

Analysis of the Challenges and Legal Needs Faced by Physically Disabled National Paralympic Athletes

Bedensel Engelli Milli Paralimpik Sporcuların Karşılaştığı Zorluklar ve Yasal İhtiyaçların Analizi

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Abstract: In this study, the challenges and legal needs faced by nationally recognized Paralympic athletes with physical disabilities were examined. The research employed a phenomenological design, with the population consisting of 57 athletes who competed in the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games. A purposive sampling method was used to select 40 athletes, with whom semi structured interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform. The data collected were analyzed through content analysis using the MAXQDA 24 software, resulting in the identification of 8 main themes, 11 sub themes, and 168 codes. The findings indicate that athletes face significant challenges both prior to and after obtaining national status, particularly in areas such as transportation, access to equipment, financial support, facility accessibility, psychological support, sponsorship, and athlete management. In addition, needs were identified regarding retirement rights, contractual arrangements, insurance coverage, teaching appointments, administrative procedures, and award regulations. Within the scope of social rights, the necessity for increased support for wheelchairs and prosthetics, improved accessibility to transportation, tax reductions, and expanded employment opportunities was also highlighted. In conclusion, the study reveals that Paralympic athletes encounter multifaceted challenges in physical, social, economic, and legal domains. It is further assessed that implementing improvements in line with athletes' needs and expectations will enhance their motivation and athletic performance.

Keywords: Paralympic games, physical disability, difficulties encountered.

Özet: Bu çalışmada, ulusal düzeyde tanınan fiziksel engelli Paralimpik sporcuların karşılaştığı zorluklar ve hukuki ihtiyaçlar incelenmiştir. Araştırma, fenomenolojik bir tasarım kullanılarak, 2020 Tokyo Paralimpik Oyunları'nda yarışan 57 sporçudan oluşan bir popülasyon üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak 40 sporcu seçilmiş ve Zoom platformu aracılığıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Toplanan veriler, MAXQDA 24 yazılımı kullanılarak içerik analizi yoluyla analiz edildi ve 8 ana tema, 11 alt tema ve 168 kod belirlendi. Bulgular, sporcuların ulusal statü kazanmadan önce ve sonra, özellikle ulaşım, ekipmana erişim, mali destek, tesis erişilebilirliği, psikolojik destek, sponsorluk ve sporcu yönetimi gibi alanlarda önemli zorluklarla karşılaştıklarını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, emeklilik hakları, sözleşme düzenlemeleri, sigorta kapsamı, öğretim görevleri, idari prosedürler ve ödül düzenlemeleri ile ilgili ihtiyaçlar da tespit edilmiştir. Sosyal haklar kapsamında, tekerlekli sandalye ve protezler için daha fazla destek, ulaşım erişilebilirliğin iyileştirilmesi, vergi indirimleri ve istihdam fırsatlarının genişletilmesi gerekliliği de vurgulanmıştır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma Paralimpik sporcuların fiziksel, sosyal, ekonomik ve hukuki alanlarda çok yönlü zorluklarla karşılaştıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Sporcuların ihtiyaç ve beklentilerine uygun iyileştirmelerin hayata geçirilmesinin, onların motivasyonlarını ve atletik performanslarını artıracığı değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Paralimpik oyunlar, fiziksel engellilik, karşılaşılan zorluklar.

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INTRODUCTION

Due to certain problems, deficiencies, or impairments that occur before, during, or after birth, individuals encounter physical, social, and societal problems throughout their lives. If such circumstances result in restrictions on individuals' lives and hinder their social participation, they are classified as "disabled." (Blandford & Sarı, 2018). Disability can generally arise from congenital or acquired causes. These conditions prevent individuals from fulfilling their roles in social, physical, and societal spheres and necessitate various forms of support. As a result of all these circumstances, disability can be defined as the impairments and losses experienced by individuals in their physical, emotional, and cognitive functioning (Kaya, 2019). Disability is medically defined as individuals experiencing cognitive, physical, social, psychological, and emotional loss as a result of congenital conditions or accidents or traumas experienced later in life, and consequently being unable to independently use these abilities in their daily lives. As a result, individuals with disabilities are defined as persons requiring rehabilitation, protection, care, support, or counseling services (Duyan et al., 2008). Since it is crucial for individuals with disabilities to develop themselves, there are many factors that influence their development, the most important of which is sports. The effects of sports on individuals with disabilities have become increasingly apparent over time. Sports are a very important and encouraging tool for individuals with disabilities in terms of their participation in society, physical strengthening,

independent movement, mental health, and prevention of emotional disturbances (Tow et al., 2019). People with disabilities participate in sports not only for rehabilitation and social development but also to showcase their talents professionally. The disabled sports movement was created for individuals with disabilities to participate in sports professionally. The disabled sports movement consists of three major organizations: the Deaflympics, Special Olympics, and Paralympic Games. Among these, the Paralympic Games are the most popular organization. The Paralympic Games are important in terms of encouraging physical activity, social participation, social acceptance, and strengthening human rights awareness for individuals with disabilities. When Paralympic athletes want to demonstrate their abilities in a competitive environment, they struggle not only with their traumatic or genetic disabilities but also with problems stemming from social stigma and prejudice (Ergin, 2021). The Paralympic Games were established as an organization to enable individuals with disabilities to participate in physical activities and benefit from the rehabilitative aspects of sport. However, over time, the Paralympic Games have evolved into an organization where superior performance, competition, and athletic excellence take center stage (Anatça & Yılmaz, 2019; Karadağ & Çetiner, 2022). It is generally known that athletes with disabilities face various difficulties and barriers to participating in physical activities and sports. The purpose of this research is to determine the difficulties faced by

physically disabled Paralympic athletes in participating in physical activities and sporting events and their needs in terms of legal regulations in general. The scope of the study includes the access of physically disabled Paralympic athletes to sports facilities and the necessary arrangements in these facilities, the necessary arrangements for the development of talented disabled athletes, regulations that need to be made in award regulations, the level of psychological support received by athletes, the adequacy of the team working with athletes, their retirement status after ending their sports career, and their need for comprehensive legal regulations. It is believed that this research will make an important contribution to the literature by highlighting the difficulties faced by physically disabled athletes in terms of physical activity and participation in sports, as well as their legal needs, and by proposing solutions to these problems. This study is significant for the development of sports policies, as it comprehensively identifies the challenges faced by Paralympic national athletes with physical disabilities and their legal needs throughout their participation in sports and physical activity.

METHODS

Research Model: This study employed a qualitative model. The qualitative research model allows the researcher to

observe events and participants in depth in their natural environments. In this research model, the researcher analyzes and interprets all data obtained from photographs, notes, audio and video recordings, oral narratives, and written documents, and then draws a general conclusion after all these stages. (Creswell, 2013). This study employed a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is an approach that draws deep meanings from all of the participants' experiences. In this research design, the researcher collects data directly from the participants' views in line with the purpose of the study and attempts to reveal findings related to the participants' experiences. Throughout this process, all written and verbal views obtained from the participants are used as primary sources of data. (Kocabıyık, 2015).

Research Group: The population of the study consists of 57 physically disabled national athletes who participated in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. The sample of the study consists of 40 athletes, with at least one athlete representing each sport. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling aims to achieve maximum diversity. Only athletes with physical disabilities were included in the study; athletes with other types of disabilities were not included. Demographic information regarding the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables		N	%
Gender	Female	19	47.5
	Male	21	52.5
Age	18 25	1	2.5
	26 35	19	47.5
	36 45	16	40.0
	46 55	3	7.5
	55+	1	2.5
Educational Status	Primary Education	3	7.5
	Secondary Education	14	35.5
	Undergraduate	22	55.5
	Postgraduate	1	2.5
Disability Status	Congenital	15	37.5
	Acquired	25	62.5
Year of Initiation into Sport	1994 1998	2	5.0
	1999 2003	2	5.0
	2004 2008	12	30.0
	2009 2013	12	30.0
	2014 2018	12	30.0
Sport Branch	Para Archery	9	22.5
	Para Swimming	1	2.5
	Para Powerlifting	4	10.0
	Para Table Tennis	5	12.5
	Para Athletics	2	5.0
	Para Shooting	9	22.5
	Wheelchair Basketball	7	17.5
	Wheelchair Fencing	1	2.5
	Para Badminton	1	2.5
	Wheelchair Tennis	1	2.5
	Total	40	100

The research group consisted of 40 participants, 47.5% of whom were women (19%) and 52.5% were men (21%). The age distribution of participants revealed that the largest proportion (47.5%) were in the 26 35 age range. In terms of educational background, 55.5% of participants were university graduates. In terms of disability status distribution, 62.5% of athletes became disabled later in life, while 37.5% were determined to be disabled from birth. In

terms of the year they started playing sports, 90% of participants were determined to have started between 2004 and 2018. In terms of distribution by sport, the highest representation was observed in Para Archery and Para Shooting at 22.5%, followed by Wheelchair Basketball at 17.5%.

Data Collection: For the research to be conducted, ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Muş Alparslan University (Document Date and Number: 11.12.2023 120941). All necessary permissions were obtained from the respective federations for all athletes interviewed within the scope of the research. Within the scope of qualitative research, data were collected through online interviews with participants using a semi structured interview technique. All necessary ethical and institutional approvals were obtained prior to the interviews conducted with participants via the Zoom platform. Participants were informed about the research process and participated on a voluntary basis. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality. Prior to recording audio or video during the interviews, explicit consent was obtained from the participants. Using the semi structured interview technique, the researcher asked pre prepared questions while allowing participants the freedom to elaborate on their answers (Batu, 2000). The semi structured interview form consists of 10 questions. Probe questions have been added to allow participants to explain their views in more detail and to enrich the research. Semi structured interview questions were developed based on input from six academics who are experts in their field.

Analysis of Data: Research data were collected from participants using a personal information form and a semi structured interview form. To ensure confidentiality in the interviews conducted via Zoom with the participants' consent, participants were assigned codes ranging from "S1" to "S40." The data were analyzed using content analysis method, and the meanings obtained were organized into codes, categories, and themes. (Baltacı, 2019; Saldaña, 2019). Data analysis was performed using MAXQDA 2024 software. Approximately 350 pages of transcribed interview data were obtained. The researcher reviewed the data multiple times and applied a two stage coding process. The codes obtained were grouped according to their similarities to arrive at categories and themes. The analysis resulted in 8 main themes, 11 sub themes, and 168 codes. The reliability of the research was ensured through feedback from experts and revisions made in consultation with the thesis advisor. Content analysis is a systematic and objective analytical method used to identify, classify, and interpret the fundamental elements of texts and discourses (Robert & Bouillaget, 1997).

Validity and Reliability of the Study: Reliability in qualitative research is established based on four fundamental criteria. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and verifiability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). These criteria correspond to the concepts of validity and reliability in quantitative research and were developed to establish the scientific rigor of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). To ensure the reliability of this study, semi structured questions were developed with the contributions of subject matter experts, and all design and implementation stages were supported. To establish consistency among coders, a portion of the data was independently coded by a second researcher, and a Kappa coefficient of 0.74 was obtained using the Kappa test performed in MAXQDA software. The Kappa test result indicated a high level of consistency between the two coders (McHugh, 2012). Data collection tools,

participants' demographic characteristics, and detailed explanations of procedures were presented within the scope of the study's feasibility. The accuracy of the data was ensured by obtaining feedback from participants, and the analysis of verified information was carried out taking into account subjective conditions in terms of reliability. In the Kappa test, values range from -1 to +1, where -1 indicates negative agreement, 0 indicates chance agreement, and +1 indicates positive agreement. To ensure reliable agreement, the result is expected to be above 0 and close to +1 (McHugh, 2012).

RESULTS

The research data were analyzed using content analysis. As a result of the analyses, 8 main themes, 11 sub themes, and a total of 168 codes were created. The findings section presents the main themes, sub themes, and codes in detail.

Challenges Encountered

This section presents the findings concerning the difficulties faced by national athletes with physical disabilities both prior to and after obtaining national athlete status. The data derived from participants' statements reveal the general challenges experienced during the period before achieving national recognition.

Faced by National Athletes with Physical Disabilities Before Attaining National Status

The following section presents the participants' views regarding the challenges they encountered before becoming national athletes. Prior to attaining national status, participants reported difficulties related to transportation, limited access to necessary equipment, financial hardship, and the inadequacy of sports facilities suitable for athletes with disabilities. Their statements on these issues are as follows:

"Before becoming a national athlete, we went through many hardships. Our home was in an area that was basically like a village, so traveling to and from places was extremely difficult for us. I didn't know how I would succeed or what path I should follow. From the beginning, I believed I could achieve this, but I also knew it would be very challenging. In terms of powerlifting, I never had any problems and lacked nothing; however, for nearly two years, I experienced significant difficulties with transportation." (S11). "I had serious difficulties accessing a proper firearm. The equipment we needed was quite expensive, and since I was new to the sport, no one knew whether I would eventually master it. People would question whether it was worth spending that much money. Because of this, I struggled with equipment issues and trained for several years using a gun that wasn't even mine. Later on, the governor's office and a few other institutions helped, but even then, I faced considerable challenges honestly, it was quite difficult." (S24). "My spouse was a national athlete, and thanks to that, I received considerable support. For example, we managed to secure sponsorship for equipment such as bows and arrows, and they were purchased for me. However, not everyone is as fortunate as I was. Support is usually provided only after athletes become national competitors, and by that stage, we no longer need it as much because we

start receiving income and can cover our own expenses.” (S7). “In Türkiye, we still do not have a sufficient number of facilities where athletes with physical disabilities can hold training camps, at least not in proportion to the number of active athletes. For instance, we are currently training at the Eryaman Tohum Center because it is suitable for athletes with disabilities, which is why most of our camps are held in Ankara. In this regard, I believe that the Tohum Olympic Preparation Centers should be expanded and restructured to function more comprehensively as Paralympic Training Centers.” (S16).

Challenges Faced by National Athletes with Physical Disabilities After Attaining National Status

The following section presents participants’ views regarding the challenges they encountered after attaining national athlete status. According to the athletes, the main difficulties experienced post recognition include the high cost of equipment, insufficient material support, societal misconceptions about athletes with disabilities, the belief that individuals with disabilities engage in sport solely for rehabilitation purposes, limited public awareness of Paralympic sport, and the tendency of society to underestimate the achievements of athletes with disabilities. Participants also noted that some individuals did not encounter any particular difficulties after becoming national athletes. Their statements are as follows:

“As the standards increase after joining the national team, the need for equipment naturally rises as well. In an event like archery, equipment is directly proportional to performance; if the equipment is insufficient, you simply cannot achieve the desired results. In this sense, the financial and economic conditions in the country created difficulties, and there were times when we could not obtain the necessary equipment due to financial constraints. These issues mostly occurred earlier in my career. Later on, being a veteran made it somewhat easier to access certain resources, and in that regard I was more fortunate. However, if we consider the broader challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, the situation is quite difficult people with disabilities cannot access these resources easily.” (S1). “In terms of equipment, not all of my needs were being met, and I had to train with non professional bows and arrows. These were the kinds of problems I encountered before joining a club.” (S6). “Paralympic national athletes should not be perceived as engaging in sport merely for rehabilitation; rather, there must be a societal awareness that we perform this work professionally, just like Olympic athletes, because there is absolutely no difference between us. We also spend months in training camps, staying away from our families and homes, and many of us must put aside additional jobs to commit fully to our sport. In my view, the conditions are entirely comparable, and I even believe that Paralympic athletes demonstrate a greater level of dedication. Because we all have disabilities, we continually face numerous challenges.” (S30). “I believe that the Olympic and Paralympic systems should not be treated separately in our country. If the Olympics exist, the Paralympics exist; if there are Paralympic Games, then there are Olympic Games. Both are held in the same city and under the same conditions. In Türkiye, of course, the biggest sector is football. In my view,

that field has moved beyond the realm of sport. I say this as a physical education specialist trained at Gazi University. The overall perspective needs to change. Using the term ‘Paralympic athlete’ instead of ‘disabled athlete’ would be far more appropriate and meaningful for us.” (S36). “Wheelchair basketball began in Europe in the 1940s, whereas we started in the 1990s. Despite being nearly 50 years behind Europe, winning the European Championship did not receive the level of recognition it deserved in our country. I believe it was not valued sufficiently. We do not have any political agenda or propaganda; we simply went there, competed, and brought home the trophy as European champions. These athletes deserve far greater appreciation, in my opinion. What happened afterward? We were granted the right to a green passport and given honorary athlete status. But in reality and perhaps this goes slightly beyond our main topic these athletes should receive much more visibility. They should have biographies written about them. Because these athletes are exceptional individuals who have challenged the world, I believe they should be given significantly more recognition.” (S37). “As I mentioned before, one naturally expects a professional environment in terms of facility provision. Over time, the state increased its interest in this sport, and the General Directorate of Sports played a role in this development. As the scope of this field expanded, our opportunities also improved. Throughout the process, we submitted various requests to the relevant state institutions, and the response to these demands was sometimes slow, sometimes timely, which helped accelerate progress to some extent. However, the most critical issue was facility development, particularly regarding accessibility. Once improvements in facility infrastructure advanced, our path became much clearer.” (S22).

Expected Adaptations for Individuals with Disabilities in Sports Facilities

Perspectives on the Adaptations Expected for Individuals with Disabilities in Sports Facilities

The following section presents participants’ views regarding the modifications that should be implemented in sports facilities to accommodate individuals with disabilities. According to the athletes, restrooms, sinks, and shower areas must be designed in an accessible manner; ramps and incline levels should be suitable for wheelchair use; and sports facilities should incorporate disability friendly structural adjustments. Participants also emphasized the need to improve access to sports venues and to increase the number of training spaces available for athletes with disabilities. Their statements are summarized as follows:

“They build what they call an ‘accessible restroom,’ but the only accessible part is the sign on the door. Once you enter, the doorway is extremely narrow, and there is no space for a wheelchair to turn. There are clear standards and regulations on how such restrooms should be designed, yet no one follows them placing a sign appears to be enough. The same applies to ramp slopes, sidewalk inclines, and widths. They construct a sidewalk but place a pole or a tree right in the middle of it.” (S3). “The grab bars in shower areas should not be installed haphazardly; in some places, not having them at all would be safer than the way they are currently placed. In my opinion, the shower systems used in

Europe should be adopted. Showers should not be divided into small sections, and even if partitions exist, they must be at floor level for easy access. The raised barriers that separate shower areas should be removed, and the entire space should be designed as a broad, unobstructed shower zone.” (S31). “First and foremost, facilities must have level entrances. When there are only stairway entrances, athletes are not always accompanied by someone who can assist them. For example, if you are training yourself, the person who would help you cannot simultaneously work or attend to you. Finding someone who can lift a wheelchair down the stairs or provide support is extremely difficult, and not everyone is willing or able to do this.” (S5). “At the sports facility where we train, those using wheelchairs have to take the elevator, while I can use the stairs since I walk with a prosthetic leg. However, it is extremely difficult for wheelchair users to reach the upper floors. When there is a power outage and the generator fails to activate, athletes must be carried down by others, which causes considerable anxiety. The facilities definitely need further improvement. Although there has been progress compared to the past, for example, Türkiye’s largest para shooting center where all national camps are held in Eryaman still needs significant development. Two wheelchair users cannot even turn around in the training hall at the same time because the area is very narrow.” (S29). “Some of our teammates with disabilities live far from training venues. In Kocaeli, for instance, there is a transportation service that picks up athletes with disabilities from their homes and brings them to the sports hall. However, such services are not available in Antalya or in many other cities. Some athletes struggle greatly to get to training because there is simply no accessible transportation. Having such a system everywhere would be extremely beneficial.” (S12). “I can say that there are hardly any places suitable for us. For example, I currently live in Denizli, and the training venue I use now is accessible, but this was not the case before. When we used to train at the stadium, transporting our bows, carrying equipment, and even retrieving our arrows created significant difficulties.” (S7).

Psychological Support

Perspectives on the Provision of Psychological Support for Athletes with Physical Disabilities

The following section presents participants’ views regarding the provision of psychological support to athletes. According to the participants, opinions varied: some stated that psychological support is provided to athletes with physical disabilities, others noted that such support is offered only prior to competitions, while some indicated that no psychological support is provided at all. Their perspectives are summarized as follows:

“Last year, we were under the Turkish Sports Federation for the Physically Disabled, and a psychological support program had just begun there. In previous years, there were no permanent sports psychologists present during camps. This changed last year. In the Archery Federation, where we are now, psychological support has been provided since the very first day. We always have a psychologist in our training camps. There are structured mental development sessions with the psychologist, including both team based and

individual sessions. We also receive psychological support during competitions. In this regard, psychological assistance is consistently provided, and a psychologist is officially part of the technical staff.” (S2). “Psychological support is provided, but in my opinion, it is insufficient. Previously, psychologists would only come during competitions, perhaps once or twice a year. This was far from adequate; psychological support should be delivered on a more regular basis. Although the system has improved recently, the previous level of support was certainly not enough.” (S10). “Our federation absolutely does not arrange meetings with a psychologist. No, there is no such support no psychological assistance whatsoever. Regardless of which federation I work under, unfortunately, there is a saying they often repeat directly to my face: ‘A fruitful tree is the one that gets stoned.’ They essentially tell me, ‘If you don’t produce results, then we won’t criticize you.’ I have even reported this issue to the ministry. Although I am now working under a different federation because we were transferred to the mainstream federation nothing has changed” (S13).

Perspectives on Coaches and Other Team Staff

Athletes’ Perspectives on Coaches and Other Team Staff

The following section presents participants’ views regarding coaches and other members of the support staff. Athletes evaluated these individuals as sufficient, partially sufficient, or insufficient in fulfilling their roles. Their perspectives are summarized as follows:

“As I mentioned before, after moving under the Archery Federation, we began working with individuals who truly prioritize quality and who genuinely understand both the sport and the athletes. Our current technical director is a world class expert who has earned a strong reputation in international archery over many years. He has consistently achieved success in global competitions and leads a highly professional team. Training under his guidance, alongside the staff he assembled, is an exceptional opportunity for us. He and his team have been selected as ‘Coach of the Year’ multiple times. His knowledge, skill, professional development, and ability to communicate effectively with athletes make working with him a tremendous advantage not only for the athletes, but also for the coaches and the entire support team. Their contribution to our progress in recent years has been truly remarkable.” (S5). “I have a coach who is a European and World champion; I learned the sport from him. My other coach, who graduated from the School of Physical Education and Sports, is a weightlifting trainer. They are both excellent for me they raised me as an athlete. However, since their primary specialization is not Paralympic sport, they support me voluntarily. If there were a dedicated department for disability sports and coaches graduated specifically from that field, receiving structured support would be far more beneficial for us, especially in terms of psychological well being.” (S11). “If we look beyond the Paralympic context, I believe the coaches are generally competent. However, the Paralympic field involves numerous unique challenges and detailed considerations, and we unfortunately learn many of these only as we experience them firsthand. In this regard, full proficiency is not yet present.” (S9).

Training and Development of Talented Athletes with Disabilities

Athletes' Perspectives on the Training and Development of Talented Athletes with Disabilities

The following section presents participants' views and recommendations regarding the training and development of talented athletes with disabilities. According to the participants, several factors are essential: conducting talent identification programs in schools, increasing the visibility of Paralympic sports, guiding individuals toward disciplines that align with their physical abilities, ensuring strong family support, providing adequate financial assistance, and organizing school based seminars in which Paralympic athletes introduce and promote disability sports. Their perspectives are summarized as follows:

"Children who are born with a disability or who develop a disability during their early schooling years must somehow be integrated into sport. As I mentioned earlier, there are numerous disciplines suited to their abilities basketball, archery, tennis, air pistol, and many others. They should be given opportunities to access these sports, explore their talents, and be guided toward whichever activity makes them feel most comfortable, whether it is archery, basketball, or another discipline. In my view, there is a significant gap in this area." (S1). "The biggest issue is that the media does not broadcast our events. For example, we compete in the Super League, yet only one match per month sometimes only one every two months is shown on television. Last year the coverage was better; two or three matches per month were broadcast. Now it has dropped dramatically." (S36). "Based on the athlete's disability, they should be directed to an appropriate sport if their condition is not suitable for basketball, then perhaps swimming, table tennis, or archery. This guidance must be provided systematically within a structured program." (S31) "To begin with, when we consider an individual with a disability who spends most of their time at home, the process starts even before they reach a sports facility. First, we must ask whether the family has the means to support them. If the person uses a single assistive device, do they have access to transportation? If not, is public transportation accessible to them? Suppose they manage to reach the sports hall then the facility itself must be suitable for their needs. Equally important is whether the hall has staff who truly understand and can support athletes with disabilities. Is there an experienced coach who specializes in that discipline? And beyond that, ongoing support is essential. If the child shows progress, they will eventually be selected for the national team. However, this entire pathway involves many steps; it is truly not an easy process." (S16). "To be honest, while everyone including the ministry and senior officials emphasizes the importance of enabling individuals with disabilities to participate in sport and encouraging us to train athletes, the reality is more complex. Yes, we can identify talented athletes, but the sport we practice is quite costly. Firearms, jackets, and other shooting equipment are expensive, and this creates a significant barrier. We are asked to both encourage participation and increase the number of licensed athletes, yet when new athletes are directed to the sport, we immediately encounter material shortages. This is precisely where the disconnect begins." (S26). "We were

actually at a school today when you called. We delivered a seminar there, explaining to students how they should interact with individuals with disabilities and how to approach them respectfully. But a single session is not enough; this kind of education needs to be provided repeatedly and consistently." (S7).

Sponsorship and Athlete Management

Athletes' Perspectives on Having Sponsors and Managers

The following section presents the participants' views and suggestions regarding the issue of having sponsors and managers. Their perspectives on possessing or lacking sponsorship and managerial support, the necessity of sponsors and managers for financial assistance, and the limited popularity of Paralympic sports are summarized as follows:

"I do not have a manager, but I do have a sponsor. Since the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games, my sponsor has provided me with consistent financial and emotional support." (P23). "I have never had a sponsor. It is not that we are weak in this area, but I have simply never received any sponsorship offers. I have genuinely made every effort to find a sponsor, yet I have not received any response." (P11). "I do not have a manager, nor do I have a sponsor. I only have my coach. He took me under his wing, supported me, and helped me grow. We are still working together, and he is the only person who looks after me. Not having a sponsor is a disadvantage; it is an important issue in our field." (P12). "There is an undeniable reality: in order to operate in a professional and institutional manner, sponsorships play a critical role. My expectations from sponsors are not limited to financial resources; rather, I value the opportunities that sponsorships provide for reaching a broader population of individuals with disabilities through promotional activities. Major corporations and large companies could easily carry out highly impactful initiatives in this regard if they wished to. We do not have access to all necessary financial means. Social institutions, local administrations, major holdings, and private companies should take responsibility. Unfortunately, this lack of sponsorship support is not unique to us; across almost all Olympic and Paralympic disciplines excluding sports such as football, volleyball, and basketball there is no adequate sponsorship culture." (P19). "The media is undeniably insufficient. To give an example, in table tennis we have numerous European and world champions, yet I do not believe that the general public is truly aware of these achievements. Paralympic sports receive little attention and have almost no media presence. As a result, both recognition and sponsorship remain limited because people do not support athletes they do not know. Even our high level of success does not provide a meaningful advantage in this respect." (P17).

Violations of Rights Arising from Athlete Contracts

Athletes' Perspectives on Rights Violations Arising from Their Contracts

The following section presents the participants' views regarding their contractual situations. The perspectives of those who have experienced rights violations, those who

have not, and those who do not have any contractual arrangements are summarized as follows:

“I previously experienced such an issue at my former club. I was unable to receive the payment owed to me, so I pursued legal action. Through my lawyer, the matter was taken to a settlement process, and eventually, I received the compensation I was entitled to.” (P32). “I have not encountered any such situation so far. Our club consists of individuals who are conscientious enough not to subject athletes to violations of their rights. Therefore, I do not believe I have experienced any loss of rights.” (P5). “No, I have not. I have never signed a contract with my club, nor have I been involved in any similar arrangement with the federation.” (P8). “I have not signed anything with my club. They generally handle our licenses and registration directly, so it works in that manner. As far as I know, I have not encountered any issue of this kind up to now.” (P12).

Athletes’ Retirement Rights and Expectations

Athletes’ Perspectives on Their Retirement Rights and Expectations

The following section presents the participants’ views regarding their retirement rights and expectations. Their perspectives on the rights granted to athletes who achieve ranking positions, the adequacy of the honorary pension, the need to increase this pension due to its insufficiency, and the provision of compensation after retiring from sport are summarized as follows:

“When we achieve ranking results, we are already rewarded by the state. We receive what is called an honorary pension, which functions similarly to a retirement pension for us. The amount increases depending on our achievements, and this payment continues throughout our lives or can be transferred to our children. From my perspective, the support provided in this regard is satisfactory. Personally, I find the amount sufficient. As the minimum wage rises, our pension also increases. In that sense, it is tied to the athlete’s level of achievement. I believe that athletes are rewarded appropriately.” (P8). “When I compare my retirement income with that of ordinary retired citizens today, mine is higher. For example, if a typical retiree receives around 7,500 lira, I earn about 14,000 lira as a world champion. I am considered a civil servant retiree, so I am satisfied and have no concerns.” (P14). “I am a retired athlete. Due to my international achievements, I was granted retirement status based on my national team career. Given today’s economic conditions and the significant rise in the cost of living, I believe that the honorary pension provided to national athletes particularly those who have earned international distinctions should be increased. After all, we are athletes who have represented the country around the world and ensured that the national anthem was played something only a small number of athletes in this country have achieved. For example, as a team, we became champions for the first time in Türkiye in 2017. The state already has a reward regulation, but I think it would be reasonable to adjust the pension granted to retired athletes to at least match the minimum wage or rise in parallel with it.” (P37). “I think receiving compensation would be quite beneficial. It would put us on a similar footing with regular

retirees; just as they receive compensation, we could also be entitled to it.” (P20). “I would prefer that compensation be provided upon retirement; it would be a positive step. I would absolutely want the process to function similarly to a standard insured employment system.” (P21).

Legal Rights and Expectations Afforded to Athletes with Disabilities

Perspectives on the Legal Rights and Expectations Afforded to Athletes with Disabilities

The following section presents the participants’ views regarding their expectations about the legal rights afforded to athletes with disabilities. Their perspectives include expectations that national athletes who do not achieve ranking results should also be eligible for the honorary pension, views opposing the extension of the honorary pension to athletes without rankings, suggestions for simplifying official documentation and procedures, ensuring that no athlete remains uninsured through the use of professional contracts, expanding the right of athletes with disabilities to be appointed as teachers, providing broader support for wheelchairs and prostheses as part of social rights, resolving difficulties in accessing disabled parking spaces, introducing discounts on all utility bills for individuals with disabilities, revising the tax reduction (ÖTV) regulations for vehicle purchases, increasing discounts and support for medical equipment, improving employment opportunities, views on whether the awards given to disabled athletes are sufficient or insufficient, addressing delays in award payments, improving award related practices, and revising the “eight country rule.” Their views on these matters are summarized as follows:

“It is necessary to achieve a ranking in order to receive a pension, and this creates a significant problem. I have many friends who were highly talented but had to quit sports and enter the workforce because they were not eligible for a pension. As a result, many gifted athletes are forced to end their sporting careers.” (P11). “In my view, rewards should certainly be tied to performance. I do not agree with granting a pension to athletes who have merely competed twice as national team members. I believe pensions should be allocated only to those who achieve rankings. There should be a clear distinction between successful and unsuccessful athletes.” (P15). “For example, in Europe apologies for elaborating this much but when someone receives a disability report, it is considered valid for life. They acknowledge that the person is permanently disabled and proceed accordingly. This is not something I personally wished for, but given my situation, I am grateful. However, dealing with such bureaucratic processes is extremely exhausting. There are unnecessarily large amounts of paperwork. We understand that state procedures exist, but there is nothing we can do this is the reality we must accept.” (P33). “Some clubs still allow athletes to compete for certain periods without providing social security coverage. This should not be allowed. To prevent such situations, the federation must require contracts from every athlete. It is the federation’s responsibility to enforce this. This practice has only recently started to develop. Since transitioning under the Basketball Federation, they have implemented a partial exemption this year, ensuring tighter

control so that no uninsured athlete can compete for an entire season. Even if an athlete holds a separate job for example, a civil servant they may be permitted to play without additional insurance, but an athlete with no insurance at all is no longer allowed to compete. This issue has now been addressed. With the move to the Basketball Federation, I know that these regulations will be strengthened further next year. Athletes will be able to compete only by paying a 3% insurance contribution. To further advance these improvements, it is essential that every athlete be required to sign a professional contract.” (P31) “I would like to highlight an issue related to the appointment rights of athletes with disabilities. There used to be a significant problem in this area, and I filed a lawsuit regarding it one that I eventually won. According to the regulation, athletes with disabilities, including national athletes with international achievements, were eligible for teacher appointments only if they placed in the top three at the Paralympic Games. The regulation excluded achievements from European or World Championships, or events such as the Mediterranean Games, offering no appointment rights based on those results. Relying on this regulation, I initiated legal action, and after approximately one and a half years, I won the case. Following this decision, all athletes with disabilities can now cite my case as a precedent, meaning that any athlete who earns a medal at a European or World Championship is entitled to be appointed as a teacher. However, there remains a gap in the regulation. For Olympic athletes, appointments are granted based on results from the Mediterranean Games even for those younger than 15 years old. I discussed this issue with the department head at the Ministry of Sports, who approved my own appointment. I explained that if a 15 year old Olympic athlete achieves a ranking, they are granted a lifelong appointment right, even if they later quit the sport entirely. Yet, an active athlete with a European Championship title or a World Championship silver medal is denied the same right simply because they are classified as disabled. He acknowledged this inconsistency over the phone. I told him I would pursue legal action, and he encouraged me to do so, saying it was my right. I filed the lawsuit and won. As a result, all athletes with disabilities who achieve rankings at European Championships, World Championships, or other recognized international competitions now have the right to be appointed as teachers. I am genuinely pleased about this outcome.” (P39). “In the national team, for example, I received support for arrows, but when it came to the bow itself, I still had to manage certain things on my own. However, in 2019, my club provided substantial assistance in this regard. I received significant support from Okçular Vakfı Sports Club. The federation also offered support for participating in competitions and training camps at the national team level. Still, when it came to acquiring equipment and obtaining a wheelchair, I had to take care of many of these needs myself.” (P2). “As athletes with disabilities, we face far greater challenges compared to nondisabled athletes particularly in para archery. For example, the differences in training conditions are substantial. If the facilities where we train lack accessible restrooms, showers, or disabled parking, it creates serious difficulties. You essentially begin each training session at a disadvantage already ‘one step

behind’ before you even start.” (P1). “For electricity, there is no such support. We applied, but nothing is available. Only water bills have discounts. There is no support for natural gas either. The municipality provides the water discount solely because of disability status. So, while there is a discount for water, there is none for natural gas or electricity. Overall, these social rights are insufficient. There is no disabled parking entitlement, nothing beyond the water discount. At least based on my experience, I have not encountered any other support.” (P13). “In the past, the Special Consumption Tax (ÖTV) exemption included an engine limit of 1.6 liters. We were able to purchase 1.6 liter vehicles from brands such as Mercedes and BMW. However, due to recent legal changes, the limit has been replaced by a price cap of 1.5 million lira. At present, it is nearly impossible to purchase the vehicles that are most essential for us namely, disability adapted vehicles within this price threshold. A new regulation in this area would be greatly appreciated. As athletes with disabilities, we want to be able to use high quality vehicles.” (P15). “We would be very pleased if discounts were offered on medical equipment because the costs are extremely high. Our wheelchairs and other specialized medical materials are incredibly expensive. Discounts in this area would be the most important support for us.” (P6). “I would also like to mention an issue related to employment for individuals with disabilities. As far as I know, workplaces with 100 employees are currently required to employ at least 3% disabled workers. I believe this quota should be increased. If it were raised even to 5% or ideally 10% it would significantly improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Finding a job is very difficult, especially for those without formal education, as the private sector offers limited opportunities. Increasing these quotas would reduce unemployment among people with disabilities and make it easier for them to enter the workforce.” (P32.) “In fact, the awards granted to athletes were very satisfactory until about five or six years ago; however, they have since been reduced. When compared to other countries, the awards we receive are still relatively favorable. I speak with friends from various countries, and many of them either do not have an award system at all or receive extremely minimal amounts. So, when we ask whether we receive adequate recognition for our efforts, I would say yes but of course, there are systems in other countries that are even better. This situation is unfortunately influenced by national economic conditions. Even so, I believe that we are, to a certain extent, compensated for our efforts.” (P30). “I do not find the awards sufficient. In the past, for example, the awards were much higher, but later the amounts were reduced. We invest tremendous effort physically and psychologically. When you step onto the field and win a medal, naturally you hope to receive a meaningful award. However, the award amounts have decreased considerably.” (P7). “When receiving an award, athletes make plans they want to invest in their careers and in their future. However, by the time the award payment is deposited, its value has unfortunately diminished significantly. That is why I always say this: when you receive an award, think of it as being worth only a quarter of its actual amount at that moment, so that you understand what you will realistically be able to do with it once the

money is finally in your hands.” (P9). “Sometimes you travel abroad, compete in a World Championship, win a world title, yet you still do not receive any rights or awards. They say, ‘This is not a Paralympic event,’ meaning that if a competition is not classified under the Paralympic program that year, no award is granted. For example, I became world champion twice. From these achievements, the total amount I received was minimal. For the 2017 championship, I received nothing zero. For the 2019 title, I received only 4,500 lira.” (P3). “In my opinion, the requirement of participation from at least eight countries in the award regulation is fundamentally flawed. The number of Paralympic athletes worldwide is already low, so the situation cannot be evaluated in the same way as able bodied sports. You may meet the European qualification standard, then the World standard, and even the Olympic standard. You may arrive in the morning and find that eight countries are participating, but by evening the number may drop to seven yet your qualification is still legitimate. The presence of eight or twenty countries is not something the athlete can control. Linking the award system to such an unpredictable condition is, in my view, quite illogical. This is one of the biggest issues in swimming. It is incredibly difficult to have eight finalists; if two athletes from the same country reach the final, the award is halved. They base the award solely on the final lineup of eight athletes, not on the number of participants in the heats, even though in the heats you may compete against athletes from forty countries. If the total number of participating countries were taken into account, instead of only the final, it would be far more advantageous for swimmers. As it stands, the system creates a significant disadvantage.” (P10).

Other Perspectives Expressed by the Athletes

Athletes' Views on Other

The following section presents the participants' additional views.

The participants' views regarding the need to train more Paralympic athletes, the role of sport in fostering self confidence, taking on coaching roles after ending their athletic careers, the importance of support from government officials and artists for Paralympic sports, and the motivational benefits of federation presidents attending training sessions are summarized as follows:

“In Türkiye, I am unable to progress as an athlete because I do not have a training partner. I need to attend competitions or training camps to improve myself. Although I work with my coach here, I have no partner to train with, and there are no matches being held. There is no classification system for wheelchair fencing in Türkiye nothing exists in this field. Therefore, I need to go abroad. To compete with international athletes, I must participate in tournaments.” (P38). *“I would also like to mention this: before becoming a national athlete, my self confidence was very low. My family was extremely protective of me almost treating me like something fragile that would break easily. Whenever I went outside, eight, nine, sometimes ten children would accompany me. I always feared that if the wheel of my chair burst, I would not know what to do. But after becoming a national athlete and seeing what other individuals with*

disabilities were able to do independently, I returned to Türkiye thinking, ‘If they can do it, so can I what am I lacking?’ When I first started going to the market or other places on my own with my powered wheelchair, even though I had a phone with me, I would call people out of fear that something might happen, like a tire burst. But over time, I began to feel truly independent.” (P24). *“I believe the state should create more opportunities for athletes once their competitive careers come to an end. In this regard, it is essential to make greater use of athletes' experience, knowledge, and expertise. New positions should be established to ensure that their skills are effectively utilized. Although some steps have already been taken in this direction, I think the state should be more proactive inviting athletes to share their insights, asking them what challenges they have encountered, what practices are effective, and how systems can be improved. In my view, the contributions of former athletes should be recognized and incorporated more comprehensively across all relevant areas.”* (P2). *“The close engagement of the Minister with us during that period attracted considerable attention from both the media and the public. This was, in fact, highly significant. When high level state officials or well known public figures approach Paralympic sport with sensitivity and seriousness, it naturally increases visibility and awareness. During that time, the Minister showed as much dedication to the Paralympic Games as he did to the Olympic Games remaining with us, supporting us, and standing by our side. This drew media and societal interest, and I can say that it helped shift certain public perceptions in a positive direction.”* (P19). *“In my view, the person who can elevate an athlete to the highest level is the federation president. They should attend training sessions and contribute to athletes' motivation. We are not asking them to train with us or do specific things for us; rather, they should be present during training not arriving only after training sessions have ended. I believe such an approach is inappropriate.”* (P13).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the difficulties and legal needs encountered by national Paralympic athletes with physical disabilities in the process of participating in sports and to develop recommendations. Within the scope of the study, 8 main themes, 11 sub themes, and 168 codes were identified through content analysis. Within this framework, a wide range of issues were identified and solutions proposed, ranging from access to sports facilities and infrastructure limitations, access to equipment and financial burdens, social attitudes, psychological support, the adequacy of technical staff, to legal and social rights. The research findings showed that physically disabled Paralympic athletes experienced problems with ramps and slopes in the structure of sports facilities and in toilet and bathroom areas when accessing sports facilities, and that this situation limited their participation in sports (Kuyulu & Beltekin, 2020; Bekçi, 2012; Kızar, 2018). Research shows that athletes with disabilities face problems due to the high cost of sports equipment and insufficient financial support (Madhushani & Burnett, 2020; McLoughlin et al., 2017; Wilson & Khoo, 2013). In addition, it is observed that sponsorship and management support issues, which are

among the main problems faced by athletes, lead to economic inadequacies (Madhushani & Burnett, 2020; Çınarlı & Ersöz, 2010). For Paralympic athletes, the low visibility of Paralympic sports, combined with a rehabilitation focused perception and stigma, reduces motivation and public recognition (Wilson & Khoo, 2013; Argan et al., 2021; Crawford & Stodolska, 2008). The fact that psychological support provided or required for athletes is concentrated only in the pre competition period highlights the importance of a continuous psychological service model that takes into account the emotional determinants of physical performance (Mellalieu et al., 2009; Topuz & Çağlayan, 2019). The knowledge base of coaches and other support staff regarding athletes with disabilities, their ability to keep up with technological developments, and their level of professional development are important criteria in terms of athletes' performance and motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Yılmaz, 2021). The fundamental barriers to participation in sports must be eliminated by conducting talent scouting programs for disabled athletes in schools, increasing the visibility of Paralympic sports, selecting sports appropriate to the type of disability, and emphasizing the importance of strong family support (Karadaş & Çetiner, 2022; Shields et al., 2012). Regulation No. 2013/5628 stipulates that athletes who achieve rankings in Olympic and Paralympic disciplines shall be awarded TL prizes equivalent to the value of a gold coin for individual or team competitions held at the Olympic, Paralympic, World, or European Championships (Bakanlar Kurulu, 2013). Expectations regarding the preparation of contracts within the scope of the legal and social rights of Paralympic athletes, the implementation of corrective regulations in award regulations, the timely awarding of prizes, the uncertainty created by the phrase "may be awarded" in the law, and the revision of the "eight country rule" are noteworthy. Although retirement and honorary retirement pensions are provided for under Law No. 5774 (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 2008), they have been criticized for being financially inadequate. Another issue that athletes criticize and are concerned about is social expectations. Athletes have raised the issue of greater flexibility in Special Consumption Tax (ÖTV) exemptions for vehicle purchases as equipment needed to assist with their disabilities, more support for medical supplies and prosthetics, and shorter replacement periods for these supplies as a result of state support. Additionally, opinions have been expressed advocating for inspections to facilitate access to disabled parking spaces, raising public awareness, and providing more employment opportunities through discounts on all public service bills (Yayman & Çımat, 2012; Konya Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2023; Güngör & Güneş, 2013). In conclusion, it has been determined that Paralympic athletes face challenges in many areas, ranging from sports facilities to transportation, from lack of equipment to financial

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- support, from psychological support to the adequacy of the coaching team, from sponsorship to public awareness, and from social rights to legal rights, and that solutions to these problems must be found. The prevailing view is that these problems can be experienced not only when starting sports or during professional sports careers, but throughout all stages of participation in sports. For this reason, addressing these multifaceted challenges requires sustainable, rights-based policies that integrate existing institutional support mechanisms, enhance overall accessibility, and ensure that sports always provide equal opportunities for athletes with physical disabilities.

Suggestions

To eliminate the barriers to participation in sports for Paralympic athletes, transportation issues must first be resolved by reaching agreements with the relevant authorities to ensure access to sports facilities. Sports facilities should be universally designed and redesigned to be accessible to people with disabilities. Equipment shortages should be regularly addressed through the relevant authorities. Coaches and other team members should undergo special training for athletes with disabilities to make training types and varieties more suitable. Psychological support services should be available to athletes at all times, not just before competitions. Increasing the number of Paralympic athletes and identifying talented disabled athletes by conducting regular talent scouting in schools, instilling sports awareness in families, and creating awareness in society that disabled individuals can participate in sports professionally will pave the way for starting sports at an early age. To strengthen the social rights of athletes, contracts should be drawn up for each athlete, the award regulations should be adapted to the current economic situation, awards should be given on time, the eight country rule should be reevaluated when creating awards, and athletes' pensions should be revised more positively. Ensuring compliance with international standards for medical equipment, wheelchairs, and prosthetics for athletes with disabilities, making Special Consumption Tax (ÖTV) exemptions more flexible for vehicles that meet their specific needs, and providing employment opportunities are essential. These improvements will increase the well being of athletes in Paralympic sports in Turkey, resulting in increased sustainable success.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Çalışmanın Amacı: Bu çalışmanın amacı, bedensel engelli milli paralimpik sporcuların milli olmadan önce ve milli olduktan sonra karşılaştıkları zorluklar ve hukuki

ihtiyaçlarını belirlenmesidir. Çalışmada bedensel engelli milli sporcuların milli olmadan önce ve milli olduktan sonra karşılaştıkları zorluklara, spor tesislerinde yapılması

beklenen düzenlemelere, sporcuların ihtiyaç duydukları psikolojik destek seviyesine, antrenör ve diğer ekip üyelerinin yeterlilik düzeylerine, temelden gelen yetenekli engelli sporcuların yetiştirilmesinde yapılması gerekenlere, sporcuların son derece ihtiyaç duyduğu sponsor ve menajer sorunlarının çözümlerine, sporcuların imzaladıkları sözleşmelerden doğan hak ihlallerinin veya sözleşmelerinin olup olmadığına, engelli sporcuların sporu bıraktıktan sonra emeklilik haklarına, engelli sporcuların hukuki hakları kapsamında ödül yönetmeliklerine, sosyal haklarına ve hukuki olarak ihtiyaç duydukları hakların kendi görüşleri ile ortaya konması hedeflenmiştir.

Araştırma Problemleri: Bedensel engelli milli paralimpik sporcuların milli olmadan önce karşılaştıkları zorluklar, milli olduktan sonra karşılaştıkları problemlerin nasıl değiştiği ve sürdüğü, spor tesislerindeki genel düzenlemelerde öne çıkan eksiklikler, psikolojik destek ve antrenör ile teknik ekibin yeterliliğini sporcuların nasıl değerlendirdiği, sponsorluk ve menajerlik gibi sorunların sporcuları nasıl etkilediği, hukuki haklar kapsamında sözleşmelerden kaynaklanan hak ihlallerinin niteliği, emeklilik hakları kapsamında sosyal güvencenin yeterliliği, sosyal haklar altındaki genel ihtiyaçların neler olduğu araştırmanın problemleridir.

Literatür Araştırması: Literatürde engelli bireylerin tüm alanlardaki hakları konusunda çok boyutlu bir yapının olduğu; sporun engelliler için fiziksel güçlendirme, rehabilitasyon ve sosyalleşme haricinde aynı zamanda profesyonel olarak bir branşı yapabileceklerinin vurgulandığı görülmüştür. Engelli bireylerin profesyonel olarak yaptıkları spor branşları altında bazı ihtiyaçlarının olduğu bununla birlikte kurumsal desteğin, görünürlüğün ve sponsorluk gibi desteklerin sınırlı kaldığı belirtilmektedir. Çalışmada nitel yönteme dayalı fenomenolojik deseni kullanılmıştır.

Yöntem: Evreni Tokyo 2020’de yer alan 57 bedensel engelli milli sporcu oluşturmuş, amaçlı örnekleme ile her branştan en az birer sporcunun temsili ile toplam 40 sporcu örnekleme oluşturmuştur. Veriler önceden 6 uzmanın görüşleri alınarak oluşturulan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile çevrim içi ortamda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmanın yürütülmesi için Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Eğiti Kurulundan etik kurul izni alınmıştır (11.12.2023 120941). Bedensel engelli milli paralimpik sporcular ile görüşmelerin gerçekleştirilebilmesi için tüm federasyonlardan izinler alınmıştır. Yapılan görüşmeler için ayrıca sporculardan da izinler alınmıştır. Toplanan veriler yaklaşık 350 sayfalık doküman içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Analiz sonucunda 8 ana tema, 11 alt tema ve 168 kod belirlenmiş; kodlayıcılar arası uyumun ölçülmesi için Kappa testi uygulanmış ve sonu. 0,74 çıkmıştır.

Sonuç ve Değerlendirme: Bulgular, sporcuların milli olmadan önce özellikle ulaşım konusunda oldukça

zorlandıklarını, branşın pahalı ekipmanlarına erişemediklerini, maddi yetersizlikler yaşadıklarını, spor tesislerinin sayısının yeterli olmadığını, spor tesislerinin engelliler için uygun olmadığını ve bu konularda ciddi sorunlar yaşadıklarını belirtmiştir. Sporcular milli olduktan sonra ise ekipmanlara ulaşabildiklerini performanslarının arttığını ancak yine de gereken desteklerin her zaman yeterli düzeyde olmadığını ifade etmişlerdir. Sporcular başarı alsalar dahi görünürlük sorunları yaşadıklarını, toplumun engelli bireylerin sporu yalnızca rehabilite amacıyla yaptıkları görüşlerinin olduğunu, başarıların yeterince takdir edilmediğini ve tüm bunların motivasyon ve sponsor bulunmasında problemler oluşturduğunu, bu konuda kurumsal desteğinde yetersiz kaldığını vurgulamıştır. Spor tesislerinde bir takım problemler olduğunu ve düzeltilmediği yönünde görüşler belirtilmiştir. Bunların başında erişilebilirlik olarak spor tesislerinin girişlerindeki rampa eğimlerinin hiç olmaması ve olsa dahi eğimlerinin çok dik olduğunu, kapı eşiklerinin yüksek olduğunu, tuvalet ve banyo düzenlemelinin engelliler için uygun olmadığını ve bu durumların sporcuların antrenman yaparken güvenliklerinin sürekli olumsuz etkilendiğini ifade etmişlerdir. Bedensel engelli sporcular psikolojik destek hizmetlerinin bazı federasyonlara göre farklılık gösterdiğini; bazı branşlardaki federasyonların düzenli destek sağladığını, bazılarının ise yalnızca müsabaka öncesine özgü veya yetersiz uygulamalarının olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Antrenör ve diğer ekip üyelerinin değerlendirmeleri genel anlamda iyi olmakla birlikte, paralimpik sporcuların kendilerine özgü uzmanlaşmış eğitim kadrolarına gereksinim duydukları vurgulanmıştır.

Hukuki ve sosyal haklar kapsamında sporcular, tüm branşlarda sözleşme ve sigorta güvencesinin zorunlu olması gerektiği ve bu konunun denetimlere tabi tutulması gerektiğini vurgulamıştır. Sporcular emeklilik hakları kapsamında şeref aylığı uygulamalarında güncel ekonomik şartlar göz önüne alınarak iyileştirmeler yapılması gerektiğini, ödül yönetmeliğinde ödüllerin zamanında verilmesi geciktirilmemesi gerektiğini ve “sekiz ülke kuralı” gibi kuralların kaldırılması veya yeniden değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamıştır. Medikal malzemeler açısından tekerlekli sandalye ve protezlerde gereken kurumsal desteğin artırılması gerektiği, araç alımlarında Özel Tüketim Vergisinde esneklik sağlanması gerektiği ve istihdam olanaklarının genişletilmesi gerektiği vurgulanmıştır.

Sonuç olarak, bedensel engelli milli paralimpik sporcuların karşılaştıkları zorluklar ve hukuki ihtiyaçlar kapsamında ulaşımın sağlanması, tesislerde düzenlemelerin yapılması, sürekli psikolojik ve teknik desteğin sağlanması, sponsorluk mekanizmalarının güçlendirilmesi, hukuki düzenlemelerin sporcuların ihtiyaçlarına göre güncellenmesi gerekmektedir. Paralimpik sporcuların motivasyonlarının ve sürdürülebilir başarının bu düzenlemeler ile sağlanacağı düşünülmektedir.