



The Relationship Between Mental Health and Self Perception of Male Athletes

Yasin YILDIZ¹, Aydıner Birsin YILDIZ², Doğukan Batur Alp GÜLŞEN³

¹Aydın Adnan Menderes University, Faculty of Sport Science, Aydın/Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3230-5717>

²Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Faculty of Sport Science, Ankara/Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3767-1057>

³Aydın Adnan Menderes University, Faculty of Sport Science, Aydın/Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9434-619X>

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ORJINAL MAKALE

Abstract

This study suggests that participation in physical activity may be associated with positive mental health outcomes. It was observed that participation in physical activity might have the potential to reduce levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as may contribute to improving individuals' quality of life. The study was conducted using a descriptive survey design. Convenience sampling was chosen as the sampling method. The Self-Perception Scale, the DASS-21 Scale, and a personal information form prepared by the researcher were used as data collection tools. A total of 251 male athletes, who are actively engaged in sports and volunteered, participated in the study. For statistical analysis, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the relationship between the two concepts. Furthermore, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to calculate the effect of mental health levels on self-perception. The findings revealed that male athletes' self-perception is influenced by their levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. It was found that 21% of the variance in the self-perception of male athletes is attributable to anxiety, 13% to depression, and 10% to stress. Significant negative correlations were identified between male athletes' self-perception and the concepts of anxiety, depression, and stress. The study's results suggest that as male athletes' mental health levels worsen, their self-perception also deteriorates.

Keywords: Mental Health, Self Perception, Male Athletes

Erkek Sporcularda Ruh Sağlığı ve Benlik Kavramı İlişkisinin İncelenmesi

Özet

Bu çalışma, fiziksel aktiviteye katılımın olumlu zihinsel sağlık sonuçlarıyla ilişkili olabileceğini önermektedir. Fiziksel aktiviteye katılımın, depresyon, anksiyete ve stres düzeylerini azaltma potansiyeline sahip olabileceği ve bireylerin yaşam kalitesinin artırılmasına katkı sağlayabileceği gözlemlenmiştir. Araştırmada betimsel tarama modeli kullanılmıştır. Örneklem yöntemi olarak kolayda örnekleme tercih edilmiştir. Veri toplama aracı olarak, araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanan kişisel bilgi formunun yanı sıra Benlik Kavramı Ölçeği ve DASS-21 Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmaya, aktif olarak spor yapan ve gönüllü olan toplam 251 erkek sporcu katılmıştır. İstatistiksel analizde iki kavram arasındaki ilişkiyi belirlemek amacıyla Pearson korelasyon katsayısı hesaplanmıştır. Ayrıca, ruh sağlığı düzeylerinin benlik algıları üzerindeki etkisini hesaplamak için basit doğrusal regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Bulgular, erkek sporcuların benlik algılarının stres, anksiyete ve depresyon düzeylerinden etkilendiğini ortaya koymuştur. Erkek sporcuların benlik algısındaki varyansın %21'inin anksiyeteden, %13'ünün depresyondan ve %10'unun ise stresten kaynaklandığı bulunmuştur. Erkek sporcuların benlik algısı ile anksiyete, depresyon ve stres kavramları arasında anlamlı negatif ilişkiler tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, erkek sporcuların ruh sağlığı düzeyleri kötüleştikçe öz algılarının da bozulduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ruh Sağlığı, Benlik Algısı, Erkek Sporcular.

Introduction

Beginning with the question ‘Who am I?’, every individual strives to define themselves. Scholars in social psychology and identity studies have sought to shed light on the efforts of individuals to define themselves (James, 1980; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Bamberg, 2011). Although researchers in social psychology have endeavored to clarify the relationship and distinction between the concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘self,’ they have acknowledged that further research is needed to fully comprehend these terms (McCrae & Costa, 2008; McAdams et al., 2021; Roberts & Yoon, 2022). The primary distinction of the concept of self from identity lies in the fact that the self is essentially a perspective (James, 1963). The perspective individuals hold of themselves is susceptible to variation due to numerous factors. Particularly in the highly variable sports environment, it is not surprising that mental factors fluctuate. The answers athletes provide to the questions ‘Who am I, and what am I capable of?’ in a sports context can be regarded as a form of internal dialogue that may influence their mental processes. Studies have demonstrated the impact of mental health on athletic performance (Tossici et al., 2024). A study examining the mental health of university athletes competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) league reported that the vast majority of participants (96.4%) stated that their mental health affected their performance (Beebe et al., 2024). Phrathep et al. (2013) through an Optimal Performance Program conducted with an adolescent gymnast, concluded that it is possible to optimize both sports performance and mental health simultaneously. Strategies developed to help athletes maintain their mental health play a crucial performance-oriented role in the field of sports psychology (Vella et al., 2022; Rice et al., 2016).

An examination of the results from the most recent Olympic Games, the 2024 Paris Olympics, reveals that the differences in competition outcomes among athletes were minimal, demonstrating the intense level of competition in the sports arena (IOC, 2024). Athletes have clearly demonstrated that every factor affecting performance must be thoroughly examined and not overlooked. The consistent assertions by athletes that they mentally prepared themselves for the Olympics have once again highlighted the importance of mental health. It is frequently emphasized that athletes who know themselves well are more likely to maintain mental well-being, as reflected in the self-perception defined by James as the individual's ability to articulate who they are. The self, as a theoretical construct, has been described as the sum of an individual's experiences (James, 1963). An athlete's self-awareness, their belief in their capabilities, motivation, goals for success, and the definitions they ascribe to themselves are all factors that affect their performance. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that mental health can negatively influence the self-definitions that individuals impose upon themselves (Pelters, 2024). Successfully managing the mental challenges athletes face in relation to their mental health can only be achieved through the integration of appropriate training techniques. The questions of what athletes desire, their expectations, what holds value for them, who they are, and what they are capable of have frequently been the focus of various research studies. All of these questions essentially pertain to the concept of self and address the degree to which athletes are aware of their own identity. Positive self-schemas or self-theories result in a sense of well-being and good mental health [16], while negative self-theories can lead to emotional distress (Segal & Blatt, 1993), cognitive distortions resulting in depression (Beck & Rush, 1978), and other chronic psychological issues (Snyder et al., 1991). Given that the aforementioned parameters influence athletes' mental health, this study is designed with the hypothesis that mental health has a direct effect on athletes' self-development. Mental well-being is considered to have significant importance for an athlete's self-awareness, which, as discussed in James' theory, involves recognizing the "known self" and is crucial for athletic performance.

The Present Study

Bamberg (Bamberg, 2011) related the concept of self and the closely related concept of identity to the essence of being human by addressing them through phylogenetic, sociogenetic, and ontogenetic terms, while emphasizing that these concepts conceal their evolution and constant transformation in historical, cultural, and personal contexts (ontogeny) specific to each individual. Athletic performance is directly influenced by psychological factors alongside

athletes' personal histories, making it essential to better understand the concept of self in order to comprehend how athletes define themselves and what influences their self-perception. In this study, we aimed to explain the mental health factors that affect athletes' self-perception. There is empirical evidence that the factor of gender contributes to the development of different coping strategies for mental health issues among athletes. However, it has been noted that gender-based differences in mental traits are less common among professional-level athletes (Anshel et al., 2001). As mentioned above, mental health impacts athletic performance, but understanding its effects on self-perception can provide valuable insights for interventions by sports psychologists and coaches. Therefore, examining the health levels of male and female athletes in separate studies is believed to be important for the clarity of research findings. This study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the effects of social roles and pressures in the daily lives of male athletes on their mental health and self-perception levels.

Method

The Research Design

In this study, it was aimed to examine the relationship between two or more concepts. In this direction, the relational survey model was preferred among the research models. With the relational survey model, results are obtained to determine the relationships between two or more variables (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study is a cross-sectional research in which causal relationships are examined concurrently within a specific time frame.

Sample

To determine the sample size required for the study, a Power multiple regression analysis was conducted. The analysis indicated that, to achieve an effect size of $f^2=0.15$ with $1-\beta=95\%$ and $\text{Alpha}=0.05$, a minimum of 107 participants would be necessary. To account for the potential of missing or incorrect data, a total of 251 participants were recruited for the study.

The sample consisted of 251 professional male athletes with an average age of 20.98 ± 2.20 years, the youngest being 18 years old and the oldest being 31 years old. The sample was formed by using convenience sampling method. The sample consisted of 128 individual athletes and 123 team athletes. All participants involved in the study were included voluntarily by completing an informed consent form. Additionally, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection Methodology

The data collection process of the research was carried out in line with the approval of the Aydın Adnan Menderes University social sciences and humanities research ethics committee

(31906847/050.04.04-10). Ethical approval was obtained from the local ethics committee. The sample group was composed of volunteer participants. In this context, responses were received from a total of 251 participants and all data were used in the analyses.

Data Collection Tools

Self-Theory Scale (Yavuzer et al., 2017) and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 21) were used as data collection tools in the study.

Self-Theory Scale

It is a scale developed by Berg and Snyder (2010) to measure the self-perception. The scale evaluates positive and negative perceptions of the individual. Turkish adaptation was made by Yavuzer et al., (2017) consisting of 36 questions. The scale has a nine-point Likert-type rating (1= not true at all and 9= completely true). In the validity and reliability study of the Self-Theory Scale, it was determined that the total explained variance was 55.98%. Additionally, the factor loadings of the scale ranged between 0.34 and 0.89. The confirmatory factor analysis results for the scale were reported as RMSEA=0.04, NFI=0.88, NNFI=0.95, CFI=0.95, GFI=0.89, and AGFI=0.85. The internal consistency coefficient for all 36 items was found to be 0.84. The reliability coefficient calculated using the split-half method, adjusted with the Spearman-Brown correction, was found to be 0.79. Based on the validity and reliability evidence examined, the scale was deemed suitable for use in the study. The Self-Theory Scale, developed to measure individuals' self-perception across various life domains, yields a minimum score of 36 and a maximum score of 180. Through its total score, the scale assesses participants' levels of self-perception. In line with the research hypotheses, the scale's total score average was used to determine its relationship with mental health. The Self-Theory Scale consists of the following subdimensions: Physical Appearance, Physical Health, Intelligence, Academic Achievement, Leisure Activities, Personality, Family Relationships, Close Relationships, and Friendships. According to the scale's validity and reliability study, the total score provides information about individuals' levels of self-perception. Since this approach aligns with the purpose of the study, calculations were conducted using the total score of the scale, and its predictive power for mental health was analyzed. Analyses at the level of individual subdimensions were not performed.

Depression Stress and Anxiety Scale (DASS21)

It is a scale developed by Brown et al., (1997) to measure perceptions of depression, anxiety and stress. A Turkish version consisting of 21 questions was adapted by Yılmaz et al. The scale has a four-point Likert-type rating (0= not acceptable to me and 3= completely acceptable to

me). In the validity and reliability study of the DASS-21 scale, Cronbach's Alpha values were reported to range between .755 and .808, while McDonald's Omega values ranged between .756 and .809. Examination of the confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that the scale demonstrated an excellent fit across all sub-dimensions. Based on the validity and reliability evidence for the DASS-21 scale, it was determined to be sufficiently reliable and valid for use in our study.

Data Analysis

It was determined that the internal consistency of the responses obtained within the scope of the research was sufficient. The normality of the data to be used in the analyses was evaluated based on kurtosis and skewness coefficients. In line with the fact that the values determined were between +2 and -2, which are accepted as the criterion values by George and Mallery (2000), it was determined that the data were suitable for normal distribution (Table 1). In this direction, correlation and simple regression analyses were applied. Among the assumptions required for regression analysis, the normality of the data and errors were reviewed. It was determined whether there was a linear relationship between the variables. The co-variance of the variables was examined. Errors were determined to be independent of each other. After ensuring that all the assumptions required for the analyses were met, the data obtained in the research were analysed using the SPSS 27.0 package program, and a $p < .05$ significance level was considered in all analyses.

Findings

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	n	Mean	sd	Skewness	Kurtosis	CrAlpha
Self-Perceptions	251	2.78	,376	-,486	1,287	.730
Anxiety	251	1.71	,681	,961	,288	.835
Depression	251	1.80	,757	,866	-,016	.877
Stress	251	2.04	,791	,663	-,295	.874

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the responses obtained from the participants. When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that the responses obtained show a normal distribution. It can also be said that the scores obtained from the scales are at a low level. It was concluded that the scale is reliable due to the internal consistency coefficient being 0.70 or higher.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis Results for Determining the Relationship Between Self-Perceptions and Anxiety, Depression And Stress.

		Anxiety	Depression	Stress
Self-Perceptions	r	-.460**	-.371**	-.329**
	p	<.001	<.001	<.001

Table 2 shows the results of the correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between participants' self-perceptions and anxiety, depression and stress. When the results were examined, it was found that there was a low-level but significant negative relationship between self-perception and anxiety, depressive state and stress ($r = -.466, -.373, -.333$, respectively).

Table 3 Regression Analysis Results to Determine the Effect of Self-Perception on Anxiety.

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p	Durbin Watson
Constant	4.37	.327	-	13.3	-					
Self-Perceptions	-.853	.104	.460	-8.16	.460	.211	.208	66.7	<.001	1.83

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of the participants' self-perceptions on their anxiety levels. When the results are examined, it is seen that the self-perceptions significantly predicts the level of anxiety ($p = <.001$) and explains approximately 21% of the variance ($R = .460$; $R^2 = .211$). The standardized regression coefficient was found to be $\beta = .853$ (95% CI, -1.06 / -.648). Based on these findings, it can be said that self-perceptions is a determinant of anxiety level, and with the increase in self-perceptions, anxiety will decrease.

Table 4 Regression Analysis Results to Determine the Effect of Self-Perception on Depression.

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p	Durbin Watson
Constant	4.18	.381	-	10.9	-					
Self-Perceptions	-.765	.122	.371	-6.29	.371	.137	.134	39.6	<.001	1.99

Table 4 shows the results of the regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of the participants' self-perceptions on their depression levels. When the results are examined, it is seen that the self-perceptions significantly predicts the level of depression ($p = <.001$) and explains approximately 14% of the variance ($R = .371$; $R^2 = .137$). The standardized regression

coefficient was found to be $\beta = -.765$ (95% CI, -1.00 / -.526). Based on these findings, it can be said that self-perceptions is a determinant of depression level, and with the increase in self-perceptions, depression level will decrease.

Table 5 Regression Analysis Results to Determine the Effect of Self-Perception on Stress.

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p	Durbin Watson
Constant	4.26	.404	-	10.5						
Self-Perceptions	-.709	.129	.329	-5.49	.329	.108	.105	30.2	<.001	1.79

Table 5 shows the results of the regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of the participants' self-perceptions on their stress levels. When the results are examined, it is seen that the self-perceptions significantly predicts the level of stress ($p = <.001$) and explains approximately 11% of the variance ($R = .329$; $R^2 = .108$). The standardized regression coefficient was found to be $\beta = -.709$ (95% CI, -.963 / -.455). Based on these findings, it can be said that self-perceptions is a determinant of stress level, and with the increase in self-perceptions, stress level will decrease.

Table 6 Results for Comparison in terms of National Sportsmanship.

Variables	Sport	n	Mean	sd	t	p	η^2
Self-perceptions	Individual	128	3,15	,385	1.70	.090	—
	Team	123	3,07	,344			
Anxiety	Individual	128	1,71	,702	.191	.849	—
	Team	123	1,72	,662			
Depression	Individual	128	1,66	,686	3.10	.002*	0,04
	Team	123	1,95	,801			
Stress	Individual	128	2,02	,815	.437	.663	—
	Team	123	2,07	,768			

$p > 0,05^*$

Table 6 shows the results of the analysis for comparison in terms of the variable of being a team athletes or individual athlete. Descriptive statistics regarding the responses obtained from the participants are given. When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that team athletes have significantly higher depression level scores compared to individual athlete ($t=3,100$; $p=.002$; $\eta^2=0,04$). Upon examining the results, it was determined that the effect size ranged between low and moderate levels.,

Discussion and Conclusions

The primary aim of this study is to examine the relationship between male athletes' mental health and their concept of self. When analyzing the research findings, a significant negative relationship was observed between male athletes' self-perception and the variables of anxiety, depression, and stress. The results indicate that lower self-perception scores tend to be associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress in male athletes. In the study, mental health levels were determined as the predictor/independent variable, while self-perception levels were identified as the predicted/dependent variable. Additionally, a regression coefficient was calculated to determine the extent to which mental health levels are associated with self-perception levels in male athletes. It was observed that anxiety accounted for 21%, depression 13%, and stress 10% of the variance in male athletes' self-perception. These findings highlight notable associations between these mental health variables and self-perception. Moreover, an independent sample t-test was conducted to examine whether athletes participate in team or individual sports. The results indicated that male athletes involved in team sports reported higher levels of depression. This finding underscores the potential role of team dynamics and communication as factors linked to mental health.

Research has highlighted that peak athletic performance is associated not only with physical health but also with mental health (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Factors such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which are key components of mental health, have been reported to correlate with athletic performance. Furthermore, self-perception has been identified as a significant variable in sports research (Bowker, 2006; Sonstroem & Morgan, 1989). Hepler & Andre (2021), in their study involving child athletes, noted that participation in sports was linked to improved self-perception and enhanced quality of life. Similarly, even recreational physical activity has been associated with better self-perception in adolescents (Beasley & Garn, 2013). Babic et al. (2014) emphasized in a systematic review that physical activity contributes to the development of a strong self-perception. The strengthening of self-perception through exercise has been supported by both quantitative and qualitative research (Freire et al., 2020).

This study was conducted with the hypothesis that mental health is related to self-perception as well as performance. The results suggest significant associations between mental health and self-perception. The importance of self-perception in sports has been explored by sports scientists, and examining its relationship with mental health may provide insights into factors

influencing both health and performance. Rice et al. (2016), in their systematic review, highlighted correlations between mental health and the performance of elite athletes. Birrer et al. (2012) observed that performance anxiety and high expectations were linked to poorer mental health among professional athletes. Streeter et al. (2012) noted the positive effects of yoga and Pilates on mental health in addition to their physical benefits. Furthermore, Eime et al. (2013) found that team sports participation was associated with better mental health outcomes for young athletes. Many studies have reported that regular exercise is linked to reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, improved mental health, and lower cortisol levels, which are associated with stress reduction (Alanoglu et al., 2020; Herring et al., 2010; Kiyak & Taskin, 2025). Lubans et al. (2012) emphasized that regular physical activity supports adolescent mental well-being.

Research on prosocial (Al-Yaaribi & Kavussanu, 2017; Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009) and antisocial (Sage et al., 2006) behaviors within teams has shown their significance for athletes' experiences. The higher levels of depression reported by team athletes could be associated with their greater exposure to prosocial and antisocial behaviors compared to individual athletes. These behaviors, whether consciously or unconsciously exhibited within teams, may contribute to variations in athletes' mental health and self-perception. Reardon and Hitchcoc (2024), in their study on mental health in individual and team sports, observed that athletes in individual sports reported more negative mental health outcomes compared to those in team sports. However, they recommended addressing mental health challenges for athletes in both categories.

Research supports the notion that poor mental health correlates negatively with self-perception (Gulliver et al., 2010; Hurley et al., 2020). Similarly, studies have suggested that poor mental health may be associated with both self-perception and athletic identity (McAdams & Pals, 2006). The mental health of athletes appears to influence not only their self-perception but also their athletic identity (Rice et al., 2020).

Understanding the relationship between male athletes' self-perception and mental health is crucial for addressing psychological challenges related to performance pressure, gender roles, and sports identity. Identifying how mental health interacts with self-perception can provide valuable insights for performance improvement. Based on the findings, it is recommended that athletes be regularly supported by sports psychologists or mentors to maintain their mental health. Enhancing the mental health literacy of technical staff (coaches, managers, dietitians, etc.) working with athletes is also considered important. Strategies aimed at protecting young

athletes' self-perception should be prioritized to promote their mental well-being and personal development throughout their athletic careers. Coaches should integrate mental health considerations into physical health strategies to optimize athletic performance. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that male and female athletes face different daily responsibilities, which may influence their mental health. Considering gender as a key psychometric variable in studies exploring mental health and self-perception is believed to be essential for both groups.

Ethics Approval Information

Ethics Committee: Aydın Adnan Menderes University, Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences Research

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Authors' Contribution Statement

The processes related to the introduction section of the study were carried out by the first author; the processes related to the method and findings sections were carried out by the second author; and the processes related to the discussion and conclusion sections were carried out by the third author.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this research.

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