

Original Research

Prosocial and antisocial behaviors in Turkish female and male football players

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Submitted: 25 April 2021 Accepted: 27 May 2021 Available online: 28 June 2021 Published: 8 February 2022

Abstract

Background and objective: Women have increasingly taken more part in a rather male-dominated sport in recent years: football, so our study's main focus is exploring the acts and behaviors of the female athletes during a football match. The study analyzes the sex-related differences in prosocial and antisocial behaviors between male and female athletes. **Materials and methods:** A total of 837 players, recruited from various leagues in Turkey, participated in the study. Participants were active female (n = 432) and male (n = 405) football players. The informed consent form and Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport Scale (PABSS) were utilized as data collection tools. **Results:** Female football players displayed less prosocial and more antisocial behaviors compared to male football players. Among all the league statuses, both female and male players exhibited the highest prosocial and the lowest antisocial behaviors in the top league status. Additionally, there were statistically significant differences concerning the age variable ($p < 0.05$). **Conclusions:** Our study findings indicate that male football players engaged in more prosocial behaviors toward both their teammates and opponents than female football players; moreover, male players engaged in less antisocial behaviors in general. Players reported higher prosocial and lower antisocial behavior scores as league status increased. Lastly, higher prosocial behavior scores were obtained with increasing age.

Keywords: Women's football; Prosocial behavior; Antisocial behavior

1. Introduction

Football is the most popular sport worldwide across both sexes and all age groups regarding its performers and spectators; therefore, it assumes a prevailing position among all other branches [1]. Besides being an industry, football echoes with millions of people worldwide and has been used to provide an insight into the country's cultural value and sense of honor [2]. In a sports context, numerous factors such as competition, desire to win and succeed, and earning respect encourage football players to engage in moral behaviors [3]. Although most of the past studies in this field concentrated only on football-specific components such as physical, physiological, and technical-tactical performances, an increasing number of recent studies have opted to investigate the players' moral behaviors considering the large spectator and athlete populations [4–6]. In particular, the prosocial and antisocial behaviors of the athletes have been the main focus of the researchers.

The terms prosocial and antisocial behavior have, respectively, indicated the proactive and inhibitive aspects of morality in the sport psychology field [7,8]. Prosocial behavior refers to the voluntary behavior of helping or benefiting others, such as helping an opponent off the floor or congratulating other players [9]. On the other hand, antisocial behavior refers to the voluntary behavior of harming

or disadvantaging others, such as trying to injure an opponent or diving to fool the referee [7,8]. In this context, high levels of morality are demonstrated when an individual engages in prosocial behavior and abstains from engaging in antisocial behavior [10].

From a women's point of view, football has always been male-dominated, and only stereotypical beliefs and characteristics of masculine culture have ever had the chance to be manifested in this field. In the past, football built up a cultural domain that enabled men to construct hegemonic masculinity and reflect different masculinities; hence, women were labeled as 'the other' and excluded from the football field [11]. However, social movements in the 1970s started a new era in women's lives. They made them more visible in sports thanks to certain turning points, such as higher prevalence of sports via sports media, political and intellectual achievements of feminism, legal reforms in women's education and business life, and women's gaining power to overcome social barriers [12]. In addition to these improvements, sports became more widespread, and it was considered one of the criteria of progress in developed countries; many social norms began to change. Therefore, football has evolved from being a male-dominated activity into an organized sport that provides an opportunity for women to prove their existence in



social and sports contexts.

Accordingly, researchers have shown great interest in athletes' behaviors and investigated sex differences through the concepts of moral reasoning, moral functioning indicators, norms of injurious acts, and unsportsmanlike conduct [13–16]. Certain studies suggested that female and male athletes displayed different behaviors during competition [17,18]. For instance, Kavussanu and Ring [17] reported that female athletes engaged in less antisocial behaviors than males. Accordingly, in another study, females exhibited less antisocial behaviors than male athletes [19]. On the other hand, in a similar study by Kavussanu *et al.* [4], the authors examined the prosocial/antisocial behaviors of female and male football players, and the results showed no statistically significant difference between females and males concerning sex; furthermore, male players engaged in more antisocial behaviors than female players. Research findings differ from each other in this regard. In addition to the literature findings above, some studies examined prosocial and antisocial behaviors concerning league status and age. Bruner *et al.* [20] reported that the frequency of engaging in antisocial behaviors decreased as league status increased.

Moreover, several researchers indicated that athletes tended to engage in less antisocial behaviors in older age groups [7,21]. However, only a few studies have investigated female athletes' moral behaviors toward their teammates and opponents during a football match. Surprisingly, there is no study in the Turkish context comparing female and male football players' prosocial/antisocial behaviors during a football match. Thus, our study focuses on exploring female football players' behaviors and acts during a football match. In this sense, this study analyzes the sex differences in prosocial and antisocial behaviors between female and male football players. Therefore, we hypothesized that: (a) females would engage in more prosocial and less antisocial behaviors than males; (b) the frequency of prosocial behavior would increase as the league status increased; (c) the frequency of prosocial behavior would increase as the age increased.

2. Methods

2.1 Research group

Forty-six football teams, recruited from various leagues in Turkey, participated in the study. Participants were active female ($n = 432$) and male ($n = 405$) competitive football players and, at the time of data collection, had been playing competitive football regularly for at least three years. A total of 837 players, professional and semi-professional (male amateur league), ranging from 17 to 29+ years of age, were enrolled in the study (Table 1). A cross-sectional survey was used to measure prosocial and antisocial behaviors.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for participants ($n = 837$).

	f	%
Sex		
Female	432	51.6
Male	405	48.4
Age (Years)		
17–19	371	44.3
20–22	146	17.4
23–25	143	17.1
26–28	86	10.3
29+	91	10.9
League status		
Female first league	149	17.8
Female second league	82	9.8
Female third league	201	24.0
Male first league	45	5.4
Male second league	50	6.0
Male third league	117	14.0
Male amateur league	193	23.1

2.2 Data collection tools

Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport Scale (PABSS): The Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport Scale (PABSS), developed by Kavussanu and Boardley [4] and adapted into Turkish by Balçıklanli [22], was utilized as a data collection tool in this study. The PABSS is a 5-point-Likert scale consisting of 20 items that represent 4 sub-dimensions assessing four types of behavior: prosocial behavior toward teammates, prosocial behavior toward opponents, antisocial behavior toward teammates, and antisocial behavior toward opponents. While 7 of the items are related to prosocial behavior, 13 items are related to antisocial behavior. The lowest and highest scores that can be obtained from the scale are 20 and 100, respectively. Turkish version of PABSS's Cronbach's alpha values are as follows: 0.70 for prosocial behavior toward teammates, 0.72 for prosocial behavior toward opponents, 0.72 for antisocial behavior toward teammates, and 0.75 for antisocial behavior toward opponents [14]. The Cronbach's alpha values of our study are 0.74 for prosocial behavior toward teammates, 0.71 for prosocial behavior toward opponents, 0.70 for antisocial behavior toward teammates, and 0.68 for antisocial behavior toward opponents.

2.3 Procedure

Following the approval of the university's ethics committee, permission to conduct the study was obtained from all football clubs. Coaches of the clubs were contacted by telephone and asked about their interest in study participation. All of the coaches showed interest and were informed about the details and general purpose of the study. Participants signed an informed consent form with questions about their sex, age, and league status before completing

the questionnaire. Questionnaires were administered to the players in the clubs' facilities before training during the regular season. It was indicated to the players that participation in this study was voluntary, and they were free to quit at any time. Participants were primarily informed that the survey aimed to measure prosocial and antisocial behaviors in sports, and then players were briefed on the general purpose of the study & the questionnaire and how to fill out the questionnaire forms. Players were asked to answer questions honestly and individually in a secluded place by reflecting on their behaviors during a match. It was also explained that all the data obtained from the survey would be kept confidential and only used for study purposes. Upon completion, questionnaire forms were collected by the researcher and used for the data set.

2.4 Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 24.0 (SPSS, Inc. Chicago, IL, USA). The data were analyzed by the Shapiro-Wilk Normality test ($p > 0.05$) to check if the error terms showed normal distribution. While comparing the obtained scores, the Independent Samples t -test was utilized for paired comparisons, and One-way ANOVA and Tukey HSD tests were utilized for multiple comparisons. The research data obtained were expressed as the mean and standard deviation (Mean \pm SD), statistical significance was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

Players' subdimension scores concerning sex variables are presented in Fig. 1. Male players displayed more prosocial behaviors in PTM and PO subdimension compared to female players. On the other hand, male players reported lower scores in the ATM subdimension than female players, which reached statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). No statistically significant difference was found in the AO subdimension concerning the sex variable ($p > 0.05$). These results indicate that male players engaged in more prosocial behaviors toward their teammates and opponents than female players and displayed less antisocial behaviors toward their teammates. Although male players had lower scores in the AO subdimension, there was no statistically significant difference.

Players' subdimension scores concerning league status are presented in Fig. 2. Regarding prosocial behaviors, the highest scores in the PTM subdimension were observed in MFL, whereas the lowest scores existed in FSL; moreover, scale scores obtained from the PO subdimension were similar in all groups, but the lowest scores were found in FSL ($p < 0.01$). Additionally, the highest scores in ATM and AO subdimensions were detected in FSL, while the lowest scores were reported in MFL ($p < 0.01$). These results show that both female and male players reported higher scores of prosocial behavior in the highest league status, whereas the highest scores of antisocial behavior ex-

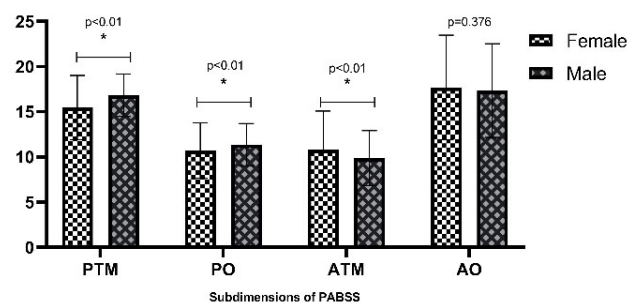


Fig. 1. Comparisons of PABSS' subdimensions between female and male football players. Values are expressed as a mean and standard deviation; $*p < 0.01$. p values, 95% confidence interval; PTM, Prosocial teammate; PO, Prosocial opponent; ATM, Antisocial teammate; AO, Antisocial opponent.

isted in FSL and MAL. Likewise, the lowest scores of antisocial behavior were observed in the highest league status.

Players' subdimension scores concerning age groups are presented in Fig. 3. The lowest PTM and PO subdimension scores were found in the 17–19 age group, and the highest scores for PTM were observed in the 26–28 age group, whereas the 29+ age group reported the highest scores for PO ($p < 0.01$). Regarding antisocial behaviors, the highest scores for ATM and AO were detected in 26–28 and 23–25 age groups, while the lowest scores for ATM and AO were observed in 17–19 and 29+ age groups, respectively ($p < 0.01$). These results demonstrate that higher average scores for prosocial behaviors were reported as the age increased; however, the highest scores for antisocial behaviors were found in 23–25 and 26–28 age groups.

4. Discussion

This study examined such behavioral differences between male and female football players by investigating the sex-related differences in prosocial and antisocial behaviors and concluded some remarkable results. The most significant and surprising of them was that male athletes engaged in more prosocial behaviors toward their teammates and opponents than female athletes. Additionally, antisocial behavior scores are also lower in male players than in female players. These findings do not support our initial hypothesis. In a similar study by Kavussanu *et al.* [4] the authors examined the prosocial/antisocial behaviors of female and male football players. The results showed no statistically significant difference between females and males concerning sex; furthermore, male players engaged in more antisocial behaviors than female players. The authors' interpretation of these results was that antisocial behaviors were very common in football, males' involvement and football experiences were far more than females, and therefore; male players could consider antisocial behaviors as acceptable and could tend to engage in antisocial behaviors more than female players. These conclusions are inconsistent with our

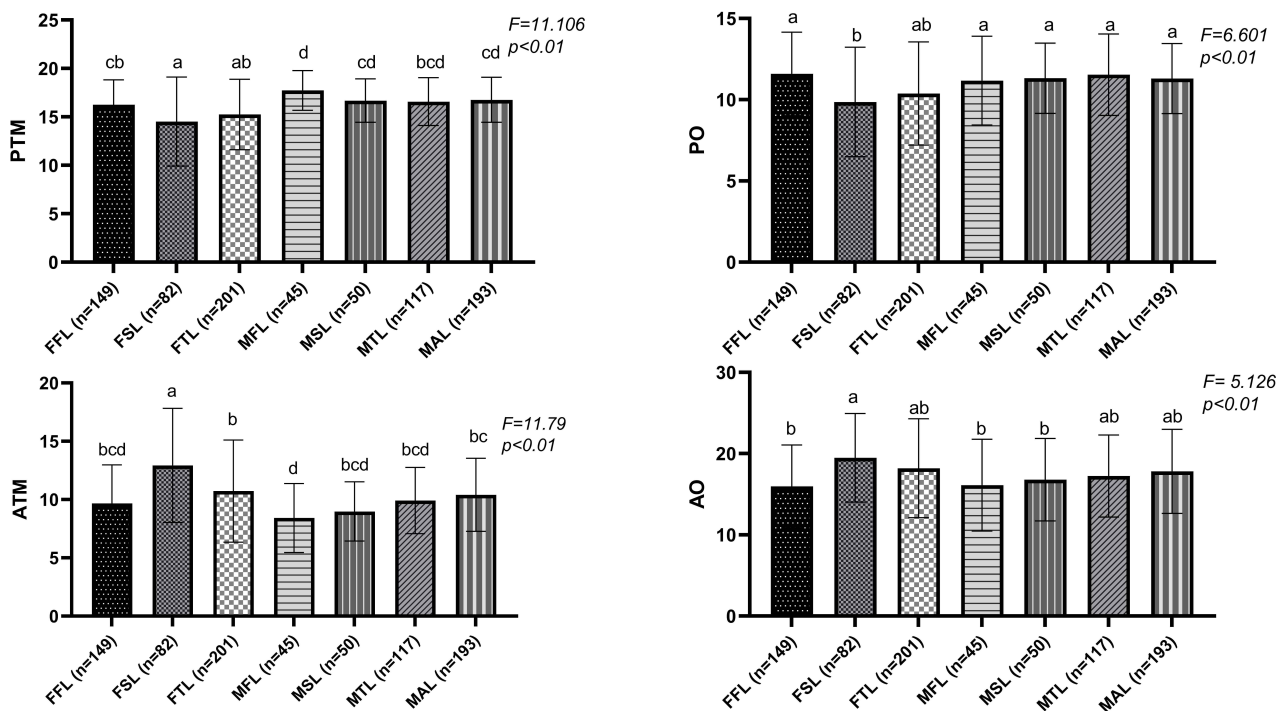


Fig. 2. Comparisons of PABSS' subdimensions according to female and male football players' league status. Values are expressed as a mean and standard deviation; F results of One-Way ANOVA; abcd Results of Tukey HSD; $p < 0.01$. p values, 95% confidence interval; PTM, Prosocial teammate; PO, Prosocial opponent; ATM, Antisocial teammate; AO, Antisocial opponent; FFL, Female first league; FSL, Female second league; FTL, Female third league; MFL, Male first league; MSL, Male second league; MTL, Male third league; MAL, Male amateur league.

study findings. As previously mentioned, women's football has had growing popularity in recent years, and the nature of the sport has evolved at certain points for the female athletes, meaning more competitive behavior, more 'win at all costs' approach, and more tendency to regard football as a job, which may have led female players to change their behaviors and engage in more antisocial acts during the match. Besides, this inconsistency may have resulted from socio-cultural differences. In support of this reason, there are some studies in the literature suggesting that prosocial and antisocial behaviors differ in female and male athletes due to socio-cultural factors [23,24]. When examining this finding concerning the Turkish context, it should be considered that women's football has still not been embraced by society. Lack of widespread media coverage, a limited number of spectators, and insufficient financial resources are all the reflections of disapproval. Therefore, we think that female athletes may have engaged in more unsportsmanlike conduct to establish themselves in football culture, characterized by its competitive and tough nature. Indeed, females take part in male-dominated football culture only under certain conditions, including not undermining aesthetic and moral values desired by society; moreover, complying with social norms related to feminine imagery and ethics [25].

Moreover, there appears to be an interaction between the sex variable and the social identity, which is linked to antisocial behavior and how it differs by sex. Specifically, young athletes' sensitivity to cultural and social sex role expectations (orientation efforts) can alter the relationship between social identity and antisocial behavior [26]. It seems reasonable to assume that within-team competition will likely increase in women's football since it becomes a center of attention with rising numbers of fans and audiences, especially considering that female players reported higher antisocial behaviors toward their teammates' opponents in our study. On the other hand, there are several studies investigating football players' behaviors with different approaches. In a recent study, Bruner *et al.* [20] examined the relationship between social identity and antisocial and prosocial behaviors. The authors suggested that social identities could influence the frequency of prosocial and antisocial behaviors that athletes could encounter.

Furthermore, prosocial and antisocial behaviors were predicted by cognitive centrality and ingroup ties at an individual level. Perceived norms for prosocial teammate behavior moderated the relationship between ingroup ties and cognitive centrality in addition to ingroup effect and prosocial behaviors. Thereby, sex appeared to moderate the relationship between cognitive centrality/ingroup effect and

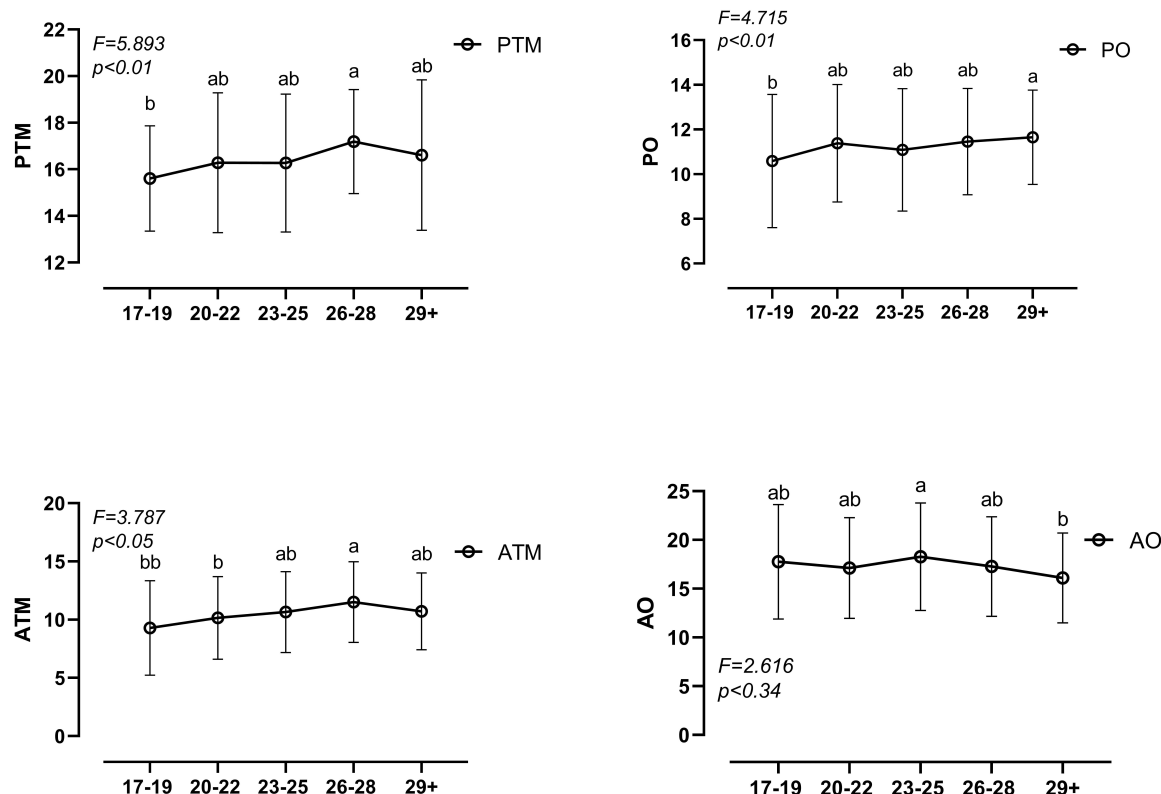


Fig. 3. Comparisons of PABSS' subdimensions according to football players' age groups. Values are expressed as mean and standard deviation; F results of One-Way ANOVA; ab Results of Tukey HSD; $p < 0.01$. p values, 95% confidence interval; PTM, Prosocial teammate; PO, Prosocial opponent; ATM, Antisocial teammate; AO, Antisocial opponent.

antisocial opponent behaviors. Another point to consider here is the moral atmosphere of the team [27]. For instance, noted that teams' moral atmospheres were related to moral behaviors. It is also well known that precursors of antisocial behavior are directly associated with athletes' mood, motivation, and commitment, especially young ones [28].

In line with our second hypothesis, the highest scores for prosocial behavior among all league statuses were detected in FFL and MFL. Indeed, the lowest scores for antisocial behavior were also found in FFL and MFL. It might be concluded with these findings that players engage in more prosocial and less antisocial behaviors as the league status increases. Teams' moral norms and social identities play a crucial role in this context [29]. Similarly, Benson and Bruner reported that higher levels of ingroup ties and social identity lowered antisocial behaviors. Higher ingroup ties and ingroup affect, in particular, reduced antisocial behaviors [30]. Based on our findings, it is safe to say that ingroup ties, moral atmosphere, and norms of the top league status are influential on the behavior of the football players. However, prosocial and antisocial behaviors should be assessed individually, as players' responses to instructions might be linked to their personality traits. Moreover, it has to be kept in mind that players with neurotic personalities tend to engage in antisocial behaviors [31]. Several other

studies associate antisocial behavior with effort and performance during a match [32,33].

In the current study, football players' prosocial and antisocial behaviors were analyzed concerning age variable and, following our third hypothesis, results demonstrated that the lowest scores for PTM and PO subdimensions were found in the 17–19 age group, whereas the highest scores for PTM were observed in 26–28 age group and 29+ age group reported the highest scores for PO. As for the antisocial behaviors, the highest scores for ATM and AO were found in 26–28 and 23–25 age groups, while the lowest scores for ATM and AO were observed in 17–19 and 29+ age groups, respectively. Study findings indicated higher average prosocial behavior scores with increased age, although the highest scores for antisocial behaviors were found in 23–25 and 26–28 age groups. Previous studies on prosocial and antisocial behaviors in sport contexts focused primarily on adolescents [7,21,34,35]. However, findings were inconsistent regarding the relation between prosocial behavior and age. In their meta-analysis of age differences and prosocial response to moral reasoning, Eisenberg and Fabes [9] showed that prosocial behavior increased from childhood to adulthood, particularly in some forms (e.g., sharing) compared to others (e.g., providing emotional support).

Along with its design, sample size, and structure, the present study was intended to shed some light on football players' prosocial and antisocial behaviors, females in particular. To the best of our knowledge, the approach of our study was used for the first time in the Turkish context to analyze the behaviors and acts of the players during a football match.

5. Limitations and recommendations for future research

The present study has certain limitations that should be considered. First, our findings are based on self-report measurement. As we mentioned, questionnaires were administered to players before training, during the regular season. Although this is an efficient method to predict players' acts during the match, it is not a perfect measurement to reflect real-world football actions. In other words, players may behave and act contrary to their self-reported behaviors and acts with increased adrenaline levels and excitement during a match.

Moreover, different results could have been obtained from the questionnaires if we had administered them after the training on the same measurement days. Namely, additional qualitative studies, videotaping the acts during a match or interviews would most likely provide further information about this topic. Secondly, a cross-sectional design was used in this study; therefore, no causality was sought. Hence, longitudinal design should be conducted using our study findings to uncover the underlying reasons for prosocial or antisocial behaviors. Thirdly, our measurements were primarily based on the social group approach, which may have led players to respond to the questionnaires in a certain manner. In addition to this approach, players' prosocial and antisocial behaviors should be evaluated individually to reveal if these behaviors are linked to players' personality traits. Fourthly, participants' socioeconomic status (SES) was not examined in this study. SES could impact players' moral behaviors during a football match, and future studies would need to include the measures of socioeconomic status to analyze moral behaviors more explicitly. Fifthly, although the PABBS is frequently used with similar internal consistency values to ours, in scientific literature, studies are supposed to have internal consistency values higher than 0.80, so it was noted down as our last limitation.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study makes an important contribution to the literature and provides new insights by demonstrating football players' prosocial and antisocial behaviors and underscoring the role of sex, league status, and age in such behaviors. Inconsistent with the previous findings in the literature, our study findings showed that male players engage in more prosocial behaviors toward both teammates and opponents than female players; moreover, male players

engage in less antisocial behaviors, in general. These findings can be associated with the changes in female players' social behaviors due to the growing popularity of women's football. Furthermore, higher prosocial and lower antisocial behavior scores in higher league statuses can be attributed to football players' professional identities and experiences. Ultimately, prosocial behavior increases as age increases, and this finding might result from the football players' social and sports maturity.

Our study examined the female and male football players' prosocial/antisocial behaviors, and several surprising findings were presented. We hypothesized that females would engage in more prosocial and less antisocial behaviors than males, but findings showed the opposite. These findings are not in line with previous findings, in general. However, our study results should be interpreted in the Turkish Context because some moral, ethical and social standards that society set for women in Turkey may have affected the current findings. On the other hand, there is a limited number of studies investigating female and male football players' behaviors in terms of sex; therefore, the present study can be admitted contributing to the literature. Additionally, research results are inconsistent in this manner, so further studies are needed to be conducted to provide conclusive evidence concerning this topic. Our practical suggestions following the results obtained as follows: the frequency of prosocial and antisocial behaviors in football ought to be assessed through qualitative research, and thus, the main reasons for that sort of behavior may be revealed. Coaches of the teams should be aware of these behaviors' risks that could destroy the team spirit and negatively affect the match result; thereby, they could prevent unintended consequences by taking some precautions and cooperating with the sport psychologist. Furthermore, football players' prosocial/antisocial behaviors can be investigated individually and socially from psychological and sociological perspectives.

Author contributions

Conceptualization—KA; methodology—KA and AKY; validation—KA, CA, FK and AKY; formal analysis—AM and KA; investigation—AM, CA, KA and AKY; resources—AM; data curation—FK, HM; writing - original draft preparation—HM; writing - review and editing—KA, CA, AM and HM; visualization—AM and AKY. All authors contributed to editorial changes in the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by Sinop University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Number: 2020/26). Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their gratitude to the football players who participated in this research.

Funding

This study received no external funding.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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