

# Investigation of Emotional Intelligence Levels of Elite Athletes: The Role of Gender and Age

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim:** The aim of this study is to investigate the role of age and gender in examining the emotional intelligence levels of athletes..

**Methods:** The universe of the research consists of licensed athletes in Turkey, and the sample consists of 2736 licensed athletes who continue their active sports life in 2019. As a data collection tool in the research; Voluntary Participation Consent Form and Personal Information Form were used. The "Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale", developed by Schutte et al., (1998), edited by Austin, Saklofske, Huang, and McKenney, (2004), and adapted into Turkish by Tatar, Tok, and Saltukoğlu (2011), was used to measure emotional intelligence. SPSS 25 package program was used for the statistical analysis of the data, and descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA and t-test analyzes were used in the analysis of the data obtained.

**Results:** As a result of the analysis, it was seen that there was no significant difference in the comparison of the emotional intelligence sub-dimensions and the total score according to the type of sport they do ( $p>0.05$ ). According to the age variable of the athletes, between the emotional intelligence sub-dimensions and the total score; there was a statistically significant difference in optimism/mood regulation, use of emotions sub-dimension and emotional intelligence total score ( $p<0.05$ ). In the sub-dimension of evaluation of emotions, there was no statistically significant difference ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** When the emotional intelligence levels of the athletes were examined according to the gender variable, it was observed that there was a significant difference in favor of women in the use of emotions, evaluation of emotions and total emotional intelligence scores ( $p<0.05$ ). The results were discussed in the light of the relevant literature and suggestions were made for future studies.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Elite Athletes, Gender, Age

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## INTRODUCTION

"What is an Emotion?" published by William James in 1884. Thanks to the book titled, many researchers have turned to investigate the physiological and physical processes of emotions (Tok, 2008). The concept of emotional intelligence, known for Salovey and Mayer's (1990) research on emotions and gaining an international reputation with Goleman's (1995) book "Emotional Intelligence", has been associated with almost every branch of science today (Sarikabak, 2019). Different definitions have been included in research on Emotional Intelligence. Goleman (1995), on the other hand, defined Emotional Intelligence as the ability of an individual to recognize their own emotions, to understand the emotional states of other individuals and to manage this emotional process in the best way.

In order to better understand the emotional states of individuals and to train emotionally intelligent athletes, it is necessary to examine the concept of emotional intelligence in the sports literature. In this context, Sarikabak (2018) defines emotional intelligence in sports as: "The athlete's understanding of his own emotional state and physical characteristics and the physical requirements of his branch, being aware of the emotional states required by the opponent and teammates and the branch, evaluating their

physical characteristics well and using all these features professionally managing the process". The effect of emotions on athletes' reaching high performance or their ability to show high performance becomes more important with each passing day (Lazarus, 2000; Sit & Lindler, 2005). Because in order for the athletes to perform well, the athlete must recognize the feelings of his teammates and rivals as well as his own feelings (Sarikabak, 2018). In addition, within the scope of emotional intelligence studies; It has been stated that emotional intelligence has a positive and significant relationship with the psychological skills of athletes (Lane et al., 2009; Laborde, Dosseville, & Allen, 2010; Fernandez et al., 2020). The fact that the athletes have a high level of emotional intelligence has been observed as a reason for high performance for success in different sports branches (Zizzi, Deaner, & Hirschhorn, 2003; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; Crombie, Lombard & Noakes, 2009). In order to achieve the highest level of performance and success in the constantly developing and changing world, researchers examine the effects of different variables on athletes. Examining the gender and age variable, which is an active role in research on emotional intelligence, on licensed athletes creates a new perspective in sports sciences.

The effect of emotional intelligence on gender and

age factor, which forms the basis of the aims of the research, has been studied for decades and continues to be studied (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Dekhane & Jadhav, 2021, Çelebi and Demir, 2020: 122). Considering the gender variable, which was examined with different measurement methods, it was observed that the emotional intelligence levels of women were generally higher than men (Goleman, 2001). However, as a result of the studies conducted, there are also studies stating that men have a higher level of emotional intelligence than women (Lopez-Zafra & Gartzia, 2014). Therefore, there is no consensus on the effect of emotional intelligence on gender.

In the guide named "Technical manual for the trait emotional intelligence questionnaires (TEIQue)" published by Petrides (2009), the relationship between emotional intelligence and age is explained as follows; "Individuals' levels of emotional intelligence are likely to remain relatively constant throughout their lives," but important events or a conscious individual's life effort may cause a change in emotional intelligence. Palmer et al. (2003) suggested that some emotional intelligence competencies may change with age and may improve with education. However, in the literature reviews, it was stated that there was no significant relationship between age and emotional intelligence, and even a negative relationship was observed in some studies (Day & Carroll, 2004).

Within the scope of this research, it was aimed to contribute to the researches in the field of sports sciences and emotional intelligence by examining the effect of the emotional intelligence levels of licensed athletes on the role of gender and age.

**MATERIAL & METHODS**

The research was conducted in relational screening model. Relational screening model is the research in which the relationship between two or more variables is done without intervening the variables (Büyüköztürk et al., 2017). Within the scope of the research, a total of 2736 athletes living in different provinces of Turkey were reached in 2019 and these participants were selected by simple random method.

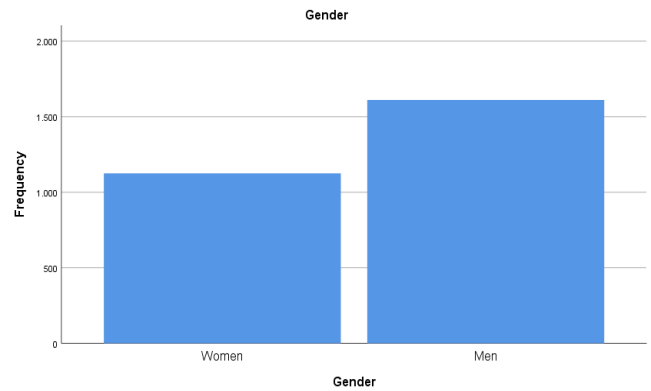
Voluntary participation consent form, personal information form and voluntary consent form created by the researcher were used as data collection tools in the study. The "Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale", developed by Schutte et al., (1998) and edited by Austin, Saklofske, Huang, and McKenney, (2004), and adapted into Turkish by Tatar, Tok, and Saltukoğlu (2011), was used to measure emotional intelligence.

In the analysis of the data, the information about the participant group and the other variables of the research were analyzed with descriptive statistical techniques. Independent t-test and one-way ANOVA analyzes were used in the analysis of the data. The significance level of the data was taken as (p<0.05). SPSS 25 package program was used to evaluate the data.

**RESULTS**

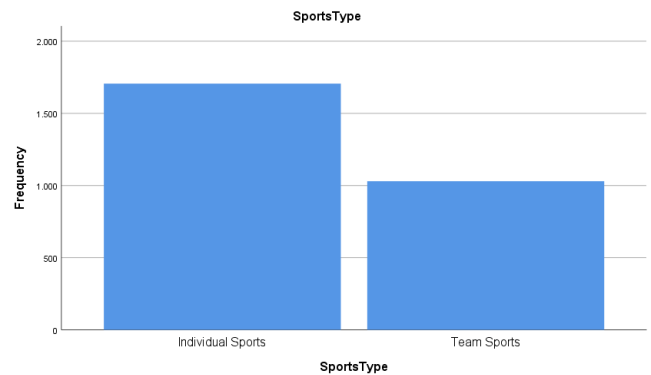
When Table 1 was examined, the frequency values of the gender information of the athletes participating in the research were included. It was seen that 1125 of the athletes were women and 1611 of them were men.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Athletes



N = 1125 Women N = 1611 Men

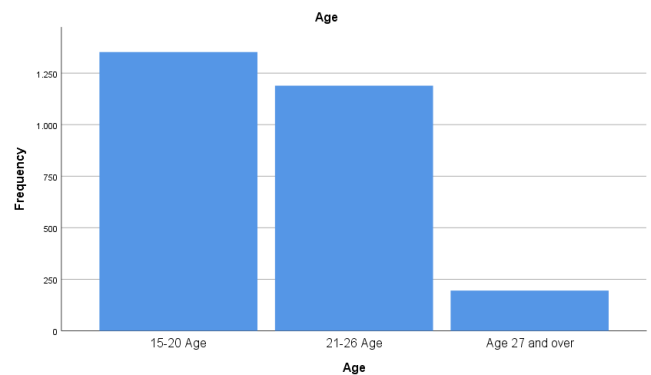
Table 2. Distribution of Athletes by Sport Branches



(n) = 1736 Individual sports (n) = 1030 Team sports

In the answers given according to the sport type question in Table 2, it was seen that 1706 athletes were engaged in individual sports, while 1030 athletes were engaged in team sports.

Table 3. Distribution of Athletes by Age Categories



(n)= 1352 15-20 age, (n)= 1189 21-26 age, (n)= 195 age 27 and over

When Table 3 was examined, it was seen that 1352 of the athletes were between the ages of 15-20, 1189 were between the ages of 21-26 and 195 were at the age of 27 and over.

Table 4. Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Sub-Dimensions and Total Scores of the Athletes according to the Sports Types

	Sport Type	N	$\bar{x}$	t	p
Optimism/Mood Regulation	Individual Sports	1706	54,4551	1,221	,222
	Team Sports	1030	53,9951		
Use of Emotions	Individual Sports	1706	19,7151	-1,886	,059
	Team Sports	1030	20,0165		
Evaluation of Emotions	Individual Sports	1706	34,7777	,545	,586
	Team Sports	1030	34,6320		
Emotional Intelligence Total	Individual Sports	1706	143,2905	,251	,802
	Team Sports	1030	143,0884		

It was seen that there was no significant difference in the comparison of emotional intelligence sub-dimensions and total score according to the type of sport they do ( $p>0.05$ ).

Table 5. Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Sub-Dimensions and Total Scores of Athletes by Age

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Significant Dif.
Optimism/Mood Regulation	Between Groups	2458,175	2	1229,088	13,605	,000	2>1
	Within Groups	246817,479	2732	90,343			
	Total	249275,654	2734				
Use of Emotions	Between Groups	281,255	2	140,627	8,611	,000	1>3 2>3
	Within Groups	44633,350	2733	16,331			
	Total	44914,605	2735				
Evaluation of Emotions	Between Groups	41,688	2	20,844	,454	,635	-
	Within Groups	125506,234	2732	45,939			
	Total	125547,922	2734				
Emotional Intelligence Total	Between Groups	4004,068	2	2002,034	4,821	,008	2>1
	Within Groups	1133710,284	2730	415,278			
	Total	1137714,352	2732				

1. 15-20 Age 2. 21-26 Age 3. Age 27 and over

In the comparison of emotional intelligence sub-dimensions and total scores according to the age variable of the athletes; It was seen that there was a statistically significant difference in optimism/mood regulation, use of emotions sub-dimension and emotional intelligence total score ( $p<0.05$ ). As a result of the Post Hoc Tukey test conducted to determine between which groups the significant difference occurred, in the optimism/mood regulation sub-dimension; In the sub-dimension of the use of emotions; In the total score of emotional intelligence; It was seen that it was in favor of those between the ages of 15-20 and 21-26, and those between the ages of 21-26. There was no statistically significant difference in the evaluation of emotions sub-dimension ( $p>0.05$ ).

Table 6. Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Sub-dimensions and Total Scores of Athletes by Gender Variable

	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	t	p
Optimism/Mood Regulation	Woman	1125	54,6788	1,807	0,69
	Male	1611	54,0050		
Use of Emotions	Woman	1125	20,0596	2,521	,012
	Male	1611	19,6673		
Evaluation of Emotions	Woman	1125	35,2773	3,585	,000
	Male	1611	34,3354		
Emotional Intelligence Total	Woman	1125	144,6073	2,984	,003
	Male	1611	142,2429		

In Table 6, when comparing the emotional intelligence sub-dimensions and the total score according to the gender variable of the athletes; It was observed that there was a significant difference in favor of women in the use of emotions, evaluation of emotions and emotional intelligence total score ( $p<0.05$ ). There was no significant

difference in the optimism/mood regulation sub-dimension ( $p>0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In this part of the study, the findings reached and the results encountered in the literature were discussed and evaluated. No statistical difference was observed in terms of emotional intelligence when the athletes were considered as individual or team players ( $p>0.05$ ). Looking at the average score of the athletes, it was seen that team athletes were better at using their emotions. This can be explained by the fact that team athletes spend more time with each other, have an intense relationship in terms of empathy and social skills. When the relevant literature was scanned, it was seen that there were studies supporting this hypothesis (Stubbs and Messer, 2002; Druskat et al., 2003; Soflu et al., 2011).

When the relationship between the emotional intelligence levels of licensed athletes and the age variable was examined, it was seen that there were significant differences in terms of optimism, use of emotions and emotional intelligence total score ( $p<0.05$ ). The fact that the athletes experience the difficulties they experience during competition and training can be explained by making them more mature in later ages and approaching the events with an optimistic point of view in case of any difficulty. Most of the studies in the field support this hypothesis (Petrides, 2009; McNulty et al., 2016). However, it was seen that there were negative results according to the results obtained by the researchers from the findings (Day & Carroll, 2004). Frijda, (1986) and Lazarus (1991) stated that emotions are more closely related to motivation than behavior and that motivational features trigger behavioral and emotional processes in the later processes. As a result of the fact that the athletes between the ages of 21 and 26 were more experienced than the athletes between the ages of 15-20 and combine their motivation with experience, it was expected to be effective in the emotional intelligence sub-dimensions and total scores. The reason why the athletes between the ages of 15-20 had lower scores than the athletes between the ages of 21-26 may be related to the fact that they were faced with situations such as adolescence, school and family pressure and that they cannot fully reflect their emotions. At the same time, athletes between these age groups may experience ups and downs in their mood. While the studies conducted in the field support this hypothesis, they emphasized that sports experiences can also be negatively affected in age ranges including adolescence (Smith, Smoll, Cumming, & Grossbard, 2006; Harmon-Jones & Summerell, 2017; Lagestad & Sørensen, 2018; Sabiston et al., 2020). Although scientists try to explain the relationship between emotional intelligence and age for athletes, the number of concrete evidence obtained in the literature was very limited. As a result of the findings and supported hypotheses in this study; It can be said that the emotional intelligence levels of the athletes go through stages that can be called the beginning level between the ages of 15-20, the highest level between the ages of 21-26, and the regression period at the age of 27 and above. However, large sample groups explaining the relationship between emotional intelligence and age and studies examining

periodic differences are needed to make this result more evident.

When the emotional intelligence levels of the licensed athletes were compared according to their gender, a statistically significant difference was found in favor of women in the use of emotions, evaluation of emotions and total emotional intelligence score ( $p < 0.05$ ). When the relevant literature was reviewed, Brackett and Salovey (2006) stated in their study that women may have higher emotional intelligence levels due to early communication with children and motherhood characteristics. In the same study, it was also stated that women were better at reading facial expressions and using emotions, referring to physiological readiness. Özdemir and Tokol (2008), on the other hand, claimed that women can be better at interpersonal interaction than men, thanks to the estrogen hormone found in women. Similar studies in the field say that the regions of the brain responsible for managing emotional functions are more developed in women. McNulty et al., (2016) stated in their study on university students in 4 different countries that women's emotional intelligence averages were higher than men's and that women manage their emotions better. Petrides (2009), one of the pioneers of the field of emotional intelligence and publishing guidebooks on emotional intelligence, supports these findings. However, when we look at other studies in the field, it is possible to come across studies stating that men have higher emotional intelligence than women (Ogunyemi et al., 2014). Researchers suggesting that the effects of the gender variable on emotional intelligence may vary according to cultural norms, report that women have to face more intense emotional states and are more experienced in trying to regulate their moods (Hoeksema, 1987; Rotter & Rotter, 1988; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson et al. Grayson, 1999; Gross and John, 2003). For example, in a study comparing emotions with eastern and western cultures, Chinese women were found to have low levels of emotional regulation, while American women were found to have higher levels of emotional regulation (Eid & Diener, 2001). According to the results obtained from the findings of another study, it was concluded that women's episodic memories were better than men's (Wang, 2013). Therefore, it was thought that women were better in social relations and more effective in remembering past events than men. It can be expected that this situation will help women better understand the emotional states of the individuals in front of them and cause women to become emotionally intelligent. It is also thought that this difference in the gender variable may be due to the fact that emotional intelligence is measured using different measurement methods. In some studies, it was seen that men's high emotions come to the fore, especially in competitive sports. According to the researchers, although it is interesting that men's high emotions come to the fore during sports competitions, as a result of the fact that male athletes' characteristics such as competitiveness, aggression and physicality are more dominant, the reflection of power on emotional states and the fact that this situation has a solid effect in daily life causes negative behaviors in the expression of emotions. (Messner, 1992; Goodman et al., 2002; Connel & Messerschmidt, 2005; Wong et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be seen as an expected result that

women's emotional intelligence levels are high when comparing emotional intelligence in terms of gender in athletes. It is recommended to enlarge the sample groups in order to achieve more accurate results when comparing large sample groups such as gender. At the same time, measurement methods developed in the measurement of emotional intelligence, regardless of cultural differences, ensure that clear results about emotional intelligence cannot be reached.

Our emotions, which are in every moment of our lives, direct us according to the flow of our lives and our efforts. Most people experience their own emotional processes by experience. In today's sports sector, which has reached huge budgets, better emotional recognition of athletes and their evaluation according to their distinctive features can contribute to the success of athletes. Therefore, correct emotional intelligence training should be given to the athletes, taking into account the situations experienced by the athletes before, during and after the competition, and the reactions given to these situations.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained as a result of the research, it can be suggested that more intense emotional intelligence trainings should be given to the athletes between the ages of 15-20. Athletes between the ages of 21-26 may need additional support to maintain their emotional intelligence levels. It is hoped that this research will contribute to other studies to be conducted.

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