

The Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Women Wrestlers Preparing for the Olympics

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ABSTRACT

Background: While the whole world is struggling with COVID-19, the world of sports is also struggling with an unprecedented situation. The postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee and the cancellation or postponement of all competitions and sports activities in Turkey adversely affected the success of the athletes who will take part in these organizations, both psychologically and physically.

Aims: In the study, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic process on five female wrestlers in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were investigated.

Method: In the study conducted with the athletes in the Olympic team, the phenomenology design was used. The study group of the research consists of 5 female wrestlers in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic team.

Results: As a result of the research, it is seen that the negative effects of the process are seen in general, and the training obstacle in particular hinders their work. The fact that they lost their form due to the restriction of training and quarantine due to catching Covid-19 is among the research findings that negatively affect the preparation processes for the Olympic competitions.

Conclusion: Athletes can be provided with additional psychological support through the clubs they are affiliated with. Various trainings/camps, etc., are organized in order for the athletes to regain their lost physical performance during the said period. can be planned. Various motivational activities can be organized in order to eliminate the negative effects of the pandemic process.

Keywords: Covid-19, Female Wrestler, Olympic

INTRODUCTION

Wrestling is a sport that dates back to ancient times and is one of the oldest games in the history of the Olympic Games.¹ Wrestling, which has never lost its popularity in any period of history, has always been an important part of sporting events. Wrestling², which is a part of the Ancient Greek Olympics, which took the form of a sports feast, continues to maintain its importance today with the championships held at the national or international level. Apart from some traditional styles (aba, karakucak, oily, shalwar, sumo, etc.), wrestling is an olympic combat sport in three categories: freestyle for men and Greco-Roman, and freestyle for women. National or international wrestling competitions are held within the framework of the rules published by the United World Wrestling (UWW) and constantly updated.³

The preparation process for the Olympics, which is held every four years, is of great importance for athletes. As a matter of fact, while the preparations for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics continued, all sports competitions had to be postponed due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology detected in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, China. It was then announced by the National Health Commission of China that the outbreak was associated with exposures in a seafood market in the city of Wuhan, and Chinese authorities identified a new type of coronavirus (2019-nCoV) isolated.⁵

It has been observed that the epidemic spread has turned into a pandemic due to the unpreparedness of all countries of the world against the COVID-19 virus, the delay in the measures taken, the lack of planning, and the

high rate of transmission of the disease.^{6,7} Moreover, the virus has managed to influence the world not only in the field of health, but also in the fields of social, economic, political and sports.^{8,9}

While the whole world is struggling with COVID-19, the sports world is struggling with an unprecedented situation. The postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee and the cancellation or postponement of all competitions and sports activities in Turkey adversely affected the success of the athletes who will take part in these organizations, both psychologically and physically.¹⁰

For this reason, it will compete in the Olympics, one of the most important sports organizations. Since the success of the athletes is considered important especially for the prestige of the country.²³ In the study, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic process on five female wrestlers in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were investigated. In this direction, in the study;

- The process of starting wrestling of the athletes and the approaches of the people around them.
- What are the views of the athletes about the wrestling branch?
- Covid-19 pandemic process and its effects
- Athletes' thoughts on Olympic competitions
- Future career plans of athletes topics are mentioned.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Model: Qualitative research method was used in the research. According to Snape and Spencer¹¹ qualitative research is a research approach used to understand and interpret social phenomena rather than statistical measurement. In the study conducted with the athletes in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic team, the phenomenology design

was used. Phenomenological studies aim to reveal the cognitive patterns in the minds of individuals by examining their interpretations of the situations they personally experience.¹²

Working group: The study group of the research consists of 5 female wrestlers in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic team. During the Covid-19 pandemic process, the criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the research conducted with the athletes in the wrestling branch preparing for the Olympics. The understanding in this sampling method is to study all situations that meet a set of predetermined criteria¹³ and to sample units that meet certain criteria¹⁴. In the aforementioned research, the female wrestlers' participation in the women's national wrestling team and the right to participate in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were the criteria for the selection of the sample. Since the participants selected for phenomenological studies should be chosen from people who have personally experienced the event, Creswell¹⁵ stated that the number of participants should consist of a heterogeneous group ranging from 3-4 people to 10-15 people¹⁵; Polkinghorne¹⁶, on the other hand, states that participants who have experienced 5-25 events will be sufficient in this type of research. In this direction, it is thought that 5 people are sufficient in terms of the research sample.

Table 1 contains information about the age of the participants in the research, the category of weight they compete in, the profession they have performed and the level of education.

Table 1: Descriptive Information of the Athletes Constituting the Research Sample

Athlete	Age	Weight	Vocational	Education Level
K1	27	57	Teaching	Graduate
K2	26	68	Teaching	Graduate
K3	26	48	Teaching	Graduate
K4	30	76	Teaching	Undergraduate (continued)
K5	20	53	Student	Graduate (continued)

Data collection tool: Interview technique was used as data collection technique in the research. The data of the study was collected through a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. In the semi-structured interview form, pre-prepared questions are asked and changes can be made during the interview.¹⁷

First of all, a literature review was conducted by the researcher and a question pool was created. The pool of questions created was evaluated in line with the opinions of an expert lecturer who took part in international studies in his field, and a draft interview form was prepared by making necessary arrangements. The draft interview form was prepared for the pilot application, taking into account the factors such as the suitability and clarity of the questions for the research. A pilot study was carried out by applying the prepared interview form to an athlete. As a result of the pilot study, it was seen that the questions were functional.

Data analysis: The data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed by content analysis method. The main purpose in content analysis is to reach concepts and

relationships that can explain the collected data¹³. In content analysis, the data set should be analyzed step by step and divided into units.¹⁸ Codes, categories and themes are obtained from the facts repeated in the data set or emphasized by the participants repeatedly, and related concepts are interpreted together.¹⁹

The data obtained from the study were analyzed in four stages:

1. Coding of the data (coded according to the concepts extracted from the data)
2. Determining the themes of the coded data,
3. Editing codes and themes,
4. Identification and interpretation of the findings.¹³

The data was first read by the researcher, then the codes were extracted, themes related to the codes were created and links were determined within the sub-purposes. As a result of the determined results, the findings were defined and interpreted.

Validity of the Research: In the study, for the validity of the semi-structured interview form, the opinion of an expert in the field was taken and a pilot application was made with an athlete using the draft form. As a result of the pilot application, the interview form was given its final form. The reason and process of the research were explained to the participants in the study in detail, and the identity of the participants was kept confidential.

Direct quotations are included in the findings. Direct citation means that the views of the participants in the research are included in the study without changing them. In this study, participant opinions were quoted directly for validity. In addition, the role of the researcher and the limitations of the research are clearly stated.

Role of the Researcher: During the research, while communicating with the participants, the information about the study was explained to the participants as transparently as possible. In addition, the researchers showed an objective approach both in the data collection process and in the data analysis process, acted away from prejudices and avoided directing. In the study, code names were used instead of using expressions that would reveal the identity of the participants. In addition, the family life of the researchers, the culture he grew up in, the education he received, the characteristics of the environment he lived in, his political view, etc. characteristics have no effect on the research process and were not included in the process. The study was carried out by the researchers without prejudice.

RESULTS

The data obtained from face-to-face interviews with 5 female wrestlers in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic team were analyzed. The findings of the analyzes are explained under the following headings.

1. What are the athletes' starting processes and the approaches of the people around them?

The athletes in the wrestling branch preparing for the Olympics were asked how they started wrestling and the factors that encouraged them after they started wrestling. Among the answers given by the athletes, the most "acquaintance/friend" response was received. The factors that encourage the athletes to wrestle and their frequency (f) are given in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2: Categories and Frequencies of Encouraging Wrestling

Theme	Categories	f
Elements that encourage wrestling	Acquaintance/Friend	3
	Coach	2
	Success Example	2
	Coincidence	2
	Family	1
	Preparation for Special Talent Exam	1
	Athlete History	1
Sports Facility Membership	1	
Total		13

In addition to the guidance of a friend/acquaintance, it is seen that the coach effect and the sportive success of a close acquaintance/friend play a triggering role in the start of wrestling. Some of the answers given by the athletes are as follows:

K5: When I was in the 3rd grade of primary school, I had a desk friend. He won a medal from the competition, and when I saw that medal, I thought "I want it too"...

K4: It was purely a coincidence that I started wrestling. I started wrestling to learn the Piolet move. The reason for this was to enter the School of Physical Education and Sports at Balikesir University. I started wrestling to learn the piolet move, which is mandatory in the skill park...

A question was asked to the athletes in the wrestling branch preparing for the Olympics, what is the view of your family and close circle when you start wrestling. Among the answers given by the athletes, the most common answers are "Family Support" and "Negative Perspective of the Society". Elements related to the approach of the environment and their frequencies (f) are given in the table below (Table 3).

Table 3: Categories and Frequencies of Important Elements of Distance Education

Theme	Categories	f
Approach to the Environment	Family Support	3
	Negative Perspective of Society	3
	Hot	1
	Positive	1
	Relative Reaction	1
Total		9

Some of the answers given by the athletes who were faced with the "reaction of relatives" in addition to receiving "warm" and "positive" reactions from their environment are as follows:

K2: I got a positive response. I've never had a negative reaction, especially from my family...

K4: At first, women's wrestling was not known and accepted by the society. I got many reactions from my relatives. There were many people who said that I shouldn't or can't do this sport. ...

2. What are the views of the athletes about the wrestling branch?

a) What are the positive aspects of wrestling?

Athletes in the wrestling branch preparing for the Olympics were asked their opinions about wrestling. In this direction, they generally answered the question about what wrestling

gives them, "Self-confidence" and "Material Gain". Positive opinions about wrestling and their frequency (f) are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Categories and Frequency of Athletes' Positive and Negative Aspects of Wrestling

Theme	Categories	f
Positive Aspects	Confidence	4
	Financial Income	4
	Vocation	3
	Character Formation	2
	Sociability/New Environment	2
	Family/ Environmental Appreciation	1
	A sense of unity and togetherness	1
	Spouse	1
	Healthy Body	1
Total		19
Negative Aspects	Longing for family/loved ones	4
	Inability to spend time with relatives	2
	Sacrificing Social Life	1
Total		7

They stated that besides the positive aspects of wrestling such as character formation and giving meaning to their lives, it also contributed to their socialization and acquiring a new social environment. Accordingly, the answers of some athletes are as follows:

K1: There is a very good sense of unity that I gained in wrestling. I made very good friendships, gained my self-confidence, established my personality. ...

K3: It had many benefits, whether it was the university I attended, the teaching profession, or financial gain. And I met very nice people. ...

b) What are their negative (wrestling) views?

Athletes in the wrestling branch preparing for the Olympics were asked their opinions about wrestling. In this direction, they generally answered the question about what wrestling made them lose, "Longing for family/loved ones". Negative opinions about wrestling and their frequency (f) are given in Table 4.

They stated that wrestling causes them to spend less and limited time with their relatives, which is why they feel longing and longing for their families and relatives. They also stated that they had to make sacrifices for their social lives due to intense training and camp processes. Accordingly, the answers of some athletes are as follows:

K4: I had to make great sacrifices in my social life. I've been so far from my family...

K2: We miss our family. And there are times when we lose our relatives from time to time during these longing periods. I think the only thing we lose is not being able to spend too much time with them. ...

3. How do athletes evaluate the covid-19 pandemic process and its effects?

Various questions were asked about the covid-19 pandemic process to the athletes in the wrestling branch preparing for the Olympics. Firstly, they were asked whether they had caught the Covid-19 disease and 4 athletes stated that they had the aforementioned disease. Athletes caught in Covid-19 stated that this situation negatively affected their performance, that they had difficulty in training in quarantine and that they had difficulty in maintaining their form. In addition, one participant said

that although he was an athlete, he had a serious illness. Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K3: I think it also affects my performance badly because how long can we train in a room while under quarantine? ...

K1: We couldn't train... We couldn't train hard enough...

"Training Restriction", "Quarantine", "Inability to Participate in Matches", "Psychological (negative) Effect" and "Aging Progression" were answered to the question about how preparing for the Olympics during the Covid-19 pandemic process affects the work of athletes (Table 5). In the said period, they stated that their motivation decreased with the postponement of the competitions planned to be held in 2020 to 2021, and that their 1 year aging situation during this period may also have an impact on their performance. Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K4: This was a huge problem for us at first. Because we always made our preparations and plans accordingly, and the sudden occurrence of such an event shook us all psychologically...

K2: If I don't train for even a week in our sport, it goes back a month. Incredibly, this process has set us back. ...

Table 5: Categories and Frequencies of the Effect of the Pandemic Process on the Olympic Studies

Theme	Categories	f
Pandemic Impact	Training Constraint	1
	Quarantine	1
	Unable to Attend Matches	1
	Psychological (negative) impact	1
	Progression of Age	1
Total		5

4. What are the injuries and the effects of this situation during the preparation of the athletes for the Olympic competitions?

Regarding the Covid-19 pandemic process, they were asked whether they experienced any disability in addition to catching the corona virus during this period. 3 athletes stated that they experienced injury during the said period, 1 athlete suffered minor injuries, and 1 athlete stated that he did not experience any injury or injury. In addition, they stated that the decrease in the training intensity during the quarantine and pandemic periods, and then the lifting of the bans and the sudden start of an intense tempo may have an effect on disability and injuries. Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K5: I broke my ankles in training. That process affected me a little...

K2: In wrestling practice, the lateral ligaments of my knee were stretched, ...

5. What are the thoughts of the athletes about the Olympic competitions?

Various questions were asked about the Olympic organizations to the athletes included in the research. First of all, to the question about the feeling of being an Olympic athlete and representing the country in the Olympics, answers were given that "National Feelings" outweighed "National Feelings" and "Seeing an Idol" increased responsibility in addition to the "Great responsibility" answer. In addition, one participant stated that the "Medal Excitement" predominates. Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K1: You are seen as an idol. You need to pay attention to the movements and behaviors you do, you need to work harder in training. This puts more responsibility on it. ...

K5: I want to win the Olympic medal at a young age. ...

In the question asked to the athletes about how they prepared for the Olympic competitions, 3 athletes stated that they "Worked With Perseverance" and 1 athlete stated that they "Sacrificed" in many subjects. On the other hand, they also stated that they were faced with the problems of "Disability Disability" and "Injury Disability" during the preparation process for the Olympics. Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K3: it is very valuable because I put a lot of effort into it. ...

K4: You have to make a huge sacrifice...

When the athletes were asked who do you think they received the most support while preparing for the Olympics, all the athletes answered "Family". In addition to this response, they also provided answers such as "Mother", "Father", "Spouse", "Fiancee", "Inner Motivation", "Friend", "Trainer", "Psychological Well-Being". Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K1: I get a lot of support from my family, especially from my father. They are always behind me, doing their best to help me succeed. ...

K3: My own inner motivation is more important. But now I get the support that I didn't get from my family in the beginning, in a very big way. They have a lot of support. ...

To the question of where do you see yourself in the Olympics, where do you think you should be and where is your goal, 3 athletes answered "Podium" and 2 athletes "Medal". In addition to this answer, they also conveyed their answers regarding the history of Turkey's sports that "Being the First" and "Process" are more important than results like the podium or medal. Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K2: Of course, my goal in the Olympics is to be on the podium. ...

K3: Everything I have done in this process is also very valuable and valuable to me...

6. What are the future career plans of the athletes?

The question of which side of wrestling do you want to be on when your wrestling life comes to an end was asked to the athletes included in the research. To the question posed, 2 athletes answered "Training" with the aim of raising female wrestlers, and 2 athletes answered "Administration" for similar reasons. An athlete, on the other hand, gave the answer of "Establishing an Association" and "Creating Non-Governmental Organizations" in order to serve the society. In addition to the answer he gave, an athlete stated that he could continue to work as a "Teacher" or "Academician". Some of the athletes' answers are as follows:

K5: Of course, my first goal is to finish school and get my teaching job. Then it may be a dream of doing my master's degree and maybe staying at the university. ...

K1: Actually, I think about coaching. Because we have many shortcomings as women's wrestling. Our athletes from below are very few, the number of qualified female trainers is very few. I think that being successful and being a coach will also change the athletes we will train. Coaching or administrative part, I think I will not break with wrestling.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the research, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic process were examined through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with five female wrestlers preparing for the Olympics. As a result of the research, it is seen that the negative effects of the process are seen in general, and the training obstacle in particular hinders their work. The fact that they lost their form due to the restriction of training and quarantine due to catching Covid-19 is among the research findings that negatively affect the preparation processes for the Olympic competitions.

In the study of Mehrsafari et al.²⁰, it is pointed out that health authorities and sports communities have to determine their priorities in special cases and make plans for athletes to continue their health and sports activities. In the study, the fact that female wrestlers faced difficulties in maintaining their sportive activities in the said process and the negative results of this confirm the findings of the current study.

In the study conducted by Demirtaş and Çıplak²¹, both male and female athletes stated that they lacked training due to the COVID-19 outbreak, they fell out of shape, and they could not train specifically for the branch. They stated that they were worried about the health of the athletes and the deficiencies in their training programs. In the study, female wrestlers also expressed their concerns because they were behind in training.

Leonardo, Danilo and Andrade^{22,24} emphasize that it is important for professional athletes to pay attention to their habits and to do strength and conditioning exercises during the pandemic process. They argued that the athletes who took these precautions could adapt more quickly, be more successful and overcome the pandemic process with less damage when returning to their sports life after the pandemic. The difficulties experienced by female wrestlers during the pandemic process and the adaptation problem afterwards support the result of this research.

According to the results of the research and the review of the literature, in order to reduce or eliminate the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic;

- Athletes can be provided with additional psychological support through the clubs they are affiliated with.
- Various trainings/camps, etc., in order for the athletes to regain their lost physical performance during the said period. can be planned.
- Various motivational activities can be organized in order to eliminate the negative effects of the pandemic process.

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