates (Humphrey, 2013; Kökçam et al., 2022). Good cohesion within a team may lead to the enhancement of athletes' PR.

A significant effect of gender on PR was found, with male athletes demonstrating higher levels of PR compared to female athletes. This finding is consistent with meta-analytic studies in the sport psychology literature (Gök & Yılmaz Koğar, 2021). The greater competitive experience of male athletes, their upbringing in social norms that encourage risk-taking, and the differences in their stress coping strategies may explain this result (Smyth & Sweetman, 2015). However, some studies suggest that female athletes can also demonstrate high PR by effectively utilizing EI and social support mechanisms (Hoar et al., 2010).

The negative effect of sport type on PR suggests that individual athletes may be more psychologically vulnerable. This result can be attributed to the nature of individual sports, where athletes may feel isolated in both success and failure, social support mechanisms tend to be more limited compared to team sports, and they are forced to cope with stress factors alone (Andersen et al., 2018). The literature indicates that individual athletes experience more difficulties in stress management compared to team athletes, and this can negatively impact their PR (Darongkamas et al., 2011).

On the other hand, team athletes may benefit from greater group support and collective coping strategies, which can help mitigate the effects of stress (Johnston et al., 2021). However, individual athletes' development of greater self-discipline and their ability to demonstrate resilience based on intrinsic motivation can, in some cases, provide an advantage in terms of PR (León-Guereño et al., 2020).

Another important finding of the study is that the interaction effect between gender and EI on PR is significant and negative. This suggests that EI plays a more decisive role in enhancing PR for female athletes. When female athletes develop their emotional intelligence, they can more effectively utilize their coping skills to manage stress (Enns et al., 2018; Ogińska-Bulik, 2005) thereby increasing their PR. The lower impact of EI for male athletes may indicate that they rely on different mechanisms to cope with stress (e.g., problem-focused coping strategies or individual coping methods instead of social support) (Gök & Yılmaz Koğar, 2021; Graves et al., 2021). This finding suggests that emotional intelligence-based interventions may be particularly effective in enhancing the PR of female athletes.

However, the lack of significant interactions between sport type, gender, and EI suggests that these variables should be evaluated independently. It appears that neither sport type (team or individual), gender, nor EI interacts to create an effect on PR. This finding may indicate that individual differences (such as personality traits, experiences, and support systems) could be more decisive in the development of PR (Hirano, 2020).

Recommendations and Limitations

This study demonstrates that emotional intelligence, gender, and sport type are critical factors in enhancing PR in student athletes. It has been found that athletes with higher EI exhibit greater PR. This finding emphasizes the need to incorporate psychological training programs that develop emotional awareness, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills for athletes. The higher PR of male athletes compared to female athletes suggests that gender is an important variable in sport psychology. This indicates the need to develop specialized programs aimed at strengthening coping mechanisms for female athletes. The lower PR of individual athletes shows that more support should be provided in their stress management and resilience-building processes. Coaches and sport psychologists can offer mental training, emotion regulation exercises, and stress management programs to enhance athletes' EI (Houghton et al., 2011; Thomas & Zolkoski, 2020). Stronger social support mechanisms and training programs to increase PR can be developed for female athletes (Fiorilli et al., 2019). Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and meditation-based techniques could be recommended to help individual athletes improve their stress-coping skills (Lau et al., 2017). Since the study uses a cross-sectional design, causal relationships cannot be definitively determined. Future research should investigate the relationships between emotional intelligence, PR, and gender using longitudinal designs. The impact of cultural factors on PR should be explored further. Comparing studies conducted in different countries could provide a broader perspective on the effects of gender and EI (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024).

This study revealed that the effect of EI on PR is more pronounced in female athletes compared to male athletes. Additionally, it was observed that team sports provide more support for athletes' PR compared to individual sports, and male athletes have higher levels of PR than female athletes. These findings highlight the important role that gender and sports type play in understanding and supporting athletes' psychological endurance. Future research can further explore the effects of these factors on PR, enabling the development of more effective strategies for enhancing psychological well-being in the context of gender and sports type.

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