

# An investigation on levels of the empathic tendencies of elite university tennis players in terms of different variables

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## Abstract

The research consists of a screening model aimed at evaluating the Empathic Tendency Levels of elite university tennis players in terms of different variables. The research sample comprises 151 athletes, 68 females and 83 males, who had voluntarily responded to the survey out of 416 athletes participating to the Universities Tennis Tournament, organized by Turkish University Sports Federation (TÜSF). The Scale of Empathic Tendency (SET), developed by Dökmen, was used as the data collection tool. The Scale had been developed with a view to measure the individual potential to develop empathy in daily life. The mean and standard deviation was computed to statistically analyze the data. The t-test and Kruskal-Wallis test for non-parametric groups were employed, and outcomes were presented in tables. The statistical significance level was selected as 0.05. As a result, no significant correlation was found between the SET scores of athletes and the age/gender variables. Nevertheless, the girls' score was higher than the boys'. Moreover, the perceived family attitude and the educational level of mothers were found to be significantly correlated with the SET scores.

**Keywords:** Tennis, empathic tendency, athlete.

## Üst düzey üniversiteli tenisçilerin empatik eğilim düzeylerinin farklı değişkenler bakımından incelenmesi

### Özet

Araştırma Türkiye'deki üst düzey üniversiteli tenisçilerin Empatik Eğilim Düzeylerinin çeşitli değişkenler açısından incelenmesini amaçlayan tarama modeli bir çalışmadır. Araştırmanın örneklem grubunu 2010 yılında Antalya da TÜSF tarafından düzenlenen Üniversitelerarası Tenis Müsabakalarına katılan 416 sporcudan tesadüfi olarak seçilen ve gönüllülük esası ile ankete katılan 68 bayan, 83 erkek olmak üzere toplam üzere 151 sporcu oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak Dökmen tarafından geliştirilen "Empatik Eğilim Ölçeği (EEÖ)" kullanılmıştır. Empatik Eğilim Ölçeği (EEÖ), bireylerin günlük yaşamdaki empati kurma potansiyellerini ölçmek amacıyla geliştirilmiştir. Araştırmada elde edilen verilerin istatistiksel analizleri için aritmetik ortalama, standart sapmalar alınmıştır. t- testi, parametrik olmayan gruplarda Kruskal Wallis testi kullanılmış ve tablolar halinde sunulmuştur. İstatistiksel anlamlılık için ise .05 anlamlılık düzeyi seçilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, sporcuların EEÖ puanları ile yaş ve cinsiyet değişkeni arasında anlamlı ilişki tespit edilememiş bununla beraber kızların puanları erkeklerden yüksek çıkmıştır. Ayrıca algılanan aile tutumu ve anne eğitim düzeyi değişkenleri ile EEÖ puanları arasında anlamlı ilişki tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tenis, empatik eğilim, sporcu.

## INTRODUCTION

It is almost impossible to think of a world without communication (5). Establishing communication is an indispensable activity of the people in their daily, private, social, and organizational lives.

Man is a social being, who makes progress in

his/her relations with his/her environment. It is important in the creation of a democratic society to have the individuals learn to pay respect to, and be tolerant of other individuals' views, opinions in their daily lives. For this purpose, the newly developed communication skills will not only bring richness and prestige in both individual, and social lives, they will also maintain the establishment of

sound interpersonal relations (12).

The individual, who ought to establish relations with others in every period of his life, requires understanding of not only him/herself, but also that of the others, acknowledging their opinions (43), and possessing the essential communicative skills for sound communications as well, in order to become successful in his/her relations. In the conducted researches, it has been ascertained that, the skills of being respectful to others, and acting transparently, concretely, and emphatic are critical for sound interpersonal relations. In terms of interpersonal relations, empathic skill is particularly regarded as one of the integral parts of the overall communication skill (6,13,38).

Nowadays, empathy is regarded among the fundamental elements, which escalate the quality of interpersonal communication. Empathy is the skill, by which the person understands the behaviors and feelings of the other person precisely by way of making use of his/her imagination (39).

The term empathy was used firstly by Lipps. Lipps explained the process with the term as "*einfihlung*", throughout which the person gets to know him/herself by way of reflecting him/herself to an object – i.e. a work of art – before him/her, feeling him/herself within it, and thereby understanding him/herself by way of absorbing the aforesaid object. Having translated the term "*einfihlung*" into English as "*empathy*" in the year of 1909 by making use of the Ancient Greek term of "*empathia*", Titchener thereby further developed the term in question, and defined empathy as the person's fictional awareness of his/her feelings (15).

In general sense of the word, empathy is the process, throughout which a person sees the things from the point of view of the person before him/her, by way of putting him/herself in the place of the aforesaid person, thereby perceives, and feels the emotions and thoughts of the said person accurately, and transmits this situation to the said person before him/her (31). This is consequently both a cognitive, and a sensual process, and occurs in a way that the person imagines him/herself in the place of the person before him/her, and thereby recollects his/her similar experiences (17).

Interpersonal empathy takes an important place in not only the social life, but also in the sporting environment (44). Sport is a social fact, which attains participation and spectators worldwide from all

ranges of age and occupation (29). Empathy affects the level of the communication skills of the sportspersons, satisfaction of the trainers and spectators, and professional sports lives as well (44). Today, the successes being achieved internationally tend to carry an important value on the daily lives, and morale levels of the society (1). The sensation it generates in the people, and the discharging feature thereof place sports in a privileged position. The conducted researches have ascertained that, individuals doing sports are prone to have higher levels of emphatic skills and tendencies (40,41,44).

Many people prefer to express their feelings in ways other than expressing them verbally. In order to understand what others feel, it is essential to unravel these non-verbal expressions, stance, tone of voice, and many more things in addition thereto (18). Such a perception comes into prominence in the field of sports.

Hardworking of sportspersons, either individually, or as a team, their possession of very good condition is by no means enough for them to become successful. It may be said that, the sportspersons who may make the right decisions depending on the circumstances, and take them within the shortest time, those who may predict the next move of either their team members, or that of their opponents, or those who may empathize with the situation of the other sportsperson, may have the advantage to succeed sooner than others in the sports. They should therefore adjust their positions, and their moves in the field, in the salon, in the ring, and even in the court as per those of both their team members, and those of their opponents, and should empathize with both their team members and with their opponents as well.

It has been conceived that, it would come into prominence to study on the empathic tendencies of senior tennis player under the light of the aforementioned knowledge.

## MATERIAL & METHOD

### Research Model

The research in question is a study with screening model, which intends to examine the Empathic Tendency Levels of the senior tennis players in Turkey from the point of various variables.

## Population and Sample

Sample group of the research is composed of a total of 151 sportspersons (68 of whom are female, and 83 of whom are male), who have been chosen randomly, and partaken in the questionnaire on a volunteer basis among the 416 sportspersons, who attended in the Intervarsity Tennis Competitions, which were organized by TÜSF (Turkish Federation of University Sports) in Antalya in the year 2010.

## Data Collection Tools

“Empathic Tendency Scale (EEÖ)”, having been developed by Dökmen (1988), was used as the data collection tool of the research (16). Empathic Tendency Scale (EEÖ) has been developed with the intent of measuring the individuals’ potential to develop empathy in their daily lives. As being a Likert-type scale, it is composed of 20 questions, which are given points from 1 to 5 per each. While summing up the points, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> questions are being summed up in a reverse order. The lowest score in the scale is 20, and the highest is 100. The overall point represents the empathic tendency point of each participant. While the higher the point means the higher the empathic tendency is, the lower the point means the lower the empathic tendency is. Having EEÖ applied by Dökmen (16) to a group of 70 students by way of test-retest method, reliability of the scale of which was attained upon being applied in intervals of three weeks. Reliability of the scale, upon the conducted analysis, was found as .82. Half-life reliability of the scale was found as .86 from the points being gained by the participants from the odd and even articles of the scale. Reliability study of EEÖ was again performed by Dökmen (16). Validity of the similar scales, attained by having a group of 24 persons undergo EEÖ, and the “Comprehension of Feelings” section of Edwards Personal Preference Inventory, was found as .68.

## Data Analysis

Arithmetic means and standard deviations were taken for the statistical analyses of the data obtained throughout the research. Besides, while t-test was applied in order to detect the relation between such variables as the gender, school type of the sportspersons, who participated in the research, and the empathic tendency points thereof, Kruskal Wallis test was applied to the non-parametric groups in order to detect the relation between such variables as the age, sports year, education level of

mother and father, and the empathic tendency points, and they were presented in tabulated form. Significance level of 0.05 was chosen for statistical significance.

## RESULTS

Taking a look at table 1, it is seen that while 68 (45%) of the undergraduate senior tennis players are female, 83 (55%) thereof are male, while 34 (22.5%) of the same are within the age range of 17-20, 87 (57.6%) thereof are within the age range of 21-24, and 30 (19.3%) thereof are within the age range of 25-28. It may also be seen from the table that, while the mothers-fathers of 62 (41.1%) of the tennis players adopted Liberal attitudes while bringing up their children, those of 21 (13.9%) adopted Authoritarian attitudes, and the mothers-fathers of 68 (45%) of the tennis players adopted Democratic attitudes while bringing up their children. While the mothers of 50 (33.1%) of the group are primary education graduates, those of 45 (29.8%) are high-school graduates, and the mothers of 56 (37.1%) were university graduates, the fathers of 40 (26.5%) of the group are primary education graduates, those of 42 (27.8%) are high-school graduates, and the fathers of 69 (45.7%) were university graduates.

**Table 1.** Frequency and percentage distributions regarding the demographical variables of the research group.

Variables		f	%
Gender	Female	68	45,0
	Male	83	55,0
	Total	151	100
Age	17-20	34	22,5
	21-24	87	57,6
	25-28	30	19,9
	Total	151	100
Family Attitudes	Liberal	62	41,1
	Authoritarian	21	13,9
	Democratic	68	45
	Total	151	100
Mother's Education	Primary School	50	33,1
	High School	45	29,8
	University	56	37,1
	Total	151	100
Father's Education	Primary School	40	26,5
	High School	42	27,8
	University	69	45,7
	Total	151	100

As being understood from the data being obtained from table 2, sportspersons’ empathic tendency points do not reveal any significant difference according to the gender variable [ $t_{(151)} = .279$ ;  $p < .05$ ].

As being understood from the data being obtained from table 3, sportspersons' empathic tendency points do not reveal any significant difference according to the age variable [ $t_{(151)} = .553$ ;  $p < .05$ ].

As being understood from the data being obtained from table 4, sportspersons' empathic tendency points do reveal a significant difference according to the parents' household management variable [ $t_{(151)} = 4.050$ ;  $p < .05$ ]. It has been ascertained that the points (mean= 68.52) of the children of those who had adopted authoritarian attitude are lower than those (mean=73.97) of the children of those who had adopted democratic attitude.

As being understood from the data being obtained from table 5, sportspersons' empathic tendency points do reveal a significant difference according to the mothers' education level variable [ $t_{(151)} = 3.410$ ;  $p < .05$ ]. It has been ascertained that the points (mean= 74.38) of the children of the mothers who are university graduates are higher than those

(mean=69.53) of the children of the mothers who are primary education graduates.

As being understood from the data being obtained from table 5, sportspersons' empathic tendency points do not reveal a significant difference according to the fathers' education level variable [ $t_{(151)} = .079$ ;  $p < .05$ ].

**Table 2.** Results of the t-test regarding the empathic tendency levels of the research group according to the gender variable.

Variables	n	Mean	sd	t	P
Female	68	72,86	8,85	,275	,780
Male	83	71,03	10,22		

### DISCUSSION

Today, it is a known fact that, the empathic skills of the individuals facilitate human relations, and that they function critically in making people understand each other much better. Upon examining the numerous works conducted on empathic skills, senior tennis players' empathic tendencies are discussed as follows.

**Table 3.** Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test regarding the Empathic Tendency Level Differences of the Research Group according to the Age Variable.

Variables	n	Mean	SD	Variance Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	p	Differences	
Age	18-21	34	72,76	7,92	Intergroup	102,56	2	51,28	,553	,577	-
	22-25	87	70,93	10,15	In-group	13732,67	148	92,78			
	26*	30	72,36	9,82	Total	13835,23	150				

**Table 4.** Results of the Anova test regarding the empathic tendency level differences of the research group according to the family attitude variable.

Variables	n	Mean	SD	Variance Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	p	Differences	
Family Attitudes	Liberal	62	70,11	9,46	Inter Group	717,84	2	358,92	4,050	,019	2-3
	Authoritarian	21	68,52	9,66	In-Group	13117,38	148	88,63			
	Democratic	68	73,97	9,29	Total	13835,23	150				

**Table 5.** Results of the Anova test regarding the empathic tendency level differences of the research group according to the parents' education level variable.

Variables	n	Mean	SD	Variance Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	p	Differences	
Mother's Education	Primary School	50	69,53	9,29	Inter group	609,39	2	304,69	3,410	,036	1-4
	High School	45	70,85	8,28	In-Group	13225,83	148	89,36			
	University	56	74,38	10,73	Total	13835,23	151				
Father's Education	Primary School	40	72,10	8,73	Inter Group	14,70	2	7,35	,079	,924	-
	High School	42	71,26	9,15	In-Group	13820,53	148	93,38			
	University	69	71,57	10,43	Total	13835,23	150				

As being seen in table 2, EEÖ point averages of the senior female tennis players are higher than those of the male players, however it has further been seen that the said difference between the points do not matter statistically. From the studies conducted by Köksal (23), Genç & Kalafat (22) among different groups, no relevance has been sorted out between the empathic tendency and gender. The outcomes of the research, which reveal that the empathic skills of female sportspersons are higher than those of male sportspersons, resemble the studies having been conducted by Eisenberg & Lenon (19), McDevitt et al. (26), Mills & Grusec (27), Krein (24), Schireman & Gundy (32), Myyry & Helkama (28), Başbuğ (8), Yiğiter et al. (42), and Solak (33). It may be said that, these results have been attained under the impact of the traditional distribution of duties in the society, which drives girls to act calmer, moderate, as well as thoughtful and critical before the occurrences, while boys are driven by the same to play a more aggressive and inquiring role.

It is discerned from the statistical data in Table 3 that, there is no significant relation between the ages of the sportspersons and EEÖ points thereof. In their studies conducted with different groups, Aydın (4), Uygun (36), Genç & Kalafat (22), Çelik & Çağdaş (10) could not have detected any relation between the subjects' Empathic Tendency Levels and their ages. These findings show parallelism with those of the research. However some literatures point to a relation between Empathic Tendency and age. The reason why no significant relation has been found between empathic tendency and age in this study may be attributed to the fact that, empathic tendencies of all the subjects in the workgroup in terms of their ages, and that they are experienced senior tennis players.

Taking a look at table 4, a significant relation is seen between the perceived behavioral attitudes of the families of the sportspersons and EEÖ points. It has been discerned that the EEÖ points (mean=73.97) of the children of the families, having adopted a democratic attitude are higher than those (mean=68.52) of the children of the families, having adopted an authoritarian attitude. It may be said according to the attained result that, the families' democratic attitudes have positive effects on their children's empathic tendencies. Bar-Tal et al., (7); Krevans & Gibbs, (25), Alkaya (2), Çetin (11), in the studies they conducted with different groups, have

come to the conclusion that, while the parents' democratic behaviors towards their children positively affect the children's empathy levels, on the other hand, the oppressive, retributive, and authoritarian behaviors affect the children's empathy levels negatively.

As being the core unit of the society, family has a critical place in one's life. Family is the most ingenuous environment, in which a person may receive the love, compassion, close interest, and care necessary for his/her both physical and mental health. Family is the initial environment, in which the individual achieves satisfaction, performs his/her functions effectively, and where he/she is brought up as socially beneficial (9). Depending on the presence of a cordial and confident affiliation between the mother-father and the child, sensitivity of the family may arouse empathic concern (37). Family sincerity is generally seen as an aspect of mother-father's communication towards their child (14). A positive relation has been found out between the supportive and sincere attitudes of the families and the empathy of their children.

Among the research findings, while a significant relation is further discerned between the mother's education status variable and EEÖ points, however the same relation is not in question with the father's education status variable. It is seen among the outcomes that, the mother's education status and EEÖ points rise in the same direction, in other words, the higher the education level is, the higher the empathic tendency arises. While it has been discerned from the studies of Çetin (11), and Ekici (20) with different groups that, the mother's education status elevates the empathic tendency, Genç & Kalafat (22), and Tazegül et al. (34) could not have traced the effect of father's education status on the empathic tendency in the studies they conducted. Empathy is a person understands of another person by way of putting him/herself in place of the other person. In order to bring higher levels of empathic skills in a person, the said person should have initially been educated in his/her family. Empathic attitudes from mothers-fathers also improve their children's skill to develop empathy.

In conclusion, it may be put forth that, while there is no significant relation between the sportspersons' empathic tendencies and the gender, age, and father's education status variables, significant relations do exist between them and the

age, perceived family attitude, and mother's education status variables.

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