

Fear of Covid-19 in Fitness Centers

H. MEHMET TUNÇKOL¹, TOLGA ŞAHİN²

¹Bartın University, Sport Sciences Faculty, Bartın-Turkey

²Eylül University, Necatı Hekkon Sport Sciences Faculty, İzmir-Turkey.

Correspondence to: H. Mehmet Tunçkol, Email: mtunckol@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Background: The fitness centers are the places which people can do exercise for their physical fitness, subjective wellbeing and health. These places should have suitable conditions like ventilation system, locker rooms, hygiene etc. But in the period of Covid-19 pandemic, air conditions, locker rooms and hygiene procedures couldn't solve the infections wide spreading. Then the situation went worst and precautions like lockdowns, shut downs and curfews came in our life. In this period, people have fear of Covid-19 all over the world. After the lockdowns, shut downs and curfews people still have fear of Covid-19.

Aim: The aim of this study is to determine the fear of Covid-19 in thorough the fitness center members in the process of normalization.

Material and Methods: This study utilized the survey method that is used most commonly in descriptive research models. In the survey method, samples consist of large groups, and each member of the group is asked about own opinions in order to learn attitudes on a case, fact or a situation. For determining the fear level a survey applied to subjects consisted from Personal Data Form and "Fear of Covid-19" Scale. The study group is consisted from 394 individuals who have valid memberships in different sizes of fitness centers.

Results: After the analysis, normal distribution of the data was examined according to the values of skewness and kurtosis. Further analysis showed that members having mid-level (mean=16,33) fear of Covid-19. And also there's significant difference according to age and place of residence variables.

Conclusion: More countries should take into consideration to understand how the pandemic of Covid-19 affects fear levels of fitness center members globally. Also it could be recommended to prevention programs to members for help to overcome fear of Covid-19.

Keywords: Covid-19, Fear, Fitness, Members

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age [1]. Perfect depiction of aforementioned words about liquid reality and incessant need to reinterpret and self-create one's own life and designing new ways of acting in the face of surprising changes in the social reality is the current COVID-19 pandemic. This extraordinary time of the pandemic unquestionably influenced immensely our functioning in our well-known ordinary lives and completely revolutionized every area of social life. One of the sectors which were hurt the most is sport, space for physical activity and the fitness world [2].

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on society, leading to a rapid closure of businesses, places of work, worship, social engagement, schools and universities. Sport is often categorized under 'hobbies' or things to do once the serious business is over. However, this critical commentary argues that sport and sports events play a crucial social role even under normal circumstances [3]. The society of creators, as well as the fitness consumers, collided with new reality and new challenges. For example the loss of workplaces of personal trainers and the lack of spaces to do physical activities have immensely influenced how sport activities look like currently for the subjects actively taking care of their health, physical condition, their bodies and appearance [4].

Fitness centers are of importance as they highlight and promote healthy living among individuals through exercise and workouts. Especially in this unprecedented time, the health of an individual is very crucial. Therefore, the promotion to continue with fitness center availability during the COVID-19 pandemic is critical. Taking into consideration that fitness centers are a service-providing business, it was one of many businesses that was challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns challenged owners and managers to strategize for customers to consider their service offered [5]. Sport

facilities as indicated, and frequently disinfect high-traffic areas before, throughout and after a sporting event, including door handles, door knobs, push bars, handrails, elevator buttons, escalators, tables, counters and rest rooms. Also; properly and thoroughly disinfect equipment, surface of training place, locker rooms and medical surfaces. And undertake efforts to increase ventilation and airflow throughout event facilities (for example increase the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the system; regularly open doors and windows as much as), for both indoor and outdoor sports [6].

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants: The study group was consisted from randomly selected 394 members (268 male-68 % and 126 female- 32%) in different fitness centers in 40 cities across the Turkey. The data were collected by snowball sampling. Fitness centers members were voluntarily participated to the study in their free times. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Procedure: For determining the views of fear a survey applied to subjects consisted from Personal Data Form and "Fear of Covid-19" Scale. The fear of Covid-19 Scale was developed by Ahorse and others [7]. The scale adapted to Turkish by Ladikli and others [8]. It has 7 items and 5-point Likert. Total scores range from 7 (no fear) to 35 points (highest level of fear). The data were collected through a form created in Google Form®. It was applied to the subjects from different ways like; webpage, WhatsApp, QR Code etc.. It was available from 2020 September to 2022 January.

Statistical Analysis: As a statistical analysis; frequency, percentage, normality, t-test and one way variance analyses (ANOVA) for independent groups was used. In t-test and one way variance analysis; one of the assumptions of parametric tests, equality of variances principle had taken and in an inequality case if "p" occurs lower than significant level, it doesn't searched significant differences between the groups. Also one way variance analysis (ANOVA), Tukey HSD test was performed for finding the differences of between the groups. Significant level of analysis was taken $\alpha=0,05$.

RESULTS

According to the results of the analysis, fitness center members have mid-level (mean=16,33) fear of Covid-19 (Table 1). The

normal distribution of the data was examined according to the values of skewness and kurtosis before the analysis. Hair et.al [9] stated that skewness measure of the symmetry of a distribution; in most instances the comparison is made to a normal distribution. A positively skewed distribution has relatively few large values and

tails off to the right, and a negatively skewed distribution has relatively few small values and tails off to the left. Skewness values falling outside the range of -1 to +1 indicate a substantially skewed distribution".

Table 1: Results of Scale Scores

N	Min	Max	Mean	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
394	7	35	16,33	7,26	,728	-,199

According to the results of the analysis it was found that participants' scale scores were significant difference according to age and place of residence variables. Scale score and "age" variable results had presented in Table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA Results According to Age Variable

	Group	N	\bar{X}	S	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean of Squares	F	P	Sig.Diff. (Tukey)
Fear of Covid-19	1	253	15,79	7,35	Between groups	672,12	3	224,04	4,34	,000*	4-1, 4-2
	2	70	15,68	7,08	Inner Group	20091,97	390	51,51			
	3	42	17,90	6,27	Total	20764,10	393				
	4	29	20,34	7,01							

*p<0,05 Groups: 1: 13-23 age, 2: 24-34 age, 3: 35-45 age, 4: 46-56 age

Fear of Covid-19 Scale scores of fitness center members were significantly differed according to their ages [$F_{(3-390)} = 4,34$; $p < ,05$]. After the Tukey HSD test, it was determined that 46-56 age (mean=20,34) group had more Covid-19 fear than the 13-23 (mean=15,79) and 24-34 (mean=15,68) age groups. Scale score and "place of residence" variable results had presented in table 3 at below.

Table 3: T-Test Results According to Place of Residence Variable

Place of Residence	N	\bar{X}	SS	T	P
City	163	18,09	8,03	-4,12	,000*
Metropol	231	15,09	6,40		

*p<0,05

Examining the Fear of Covid-19 Scale scores of fitness center members according to place of residence variable, it was determined that members who has living in cities (mean=18,09) felt fear of Covid-19 according to members who has living in metropol (mean=15,09).

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to determine the Covid-19 fear of members in fitness centers. Fitness centers have an important place in modern life. Usually in big cities individuals want to be a member of a fitness center. There're too much alternative futures like indoor and outdoor facilities, equipment, trainers, programs etc. for members. Of course membership fees change according to these futures. Fitness is the most popular recreational exercise type all over the world. As the same, it's the most popular exercise method in Turkey too. A lot of individuals concern with fitness and want to be a member of a fitness center. But going to fitness center in pandemic period has become a big problem. The Covid-19 pandemic make fitness exercises harder. In the past going a fitness center, being a member was usual process. After the pandemic started everything had changed.

In some countries governments banned fitness centers because of rising cases of Covid-19. Like restaurants, beauty centers, coiffeurs also fitness centers had closed until an unknown date. Government announced fitness centers closing decision until a second order. By these regulations and also result of curfew, people became to searching and having alternative exercise opportunities in their homes. In the middle of 2021 government gave permission for opening the fitness centers. But people still had fear of Covid-19 and have mental problems like depression, anxiety etc. Some researchers searched these parameters. For example Mehrsafari et al. [10] found that fear of Covid-19 was positively correlated with COVID-19 anxiety ($p=0,01$) and Satici et al. [11] found fear of the COVID-19 through subjects and its

significantly positively predicted depression, anxiety and depersonalization.

In this study, according to fear of Covid-19 scale scores, fitness members have mid-level (mean=16,33) fear of Covid-19. Like current study; Aksoy and Atilgan [12], Çiftçi and Demir [13], Gencer [14], Özbek and Özaltaş [15], Özmen et al. [16] were found the arithmetic mean scores for fear of Covid-19 in the middle score range in Turkish society too. In some studies like Biricik and Sivrikaya [17] were revealed that students who worked out during the pandemic had less fear of Covid-19. In another study, Vegara-Ferri et al. [18] found that approximately one third of the 349 Spanish residents' social impact perception of a cycling event afraid of the situation, another third are not afraid at all about the possible risks of infection and their health, while the rest are indifferent to the situation.

As an additional anecdote the male fitness members' fear of Covid-19 (mean=15,95) less than the female members (mean=17,15). Kaçoğlu et al. [19] was found more fear in female student athletes (mean=20,0) than male student athletes (mean=17,7). Also Gencer [14], Tan et. al. [20], Özbek and Özaltaş [15] were found more fear in females too. Jungwirth et al. [4] found that physical activity decreased in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic, as female and male participants spent less time on exercising. Results revealed that decreased exercising indoors mostly applied to public sport facilities (i.e., fitness centers or sports clubs), as home exercising gained popularity during the crisis.

The Covid-19 fear scale scores of fitness center members were showed significant differences according to their ages. Older fitness members (46-56 age group) thinking that they had more virus infection risk than 13-23 (mean=15,79) and 24-34 (mean=15,68) age groups. Karakuş et al. [21] also found the same result as current study. In their study participants over 25 years old had a greater fear of Covid-19 than 18-24 aged. Also Kalafatoğlu and Yam [22] found that 31-45 years old individuals Covid-19 fear scores ($\bar{x}=19,73$) higher than the 18-30 age individuals Covid-19 fear scores ($\bar{x}=18,34$).

According to scores of Covid-19 fear scale and place of residence variable, it could be said that fitness members in small and middle sized cities (n=163) felts more fear (mean=18,09) than the fitness members in metropol. Maybe they think that they had less medical features like hospitals, intensive care units, mechanical ventilation units etc. in small or middle sized cities than metropol.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effects of the Covid-19 are still seriously felt by humanity in many regions of the world. Governments take a wide variety of

decisions to manage the process in the best way, and new restrictions are coming up every day to stop the pandemic spread more [23]. This study was carried out with individuals who had exercise in fitness centers after the lockdowns, shut downs and curfews. In this period, people have fear of Covid-19 all over the world. After the lockdowns, shut downs and curfews people still have fear of Covid-19. Normalization occurs slowly and the risk of new variations still ahead. In this sense, going to a fitness center is a challenge to own fears. Nobody wants to die because of Covid-19 and the fear is the key element to survive. Performing home-based physical exercises never satisfied people like fitness centers. So people have to learn living with their fears about Covid-19.

The current study has some limitations. First of all it should be noted that individuals' perceptions of Covid-19 and fear are not stable states and may change over time due to the trend of confirmed cases and the number of deaths caused by Covid-19. Second, it should be noted that the data were collected from Turkey, which is one of the countries moderately affected by COVID-19. Therefore, future studies should take more countries into consideration to understand how the pandemic of Covid-19 affects fear levels of fitness center members globally. And it could be recommended to prevention programs to members for help to overcome fear of Covid-19. Therefore, psychological interventions can be designed to alleviate the traumatic effects of Covid-19 by using the Covid-19 Scale.

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