

Examining the relationship between religious perception and psychological well-being levels of university football players

Mehmet H. Akgül^{ABDE}, Ahmet Y. Karafil^{ACE}

Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Turkey

Authors' Contribution: A – Study design; B – Data collection; C – Statistical analysis; D – Manuscript Preparation; E – Funds Collection.

Abstract

Background and Study Aim The relationship between sport and religion is one of the most important research topics of sport psychology recently. In the relevant literature, this relationship mostly focused on sports and Christianity. The present study examines the psychological well-being levels of athletes of the Islamic religion. This study aims to examine the relationship between the religious perception of university football players and their psychological well-being levels.

Material and Methods For this purpose, 288 university students attending different universities in Turkey, completed the Religious Orientation Scale and Psychological Well-Being Scale. Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the correlation between variables. Path analysis was applied to test the hypotheses developed in the study. The hypotheses created were tested by the path analysis method using Amos software. Moderator regression analysis was performed. Statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 23 program (SPSS Inc. Chicago. II. USA). P-value was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results According to the findings obtained from the study data, positive and significant relationships were determined between the religious perceptions of the university football players and their psychological well-being ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions In conclusion, it was concluded that the religious perception of the university football players was a significant predictor of their psychological well-being ($p < 0.05$). It can be stated that in Turkish-Islamic culture, similar results to the relationship between Sports and Christianity have been achieved. Since religion is a universal phenomenon, it can be stated that the institution of religion has a special meaning for football players.

Keywords: religious perception, psychological well-being, sports-football, university students

Introduction

The new era that emerged with the secular paradigm developed by Enlightenment thought based on wisdom and scientific knowledge is called the modern era [1, 2]. In this period, religion, which was predicted to be less effective compared to the traditional period, continued to make its presence felt more or less. Indeed, contrary to the fundamental claim of secularization thought, which is that religion will regress or disappear completely as societies progress, the fact that religion has recently regained a strong and influential position proves that the institution of religion is an indispensable social reality for all societies [3, 4]. One of the areas where the projection of this social reality is observed is the field of modern sports. Although modern sports are secular in nature, individual athletes often use religion to cope [5, 6]. It is observed that football players frequently practice various religious rituals on football fields. Therefore, the religious perception of football players is a significant psychological research subject [7].

The relationship between sports and religion is one of the important subjects of discussion in

sports psychology and sports sociology recently [8-11]. In these studies, it is seen that the relationship between sports and religion is on both cultural and religious motivational issues [12-14]. This is because both fields are important components of human activities. Sports, as a social institution, have been an important part of human life throughout history, such as games, entertainment, competitions, and leisure activities. Similarly, as a social institution and a field of values, religion has indispensable importance in human life and the cultural accumulation of society [15-17]. At the same time while sports sociology mostly focuses on the mutual interactions of sports and religious institutions, sports psychology focuses more on the moral and motivational effect of religion on athletes.

Recently, many studies have been conducted on sports and religion [6, 9, 18, 19]. However, related studies mostly deal with the relationship between Christianity and sports [20-23]. Moreover, these researches have led to multi-dimensional research, including issues such as emotion and athlete health [24]. Sports psychology has very little knowledge about Islam and sports [25, 26]. Along with Christianity and Buddhism, Islam is one of the most prominent religions in terms of theory and historical

habits [27]. For this reason, the present study differs from the relevant literature as it gives an idea about the relationship between Turkish-Islamic culture and sports.

In this regard, this study aims to examine the psychological bond that Turkish college football players establish with religion, starting from the football field.

Materials and Methods

Participants

In this study, which examines the effect of university football players' religious perception on psychological well-being, the study group consists of 288 football players (258 male, 30 female) in different sport sciences faculties in Turkey. During the data collection, all participants gave their informed consent for inclusion before completing the scales. Data were collected in the 2021-2022 fall academic year.

Research Design

The descriptive research method was employed in this study, in which the effect of university football players' religious perception on psychological well-being was examined. This type of research is defined as screening models that aim to determine the degree and direction of the relationship between two or more variables [28].

Data Collection Tools

Religious Orientation Scale

The religious orientation scale, developed by Harlak and Eskin was used to determine the religious orientation of football players [29]. The religious orientation scale consists of a total of 25 items in 5-Likert type. The scale is divided into three dimensions. These are intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation, and

query religious orientation sub-dimensions.

Psychological Well-Being Scale

The Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) developed by Diener et al. measures positive thoughts in human relationships and feelings of having a meaningful and purposeful life [30, 31]. The PWB was edited and finalized by Diener et al [31]. PWB, adapted to Turkish by Telef, is a single factor scale consisting of 8 items [32].

Statistical Analysis

The distribution normality analysis for the variables was applied before the data analysis. It has been stated in the literature that the skewness and kurtosis values of normally distributed data should be between +2 and -2 [33]. In this study, the data with skewness and kurtosis values between +2 and -2 were accepted as normally distributed. Hypothesis tests were developed to examine the effect of the religious perception of football players on psychological well-being. The hypotheses created were tested by the path analysis method using Amos software. moderator regression analysis was performed. Statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 23 program (SPSS Inc. Chicago. II. USA). P value was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the skewness and kurtosis values show that the scales and sub-dimensions have a normal distribution.

As can be seen in Table 2, the results obtained from the validity and reliability tests reveal that the scale has a reliable and valid structure.

As can be seen in Table 3, a significant moderate correlation was determined between the religious orientation scale, its sub-dimensions, and psychological well-being (** $P < 0.05$ and * $p < 0.01$),

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Results of the Study

Scales and Sub-dimensions	n	x	Std.	skewness	kurtosis
1. Religious orientation scale	288	3.635	.584	.019	-.281
2. Intrinsic religious orientation	288	4.347	.612	-.964	.415
3. Extrinsic religious orientation	288	3.462	.932	-.428	-.163
4. Query orientation	288	2.919	1.136	-.083	-.944
5. Psychological well-being	288	5.779	.749	-.180	-.555

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Results of the Scales

Scales	X ² /Df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	IFI	Cronbach Alpha
Religious orientation	1.816	.053	.931	.923	.924	.662
Psychological well-being	1.077	.016	.993	.999	.999	.748

Table 3. Correlation Analysis for Scales and Sub-dimensions

Scales and Sub-dimensions	1	2	3	4	5
1. Religious orientation scale	1				
2. Intrinsic religious orientation	.545**	1			
3. Extrinsic religious orientation	.805**	.337**	1		
4. Query orientation	.612**	-.061	.179**	1	
5. Psychological well-being	.243**	.399**	.136*	.022	1

**P<0,05 and *p<0,01

Table 4. Path Analysis Table

Hypotheses	Measurement Model	$\beta 1$	$\beta 2$	S.E	CR	P
Main Hypotheses	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	.683	.551	.114	5.991	.000*

Table 5. Mediator variable analysis to determine the effect of religious orientation on psychological well-being

Variable	Hypotheses	Mediator variable Measurement Model	$\beta 1$	$\beta 2$	S.E	CR	P
Gender	Female	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	.335	.397	.159	2.105	.001*
	Male	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	.309	.333	.081	3.836	.001*
Pray Before Match	Pray Before Match	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	.347	.272	.76	4.589	.001*
	Not Pray Before Match	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	-.102	-.069	.311	-.328	.743
Perception of religiosity	Strong	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	.360	.303	.127	2.836	.005*
	Moderate	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	.304	.245	.100	3.128	.002*
	Weak	Psychological well-being <---Religious Attitude	.237	.163	.196	1.209	.227

while a weak positive correlation was found between the query orientation and psychological well-being ($p>0.05$).

As can be seen in Table 4, H= intrinsic religious orientation has a positive significant effect on psychological well-being ($\beta 2=.551$ $p<0.05$). The hypothesis formed in the study was accepted according to this result.

According to Table 5, as a result of testing the mediating role of gender, a significant positive effect of religious perception of men and women on their psychological well-being state was determined. ($p<0.05$) As a result of the evaluation of the mediator role of praying before the match, it was found that the religious perception of football players who pray before the match had a significant positive effect on their psychological well-being ($p<0.05$). As a result of the evaluation of the mediator role of perception of religiosity, it was found that the religious perception of football players who have a

strong and moderate perception of religiosity about themselves, had a significant positive effect on their psychological well-being ($p<0.05$).

Discussion

The religious belief system is very important in terms of human psychology [34, 35]. Religious beliefs and practices can be seen in almost every dimension of human life, and their impact covers all social areas. One of these social areas is sports. Although religious ritualistic elements find their expression in different forms almost in every field, they frequently take place in various sports activities, especially in various stages of the football game, and athletes come to the fore from time to time with such behaviors [36].

According to the results obtained in this study, in which the relationship between religious perception and psychological well-being of professional football players was examined, it was determined

that there was a moderate and positive significant relationship between religious perception and psychological well-being. (Table 3, 4). Based on the data obtained, it is considered that the religious perception we observe in the athletes at various stages of the football game and, accordingly, various religious rituals have a special meaning in terms of sportsman behavior. Similarly, some studies state that both sports and religion have positive effects on psychological well-being [15, 34, 35]. However, Spittle and Dillon in their study, state that there is no positive relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being in their study on golf players [37]. Therefore, it is possible to achieve different results in different sports branches.

As a result of examining the relationship between the religious orientation of professional football players and their psychological well-being levels and the relationship between demographic variables, significant differences were found in the query religious orientation sub-dimension of the religious orientation scale and psychological well-being according to the variable of gender, pray before match and perception of religiosity (Table 5). In the comparison between the genders, significant differences were found between religious perception and psychological well-being in both genders. It shows that both male and female football players need religion to provide psychological support and increase their performance. Jona and Okou [6] in their study titled "Sports and Religion," state that athletes can use their religion as a source of psychological support as they cope with the challenge and uncertainty of competition and as they try to find special meaning for their sports lives. Similarly, Roychowdhury in his work state that spirituality has been identified as an important factor in enhancing sporting performance, fostering excellence and individual growth, and overall well-being [38]. It is also possible to reach other similar studies [39, 40].

In the comparison between the variables of pray before match and not pray before match, significant differences were found between religious perception and psychological well-being. Religious perceptions and psychological well-being levels of football players who prayed before the match were found to be higher (Table 5). Prayer is perhaps the most frequently employed use of religion by footballers. Eitzen and Sage opined that religion can be used to help coaches and athletes deal with stressful situations [41]. For example, utilizing religious practices has been commonly implemented by

coaches as a means of supplementing practical athletic techniques. Prayer activity has been found throughout professional sport, collegiate sport, interscholastic sport, and even youth sport [41]. Similarly, Ilubala-Ziwa and Hachintu [42] in their work state that the religiosity of youths involved in sports is visible off and on the field as some of them may be seen engaging in religious acts or devotions. Worship, prayer, fellowship, ceremonies and rituals are practised during sporting events; all are expressions of religion [42]. It is also possible to reach other similar studies [43]. However, it is also possible to reach studies suggesting that such practices may be superstitious [44].

In the comparison between the variables of perception of religiosity, significant differences were found. Religious perceptions and psychological well-being levels of football players who have a strong and moderate perception of religiosity about themselves were found to be higher (Table 5). Slatinsky et al. [45] in their work state that football players with greater internal locus of control and higher strength of religious beliefs had a higher level of resiliency than players with higher external LOC and lower strength of religious beliefs. It is also possible to reach other similar studies [38, 39]. However, it is a known reality in modern times that there may be a certain percentage of players who do not have any religious beliefs.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be stated that in Turkish-Islamic culture, similar results to the relationship between Sports and Christianity have been achieved. Since religion is a universal phenomenon, it can be stated that the institution of religion has a special meaning for football players, albeit in different ways, and provides psychological support. Examining the relationship between sports and spirituality in the context of different religions, beliefs, and different sports branches are recommended to reach a wider perspective.

Acknowledgments

The authors sincerely thank the subjects, who participated in this study and contributed to the realization of this study. This research received no funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Arslantürk Z, Amman T. *Sociology*. (12. Edition). *İstanbul*: Kaknüs Publishing; 2020.
2. Turhanlıoğlu FAK. Modernity and capitalism. H. Yeşildal (Ed.), *Social change theories*. Eskişehir: Anadolu University Publishing; 2010.
3. Freyer H. *Sociology of religion*. (T. Kalpsüz). Ankara: Doğu-Batı Publishing; 2013.
4. Uzdu H. Turkish cinema and religion in the modernization process. *Journal of International Social Research*, 2016;9:1164–1164. <https://doi.org/10.17719/jisr.20164216225>
5. Aitken, BW. Sport, religion, and well-being. Shirl J. Hoffman (Ed.). *Sport and Religion, Champaign, IL*: Human Kinetics, 1992. P.237-244.
6. Jona IN, Okou FT. (). Sports and religion. *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education*, 2013;2: 46-54.
7. Ludwig F. Football, Culture and Religion: Varieties of Interaction. *Studies in World Christianity*, 2015;21:201–22. <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2015.0124>
8. Adogame A. Editorial: Religion and Sport, Past, Present and Future. *Studies in World Christianity*, 2015;21:193–200. <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2015.0123>
9. Coakley J. *Sport and Society* (12.Edition). New York: Mc Graw Hill-Education; 2017.
10. King KR. The Spirituality of Sport and the Role of the Athlete in the Tennis Essays of David Foster Wallace. *Communication & Sport*, 2018;6:219–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479516680190>
11. Lachheb M. La religion en pratique. Le port du voile dans l'espace sportif en Tunisie. *Social Compass*, 2012;59:120–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768611432122>
12. Masters KS, Knestel A. Religious motivation and cardiovascular reactivity among middle aged adults: is being pro-religious really that good for you? *J Behav Med*, 2011;34:449–61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-011-9352-6>
13. Walseth K, Strandbu Å. Young Norwegian-Pakistani women and sport: How does culture and religiosity matter? *European Physical Education Review*, 2014;20:489–507. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X14534361>
14. Watson NJ. New directions in theology, church and sports: A brief overview and position statement. *Theology*, 2018;121:243–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X18765431>
15. Akgül MH, Yetim AA. A Survey into The Religious Rites in The Traditional Kırkpınar Wrestling Tournament and The Religious Beliefs of The Wrestlers. *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*. 2018;1:25-43.
16. Güngör E. *Turkish Culture and Nationalism*. (21. Edition). İstanbul: Ötüken Publishing; 2011.
17. Tükenmez M. *Sociology and Sport*. İstanbul: Kaynak Publishing; 2009.
18. Hoffman SJ. *Sport and Religion*. Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics Books; 1992.
19. Prebish CS. “Heavenly Father, Divine Goalie”: Sport and Religion. *The Antioch Review*, 1984;42:306. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4611365>
20. Hochstetler DR. God in the Stadium: Sports & Religion in America. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 1997;24:129–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1997.9714545>
21. Parker A, Watson NJ. Sport and religion: culture, history and ideology. *Mov Sport Sci/Sci Mot*, 2014:71–9. <https://doi.org/10.1051/sm/2013063>
22. Parker A, Watson NJ. Sport, Celebrity and Religion: Christianity, Morality and the Tebow Phenomenon. *Studies in World Christianity*, 2015;21:223–38. <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2015.0125>
23. Bain-Selbo E, Goldenbach A, Evensen B, Geyerman C, Hardin R, Huffman LT, Waller SN. In: Schultz ve Sheffer ed. *Sport and Religion in the Twenty-first Century*. Lexington Books; 2015.
24. Lee Sinden J. The Elite Sport and Christianity Debate: Shifting Focus from Normative Values to the Conscious Disregard for Health. *J Relig Health*, 2013;52:335–49. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-012-9595-8>
25. Walseth K, Fasting K. Islam’s View on Physical Activity and Sport: Egyptian Women Interpreting Islam. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 2003;38:45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902030381003>
26. Zaman H. Islam, Well-being and Physical Activity: Perceptions of Muslim Young Women. In: Clarke G, Humberstone B, editors. *Researching Women and Sport*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK; 1997, p.50–67. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-25317-3_4
27. Winter TJ. *Finding the Qibla in the Postmodern World*. İstanbul: Timaş Publishing; 2016.
28. Karasar N. *Scientific Research Method* (24.Edition). Ankara: Nobel Publishing; 2012.
29. Hacerharlak H, Mehmet Eskin M. The development of religious orientation and religiosity scales and the investigation of their psychometric properties. *NYS*, 2018;1. <https://doi.org/10.5455/NYS.20180730021249>
30. Diener E, editor. *Assessing Well-Being*. vol. 39. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands; 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2354-4>
31. Diener E, Wirtz D, Tov W, Kim-Prieto C, Choi D, Oishi S, et al. New Well-being Measures: Short Scales to Assess Flourishing and Positive and Negative Feelings. *Soc Indic Res*, 2010;97:143–56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y>
32. Telef BB. The adaptation of psychological well-being into Turkish: a validity and reliability study. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 2013;28(28-3):374-384.
33. George D, Mallery M. *SPSS for Windows Step by Step: A Simple Guide and Reference, 17.0 update* (10a ed.) Boston: Pearson; 2010.
34. Collins M. Sport, Religion, Wellbeing, and Cameron’s Big Society. *IMRE*, 2014;17:139–65. <https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.v17i2.139>
35. Cowden RG, Pargament KI, Chen ZJ, Davis EB,

- Lemke AW, Glowiak KJ, et al. Religious/spiritual struggles and psychological distress: A test of three models in a longitudinal study of adults with chronic health conditions. *J Clin Psychol*, 2022;78:544–58. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23232>
36. Akgül MH. *Sports and Religion: moral and motivational effects of religion in professional football players*. A.A.Yetim (ed.), Ankara: Gazi Publishing; 2021.
37. Spittle M, Dillon R. Mystical experience to measurable description: The relationship between spirituality and flow in golf. *Facta Universitatis, Series: Physical Education and Sport*, 2014;12(1): 1-10.
38. Roychowdhury D. Spiritual Well-Being in Sport and Exercise Psychology. *SAGE Open*, 2019;9:215824401983746. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019837460>
39. Noh Y-E, Shahdan S. A systematic review of religion/spirituality and sport: A psychological perspective. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 2020;46:101603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.101603>
40. Watson NJ, Parker A. The Mystical and Sublime in Extreme Sports: Experiences of Psychological Well-Being or Christian Revelation? *Studies in World Christianity*, 2015;21:260–81. <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2015.0127>
41. Eitzen DS, Sage GH. *Sociology of North American Sport*. (6th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.; 1997.
42. Ilubala-Ziwa JL, Hachintu J. The Significance of Religious Practices in Sport: The Case of Religion and Football in Zambia. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education*, 2021;4(2), 101-114.
43. Engh MH. ‘Because I know God answers prayers’: The Role of Religion in African-Scandinavian Labour Migration. *Alternation*, 2018;SP:57–80. <https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2018/sp22a4>
44. Ofori PK, Biddle S, Lavalley D. The role of superstition among professional footballers in Ghana. *AthleticInsight*, 2012;4(2):115-126.
45. Slatinsky CP, Farren GL, Bartlett M, Fiaud V, Haasl R. Relations Among Locus of Control, Religiosity, and Resiliency in Collegiate Football Players. *Pastoral Psychol*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-021-00988-9>

Information about the authors:

Mehmet H. Akgül; (Corresponding Author); Assist. Prof.; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4665-9615>; mehmethasimakgul@gmail.com; Faculty of Sport Sciences, Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University; 15100, Turkey.

Ahmet Y. Karafil; Assist. Prof.; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1910-4673>; aykarafil@mehmetakif.edu.tr; Faculty of Sport Sciences, Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University; 15100, Turkey.

Cite this article as:

Akgül MH, Karafil AY. Examining the relationship between religious perception and psychological well-being levels of university football players. *Physical Education of Students*, 2022;26(2):48–53. <https://doi.org/10.15561/20755279.2022.0201>

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en>

Received: 11.02.2022

Accepted: 26.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022