

# A Comparison of Perceived Social Anxiety among Individual and Team Sports Participant High School Students

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## Abstract

This paper aimed to investigate individual or team sports participant high school students' perceived social anxiety levels according to their sports branch, the weekly duration/day of doing sports, the aim for doing sports and gender. Two hundred high school students ( $M_{age}=16.29 \pm 1.11$ ) participated in the study. The study designed as a cross-sectional study and the Turkish version of Social Anxiety for Adolescents (SAS-A) used as the data gathering tool. In the evaluation of data independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA statistical methods used as the hypothesis tests. According to the study findings, there was not any significant difference in the variable social anxiety according to the sports branch and the weekly duration/day of doing sports. However, significant differences were found between individual sports participants' social anxiety according to aim for doing sports and gender. As a result, this paper showed that professional individual sports participants had higher perceived social avoidance and distress for general and new situations. Also, male individual sports participants reported a higher fear of negative evaluation than females.

**Keywords:** anxiety, social anxiety, sports, adolescents, fear of negative evaluation

## 1. Introduction

Social anxiety can be defined as a common anxiety disorder that can be defined by an intense fear of being embarrassed, humiliated, and negatively evaluated by others in social environments and avoiding feared situations (Eren Gümüş, 2006). According to another definition, social anxiety is a state of a prominent and constant fear of encountering unfamiliar people or being in the eye of others, while performing one or more social actions fearing that the person will behave in a way that will be humiliated or embarrassed (Çakır, 2010 cited in Atarbay, 2017)

Researchers stated that Janet first used the term social anxiety in 1903 for individuals who feared being watched by others while speaking, playing the piano, or writing (Atarbay, 2017). According to Sübaşı (2007), researchers studying social anxiety were influenced by Schlenker and Leary's theory. According to theory, "if an individual is motivated to make a certain impression on a group or person and is skeptical about leaving this impression, which can be real or design, then social anxiety arises."

According to Brown and Larson (2002, p.120), adolescence is a transition period between childhood and adulthood, although it varies from culture to culture and shows socio-economic, regional, and gender differences. Besides being a difficult period for some adolescents, researchers have stated that biological, psychological, and social changes that occur during the developmental stages of adolescence can cause anxiety (Eren Gümüş, 1997).

It can be said that sport contains anxiety in many facets. Moreover, researchers examined anxiety in various ways as a determining factor in sports. For example, Tezcan Kardaş (2018) examined the state anxiety levels of football players between the ages of 13-16 and stated that the factors affecting the state anxiety levels of the athletes manifested in different ways and this situation was affected by various factors. Similarly, Civan, Arı, Görücü and Özdemir (2010) examined the state and trait anxiety status of athletes interested in individual and team sports and found that those who engaged in individual sports in terms of pre-competition state anxiety level and those who engaged in a team sport in terms of continuous anxiety level differed significantly from the others.

It is possible to give various examples to the studies in the literature. However, when we examine these studies, we can see that the researchers do not mention the relationship between sports and social anxiety. With a few exceptions, sport, in general, can be said to be a social phenomenon, which involves social interactions (Chandler, Cronin, and Whampley, 2002, p.185) and it is possible to find out the traces of social anxiety in an environment of social interactions.

Therefore, in this study, we aimed to investigate the perceived social anxiety of high school students interested in individual and team sports in terms of various variables. In order to reveal more detailed results, we looked for answers to the following study questions.

RQ: Do the social anxiety levels of the participants differ significantly according to;

- The sport type they prefer?
- Weekly day/duration of doing sports?
- Their purpose in doing sports?
- Gender?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Study Design

In the present study, we used the cross-sectional method as study design. According to this method, first, data is collected from the sampling group in order to identify relationships between the patterns and then generalized back to the population (Gratton and Jones, 2010).

### 2.2 Participants

200 high school students from Kılıçarslan High School and Kütahya High School in Kütahya city center voluntarily participated in the study. The random sampling method was used in order to determine the study sample (Balvanes and Caputi, 2001).

**Table 1.** The Distribution of the Demographic Information of the Participants

Variables		F	%
Age	14-16	113	56.5
	17-19	87	43.5
	Total	200	100
Gender	Male	100	50
	Female	100	50
	Total	200	100
Sport Branch/Type	Individual Sports	64	32
	Team Sports	136	68
	Total	200	100

### 2.3 Data Collection Tool

In the study, as the data collection tool, in addition to a 5-item personal information form prepared by the researchers, the social anxiety scale for adolescents (SAS-A) was used. La Greca and Lopez (1998) originally developed the scale and, Aydın and Tekinsav Sütçü (2007) adapted to Turkish using exploratory factor analyze method. Exploratory factor analysis is a method that is generally used to construct a questionnaire to measure an underlying variable (Field, 2009, p.628). The Turkish version of SAS-A is a self-report scale with 18 items anchored with five Likert type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always) covering three dimensions: fear of negative evaluation (e.g., I worry about what others say about me), social avoidance and distress-new (e.g., I get nervous when I meet new people), social avoidance and distress-general (e.g., I feel shy even with peers I know very well).

### 2.4 Procedure

Self-reported measures from the participants were collected by the researchers using a face to face approach before the lessons in selected classes after making an appointment with the students and the teachers who had the course.

The participants were informed about the study and completed all scales within 10-15 minutes. Informed consent had been obtained from all participants before any assessments were carried out.

2.5 Data Analyses

Firstly, the reliability of the data collection tool for the study group was tested, and Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.83 for the total scale. Besides, fit indicators were assessed. The distribution of the data was checked and it was determined that the data had a normal distribution. Therefore, Independent Sample t-test and One-way ANOVA tests with a 95% confidence interval were used to determine the significant differences in the study.

3. Results

**Table 2.** The Social Anxiety of the Participants According to Sport Type

Social anxiety	Sport type	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t	p
Fear of negative evaluation	Individual Sports	64	16.82	5.43	-.55	.578
	Team Sports	136	17.27	5.13		
Social avoidance and distress-general	Individual Sports	64	10.96	3.87	-1.33	.185
	Team Sports	136	11.77	4.27		
Social avoidance and distress-new	Individual Sports	64	14.87	4.12	.00	1.00
	Team Sports	136	14.87	4.17		

Discription: According to independent samples t-test results, there were not any significant differences in the variable social anxiety according to the type of sport in any dimension ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 3.** The Social Anxiety of Participants According to Weekly Duration/Day of Doing

			N	Mean	Std. Dev	F	p
Individual Sports Df = 2-63	Fear of negative evaluation	1-2 days	27	16.77	5.87	.01	.986
		3-4 days	18	16.72	5.15		
		5 ≥ days	19	17.00	5.31		
		Total	64	16.82	5.43		
	Social avoidance and distress-general	1-2 days	27	10.62	3.78	.59	.554
		3-4 days	18	10.61	4.52		
		5 ≥ days	19	11.78	3.40		
		Total	64	10.96	3.87		
	Social avoidance and distress-new	1-2 days	27	15.55	4.47	1.44	.243
		3-4 days	18	13.50	3.68		
		5 ≥ days	19	15.21	3.89		
		Total	64	14.87	4.12		
Team Sports Df = 2-135	Fear of negative evaluation	1-2 days	59	17.1	5.86	.205	.815
		3-4 days	67	17.53	4.50		
		5 ≥ days	10	16.6	4.85		
		Total	136	17.27	5.13		
	Social avoidance and distress-general	1-2 days	59	12.06	4.78	.655	.521
		3-4 days	67	11.73	3.80		
		5 ≥ days	10	10.4	4.27		
		Total	136	11.77	4.27		
	Social avoidance and distress-new	1-2 days	59	14.59	4.55	.265	.767
		3-4 days	67	15.04	3.97		
		5 ≥ days	10	14.4	3.37		
		Total	136	14.87	4.17		

Discription: According to the One Way ANOVA test result, there were not any significant differences in the variable social anxiety of individuals according to weekly duration/day of doing sports ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 4.** The Social Anxiety of Participants According to Aim for Doing Sports

		The aim of doing sports	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Individual Sports	Fear of negative evaluation	Amateur as a hobby	38	16.71	5.4	-.20	.837
		Professional for money	26	17.	5.57		
	Social avoidance and distress-general	Amateur as a hobby	38	10.15	3.68	-2.05	<b>.045</b>
		Professional for money	26	12.15	3.91		
	Social avoidance and distress-new	Amateur as a hobby	38	13.94	3.44	-2.11	<b>.04</b>
		Professional for money	26	16.23	4.71		
Team Sports	Fear of negative evaluation	Amateur as a hobby	84	17.61	5.19	.98	.325
		Professional for money	52	16.73	5.02		
	Social avoidance and distress-general	Amateur as a hobby	84	12.1	4.31	1.14	.255
		Professional for money	52	11.25	4.2		
	Social avoidance and distress-new	Amateur as a hobby	84	15.36	3.76	1.67	.097
		Professional for money	52	14.07	4.7		

Discription: According to independent samples t-test result there was a significant difference in the variable social anxiety in the social avoidance and distress-general dimension ( $t_{.05} = -2.05$ ;  $p < .05$ ) for professional individual sports participants scoring higher ( $12.15 \pm 3.91$ ) than amateur participants ( $10.15 \pm 3.68$ ) and in the social avoidance and distress-new dimension ( $t_{.05} = -2.11$ ;  $p < .05$ ) for professional individual sports participants scoring higher ( $16.23 \pm 4.71$ ) than amateur participants ( $13.94 \pm 3.44$ ).

**Table 5.** The Social Anxiety of Participants According to Gender

		Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t	p
Individual Sports	Fear of negative evaluation	Male	29	18.44	5.67	2.2	<b>.031</b>
		Female	35	15.48	4.9		
	Social avoidance and distress-general	Male	29	11.65	3.69	1.3	.197
		Female	35	10.4	3.98		
	Social avoidance and distress-new	Male	29	15.44	3.9	1.02	.311
		Female	35	14.4	4.29		
Team Sports	Fear of negative evaluation	Male	71	17.36	5.32	.2	.837
		Female	65	17.18	4.94		
	Social avoidance and distress-general	Male	71	11.56	4.62	-.61	.537
		Female	65	12.01	3.89		
	Social avoidance and distress-new	Male	71	15.01	4.29	.4	.686
		Female	65	14.72	4.07		

Discription: According to independent samples t-test results, there was a significant difference in the variable social anxiety in the fear for negative evaluation dimension ( $t_{.05} = 2.20$ ;  $p < .05$ ) for male individual sports participants scoring higher ( $18.44 \pm 5.67$ ) than female participants ( $15.48 \pm 4.9$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the perceived social anxiety of high school students who engage in individual

or team sports. According to analyze results, although social anxiety levels of the participants found to be moderate, the participants had a higher score in the “fear of negative evaluation” sub-dimension. When we examine the literature, we can see studies with similar results. For example, in his study, Göktürk (2011) implied that high school students' social anxiety levels as moderate. Besides, analyze results showed that the team sport participants perceived more social anxiety in the “fear of negative evaluation” and “social avoidance and distress-general” sub-dimensions; however, these results found to be insignificant.

When we examine the analyzed results showed in Table 3 we can see that all the participants had the lowest points in “social avoidance and distress-new” sub-dimension, than “social avoidance and distress-general” sub-dimension, and had the highest points in “fear of negative evaluation” sub-dimension. Because these results found insignificant, we can say that the weekly duration/day of doing sports does not make any significant change in the variable social anxiety. However, according to Brewer, Diehl, Cornelius, Joshua, and Van Raalte (2004) individuals with high social anxiety have a greater tendency to use protective self-presentation behaviors in exercises, such as reducing exercise intentions and durations. Also, studies showed that doing sports has a positive effect on social anxiety (e.g., Bayraktar, Tozoğlu, and Acar, 2014; Çağlayan Tunç, 2015). So, our finding differs from the mentioned studies' results.

In the present study, according to analyze results, we found significant differences in individual sports participants' perceived social anxiety in the "social avoidance and distress-general and new” sub-dimensions. These differences were in favor of amateur participants. This result maybe because of the characteristics of professional sports. Because professional sports need much more effort, pieces of training and these efforts can cause pressure and anxiety.

Lastly, analyze results showed that male individual sports participants had a significantly higher fear of negative evaluation than females. When we examine the literature, we can see studies with different or parallel results. For example, in their study, Bayraktar et al. (2014) reported lower anxiety for males. However, according to Ridgers, Fazey and Fairclough (2007), females had higher FNE but lower perceptions of athletic competence than did males. On the contrary, to individual sports participants, there were not any gender-based significant differences for team sports participants. However, in their study, Kristjánsdóttir, Erlingsdóttir, Sveinsson and Saavedra (2018) reported lower anxiety for men than women.

## 5. Limitations and Conclusion

Present study revealed some interesting results, but has a number of limitations. The first is the sample size. Although the sample size was sufficient for analyses, it is recognized that larger numbers would enhance statistical power. Second the current study was cross-sectional and in some occasions this can cause restriction of descriptive findings. So, future studies should focus on the current results with larger samples and different study designs to establish cause and effect.

In conclusion, it is stated in the literature that social anxiety usually begins during adolescence (Akdemir and Cinemre, 1996) and is widespread among adolescents (Güleç and Köroğlu, 1997). Also, a significant body of research over the past 20 years reported correlations between regular sport/exercise and self-esteem, social comparison, self-confidence, stress, and anxiety (Er, Çamlıyer, Çamlıyer, Çobanoğlu, and Er, 2009; Ekinci, Özdilek, Deryahanoğlu, and Üstün, 2014). Besides, according to Zorba (2012, p.21), doing regular sport/exercise helps individuals to increase their self-confidence and reduce anxiety. So, we think that our study will contribute to similar studies aimed at explaining the gains of sports to individuals.

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