Investigation of Aggressive and Hostile Behavior Among Fans of Football Teams

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the psychological factors underlying aggressive and hostile behaviors among football fans. The research was conducted on 450 participants who identified as supporters of Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, or Galatasaray, selected from three regions in Turkey: Marmaris, Bodrum, and Kuşadası. The data were collected using the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire and analyzed via the SPSS 20.0 statistical software. Findings revealed that aggression levels varied significantly across demographic and psychological variables. Male fans, younger individuals, unemployed participants, and those willing to attend away games displayed higher levels of aggressive tendencies. Among the clubs, Beşiktaş supporters exhibited the highest aggression scores, followed by Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray fans. A negative correlation was found between age and aggression, as well as between education level and aggression. The results highlight the influence of sociocultural, demographic, and behavioral factors on aggression in the context of football fandom. Preventive strategies involving education, media responsibility, and club-fan collaboration are recommended to reduce aggressive behaviors in sports environments.

Futbol Takımı Taraftarları Arasında Saldırgan ve Düşmanca Davranışların İncelenmesi

Yazar Bilgileri

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Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, futbol taraftarları arasında gözlemlenen saldırgan ve düşmanca davranışların altında yatan psikolojik faktörleri incelemektir. Araştırma, Türkiye'nin Marmaris, Bodrum ve Kuşadası ilçelerinden rastgele seçilen, Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe veya Galatasaray taraftarı olduğunu belirten 450 katılımcı üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, Buss-Perry Saldırganlık Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmış ve SPSS 20.0 istatistik programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, saldırganlık düzeylerinin demografik ve psikolojik değişkenlere göre anlamlı farklılık gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Erkek taraftarlar, genç bireyler, işsiz katılımcılar ve deplasman maçlarına gitmeye istekli olan taraftarlar daha yüksek saldırganlık eğilimi sergilemiştir. Takım bazında ise Beşiktaş taraftarları en yüksek saldırganlık puanına sahipken, onları Fenerbahçe ve Galatasaray taraftarları takip etmiştir. Yaş ve eğitim düzeyi ile saldırganlık arasında negatif yönlü anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Sonuçlar, futbol taraftarlığı bağlamında saldırgan davranışların oluşumunda sosyokültürel, demografik ve davranışsal faktörlerin etkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Spor ortamlarında saldırgan davranışların önlenmesi için eğitim, medya sorumluluğu ve kulüp-taraftar iş birliği temelli stratejiler önerilmektedir.

1. INTRODUCTION

Football is different from other branches in that it is a spectator sport and attracts the masses. Football matches are an environment where desired or undesired mass events occur, especially in crowds, under the influence of various external stimuli.

Aggression is a personality trait that indicates an inherent predisposition to commit aggressive acts. It is not possible to see this trait. On the contrary, it is a situation of action and reaction that can only be predicted according to appropriate behavior patterns. Aggression must always be evaluated in relation to the relevant situation that led to the act (Baumann, 1994).

Today, aggression is defined as behavior that harms, injures, or even kills any living or inanimate object. Aggression is a personality trait that indicates an inherent predisposition to engage in aggressive action. It is not possible to see this trait. On the contrary, it is a predictable action-reaction situation based only on appropriate behavior patterns. Aggression must always be evaluated in relation to the relevant situation that led to the action (Baumann, 1994; Kesen, 2007).

In terms of aggression and violence, the value judgments and attitudes towards aggression in the family and society are also very important. Children who experience or learn aggression and violence from an early age usually continue such behaviors throughout their lives (Erşan, 2009).

According to Freud, aggression is innate, while according to some psychologists, it is a negative acquisition learned after a series of experiences. Both theories are currently being debated and will continue to be debated in the future (Kabak, 2009).

The basis of aggression is probably the inhibition of behaviors that are directed at the basis of a need. This can be explained by the fact that the angry organism attacks not because of its aggressive instinct, but because its movements are prevented by an obstacle (Acet, 2001). Researchers have explained that there are many factors in the emergence of aggression (Doğan, 2007).

Aggression is also classified as active and passive. In active aggression, the intention to harm is realized with an action, while in passive aggression, the intention to harm is realized without action (Kabak, 2009). In addition to active and passive aggression, physical aggression and verbal aggression are also present (Doğa, 2007).

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study was conducted within the framework of a descriptive survey design. The primary aim of the research was to examine the psychological factors underlying aggressive and hostile behaviors observed among football fans. In line with this objective, a quantitative research approach was adopted, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire.

2.2. Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 450 individuals who identified themselves as supporters of Beşiktaş, Galatasaray, or Fenerbahçe football clubs. Participants were selected through a random sampling method from three different districts in Turkey: Marmaris, Bodrum, and Kuşadası. No specific demographic restrictions such as age or gender were applied during participant selection.

2.3. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire, which comprises 29 items structured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all appropriate" to "completely

appropriate." The Turkish adaptation of the scale, including its validity and reliability studies, was conducted by Mardan D.A.H. (2012).

2.4. Research Process

During the research process, the questionnaires were administered face-to-face in the aforementioned three districts. Participation was based on voluntary consent, and anonymity and confidentiality of participant responses were ensured. No external influence was exerted on participants, and they were encouraged to respond freely and independently.

2.5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS 20.0 statistical software package. Descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, and frequency), Independent Samples t-Test, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Pearson correlation analysis were employed to analyze the data.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and personal data were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. No coercion or manipulation was involved at any stage of the research process.

3. FINDINGS

"This section presents the data obtained from the measurement tool used in the study, along with the corresponding statistical results.
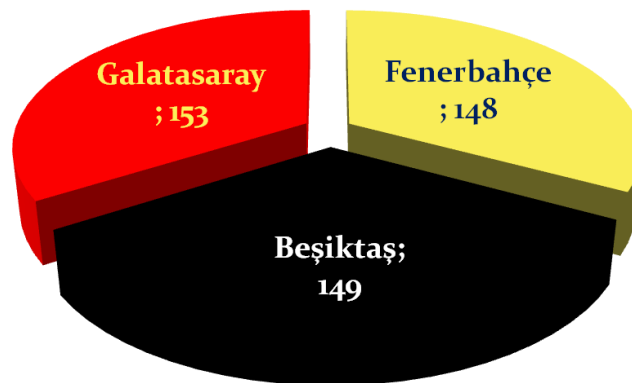

Figure 1. Number of fans participating in the study

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of football fans participating in the study according to their team affiliation. Among the participants, 153 were Galatasaray fans, 149 were Beşiktaş fans, and 148 were Fenerbahçe fans. The distribution appears relatively balanced across the three supporter groups, ensuring comparability among the data sets.
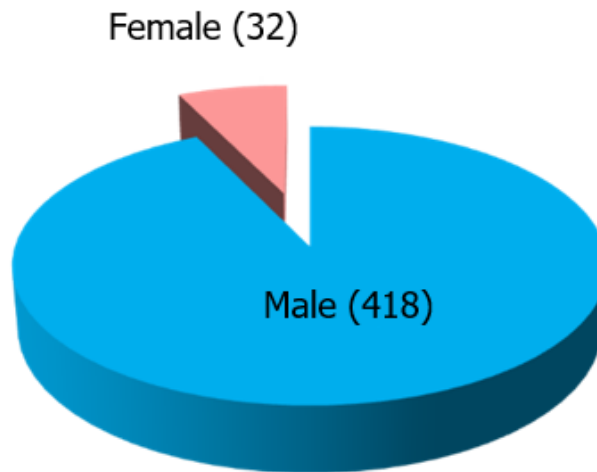
Female (32)

Male (418)

Figure 2. Gender distribution of fans participating in the study

Figure 2 shows the gender distribution of the fans who participated in the study. A significant majority of the participants were male (n=418), while only a small portion were female (n=32). This indicates a strong male dominance among the sample group, which is consistent with the general demographics of football fan communities.
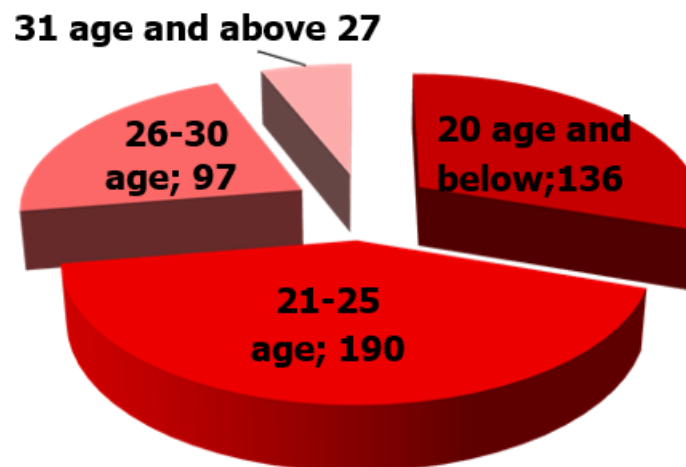
31 age and above 27

26-30 age; 97

20 age and below;136

21-25 age; 190

Figure 3. Distribution of age groups of fans participating in the study

Figure 3 illustrates the age distribution of the football fans who participated in the study. The majority of participants were between the ages of 21 and 25 (n=190), followed by those aged 20 and below (n=136). Participants aged 26–30 accounted for 97 individuals, while the smallest group consisted of those aged 31 and above (n=27). These results indicate that the study sample predominantly represents a younger fan demographic.
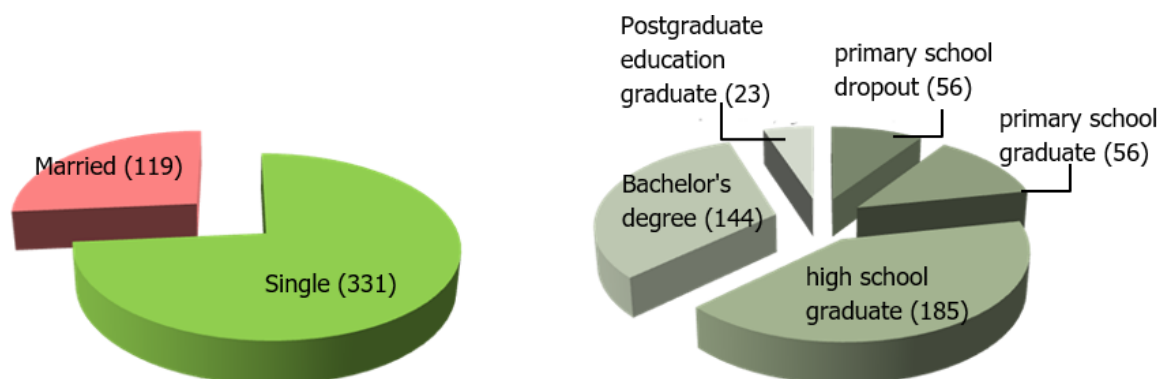
Figure 4. Marital status and educational background of participants

Figure 4 presents the distribution of participants based on their marital status and educational background. In terms of marital status, a significant majority of the participants were single (n=331), while 119 participants were married. Regarding educational attainment, the highest proportion consisted of high school graduates (n=185), followed by those holding a bachelor's degree (n=144). Additionally, 56 participants were primary school graduates, another 56 were primary school dropouts, and 23 had completed postgraduate education. These findings indicate that the sample predominantly comprises single individuals with secondary or undergraduate-level education.
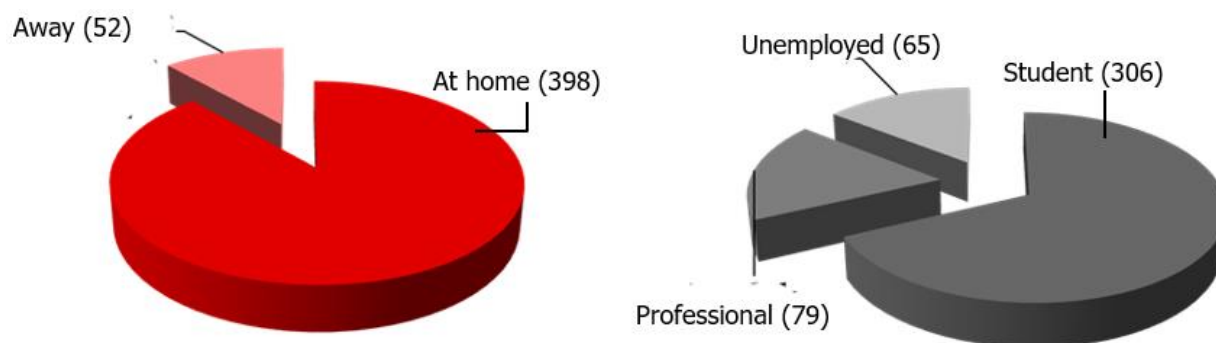

**Figure 5.** Living situation and employment status of participants

Figure 5 provides information on the living situation and employment status of the participants. The majority of the respondents reported living at home (n=398), while a smaller portion stated that they lived away from home (n=52). Regarding employment status, most participants were students (n=306), followed by professionals (n=79) and unemployed individuals (n=65). These results indicate that the sample predominantly consists of students residing at home, reflecting a young and educationally engaged demographic.

Tablo 1. Comparison of the fans participating in the study according to their demographic characteristics

		N	Mean ± SD	*f*	*p*
Gender	Male	418	3,8992±,52702	11,079	,000***
	Female	32	2,8513±,32762		
Marital status	Married	119	3,7428±,74199	1,795	,073
	Single	331	3,8541±,50973		
Attend Away Game?	Yes	52	4,5831±,53819	-11,332	,000***
	No	398	3,7256±,24182		

*****p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05;*

The analysis revealed statistically significant differences in aggression scores based on gender and willingness to attend away games. Male participants (M = 3.8992, SD = 0.52702) exhibited significantly higher aggression levels compared to female participants (M = 2.8513, SD = 0.32762), t = 11.079, p < .001. Similarly, participants who indicated a willingness to attend an away game reported significantly higher aggression scores (M = 4.5831, SD = 0.53819) than those who would not (M = 3.7256, SD = 0.24182), t = -11.332, p < .001. On the other hand, marital status did not produce a statistically significant difference in aggression levels between married (M = 3.7428, SD = 0.74199) and single participants (M = 3.8541, SD = 0.50973), F = 1.795, p = .073. These findings suggest that gender and fan behavior (such as attending away games) may be influential factors in aggression levels among football fans.
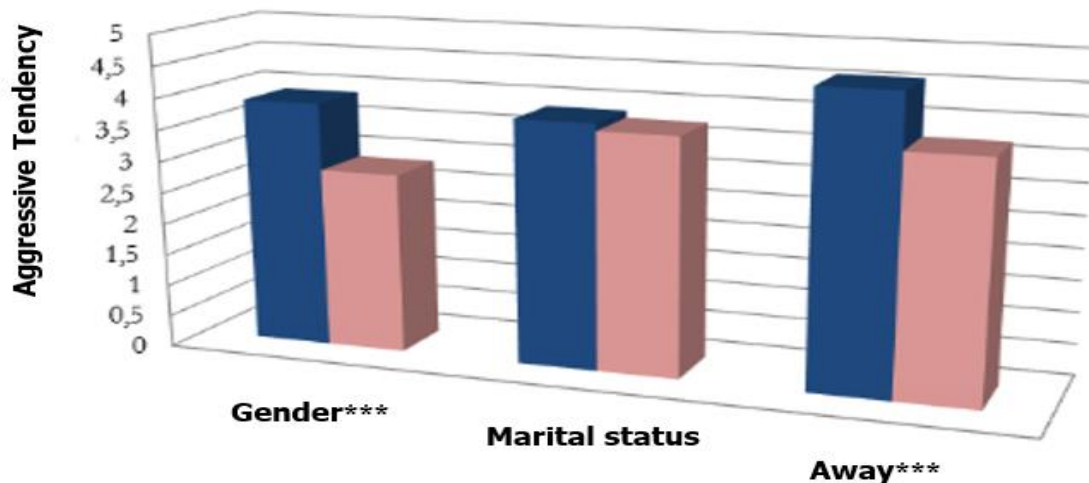
	Gender***	Marital status	Away***
■ **Male-Single-Yes**	3,8992	3,8541	4,5831
■ **Female-Married No**	2,8513	3,7428	3,7256

*****p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.*

Figure 6. Comparison of the fans participating in the study according to their demographic characteristics

Figure 6 visually compares aggressive tendencies based on gender, marital status, and willingness to attend away games. As shown in the chart, male participants displayed higher aggression scores (M = 3.8992) than females (M = 2.8513), a difference that was statistically significant (p < .001). Similarly, participants who expressed a willingness to attend away games reported significantly higher levels of aggression (M = 4.5831) compared to those who would not (M = 3.7256), again indicating a highly significant difference (p < .001). While aggression levels between single (M = 3.8541) and married participants (M = 3.7428) were relatively close, the difference was not statistically significant. These results highlight that both gender and fan behavior, particularly away game attendance, are significant predictors of aggressive tendencies among football fans.
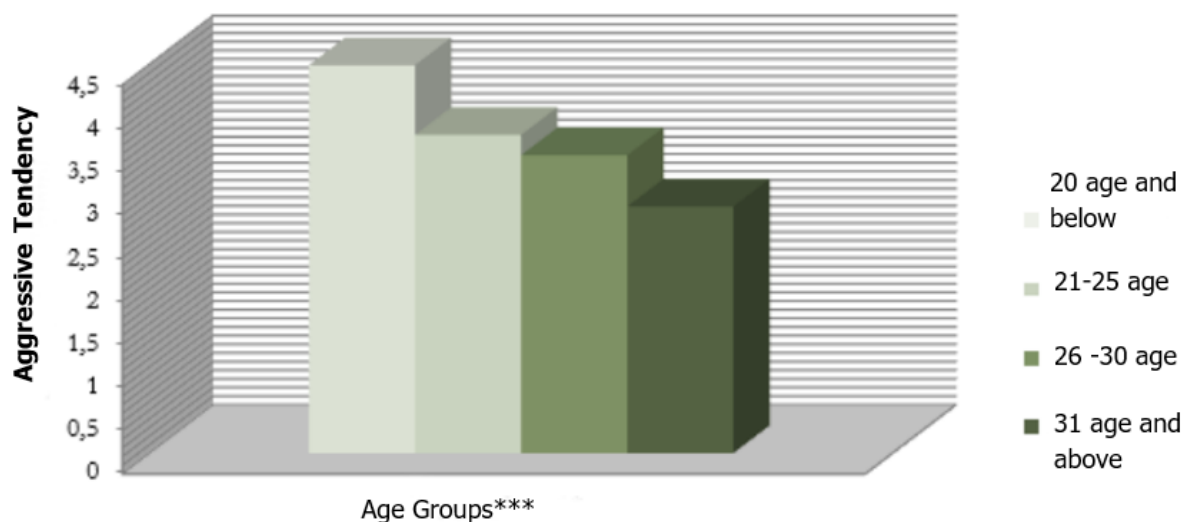

Figure 7. Comparison and correlation of the fans participating in the study according to their educational status

Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of aggressive tendencies across different age groups. According to the graph, the highest level of aggression was observed among participants aged 20 and below, followed by the 21–25 age group. Participants in the 26–30 age group exhibited moderate levels of aggression, while the 31 and above group had the lowest aggression scores. The differences between these age groups were statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that younger individuals tend to display higher levels of aggressive behavior compared to older age groups.

Table 2. Comparison and correlation of the fans participating in the study according to age groups

		N	Mean ± SD		f	p
Age Groups	20 age and below	136	4,4874	±,33154		
	21-25 age	190	3,6814	±,32225		
	26-30 age	97	3,4466	±,34681	313,734	,000***
	31 and above	27	2,8528	±,32687		
	Total	450	3,8247	±,58143		

Relationship(r)	Aggression
Fan age	-.732***

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05;

As shown in Table 2, aggression levels among football fans differed significantly across age groups (F = 313.734, p < .001). The youngest participants (aged 20 and below) had the highest mean aggression score (M = 4.4874), followed by the 21–25 age group (M = 3.6814), and then the 26–30 group (M = 3.4466). The lowest aggression levels were observed among those aged 31 and above (M = 2.8528). Moreover, the negative correlation between age and aggression (r = −.732, p < .001) suggests that as age increases, aggressive tendencies significantly decrease. This highlights age as a strong predictor of aggressive behavior among football fans.
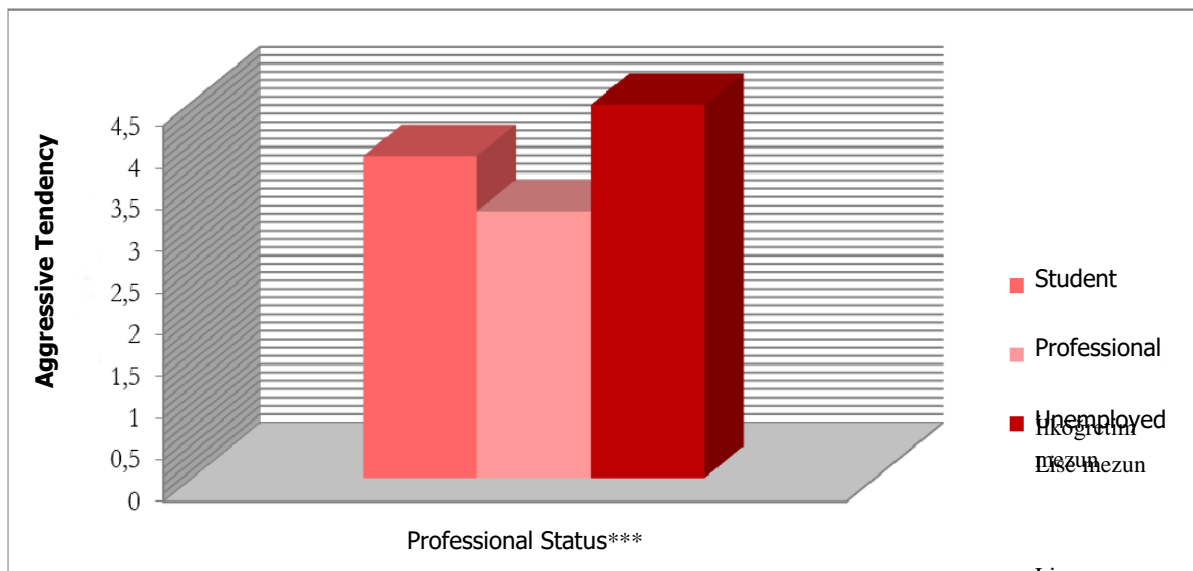

Figure 8. Comparison of the fans participating in the study according to their occupational groups

Figure 8 illustrates the comparison of aggressive tendencies among participants based on their occupational status. The results indicate that unemployed individuals reported the highest levels of aggression, followed by students, while professionals showed the lowest aggression scores. These findings are consistent with the statistical analysis presented in Table 3, highlighting that occupational status is a significant factor associated with aggressive behavior in football fans.

Table 3. Comparison of the fans participating in the study according to their occupational groups

		N	Mean ± SD		f	p
Professional Status	Student	306	3,8524	±,46526		
	Professional	79	3,1910	±,54153		
	Unemployed	65	4,4660	±,46424	140,236	,000***
	Total	450	3.8247	±,58143		

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

Table 3 shows that aggression levels significantly differed across occupational groups (F = 140.236, p < .001). The unemployed participants exhibited the highest aggression scores (M = 4.4660), followed by students (M = 3.8524). The lowest aggression levels were observed among professionals (M = 3.1910). These findings suggest that occupational status is a significant factor influencing aggressive tendencies, with unemployment possibly being associated with higher levels of psychological stress or frustration contributing to increased aggression.
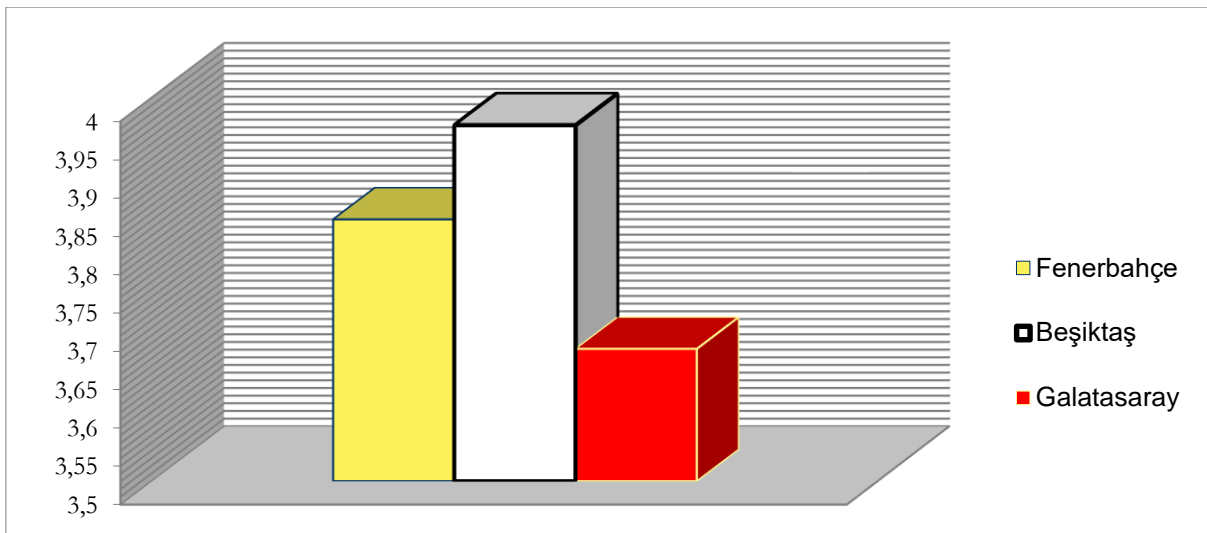

Figure 9. Comparison of the fans participating in the study according to the sports club they support

Figure 9 presents the comparison of aggression levels among supporters of Fenerbahçe, Beşiktaş, and Galatasaray. According to the findings, Beşiktaş fans exhibited the highest aggression scores, followed by Fenerbahçe supporters, while Galatasaray fans demonstrated the lowest levels of aggression. These differences suggest that team affiliation may be associated with varying levels of aggressive behavior among football fans.

Table 4. Comparison of the fans participating in the study according to the sports club they support

		N	Mean ± SD	*f*	*p*
Partisanship	Fenerbahçe	148	3,8414 ±,61082	9,972	,000***
	Beşiktaş	149	3,9642 ±,52277		
	Galatasaray	153	3,6425 ±,57363		
	Total	450	3.8247 ±,58143		

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

As shown in Table 4, aggression levels differed significantly based on the football club supported by the participants (F = 9.972, p < .001). Beşiktaş fans reported the highest aggression levels (M = 3.9642), followed by Fenerbahçe supporters (M = 3.8414), while Galatasaray fans had the lowest aggression scores (M = 3.6425). These findings suggest that team affiliation is a significant variable influencing aggressive tendencies among football fans, with certain fan bases exhibiting higher levels of aggression than others.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Male fans tend to be much more aggressive than female fans. It is thought that this situation is effective in the perception of football as a male sport in society. Although there is no statistical difference between the marital status of the fans, single fans tend to be more aggressive than married fans. This situation is thought to be due to the family responsibilities of the person.

While Bettencourt and Miller (1996) stated that males are more aggressive than females, Çobanoğlu and Ağlamaz (2006) stated that gender is not a factor affecting aggressive behavior. Özgür (2011) found that male students' violence tendency scores were higher than female students and that there was a significant difference. Donaldson (2006) explained that there is no significant difference in the aggression problem scale according to gender. There are different findings and interpretations in the aggression scores in terms of gender. Aggressive behavior patterns resulting from differences between genders are generalized as "girls are more verbal and mentally aggressive, while boys are more physically aggressive" (Güner, 2006).

Asma (2008) stated that there was no significant difference between the aggression scale scores according to gender, and explained that the perception of aggression of student athletes participating in inter-school matches was affected by many environmental factors, the most important of which were the audience, referee, opposing players, the environment, the view that aggressive behavior in sports is due to the nature of the sport, teammates and role models. Tutkun (2010) found in his study that female athletes had higher aggression sub-scores than male athletes, but there was no statistically significant difference between them. Regarding this issue, Şahin (2003) stated that males are more prone to aggression than females.

In a laboratory study of university students, males were found to be more aggressive than females, but provocation influenced aggression more than gender (Micheal, 2003).

Fans who do not leave their team alone in away games tend to be more aggressive than fans who do not go to away games. It is thought that this situation stems from the sense of belonging that the fans feel towards their team, and that the fans spend time for their team by sacrificing their own social life and wanting their team to win all the time are effective in this situation.

Güner (2006) found in his study that there was no significant difference in the aggression levels of female athletes who did team sports and individual sports, while there was a significant difference in male athletes who did team sports and individual sports. The same study found that

individuals who play individual sports are more aggressive than those who play team sports. It may be thought that aggression in team sports is less because there are rules that limit contact with the opponent. Tutkun (2010) found in his study that the destructive aggression scores of individual sports players were statistically significantly higher than those of team sports players.

There is a negative relationship between fan age and aggression. As age decreases, the tendency to aggression increases. This situation is thought to be due to the rebelliousness and lack of personal education given by youth.

There is a negative relationship between the education level of the fans and aggression. As the education level decreases, the tendency to aggression increases. This situation is thought to be due to lack of education.

In the examination of whether the mean scores of the football players on the aggression sub-dimensions and total differ according to their education levels, it was determined that the mean scores of the football players who graduated from primary school, high school and university did not differ significantly on the aggression sub-dimensions and total. This situation can be explained by the fact that the tendency to aggression may occur for various reasons in childhood and then continue to increase (Topuz, 2010).

Professional fans have lower aggressive tendencies, while unemployed fans have higher tendencies. While unemployment itself already causes stress in sociological terms, individuals who want to relieve their stress in stadiums with their fan identity tend to be aggressive.

While the highest aggression tendency is seen in Beşiktaş fans, Fenerbahçe fans are second and Galatasaray fans are third, and this situation is determined to be statistically significant. This situation needs to be examined in depth and different fan groups need to be investigated psycho-socially.

Athletes, coaches and managers need to pay attention to their behaviors and statements. In order to prevent aggression and violence, educational panels and seminars should be organized in schools starting from primary schools. The fans should be informed and made aware of the Law No. 6222 on violence in sports through the sports media, and the law on violence in sports should be implemented with determination.

There should be joint efforts between fan leaders and sports clubs to prevent aggression. Athletes, coaches and managers should be careful about their behavior and statements. While the media should not include provocative statements for the sake of circulation and should act with a sense of responsibility, they should also not use slogans that contain violence, aggression and hostility.

At the end of the study, it was determined that the highest aggressive tendency was seen in Beşiktaş fans, Fenerbahçe fans were second and Galatasaray fans were third, and this situation was statistically significant. This situation needs to be examined in depth and different fan groups need to be investigated psycho-socially.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the author during the research process. All findings were obtained through a scientific approach and an objective perspective.

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