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Motivations, Coping Skills, Reasons, Barriers, and Facilitators of Sports Participation Among Turkish Rio 2016 Paralympians

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Abstract

Research on Paralympic athletes remains less comprehensive than research on Olympic athletes and has primarily focused on physical and physiological parameters. Further research is needed to better understand psychosocial factors among Paralympic athletes. Therefore, this study aimed to compare the motivations, coping skills, reasons, barriers, and facilitators of Turkish Paralympic athletes who participated in the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games according to gender, disability type, and sport type. Seventy-eight Turkish Paralympic athletes participated in this study. Data were collected using the Motivation Scale for Sports Participation of People with Disabilities, the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28, and the Reasons, Barriers, and Facilitators of Sports Inventory. The study revealed that Paralympic athletes' motivation to participate in sports was generally similar across gender, type of disability, and sport, except that extrinsic motivation was higher among female athletes. Differences were found in the sub-dimensions of coping skills based on gender, type of disability, and sport. Additionally, the reasons, barriers, and facilitators for sports participation varied depending on these factors. Although motivation levels among Turkish Paralympic athletes were similar across gender, disability type, and sport, their athletic coping skills, reasons for participation, barriers, and facilitators varied and were influenced by these variables. The findings suggest that policymakers should consider these factors, implement appropriate strategies and policies, and develop regulations aimed at increasing the participation of Paralympic athletes in sports.

Keywords: *Elite Athletes, Paralympic Games, Psychosocial Factors, Sports Participation*

INTRODUCTION

The participation of athletes with disabilities in sports has received increasing attention with advancements in human performance and sports sciences. This shift is particularly notable given that these activities initially served as therapy and rehabilitation for people with disabilities

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following World War II (Jefferies et al., 2012; Mauerberg-deCastro et al., 2016; Tweedy & Howe, 2011). Over time, Paralympic sports have undergone a significant transformation, driven by technological innovations and evolving societal attitudes towards disability. This transformation has been further fuelled by rising participation rates, increased media coverage, greater professionalisation, the broader inclusion of various disability types, greater integration with the Olympic Games, sustained advocacy, and heightened public awareness (Blauwet & Willick, 2012; Legg & Steadward, 2011). These developments have empowered athletes with disabilities to compete at an increasingly elite level, helping to dismantle barriers and challenge stereotypes surrounding disability in sport (Brittain, 2009; Brittain & Beacom, 2018; Gold & Gold, 2007). Nevertheless, a significant difference remains in the number of athletes participating in the Olympic and Paralympic Games. For example, around 11,420 athletes participated in the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, compared to just 4,393 at the Paralympics (International Olympic Committee, 2021; International Paralympic Committee, 2021). In addition to being underrepresented, elite athletes with disabilities face many challenges that prevent them from participating in and succeeding at sports. The existence of these challenges restricts individual performance and contributes to the continued underrepresentation of athletes with disabilities in elite sport. Athletes with disabilities face many challenges worldwide, including limited access to assistive technologies and specialised sports equipment. They also suffer from a lack of media attention and sponsorship opportunities. They also face ethical issues, along with risks related to doping and sports injuries. They also face unfavorable situations after retirement. According to Mauerberg-deCastro et al. (2016), in addition to these issues, some individuals experience physical and psychological stress, which may manifest as burnout, exhaustion, injuries, and mental health problems. The high demands of high-performance training environments, increased media exposure, and the pressure to meet high standards can exacerbate these issues. These factors may lead to more severe consequences and impaired performance (Dehghansai et al., 2021).

When considering the holistic development of Paralympic athletes, several psychosocial perspectives have been largely overlooked in research on Paralympic sports and athletes, which is an area that needs to be addressed. For example, Jefferies et al. (2012) conducted a psychosocial review of Paralympic athletes. The authors asserted that the number of academic papers dealing with the psychosocial aspects of athletes with disabilities is much lower than the number of papers dealing with the biomechanical issues of these athletes. Their exploratory work focuses on issues

such as goal setting, stress, coping skills, and motivation to participate in sport. A review of the mental health of Paralympic athletes by Swartz et al. (2019) concluded that previous research on this topic was inadequate. They pointed out that these studies typically include only a small number of participants, most of whom are from wealthy Western nations, and often fail to cover the mental health of Paralympic athletes comprehensively. In order for the gaps in the literature to be filled and for a contribution to be made to the psychosocial aspects emphasized in the literature, it was considered important for the participation motivations, coping skills, reasons, barriers, and facilitators in sports of Turkish athletes competing in the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games to be examined.

Achieving success at Olympic and Paralympic levels requires perseverance, commitment, social support, opportunities, and sustained motivation (Freire et al., 2019; McLoughlin et al., 2017; Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002; Powell & Myers, 2017). Of these factors, motivation is particularly important as it drives athletes to work towards their goals and influences their participation in and performance in sports (Clancy et al., 2016). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), motivation can stem from either extrinsic sources, such as rewards and recognition, or intrinsic sources, such as the natural enjoyment of sport. According to the literature, Paralympic athletes often demonstrate high levels of intrinsic motivation (Banack et al., 2011; Jefferies et al., 2012). However, various factors, such as gender, nationality, type of disability, and sport, can influence the type and level of motivation (Fung, 1992; Garci & Mandich, 2005; Mann, 2016; Omar-Fauzee et al., 2010; Pensgaard et al., 1999; Setyaningrum, 2018; Chen et al., 2007). While the relative importance of these motivational factors may vary across individuals and contexts, the literature consistently indicates that athletes are motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Martens, 1987). To encourage sustainable participation and success among athletes with disabilities, this study examined the motivational structure of Paralympic athletes, given the importance of understanding these motivational dynamics.

The social and organisational context in which athletes compete can have a positive or negative impact on their performance. They are regularly subjected to various stressors, including organizational stressors such as coaching dynamics, injuries, and rivalries with opponents, personal stressors such as work-life balance issues, relocation challenges, and family obligations, and competitive stressors such as injuries and poor preparation (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021; Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998). As no single strategy works in every circumstance, athletes typically

use a range of coping skills to manage these complex demands (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012; Mellalieu et al., 2009). Demographic variables such as age, gender, and the type of sport played frequently influence the choice and efficacy of these tactics (Nicholls & Polman, 2007; Nicholls et al., 2007; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003). The coping skills employed by Norwegian male and female Paralympic athletes were found to be largely similar to those of Olympic athletes without disabilities within the context of Paralympic sport (Pensgaard et al., 1999). However, notable differences were observed in the use of growth-oriented and redefinition strategies. Paralympic athletes used a wide range of coping skills, such as active coping, acceptance, planning, and, in certain situations, denial. Although coping mechanisms are clearly important for athletic performance, particularly during the Paralympics, research in this area remains limited. This disparity highlights the need for additional empirical studies to understand the specific psychological demands and coping mechanisms encountered by athletes with disabilities (Martin, 2015).

To promote inclusivity and enhance engagement, it is important to understand why people participate in sport, particularly among people with disabilities and Paralympic athletes. Examining these incentives, alongside the well-established social, psychological, and physical advantages of sport, can help create a more inclusive sporting culture and increase participation rates among underrepresented groups (Shakespeare, 2016). Although studies indicate that athletes with and without disabilities may share some similar motivations for participating in sport, differences emerge according to gender, type of disability, and sport (Jefferies et al., 2012; Molik et al., 2010). These differences are particularly evident in studies of athletes competing at Paralympic, national, and elite levels in various countries and environments. For example, Wilson and Khoo (2013) found that the main motivators for Malaysian athletes with disabilities were achievement, challenge, skill development, and personal interest. Conversely, Page et al. (2001) found that American athletes prioritized social interaction, physical fitness, affirmation of competence, acknowledgment as serious competitors, and preventing disability progression as motivators for participation. Similarly, Molik et al. (2010) found that Polish wheelchair basketball players were motivated by teamwork and emotional connection, whereas bocce athletes prioritised health-related factors. Cardoso et al. (2020) found that Brazilian Paralympic athletes were influenced by factors such as opportunities to train, love of the sport, motivation from Paralympic role models, and the need to improve. Research studies of this nature provide a clearer and more transparent picture of the sporting community, but the literature still cannot go far

enough. Further research is needed to explore the motivational factors of a broader range of Paralympic athletes, taking into account variables such as the type and severity of disabilities, national and cultural backgrounds, and access to sports. As well as being suitable for athlete development and performance improvement, such research lies at the heart of mental health and disability inclusion in sport.

Any research attempt focusing on increasing the involvement of people with disabilities in the sports industry must identify and analyse the barriers and facilitators affecting their engagement with sports. Paralympic athletes may face specific barriers and motivations stemming from the high-performance nature of their environments and the pressure to win competitions. Understanding these elements is key to facilitating the participation of athletes with disabilities and improving their mental and physical health. While sports for people with disabilities are still in their development phase, a few empirical studies have sought to shed light on the specific challenges faced by Paralympic athletes in their sporting activities, as well as the factors that can help or hinder them. The primary barrier mentioned by most athletes with disabilities was a lack of cooperation from others and the absence of necessary tools, without which they cannot be physically active, as revealed in a study by Jaarsma, Geertzen et al. (2014). This study was based on the experiences of Paralympic athletes in the Netherlands. The biggest environmental barrier was the inaccessibility of sports facilities within easy reach of the athletes' households in their local communities. In contrast, factors that enabled participation included motivation to win and do well, positivity, relaxation, fitness, and health improvement. The research also identified that the type of disability influences the perceived facilitators and barriers. McLoughlin et al. (2017) concluded from their research involving American Paralympic athletes that the main issues were a lack of time, elevated costs, low public awareness, and injuries resulting from overtraining. Having a social support network, receiving professional coaching, the need for competition, and accomplishing goals all acted as facilitators. These findings emphasize that athletes' decisions to continue playing sports are affected by both internal and external factors. While these studies provide valuable insights into the area, they also highlight a significant gap in the literature. To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Paralympic athletes around the world, it is necessary to conduct comparative studies between nations with different cultural and geographical settings, which was the factor that motivated researchers to conduct the present study (Blauwet & Willick, 2012; Jefferies et al., 2012; Patatas et al., 2021).

This study examines sport participation among Turkish Paralympic athletes who competed at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games. The main topics covered are the motivations, coping skills, reasons, barriers, and facilitators to sports participation as perceived by Paralympic athletes. The research also aims to analyze how these factors change according to the gender of the athletes, the type of disability they have, and the type of sport they are participating in.

METHODS

Study Design

The research adopted a cross-sectional, correlational, quantitative research design to establish the extent to which variables are related at a specific point in time. This research design allows researchers to collect data from a group or representative sample at a single time point, rather than at intervals over a long period. Thus, it is possible to assess current actions, beliefs, or feelings without making a causal statement. The correlational aspect of this design allows researchers to determine whether and how two or more measurable variables are related. However, this method does not establish causality; it simply illustrates the interrelationships of the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Fraenkel et al., 2012).

Participants

This study examined Turkish athletes who competed at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games. A total of 78 athletes voluntarily took part in the study, with no further selection criteria for inclusion. The gender distribution of the athletes was 57.7% male and 42.3% female. Of these, 41% were involved in team sports, while 59% participated in individual sports. Athletes with physical disabilities accounted for 60.3% of the total number of athletes, while those who were visually impaired accounted for 39.7%. The average age of female athletes was 29.79 years, while that of male athletes was 34.16 years.

Data Collection Process

Prior to commencement, the study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences at Mersin University (approval number 31/10/2019-027), as well as authorisation from the relevant athletic federations. The names and contact details of the athletes who participated in the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games were obtained through official correspondence with these federations. Data were collected in person by the researcher, who visited the athletes' training camps and sports clubs. The purpose and nature of the research were

clearly explained to the athletes' coaches, who subsequently provided their consent. Athletes were informed about the study and invited to participate voluntarily. Suitable times for participation were arranged during preliminary interviews before the measurement instruments were administered. Athletes with physical disabilities completed the scales independently. For athletes with visual impairments, the scales were administered with the assistance of their coaches and under the researcher's supervision. In such cases, the researcher recorded the athletes' responses to the questionnaire based on their verbal instructions. Completing the data collection instruments took between 20 and 25 minutes.

Data Collection Tools

The Socio-Demographic Information Form

A socio-demographic information form designed by the researchers was used to gather data on the gender, age, type of disability, and sport of Paralympic athletes.

The Motivation Scale for Sports Participation of People with Disabilities

The motivation of people with disabilities has been studied using the Motivation Scale for Sports Participation of People with Disabilities (MSSPPD). The MSSPPD, developed by Tekkurşun Demir et al. (2018), comprises 22 items divided into three sub-dimensions: 12 items for intrinsic motivation, 5 items for extrinsic motivation, and 5 items for non-motivation. Respondents indicate their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 represents 'strongly agree'. The score for each item is first summed, and then this sum is divided by the number of items to obtain the average score. The lowest possible score is 1 and the highest is 5. Higher scores indicate higher levels of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, as well as non-motivation. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to evaluate internal consistency during the scale's development. These were .83 for the intrinsic motivation subscale, .87 for the extrinsic motivation subscale, and .88 for the non-motivated subscale (Tekkurşun Demir et al., 2018). In this study, the reliability coefficients for the intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and non-motivated subscales were .91, .73, and .49, respectively.

The Athletic Coping Skills Inventory

Smith et al. (1995) developed the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI-28), which was subsequently adapted for Turkish culture by Erhan et al. (2015). The ACSI-28 was used in the current study to evaluate the psychological coping skills of Paralympic athletes. The 28 items on

the ACSI-28 are divided into seven subscales: Coping with Adversity; Coachability; Concentration; Confidence and Achievement; Goal Setting and Mental Preparation; Peaking Under Pressure; and Freedom from Worry. There are four items in each subscale. Participants answered each item on a 4-point Likert-type scale, with 0 denoting 'almost never' and 3 denoting 'almost always'. The total scores for each subscale were calculated by adding up the item scores within each subscale and dividing the total by the number of items. The lowest possible score is 0, while the highest possible score is 3. Higher scores indicate stronger psychological coping skills. The internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the subscales and the entire scale were reported as follows in the original study and the Turkish adaptation, respectively: Coping with Adversity: .66 and .62; Coachability: .72 and .51; Concentration: .62 and .59; Confidence and Achievement Motivation: .66 and .60; Goal Setting and Mental Preparation: .78 and .71; Freedom from Worry: .76 and .50; and Overall: .86 and .85 (Smith et al., 1995; Erhan et al., 2015). The Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales in the current study were as follows: .46 for Coping with Adversity, .47 for Coachability, .68 for Concentration, .50 for Confidence and Achievement Motivation, .72 for Goal Setting and Mental Preparation, .68 for Peaking Under Pressure, and .32 for Freedom from Worry. The overall scale's internal consistency coefficient was .81.

Reasons, Barriers, and Facilitators of Sports Inventory

The Reasons, Barriers, and Facilitators of Sports Inventory was used to investigate the factors influencing Paralympic athletes' decision to begin and continue participating in sports. The inventory also provides a list of obstacles Paralympic athletes encounter and the enablers that support their participation. This inventory was developed by Jaarsma, Geertzen et al. in 2014. The inventory divides the reasons for sports participation, obstacles, and facilitators into the personal and environmental domains. In total, there are 54 items. Twelve items address personal reasons for participation, three address environmental reasons, six address personal obstacles, fifteen address environmental obstacles, nine address personal facilitators, and three address environmental facilitators. The researchers translated the Reasons, Barriers, and Facilitators of Sports Inventory into Turkish, adhering to the internationally recognized principles for cross-cultural adaptation of assessment tools (Beaton et al., 2000; Brislin, 1970; Hambleton et al., 2004). The translation process was highly detailed and included methodical steps intended to ensure linguistic and conceptual accuracy between the original and the translated versions across different languages. Two subject-matter experts who were bilingual and fluent in both languages

initially translated the inventory from English into Turkish. The researcher, who is bilingual, then checked the two translated versions. A single draft Turkish version was created once the translators and the research team had reached an agreement. The next stage involved a third person, who was bilingual and unaware of the original translation, translating the combined Turkish version back into English. The original inventory and this back-translated version were then compared to identify differences and clarify the meaning of the items. Two bilingual sports science experts reviewed the Turkish version. This review was based on the content validity, cultural appropriateness, and clarity of the items. Following the panel's feedback, small changes were made to improve the instrument's relevance to the local situation and clarity. In addition, a small-scale study was performed with a small group of elite-level athletes who were different from the main study sample. This pilot study aimed to evaluate the translation of the items in terms of both understanding and actual use. As no major defects were disclosed, the Turkish version of the inventory was considered complete and ready for use in the main research.

Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 21.0. The ACSI-28 data were approximately normally distributed, whereas the MSSPPD data did not meet the normality assumption. Consequently, independent samples t-tests were employed to analyze the ACSI-28 data, while the Mann-Whitney U test was applied to the MSSPPD data. Additionally, Chi-square tests were utilized to examine the data obtained from the Reasons, Barriers and Facilitators of Sports Inventory.

RESULTS

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare MSSPPD scores among Paralympic athletes, focusing on statistical differences by gender, type of disability, and sport. The results showed a significant difference in “Extrinsic Motivation” scores between male and female athletes (U = 543.50, p = .043). Female athletes had a median extrinsic motivation score of 4.4, significantly higher than the median score of 3.8 for male athletes. However, no significant differences were observed in the scores for “Intrinsic Motivation” (U = 568.00, p = .073), “Non-motivated” (U = 600.00, p = .122), and “Overall Motivation” (U = 614.00, p = .195) when comparing female and male athletes. No significant differences were found in motivation scores based on type of disability (physical vs. visual) or type of sport (individual vs. team). Across both comparisons, the

sub-dimensions of Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Non-motivated, and the overall motivation scores did not differ significantly (p> .05 for all; see Table 1).

Table 1
Mann–Whitney U Test Results for MSSPPD Scores by Gender, Disability Type, and Sport Type

Variables			*n*	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	*Mdn*	*U*	*Z*	*p*
Gender	Intrinsic Motivation	Female	33	4.54	.90	4.67	568.00	-1.790	.073
		Male	45	4.57	.34	4.67			
	Extrinsic Motivation	Female	33	4.01	.99	4.40	543.50	-2.023	.043
		Male	45	3.76	.71	3.80			
	Non-Motivated	Female	33	4.58	.50	4.58	600.00	-1.545	.122
		Male	45	4.69	.51	5.00			
	Overall Motivation	Female	33	4.37	.69	4.60	614.50	-1.295	.195
		Male	45	4.34	.39	4.36			
Types Of Disability	Intrinsic Motivation	Physical Disability	31	4.62	.29	4.67	699.00	-.306	.760
		Visual impairment	47	4.51	.78	4.67			
	Extrinsic Motivation	Physical Disability	31	4.01	.71	4.00	635.50	-.955	.340
		Visual impairment	47	3.77	.92	3.80			
	Non-Motivated	Physical Disability	31	4.59	.56	5.00	699.50	-.317	.751
		Visual impairment	47	4.68	.47	4.80			
	Overall Motivation	Physical Disability	31	4.41	.39	3.36	703.50	-.255	.798
		Visual impairment	47	4.32	.62	4.43			
Types Of Sports	Intrinsic Motivation	Individual Sports	46	4.49	.79	4.67	712.00	-.247	.805
		Team Sports	32	4.64	.30	4.67			
	Extrinsic Motivation	Individual Sports	46	3.79	.93	3.90	665.00	-.725	.468
		Team Sports	32	3.98	.70	4.00			
	Non-Motivated	Individual Sports	46	4.61	.51	4.80	651.50	-.920	.358
		Team Sports	32	4.69	.51	5.00			
	Overall Motivation	Individual Sports	46	4.30	.62	3.36	641.50	-.960	.337
		Team Sports	32	4.44	.39	4.44			

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the average ACSI-28 scores of Paralympic athletes based on gender, type of disability, and sport. The analysis revealed a significant difference between female and male athletes in two areas: "Goal Setting and Mental Preparation" [$t(78) = 2.510$, $p = .014$] and "Freedom from Worry" [$t(78) = -2.578$, $p = .012$]. Specifically, female athletes had higher scores in "Goal Setting and Mental Preparation" ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .53$) compared to male athletes ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .65$). Conversely, female athletes scored lower in "Freedom from Worry" ($M = 1.51$, $SD = .63$) than their male counterparts ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .56$). No significant gender differences were found in Coping with Adversity, Coachability, Concentration, Confidence and Achievement Motivation, Peaking Under Pressure, or Overall Coping Skills (see Table 2). Additionally, the analysis indicated variations in ACSI-28 scale scores among Paralympic athletes by disability type. Significant differences were found in the subdimensions of "Coachability" [$t(78) = 3.126$, $p = .003$], "Goal Setting and Mental Preparation" [$t(78) = 2.496$, $p = .015$], and "Overall Coping Skills" [$t(78) = 2.886$, $p = .005$]. Physically disabled Paralympic athletes had higher scores in "Coachability" ($M = 2.72$, $SD = .60$), "Goal Setting and Mental Preparation" ($M = 2.66$, $SD = .55$), and "Coping Skills Total" ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .30$) compared to visually impaired athletes, who scored lower in "Coachability" ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .56$), "Goal

Setting and Mental Preparation" (M = 2.31, SD = .64), and "Overall Coping Skills" (M = 2.14, SD = .38). Furthermore, no significant differences were found between physically and visually impaired athletes in Coping with Adversity, Concentration, Confidence and Achievement, Peaking Under Pressure, or Freedom from Worry (see Table 2). Lastly, the analysis to examine differences in ACSI-28 subdimensions and total score scale among Paralympic athletes based on the type of sport indicated significant distinctions in the following areas: "Concentration" [$t(78)$ = -2.059, p = .043], "Confidence and Achievement" [$t(78)$ = -2.425, p = .018], "Peaking Under Pressure" [$t(78)$ = -2.802, p = .006], "Freedom from Worry" [$t(78)$ = -2.155, p = .034], and "Overall Coping Skills" [$t(78)$ = -2.506, p = .014]. Team athletes had higher scores in "Concentration" (M = 2.46, SD = .55), "Confidence and Achievement" (M = 2.63, SD = .40), "Peaking Under Pressure" (M = 2.11, SD = .60), "Freedom from Worry" (M = 1.88, SD = .47), and "Overall Coping Skills" (M = 2.35, SD = .31) compared to individual athletes, who scored lower in these categories: "Concentration" (M = 2.17, SD = .64), "Confidence and Achievement" (M= 2.38, SD = .50), "Peaking Under Pressure" (M = 1.70, SD = .65), "Freedom from Worry" (M= 1.59, SD = .67), and "Overall Coping Skills" (M = 2.15, SD = .38). No significant differences were found between individual and team athletes in Coping with Adversity, Coachability, or Goal Setting and Mental Preparation (Table 2).

The Chi-Square analysis was used to determine whether the reasons for starting and maintaining sports among Paralympic athletes varied by gender, disability type, and sport type. The study revealed that female Paralympic athletes are more likely than male athletes to prioritize "learning how to deal with disability/wheelchair/aid" for personal reasons [$\chi^2(1)$ = 6.25, p = .024]. Conversely, male athletes tend to place greater importance on "support from family, partners, or children" as an environmental factor compared to their female counterparts [$\chi^2(1)$ = 5.49, p = .041]. Additionally, athletes with visual impairments often cite "losing energy" as a key motivation for starting and sustaining their athletic pursuits, more so than those with physical disabilities [$\chi^2(1)$ = 7.56, p = .012]. When examining the reasons for beginning and continuing sports, individual athletes reported competition and winning as motivations more frequently than team athletes did [$\chi^2(1)$ = 5.94, p= .033]. Table 3 illustrates the frequency of personal and environmental factors that encourage Paralympic athletes to start and continue their participation in sports, categorized by gender, disability, and sport type.

Table 2
Independent Samples t-test of ACSI-28 Scores by Gender, Disability Type, and Sport Type

Variables			*n*	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Gender	Coping with adversity	Female	33	2.45	.52	1.488	.141
		Male	45	2.27	.51		
	Coachability	Female	33	2.48	.57	.116	.908
		Male	45	2.46	.64		
	Concentration	Female	33	2.36	.68	.879	.382
		Male	45	2.24	.57		
	Confidence and achievement	Female	33	2.46	.55	-.294	.769
		Male	45	2.49	.42		
	Goal setting and mental preparation	Female	33	2.65	.53	2.510	.014
		Male	45	2.31	.65		
	Peaking under pressure	Female	33	1.73	.72	-1.621	.109
		Male	45	1.97	.59		
	Freedom from worry	Female	33	1.51	.63	-2.578	.012
		Male	45	1.86	.56		
	Overall coping skills	Female	33	2.23	.38	.067	.947
		Male	45	2.23	.36		
Type of disability	Coping with adversity	Physical disability	31	2.47	.49	1.710	.091
		Visual impairment	47	2.27	.52		
	Coachability	Physical disability	31	2.72	.60	3.126	.003
		Visual impairment	47	2.30	.56		
	Concentration	Physical disability	31	2.46	.56	1.986	.051
		Visual impairment	47	2.18	.64		
	Confidence and achievement	Physical disability	31	2.55	.47	1.018	.312
		Visual impairment	47	2.44	.48		
	Goal setting and mental preparation	Physical disability	31	2.66	.55	2.496	.015
		Visual impairment	47	2.31	.64		
	Peaking under pressure	Physical disability	31	2.01	.56	1.613	.111
		Visual impairment	47	1.77	.70		
	Freedom from worry	Physical disability	31	1.73	.58	.204	.839
		Visual impairment	47	1.70	.64		
	Overall coping skills	Physical disability	31	2.37	.30	2.886	.005
		Visual impairment	47	2.14	.38		
Type of sport	Coping with adversity	Individual sports	46	2.31	.55	-.744	.459
		Team sports	32	2.40	.47		
	Coachability	Individual sports	46	2.42	.64	-.769	.444
		Team sports	32	2.53	.56		
	Concentration	Individual sports	46	2.17	.64	-2.059	.043
		Team sports	32	2.46	.55		
	Confidence and achievement	Individual sports	46	2.38	.50	-2.425	.018
		Team sports	32	2.63	.40		
	Goal setting and mental preparation	Individual sports	46	2.46	.63	.078	.938
		Team sports	32	2.45	.62		
	Peaking under pressure	Individual sports	46	1.70	.65	-2.802	.006
		Team sports	32	2.11	.60		
	Freedom from worry	Individual sports	46	1.59	.67	-2.155	.034
		Team sports	32	1.88	.47		
	Overall coping skills	Individual sports	46	2.15	.38	-2.506	.014
		Team sports	32	2.35	.31		

Table 3
The Chi-Square Analysis of the Frequency of Reasons to Sports Participation Based on Gender, Disability Type, and Sport Type

Personal Factors	Gender			Disability type			Sport type		
	Female	Male	Total	Visually impaired	Physically disabled	Total	Individual sports	Team sports	Total
Increasing Health/physical fitness	23	29	52	22	30	52	32	20	52
Having fun/relaxation	24	38	62	26	36	62	33	29	62
Increasing Strength	19	27	46	19	27	46	26	20	46
Increasing Social contacts	27	34	61	27	34	61	32	29	61
Losing weight	6	5	11	4	7	11	8	3	11
Increasing Self-confidence	27	33	60	24	36	60	34	26	60
Losing energy [b]	18	25	43	23	20	43	22	21	43
Learning new skills	28	38	66	26	40	66	37	29	66
Competition/winning [c]	25	40	65	28	37	65	33	32	65
Increasing independence	26	29	55	22	33	55	30	25	55
Accepting disability	13	14	27	13	14	27	14	13	27
Learning how to deal with disability/ wheelchair/aid [a]	18	12	30	12	18	30	17	13	30
Environmental Factors	**Gender**			**Disability type**			**Sport type**		
	Female	**Male**	**Total**	**Visually impaired**	**Physically disabled**	**Total**	**Individual sports**	**Team sports**	**Total**
Support from family, partner, or children [a]	31	33	64	22	42	64	41	23	64
Support from friends and colleagues	23	32	55	22	33	55	30	25	55
Medical indication	1	4	5	2	3	5	3	2	5

Note. [a]: difference in gender, [b]: difference in disability type, [c]: difference in sport type.

The Chi-square analysis of barriers faced by Paralympic athletes in participating in sports revealed no significant differences between individual and environmental barriers affecting male and female athletes, $p > .05$. The most common individual barrier for female athletes was "Too busy with other activities," while for men, it was "Being dependent on others to exercise." The top three environmental barriers for both genders were identified as: "Facilities not sufficiently adjusted," "Too few sports facilities in the neighborhood," and "Materials are too expensive." The study found no significant differences in the individual barriers faced by visually impaired and physically disabled Paralympic athletes, with the predominant barrier being "Too busy with other activities." When examining environmental factors, physically disabled athletes reported perceiving "Sports possibilities are unknown" more than visually impaired athletes [$\chi^2(1) = 5.29$, $p = .040$]. Conversely, visually impaired athletes were more likely to state that "Practice/training is not sufficiently adapted" [$\chi^2(1) = 9.30$, $p = .005$] and that "Disabled athletes are not fully accepted" [$\chi^2(1) = 5.22$, $p = .040$] compared to physically disabled athletes. Additionally, when comparing individual and team athletes, individual athletes identified "Fear of injury" as a more significant barrier than team athletes [$\chi^2(1) = 6.59$, $p = .030$]. In contrast, team athletes reported more issues related to "No/not sufficiently qualified supervision" [$\chi^2(1) = 10.22$, $p = .003$], "Not enough materials available" [$\chi^2(1) = 5.01$, $p = .044$], and "Practice/training is not sufficiently adapted" [$\chi^2(1) = 6.99$, $p = .016$] compared to individual athletes. Table 4 presents the frequency of sports barriers,

categorized by gender, type of disability (physical or visual), and sport (individual or team), among Paralympic athletes.

The Chi-square analysis indicated no significant differences between individual and environmental factors that facilitate participation and maintenance among female and male athletes (p> .05). Both genders identified "Competition/winning" as the most frequently cited personal factor facilitating participation. In contrast, "Support from family, partner, or children" was the most commonly identified environmental factor. When examining the factors that facilitate participation and maintenance in sports among Paralympic athletes, results varied by disability type. Physically disabled athletes more frequently cited "Self-confidence" as an individual facilitating factor [$\chi^2(1) = 5.14$, $p = .045$], while visually impaired athletes reported "Losing energy" more often [$\chi^2(1) = 8.74$, $p = .007$]. There were no differences in the environmental enabling factors cited by athletes with physical disabilities compared to those who are visually impaired. Additionally, when comparing individual athletes to team athletes, team athletes "Losing energy," an individual facilitating factor, more frequently than those with individual athletes [$\chi^2(1) = 5.43$, $p = .036$]. No differences were observed regarding environmental facilitators between individual and team athletes (Table 5).

Table 4
The Chi-Square Analysis of the Frequency of Barriers to Sports Participation Based on Gender, Disability Type, and Sport Type

Personal Factors	Gender			Type of Disability			Types of Sport		
	Female	Male	Total	Visually impaired	Physically disabled	Total	Individual sports	Team sports	Total
Not being able to exercise because of physical disability	5	6	11	3	8	11	8	3	11
Too busy with other activities	10	5	15	8	7	15	10	5	15
Not comfortable in the presence of other athletes	5	3	8	3	5	8	6	2	8
Fear of injury [c]	4	3	7	1	6	7	7	0	7
Being dependent on others to be able to exercise	6	8	14	5	9	14	9	5	14
Environmental Factors	**Gender**			**Type of Disability**			**Types of Sport**		
	Female	**Male**	**Total**	**Visually impaired**	**Physically disabled**	**Total**	**Individual sports**	**Team sports**	**Total**
Sports possibilities are unknown [a]	21	30	51	25	26	51	27	24	51
Too few sports facilities in the neighborhood	23	29	52	23	29	52	29	23	52
No/not sufficiently qualified supervision [b]	20	28	48	24	24	48	21	27	48
Facilities not (sufficiently) adjusted	21	33	54	24	30	54	27	27	54
Transport	19	26	45	18	27	45	25	20	45
Materials not (sufficiently) adjusted	17	23	40	18	22	40	20	20	40
Not enough materials available [b]	15	22	37	19	18	37	17	20	37
Materials are too expensive	21	31	52	19	33	52	28	24	52
Practice/training is not (sufficiently) adapted [a,b]	9	18	27	17	10	27	11	16	27

Note. [a]: difference in disability type; [b]: difference in sport type.

Table 4 (Continued)

Environmental Factors	Gender			Type of Disability			Types of Sport		
	Female	Male	Total	Visually impaired	Physically disabled	Total	Individual sports	Team sports	Total
Sports activities are too expensive	19	17	36	12	24	36	23	13	36
Sports are too competitive	8	15	23	13	10	23	13	10	23
No possibility of exercising with peers	12	14	26	14	12	26	14	12	26
Disabled athletes are not (fully) accepted [a]	19	24	43	22	21	43	25	18	43
Not enough support from the environment	21	26	47	23	24	47	24	23	47
Not enough fellow disabled athletes	20	23	43	19	24	43	26	17	43

Note. [a]: difference in disability type; [b]: difference in sport type.

Table 5

The Chi-Square Analysis of the Frequency of Facilitators to Sports Participation Based on Gender, Disability Type, and Sport Type

Personal Factors	Gender			Type of Disability			Types of Sport		
	Female	Male	Total	Visual Impairment	Physical Disability	Total	Individual sports	Team sports	Total
Health/physical fitness	24	30	54	23	31	54	32	22	54
Fun/relaxation	21	38	59	26	33	59	29	30	59
Strength	26	35	61	28	33	61	34	27	61
Social contacts	26	31	57	26	31	57	31	26	57
Weight control	12	15	27	12	15	27	18	9	27
Self-confidence [a]	26	31	57	27	30	57	33	24	57
Competition/Winning	26	36	62	28	34	62	35	27	62
Losing energy [a,b]	19	31	50	26	24	50	23	27	50
Independence	26	27	53	23	30	53	32	21	53
Environmental Factors	**Gender**			**Type of Disability**			**Types of Sport**		
	Female	**Male**	**Total**	**Visual Impairment**	**Physical Disability**	**Total**	**Individual sports**	**Team sports**	**Total**
Support from family, partner, or children	28	38	66	26	40	66	39	27	66
Support from friends and colleagues	23	33	56	21	35	56	34	22	56
Medical indication	0	2	2	0	2	2	2	0	2

Note. [a]: difference in disability type; [b]: difference in sport type.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the motivations, coping skills, reasons, barriers, and facilitators influencing participation in sports among Turkish Paralympic athletes competing at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games. Particular attention was paid to the effects of gender, the type of disability that athletes have, and the type of sport they engage in. The findings revealed that, with the exception of extrinsic motivation, gender did not play a significant role in the motivational parameters of Paralympic athletes. Female athletes reported higher levels of extrinsic motivation to engage in sport than their male counterparts. Additionally, no differences were observed in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and non-motivation when athletes were categorised by type of disability or sport. Overall, participants exhibited moderate levels of motivation across all dimensions.

Findings highlight that the motivational profiles among Paralympic athletes remain consistent regardless of their impairment or the sport they compete in. These results suggest that female Paralympic athletes are influenced more by extrinsic motivational factors, such as financial rewards, material incentives, and public recognition (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Although the number of female athletes participating in Paralympic sports is increasing, female athletes still face many challenges to acceptance and continued participation, which could lead to a decline in this trend. For many, overcoming these barriers can lead to significant social and personal gains (Kirakosyan, 2021; Tekkurşun Demir & İlhan, 2020). Previous studies have shown that participating in elite sports positively affects the physical, physiological, psychological, and social well-being of female Paralympic athletes (Dean et al., 2021; Kirakosyan, 2021; Sherrill, 1993; Shamych, 2020). The athletes themselves have identified various factors influencing their decision to participate, including the sport's inherent charm, competitive opportunities, self-acceptance, societal acceptance, and institutional and interpersonal support systems (Kolkka & Williams, 1997; Rolfe et al., 2009; Slocum et al., 2018). The current research results are consistent with the Women's Sports Foundation (2017), which acknowledges that participating in the Olympics or Paralympics offers many benefits, including financial rewards, sports contracts at national and international levels, and increased exposure in sports media worldwide. These findings align with those of Szemes et al. (2017), who examined the motivational factors of Hungarian national para-swimming team athletes competing in the 2016 European Swimming Championships. The study found that the athletes had high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In a separate study conducted in Turkey, Tekkurşun Demir and İlhan (2019) examined the motivations of visually impaired athletes to participate in sports. They found no significant differences between male and female athletes regarding motivational parameters. However, in line with the current study's findings, another Turkish study involving athletes with physical, hearing, and visual impairments found that female athletes with hearing impairments exhibited higher levels of external motivation than their male counterparts (Tekkurşun Demir & İlhan, 2020). Although the findings regarding extrinsic motivation to participate in sports appear to contradict some existing literature, this is not entirely unexpected. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are crucial to enhancing athletic performance and should be at elevated levels. As the study subjects are professional athletes, it is expected that they demonstrate high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, although the relative contribution of external factors may vary. Cerasoli et al. (2014) analysed 40 years of research and found that both types of motivation are vital for athletic

performance: intrinsic motivation enhances quality and extrinsic motivation enhances quantity. Similarly, Karageorghis and Terry (2011) noted that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations affect athletes differently. While extrinsic motivation, such as tangible rewards, can enhance adult athletes' performance in the short term, long-term effectiveness depends on strong intrinsic motivation. They emphasised the importance of balancing internal and external drives. In conclusion, the comparable levels of motivation observed among Paralympic athletes, regardless of gender, type of disability or sport category — except for extrinsic motivation, which differed by gender only — are largely consistent with existing literature. The discrepancies between this study's findings and those of previous research can be attributed to variations in athletes' disability types and the sports involved. These results emphasise the importance of conducting more comprehensive research into the motivational factors that influence Paralympic competitors.

The current study of Paralympic athletes' perceived coping skills produced several key findings. Female athletes scored higher than male athletes in the "Goal setting and preparation" category. Conversely, male athletes outperformed female athletes in the 'Freedom from worry' category. Additionally, athletes with physical disabilities performed better than visually impaired athletes in "Coachability", "Goal setting and mental preparation", and "Overall coping skills". Team athletes scored higher than their counterparts in individual sports in the following categories: "Concentration", "Confidence and achievement", "Peaking under pressure", "Freedom from worry", and "Overall coping skills". These results suggest that Paralympic athletes' coping strategies vary by gender, disability type, and sport. While some of these conclusions align with those of previous studies examining the coping skills of Paralympic athletes, others diverge. For example, Pensgaard et al. (1999) investigated the coping skills of Paralympic and Olympic athletes at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Norway and found that coping skills did not differ by gender. Both groups exhibited similar strategies, including active coping, planning, social instrumental support, social-emotional support, suppression of competing activities, acceptance, venting emotions, denial, and bemusement. Stratas et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative interview with a visually impaired Paralympic athlete who competed at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games. The athlete reported experiencing various pressure-inducing situations before, during, and after the competition, including training and competition challenges, unexpected circumstances, the need to concentrate amid loud noises, and feelings of regret. The athlete stated that he employed strategies such as 'mental skills', 'self-care', 'minimising periods of inactivity' and seeking 'effective

social support' to handle these stresses. This research highlights the range of coping skills utilised by Paralympic athletes in competitive environments. One significant reason for discrepancies between these findings and existing literature may be the variety of disabilities among Paralympic athletes, leading to distinct stress factors and coping skills (Campbell & Jones, 2002; Martin, 2012). A study examining stress coping skills among Turkish athletes competing in amputee football, wheelchair basketball and swimming found gender differences in these strategies. There were no gender differences in attitudes or requests for social support, which tended to be either submissive or optimistic. However, female athletes were found to use strategies that were more confident and desperate than those used by their male counterparts (Eraslan et al., 2017). While the current study did not identify differences in social support requests by sport type, the overall literature suggests that sport type significantly affects athletes' coping skills.

This study examined whether the reasons, barriers, and facilitators for participating in sports differ among Paralympic athletes based on gender, type of disability, and sport. Female athletes reported 'learning how to deal with disability/wheelchair/aid' as a personal motivation more frequently than male athletes. In contrast, male athletes highlighted 'support from family, partner or children' as an environmental motivator more frequently than female athletes did. The study also compared the reasons for participation of visually impaired and physically disabled Paralympic athletes. Visually impaired athletes indicated 'losing energy' as a concern more frequently than physically disabled athletes, although there were no significant differences in their environmental motivations. A possible explanation for this finding is that visual impairment is not purely physical but is closely linked to increased cognitive demands, as vision loss requires sustained attention, continuous environmental monitoring, and adaptive effort, leading to greater use of mental resources and higher perceived energy expenditure; accordingly, previous studies have shown that fatigue is reported more frequently among visually impaired individuals, suggesting that reliance on non-visual cues and ongoing compensatory strategies contributes to greater perceived energy loss (Schakel et al., 2017; Schakel et al., 2019). One environmental barrier noted was that 'sports possibilities are unknown', which was reported more frequently by physically disabled athletes than by visually impaired athletes. However, visually impaired athletes were more likely to mention barriers such as 'practice/training is not sufficiently adapted' and 'disabled athletes are not fully accepted'. Among the personal facilitators of sports participation and maintenance, "self-confidence" and "energy consumption" were cited more frequently by visually impaired athletes than by athletes with physical disabilities. When the

reasons, barriers, and facilitators for participating in sports were compared by sport type, it was found that individual athletes mentioned 'competition/winning' more often than team athletes. Individual athletes also expressed greater concern about 'fear of injury'. However, environmental barriers such as 'insufficiently qualified supervision', 'insufficient materials', and 'insufficiently adapted practice/training' were reported more often by team athletes than individual athletes. Interestingly, team athletes cited 'losing energy', one of the personal facilitators for continued participation in sports, more often than individual athletes. Despite differences in reasons for engaging in and maintaining sports participation based on gender, type of disability and sport, it is evident that both individual and environmental factors play a significant role. Limited research has investigated the reasons, barriers, and facilitators for Paralympic athletes taking up sport and revealed commonalities despite varied motivations based on gender, type of disability, and age. For example, Page et al. (2001) conducted a study investigating the motivations of elite disabled athletes. They found that motivations included overcoming social and physical challenges, combatting feelings of self-contempt, remaining active to mitigate the adverse effects of inactivity and disability, and engaging socially with other disabled individuals. Participants in the study also noted that taking part in sports fosters a sense of competence, boosts fitness, delays the consequences of impairment, provides a social outlet, and offers a competitive edge. Furthermore, a 2013 study by Wilson and Khoo in Malaysia revealed that the main motivations for elite athletes with disabilities to participate in sports are achievement, challenge, and competency development. No gender differences were found in these reasons. A study conducted in Poland by Molik et al. (2010) identified physical activity, teamwork, skill development, and exercise as the main motivations for participation among athletes in wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, and bocce. Health was identified as the primary motivation for bocce players. In the current study, 80% of Paralympic athletes reported being motivated to participate in sports by 'learning new skills', 'competition/winning', and 'support from family, partner, or children'.

No significant gender differences were found in Paralympic athletes' views on barriers to participating in and maintaining sports. Athletes with physical disabilities reported the barrier of 'unknown sports facilities' more frequently than visually impaired athletes. However, the barriers of 'insufficiently adapted training' and 'lack of full acceptance of disabled athletes' were mentioned more frequently by visually impaired athletes than by those with physical disabilities. Additionally, visually impaired athletes expressed greater concern over the barrier of 'fear of injury' than athletes with physical disabilities. A higher proportion of athletes from team sports

than visually impaired athletes declared that 'insufficiently adapted training', 'insufficiently available materials', and 'lack of sufficiently qualified supervision' were obstacles. A study looking into different sports, athlete gender and type of disability found that 65% of Paralympic athletes said that "insufficiently adjusted facilities", "too few sports facilities in the neighborhood", "expensive materials," and "unknown sports facilities" were obstacles to them engaging in sports. Very few studies have been carried out on this topic. One example is the work of Jaarsma, Geertzen et al. (2014), who researched the barriers to sports participation experienced by Paralympic athletes in the Netherlands. They found that geography was the most significant obstacle for people with disabilities, and that these obstacles varied depending on the type of disability. 'Lack of sports facilities in the neighborhood' was the most common environmental barrier, while 'dependence on others to exercise' was the most common personal barrier. The research also revealed that wheelchair athletes had less access and required fewer adjustments than ambulant athletes. Furthermore, wheelchair users were more likely to experience environmental factors, such as transportation problems, and personal factors, such as reliance on others.

A study by Wilson and Khoo (2013) in Malaysia shows that elite athletes with structural disabilities face a lack of funding, facilities and equipment. Negative public attitudes, limited access to high-quality coaching and unfavourable views from the media and government must also be taken into account. According to additional research by Jaarsma, Dekker et al. (2014), transportation issues were rated as the most significant environmental barrier, while vision-related issues were the most significant personal barrier for people with visual impairments. Another personal barrier identified is reliance on others. Stephens et al. (2012), reporting on the experiences of athletes with spinal injuries, list several obstacles to participation, including administrative difficulties such as facility availability, health issues such as urinary tract infection, emotional obstacles such as insecurity, and condescending remarks from others. Therefore, the challenges faced by elite athletes are consistent with the findings of this study and a few others in the literature. However, these obstacles depend mainly on the type of disability and the sport.

This study examined the factors that facilitate sports participation and the ongoing involvement of Paralympic athletes, analysing these elements in terms of gender, type of disability and sport. The findings showed no significant gender differences in personal or environmental factors. However, physically disabled athletes were found to report higher levels of self-confidence than

visually impaired athletes. Conversely, visually impaired athletes mentioned 'losing energy' more frequently than physically disabled athletes, and team athletes cited this more frequently than individual athletes. Furthermore, 80% of Paralympic athletes cited "encouragement from family, partner or children" as an important motivator, alongside the personal factor of "competition/winning". Related literature indicated that the main motivators for Dutch Paralympic athletes were “enjoyment and relaxation”, “health and physical condition”, and “competition and victory”. These factors varied by the athletes' disability type and sport. Notably, more than 70% of the athletes in the study reported these three facilitators, regardless of gender, type of disability, or sport type (Jaarsma, Geertzen et al., 2014). Furthermore, McLoughlin et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of empowerment, advocacy, improved health, college scholarships and performance-related goals in encouraging elite athletes to participate in sports. The differences in findings between this research and others can largely be attributed to the specific facilitating factors included in our data collection tools. The emphasis on health, physical fitness, competition and positive feelings associated with winning aligns with existing literature on the topic.

Limitations

The study's findings should be interpreted with caution due to the study's limitations. The data were gathered from Paralympic athletes of various clubs and training camps across Turkey at different times, including before, during, and after training sessions, and also in the athletes' leisure time. The times, places, and situations in which the data were collected may have led participants' responses to differ from what they would normally be. Consequently, future investigations must aim to create uniform conditions for data collection to reduce the influence of the environment on athletes' opinions. In addition, the researcher and the coach led the visually impaired athletes through data collection. They marked the responses on the scale as the athletes gave them. This may have caused the participants to give socially desirable rather than genuine answers. The use of data access methods that enable reading and free-response use by the visually impaired is strongly recommended for future work. Another limitation of the present study is that only Paralympic athletes took part in it, which places serious restrictions on the application of the results from the study to the wider population of athletes with disabilities in Turkey. Besides that, it is important to consider the limitations of the data collection tools. The limitations in the tools for data collection seem to indicate that not only the views of Paralympic competitors

but also the information they provide through these instruments may be incomplete. One way this problem can be solved is by conducting more extensive studies. The studies should have qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods in their data collection. In line with previous research reporting high levels of intrinsic motivation among Paralympic athletes, the inclusion and exclusion criteria employed in this study may have yielded a relatively homogeneous and highly motivated sample, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to Paralympic athletes with varying levels of motivation, competitive experience, and disability characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that Paralympic athletes are generally motivated to participate in sport, regardless of gender, type of disability, or sport. However, female athletes displayed higher levels of extrinsic motivation. Notably, differences in athletic coping skills, reasons for participating in sport, and barriers to and facilitators of participation emerged, influenced by gender, type of disability, and sport.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings, which demonstrate that Paralympic athletes in the present study exhibit average motivation levels, are rather encouraging. However, it is very important that policymakers become more active on this issue and introduce regulations that will not cause athletes to lose their existing moderate level of motivation, but rather improve it. The research underlines the significance of developing and reshaping coping skills training for Paralympic athletes with an emphasis on factors such as gender, type of disabilities, and sports in which they compete. Psychological skills interventions have to be a part of coaching and training activities so as to help relieve or eradicate the challenges that Paralympic athletes face, thus improving their performance. Furthermore, based on the findings of this study, a strong call is made to policy makers to explore ways to encourage persons with disabilities to participate in the Paralympic Games and to ensure their continued participation. A decision to make people with disabilities feel comfortable in the sports arena requires several approaches, as it is necessary to dismantle the barriers that limit the transformation process and the integration of new supports alongside the existing ones. This, in turn, involves steps such as making training locations more accessible, providing financial assistance, and ensuring that community programs are inclusive. All these actions cannot be overemphasized, as they help ensure a level playing field for all athletes.

It is important that future research explores motivation levels among Paralympic athletes across a range of cultural and socioeconomic contexts. This will help to determine whether these factors influence their engagement and persistence in sports. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine how motivation and coping skills develop over time and in response to specific interventions, with the aim of gaining a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between these factors. Research could also examine the effectiveness of policy measures and community-based initiatives. These could promote inclusive sports participation. They could also identify potential barriers. These barriers might exist despite current support systems. By focusing on these areas, future studies can offer more detailed insights and practical advice to improve the development, motivation, and performance of Paralympic athletes.

Author Contributions

The study originated from a doctoral thesis, with the first and second authors working together to define the research topic and methodology. The first author took the lead in data collection, while both authors collaborated closely during the data analysis phase. The second author also provided supervision in presenting and reporting the findings. Although both authors exchanged ideas while writing the discussion section, the first author did the majority of this work. Once the first author completed the initial full draft, the second author conducted a thorough review and editing process to finalize the manuscript for publication. All authors have read and approved the final version and take responsibility for the integrity of the work.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethics Statement

Ethics approval was granted by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee at Mersin University on 31 October 2019, under reference number 027.

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