

*Araştırma Makalesi*

**SPORDA ÇOCUK İSTİSMARI: SPOR BİLİMLERİ FAKÜLTESİ  
ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN FARKINDALIK DÜZEYLERİ ÜZERİNE BİR  
ARAŞTIRMA**

**CHILD ABUSE IN SPORTS: A STUDY ON THE AWARENESS  
LEVELS OF FACULTY OF SPORT SCIENCES STUDENTS**

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*Melis YILDIRIM*

Sinop University Faculty of Sports Sciences, Sinop, Türkiye

Orcid: 0009-0007-5875-9852

*Gizem Ceylan ACAR*

Muş Alparslan University Faculty of Sports Sciences, Muş, Türkiye

Orcid: 0000-0003-4456-7589

*Kürşat ACAR\**

Sinop University Faculty of Sports Sciences, Sinop, Türkiye

Orcid: 0000-0001-8908-4404

\*Corresponding Author: Kürşat ACAR, Sinop University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, E-mail: kursatacar@sinop.edu.tr

## Sporda Çocuk İstismarı: Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi Öğrencilerinin Farkındalık Düzeyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma

### ÖZ

Araştırmanın amacı, Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi öğrencilerinin, çocuk istismarı konusundaki farkındalık düzeylerini belirlenmesidir. Bu kapsamda, örneklem grubunu Sinop Üniversitesi Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi öğrencileri arasından basit tesadüfi örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilen 64 Beden Eğitimi ve Spor, 71 Antrenörlük Eğitimi ve 56 Spor Yöneticiliği bölümü öğrencisi olmak üzere toplam 191 katılımcı oluşturulmuştur. Veri toplamak amacıyla "Kişisel Bilgi Formu" ve "Sporda Çocuk İstismarı Farkındalık Ölçeği (SÇİFÖ)" kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen verilerin analizinde ikili grup karşılaştırmaları için bağımsız örneklem t-testi, birden fazla grup karşılaştırmaları için ise tek yönlü varyans analizi (ANOVA) ve anlamlı farklılıkların belirlenmesinde Tukey HSD testi uygulanmıştır. Analiz sonuçlarına göre, katılımcıların ölçekten aldıkları puanlar; öğrenim gördükleri bölüm ve çocukların sporda korunmasına yönelik eğitim, seminer gibi etkinliklere katılım durumlarına göre anlamlı düzeyde farklılık göstermiştir ( $p<0,05$ ). Genel olarak değerlendirildiğinde, öğrencilerin SÇİFÖ toplam puan ortalamaları, "Oldukça farkında" kategorisine olduklarını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sporda çocuk istismarı, Çocuk koruma, Farkındalık

## Child Abuse in Sports: A Study on the Awareness Levels of Faculty of Sport Sciences Students

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine the level of awareness among students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences regarding child abuse. In this context, the sample group consisted of a total of 191 participants, selected through a simple random sampling method from among students at Sinop University's Faculty of Sports Sciences: 64 from the Department of Physical Education and Sports, 71 from the Department of Coaching Education, and 56 from the Department of Sports Management. To collect data, a "Personal Information Form" and the "Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sports (CAASS)" were used. In the analysis of the data, independent samples t-test was applied for comparisons between two groups, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for comparisons among more than two groups. The Tukey HSD test was employed to identify significant differences. According to the analysis results, the participants' scores on the scale differed significantly based on their department of study and their participation in activities such as training or seminars aimed at protecting children in sports ( $p<0.05$ ). Overall, the students' mean total scores on the CAASS indicated that they fell into the "Highly Aware" category.

**Key Words:** Child Abuse in Sports, Child Protection, Awareness

## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse as the intentional or unintentional harm caused to a child's life, physical and psychological health, development, and personal capabilities<sup>1</sup>. The types of abuse children may be exposed to in sports environments are classified into four main groups: physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect<sup>2</sup>. In particular, violence, abuse, and neglect experienced during childhood have deep and long-lasting effects on an individual's mental health and negatively affect their mental development<sup>3</sup>.

Incidents of harassment and abuse occurring in sporting environments do not merely result in individual performance decline or discontinuation of participation in sport; they can also lead to serious psychological consequences such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies<sup>4</sup>. In such situations, the indifference of responsible individuals within sports organisations towards these incidents can cause existing harm to deepen. In this context, factors that exacerbate the harm include a tendency to remain silent, a lack of knowledge about abuse, insufficient awareness of reporting and support mechanisms, and concerns about possible consequences<sup>5</sup>.

Understanding child abuse and neglect in sport necessitates addressing this issue through interdisciplinary collaboration, developing preventive strategies, and adopting a holistic approach to the matter<sup>6,7</sup>. Individual and environmental risk factors that facilitate young athletes' exposure to abuse include inadequate oversight mechanisms in sporting environments, low levels of awareness among sports stakeholders, policy gaps, and overly success-oriented approaches<sup>2</sup>.

Although awareness of preventing abuse in sport is increasing day by day, child abuse still persists on a serious scale<sup>8</sup>. This situation has led to an increase in both the quantity and quality of efforts to protect children in sport, making this issue a focus at both the academic and practical levels<sup>9,10</sup>. When examined specifically in Turkey, it is seen that academic studies in this field are quite limited; existing research is generally descriptive and knowledge-based rather than intervention-oriented<sup>11-15</sup>. In this context, education, one of the fundamental strategies for protecting children, plays a critical role in building safe sporting environments<sup>16-19</sup>.

The level of knowledge and awareness that professionals working one-on-one with children in the field of sport possess regarding child abuse plays a critical role in the sustainability of the positive effects that sport has on children. In this context, the primary aim of the present study is to determine the level of awareness among sports science faculty students regarding child abuse in sport and to identify potential contributions towards increasing this awareness.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Research Model

The study employed a descriptive survey model, which allows for a systematic analysis of the current situation regarding a specific topic. This approach provides an overview of the research topic, laying the groundwork for more comprehensive studies to be conducted in the future<sup>20</sup>.

## Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of students enrolled at the Faculty of Sports Sciences at Sinop University. The sample was determined using simple random sampling and consists of a total of 191 individuals: 64 students from the Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching, 71 students from the Department of Coaching Education, and 56 students from the Department of Sports Management. When determining the sample size, the principle recommended in scale development and application processes, namely that at least 5 and at most 20 times the number of participants should be reached for each item, was taken into account. In this context, as the 'Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sports' used in the study consists of 32 items, the target was to reach a minimum of 160 participants. In order to minimise potential data loss or problems that may arise during the analysis phase and to increase the reliability of the research, the sample size was increased to 191.

## Data Collection Tools

*Personal Information Form:* Participants were asked to answer questions regarding their gender, age, department, type of sport, and whether they had taken any courses or seminars on child protection in sport.

*Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sport (CAASS):* The measurement tool used in this study was developed by Güler (2024)<sup>22</sup> and is a comprehensive awareness scale consisting of a total of 32 items designed to assess various aspects of child abuse in sport. The scale has a structure suitable for determining individuals' level of awareness on this subject. The scale consists of four sub-dimensions: the first sub-dimension contains 12 items, the second sub-dimension contains 3 items, the third sub-dimension contains 7 items, and the fourth sub-dimension contains 10 items. Structured with a five-point Likert-type rating system, the scale allows participants to rate their opinions with options ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The scoring ranges on the scale were calculated according to Tekin's (2000)<sup>23</sup> formula of 'range width = series width/number of groups' and determined to be  $4/5=0.80$ . Accordingly, the total score range that can be obtained from the scale varies between 32 and 160. The scores obtained by participants reflect their level of awareness regarding child abuse in sport. High scores indicate a high level of awareness in this area, while low scores indicate insufficient awareness.

## Data Collection

The scale used in the study was organised into three sections by the researcher. The first section provided participants with informative explanations about the purpose and content of the study. The second section contained a 'Personal Information Form' aimed at collecting demographic information. The third section included the 'Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sports' to determine individuals' levels of awareness regarding child abuse. The prepared scale form was transferred to a digital environment via the Google Forms platform, and the link obtained was shared with participants online. The data collection process was carried out between 24 December 2024 and 5 June 2025, with no time limit imposed for completing the form. Once the required sample size was reached, access to the form was terminated, and the data obtained was included in the statistical analysis process.

## Data Analysis

In this study, an internal reliability analysis was conducted to assess the consistency of participants' responses to the scale items, and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated (Table 2). Before determining the statistical tests to be applied to the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was applied to examine whether the error terms showed a normal distribution ( $p>0.05$ ). During the statistical analysis process, the Independent Samples t-test was used to evaluate the differences between two groups, while the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for comparisons between multiple groups, and the Tukey HSD test was used to determine the source of significant differences. The findings were reported along with percentage distributions, means, and standard deviations. The significance level was set at  $p<0.05$  in the analyses. All statistical procedures were performed using the SPSS 22.0 software package.

## Ethics Committee

Ethical approval has been obtained from the Sinop University Human Research Ethics Committee with its decision dated 14 February 2025 and numbered 2025/01-04.

## RESULTS

The findings of the research are presented below in the form of tables.

**Table 1.** Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variables	f	%
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	90	47.1
Male	101	52.9
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18-20	81	42.4
21-23	86	45.0
24-26	24	12.6
<b>Department</b>		
Physical Education and Sport	64	33.5
Coaching Education	71	37.2
Sports Management	56	29.3
<b>Types of Sport</b>		
Team Sports	95	49.7
Individual Sports	96	50.3
<b>Status of Receiving Training or Seminars on Child Abuse</b>		
Yes	79	41.4
No	112	58.6

**Table 2.** Internal Consistency Coefficients for Participants' Responses to the Scale

Sub Dimensions	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Evaluation
Awareness of Recognising Abuse and Responding Appropriately	0.956	Excellent
Awareness of Responsibility	0.929	Excellent
Awareness of Abuse Symptoms	0.915	Excellent
Awareness of Risks Leading to Abuse	0.930	Excellent
Total: Child Abuse Awareness in Sports Scale	0.959	Excellent

**Table 3.** Child Abuse Awareness Scale Assessment Scores in Sport

Options	Score	Score Range ( $\bar{X}$ )	Evaluation
1. Strongly Agree	1	32-57	Not Aware at All
2. Agree	2	57-83	Unaware
3. Moderately Agree	3	84-108	Moderately Aware
4. Disagree	4	109-134	Quite Aware
5. Strongly Disagree	5	135-160	Fully Aware

**Table 4.** Participants' Average Awareness Scores by Department

Department	( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Evaluation
Physical Education and Sport	126.32	19.77	Quite Aware
Coaching Education	122.97	17.24	Quite Aware
Sports Management	120.50	23.76	Quite Aware

( $\bar{X}$ ): Mean, SD: Standard Deviation

According to the data in Table 4, students studying Physical Education and Sports, Coaching Education and Sports Management are 'quite aware' of child abuse in sport.

**Table 5.** Comparisons Based on Participants' Gender Variable

	Sub Dimensions	Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
CAASS	Awareness of Recognising Abuse and Responding Appropriately	Female	90	49.71	8.26	1.226	0.222
		Male	101	48.19	8.84		
	Awareness of Responsibility	Female	90	13.16	2.38	.215	0.830
		Male	101	13.08	2.50		
	Awareness of Abuse Symptoms	Female	90	26.43	5.21	.636	0.525
		Male	101	25.95	5.26		
	Awareness of Risks Leading to Abuse	Female	90	34.79	8.12	-.591	0.555
		Male	101	35.51	8.78		

\* $p < 0,05$  ( $\bar{X}$ ): Mean, SD: Standard Deviation

When examining Table 5 in terms of the gender variable, no statistical difference was found in the sub-dimensions of the Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sport ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 6.** Comparisons Based on Participants' Age Variable

	Sub Dimensions	Age	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p
CAASS	Awareness of Recognising Abuse and Responding Appropriately	18-20	81	48.54	8.71	.230	0.795
		21-23	86	49.37	7.49		
		24-26	24	48.46	11.66		
	Awareness of Responsibility	18-20	81	12.85	2.34	.827	0.439
		21-23	86	13.29	2.30		
		24-26	24	13.38	3.23		
	Awareness of Abuse Symptoms	18-20	81	26.56	5.32	2.249	0.108
		21-23	86	26.41	4.56		
		24-26	24	24.08	6.72		
	Awareness of Risks Leading to Abuse	18-20	81	35.89	8.34	2.026	0.135
		21-23	86	35.38	7.49		
		24-26	24	32.00	11.38		

\* $p < 0,05$  ( $\bar{X}$ ): Mean, SD: Standard Deviation

Upon examination of Table 6, no significant difference was observed in the sub-dimensions of the Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sport according to the age groups of the participants ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 7.** Comparisons of Participants According to the Section Variable

Sub Dimensions		Department	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p
CAASS	Awareness of Recognising Abuse and Responding Appropriately	Physical Education and Sport	64	50.61	8.23	2.303	0.103
		Coaching Education	71	48.63	7.84		
		Sports Management	56	47.30	9.63		
	Awareness of Responsibility	Physical Education and Sport <sup>a</sup>	64	13.84	2.18	6.123	<b>0.003*</b>
		Coaching Education <sup>a</sup>	71	13.08	2.35		
		Sports Management <sup>b</sup>	56	12.32	2.62		
	Awareness of Abuse Symptoms	Physical Education and Sport	64	26.25	4.79	.175	0.839
		Coaching Education	71	26.38	4.75		
		Sports Management	56	25.84	6.27		
	Awareness of Risks Leading to Abuse	Physical Education and Sport	64	35.63	8.82	.142	0.868
		Coaching Education	71	34.87	8.32		
		Sports Management	56	35.04	8.34		

\*p<0,05 ( $\bar{X}$ ): Mean, SD: Standard Deviation

According to Table 7, only a significant difference was observed in the sub-dimension of 'Awareness of responsibility' in the Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sport among participants in terms of department variable (p<0.05). In this case, students in the Physical Education and Sport Department have a higher level of awareness than students in the Sports Management Department.

**Table 8.** Participants' Comparisons of Sports Types

Sub Dimensions		Types of Sport	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
CAASS	Awareness of Recognising Abuse and Responding Appropriately	Team Sports	95	49.28	9.02	.605	0.546
		Individual Sports	96	48.53	8.16		
	Awareness of Responsibility	Team Sports	95	13.13	2.43	.062	0.950
		Individual Sports	96	13.10	2.46		
	Awareness of Abuse Symptoms	Team Sports	95	26.76	5.36	1.530	0.128
		Individual Sports	96	25.60	5.06		
Awareness of Risks Leading to Abuse	Team Sports	95	36.27	8.43	1.799	0.074	
	Individual Sports	96	34.08	8.40			

\*p<0,05 ( $\bar{X}$ ): Mean, SD: Standard Deviation

According to the results in Table 8, there was no significant difference in awareness levels among participants based on the type of sport variable (p>0.05).

**Table 9.** Comparisons of Whether Participants Have Received Training, Seminars, Etc. on Child Abuse in Sport

Sub Dimensions		Education Level	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
CAASS	Awareness of Recognising Abuse and Responding Appropriately	Yes	79	50.48	8.34	2.150	<b>0.033*</b>
		No	112	47.79	8.61		
	Awareness of Responsibility	Yes	79	13.78	2.13	3.262	<b>0.001*</b>
		No	112	12.64	2.54		
	Awareness of Abuse Symptoms	Yes	79	26.41	5.01	.503	0.616
		No	112	26.02	5.40		
Awareness of Risks Leading to Abuse	Yes	79	35.78	8.27	.839	0.403	
	No	112	34.74	8.60			

\*p<0,05 ( $\bar{X}$ ): Mean, SD: Standard Deviation

Table 9, when examined in terms of the situation variable of education, seminars, etc. on child abuse in sport, which is an important variable in our study, revealed significant differences in the sub-dimensions of Awareness of Recognising Abuse and Responding Appropriately and 'awareness of responsibility' (p<0.05). In summary, it

can be said that training on child abuse in sport increases participants' levels of awareness.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the awareness levels of students at the Faculty of Sports Sciences regarding child abuse in sport and evaluated them according to variables such as gender, age, department, type of sport, and any courses or seminars related to child protection in sport.

In the study, it was observed that students studying in the departments of Physical Education and Sports, Coaching Education, and Sports Management were in the 'quite aware' category in terms of their awareness levels of child abuse in sports. In this case, it is seen that the participants' awareness levels regarding child abuse in sports are at a sufficient level. Numerous studies conducted in our country indicate that teacher candidates have insufficient knowledge about child abuse<sup>24-27</sup>. In a study conducted by Bayındır (2021)<sup>24</sup>, it was revealed that teacher candidates believe that special training is required to identify children at risk, prevent negative behaviours, and provide the necessary guidance. On the other hand, Can's (2016)<sup>25</sup> thesis examined teacher candidates' knowledge levels and awareness regarding child neglect and abuse; the findings showed that teacher candidates in Turkey do not have sufficient knowledge on these issues. Our current research also suggests that the high level of awareness regarding child abuse in sports indicates that the education provided in these areas within the curriculum is effective. The inclusion of topics related to children's physical, emotional, and psychological development in the course content of these sections, as well as awareness-raising activities on sports ethics, safe training environments, and children's rights, may have increased students' awareness of these issues. Furthermore, the fact that students studying in these departments interact directly with children in practical lessons or during internships may have made them more sensitive to child abuse. Considering the aforementioned studies and our findings, there is a need for more research to determine the awareness levels of professional groups who come into direct contact with children, particularly in and outside the field of sport.

When examining the research findings in terms of the gender variable, no statistical difference was observed in the sub-dimensions of the 'Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sport'. In this case, it was concluded that the gender variable had no effect on awareness levels. Your conclusion that the gender variable does not create a significant difference in awareness levels of child abuse in sports is supported by similar findings in the literature. For example, a study conducted by Çelik and Aslan (2020)<sup>28</sup> stated that preschool teachers' levels of awareness of child abuse did not show a significant difference in terms of gender. This shows that male and female teachers have a similar level of awareness regarding child abuse.

On the other hand, when the age variable was examined, no significant difference was observed in the sub-dimensions of the Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sport according to the age groups of the participants. These findings indicate that age is not a determining factor in child abuse awareness in sport, but that personal experiences and educational level may be more influential in this awareness.

When the section variable of our study was interpreted, a significant difference was observed only in the sub-dimension of 'Awareness of responsibility' among the sub-dimensions of the Child Abuse Awareness Scale in Sports. Accordingly, students in the Physical Education and Sports Department have higher levels of awareness than students in the Sports Management Department. A study conducted by Pala (2011)<sup>29</sup> examined the knowledge and awareness levels of teacher candidates (Classroom, Science, Mathematics) regarding child abuse and neglect. The study revealed that the majority of teacher candidates had not received training on this subject and had low levels of awareness. There appears to be a limited number of studies examining levels of awareness of child abuse in sport in our country. However, based on our findings, we can conclude that students in the Physical Education and Sports and Coaching Education departments have higher levels of awareness on this issue because their education programmes place greater emphasis on child abuse and protection. Students in the Sports Management department, on the other hand, have less knowledge and awareness on this issue, indicating that their education programmes need to be strengthened in this area.

When examined in terms of variables such as training and seminars on child abuse in sport, which is an important variable in our research, significant differences were observed in the sub-dimensions of 'awareness of recognising abuse and responding appropriately' and 'awareness of responsibility'. Therefore, it can be said that education on child abuse in sport significantly increases participants' levels of awareness. There appears to be a limited number of studies examining the awareness levels of sports science students in our country. However, in a similar study, Küçük et al. (2016)<sup>30</sup>, in a similar study conducted to determine the awareness levels of athletes' families about child protection in sports, 63.7% of the 161 participants (102 individuals) stated that they did not have knowledge about child protection in sport, 5.6% (10 individuals) stated that they did have knowledge, and 68.9% (111 individuals) stated that a child protection programme in sport was needed. These findings are extremely important in terms of demonstrating the lack of knowledge and the significant need in this area. On the other hand, Lang and Michael (2014)<sup>31</sup> state that in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, specific procedures, ethical rules and mandatory practices for child protection have been developed for coaches who are in regular contact with individuals under the age of 18, as well as for all institutions and organisations that manage and implement sports activities. This systematic approach aims to make sporting environments safe for children and prevent potential cases of abuse.

In this context, when evaluated in conjunction with the findings obtained in our research, it is evident that there is a significant need to increase the level of knowledge and awareness regarding child protection among individuals working in the field of sport, particularly physical education teachers, coaches, managers and sports instructors. In particular, meaningful increases in awareness levels were observed among individuals who received training in critical sub-dimensions such as recognising child abuse in sport and developing appropriate responses. This situation demonstrates that well-intentioned approaches alone are not sufficient; systematic, mandatory and continuous training must be implemented. Our recommendations based on the research results are as follows:

- Child protection policies should be established within sports organisations, federations and schools, and these policies should be regularly updated.

- Mandatory child protection training programmes should be developed for physical education teachers, coaches and sports administrators; these trainings should be integrated into pre-service and in-service processes.
- Training content should not be limited to theoretical information; it should be supported by practical methods such as scenario-based exercises, case studies and role-playing.
- All individuals working in the field of sport should be made aware of reporting mechanisms for child abuse issues and ensure they are used correctly.
- National sports organisations should establish monitoring and evaluation systems to regularly measure the effectiveness of child protection training.
- Modules on children's rights and child protection should be included in the curricula of sports science departments and coaching education programmes.
- Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate families and the community, thereby supporting children's participation in safe sporting environments.

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