

## The effect of social anxiety on the mental well-being of sport sciences students

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the impact of social anxiety levels on the mental well-being of students of Sport Sciences. The research was conducted using a relational survey model and involved 253 students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences at a public university in the Aegean region of Turkey. Data were collected through a personal information form, the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, and analyzed using SPSS. The findings indicate that social anxiety can affect students' academic and athletic performance. However, no direct significant relationship was found between social anxiety and mental well-being ( $p > 0.05$ ). Nonetheless, it was determined that students who actively engage in sports exhibit lower levels of social anxiety and higher levels of mental well-being ( $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, variables such as department of study, academic year, and living arrangements were found to have varying effects on mental well-being. In conclusion, physical activity contributes positively to students' psychological health, and the impact of social anxiety on mental well-being appears to be indirect.

### KEYWORDS

University Students; Social Anxiety; Mental Well-Being

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The concept of anxiety originates from the Ancient Greek root meaning "concerns" and encompasses emotions such as worry, fear, and curiosity. The term was first used by Cicero to denote pressure and suffocation, and was initially distinguished from the concept of "angor" (Baydil, 2007). Over time, the impact of anxiety on an individual's thoughts and behaviors has been examined from various perspectives and has become a significant topic of research in the field of psychology.

Social anxiety, in particular, refers to a type of anxiety experienced due to the fear of negative evaluation in social settings. Arising primarily during social interaction processes, this form of anxiety can lead individuals to avoid social environments altogether (Schneier, 2002). People with social anxiety tend to harbor negative biases toward social situations and often exhibit avoidance behaviors, which may lead to specific challenges in academic and professional life (Hirsch & Clark, 2004). Consequently, this condition can adversely affect both career development and social relationships.

Both biological and psychosocial factors play a significant role in the development of social anxiety. Genetic predisposition and imbalances in neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine point to its biological underpinnings (Stein & Stein, 2008). Additionally, early life experiences, family relationships, and traumatic social encounters are among the psychosocial factors influencing the onset of social anxiety (Spence & Rapee, 2016). It can therefore be stated that the emergence of social anxiety results from the interaction between innate biological elements and environmental influences. Accordingly, a biopsychosocial approach is essential when addressing social anxiety.

Psychological well-being is a crucial factor that directly influences individuals' academic performance and social relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2001). University students often face a variety of psychosocial challenges throughout their academic journey, which may adversely affect their mental well-being. Students enrolled in faculties of sport sciences not only deal with academic demands but also engage in rigorous programs aimed at enhancing physical performance. During this process, they may encounter psychological challenges such as social anxiety (Martens et al., 1990). This highlights the importance of psychological resilience for sport sciences students in maintaining both academic and athletic performance.

Social anxiety can negatively affect an individual's academic, professional, and personal life. Individuals with high levels of social anxiety may experience avoidance of social environments and reduced performance in academic or occupational settings (Hofmann et al., 2004). Among university

students, social anxiety is considered a factor that directly impacts academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life (Mukhlisotul'Izzah, 2025). From the perspective of sport sciences students, social anxiety may influence communication within teams, participation in competitions, and training processes. Individuals with high social anxiety levels often demonstrate reluctance to engage in group work and may experience increased performance anxiety (Beenen et al., 2025). These findings emphasize the need for initiatives aimed at enhancing the psychological resilience of sport sciences students in order to improve both individual and team performance.

In recent years, a lot of research has been done in the field of health (Kaya & Algin, 2022; Algin & Sarvan, 2024; Pekgor et al., 2024; Algin et al., 2024; Algin, 2024; Sekeroglu et al., 2025). Mental well-being is defined as an individual's state of psychological, emotional, and social well-being (Keyes, 2021). This concept is not merely the absence of mental illness, but also encompasses positive psychological functioning, self-actualization, and the ability to find meaning in life (Neba, 2025). In this context, examining the effect of social anxiety levels on the mental well-being of sport sciences students is a subject of importance for both academic and athletic performance. Understanding the impact of social anxiety on psychological resilience and overall quality of life will contribute to the development of supportive interventions for students.

The aim of this study is to determine the impact of social anxiety levels on the mental well-being of students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences. By exploring the relationship between social anxiety and mental well-being, the study seeks to offer recommendations for measures to support students' psychological health. It is expected that the findings will make a valuable contribution to efforts aimed at enhancing the psychological resilience of students in sport sciences faculties. Furthermore, future research in the fields of sports psychology and mental resilience may help develop more effective strategies to boost both academic and athletic success among students.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Design and Participants**

This study employed the relational survey model, one of the quantitative research methods. The relational survey model aims to determine the existence, direction, and magnitude of the relationship between two or more variables. While it investigates whether the variables change together, it does not imply a direct cause-and-effect relationship but rather offers insight into

potential associations (Karasar, 2005). The study group consisted of 253 students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences at a public university located in the Aegean Region of Turkey.

## **2.2. Instruments and Procedures**

The data were collected using a Personal Information Form, the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale.

The "Personal Information Form" developed by the researchers, was designed to gather participants' demographic data, such as gender, academic year, department, status of engaging in sports, and accommodation situation.

The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale was developed by Liebowitz in 1987 (Dilbaz, 1997). The scale consists of 24 items, including 11 social interaction and 13 performance situations. Each item is rated using a Likert-type scale to assess the degree of fear and avoidance experienced. The Turkish adaptation, including reliability and validity assessments, was conducted by Soykan et al. (2003). For reliability analysis, three coefficients were calculated: the inter-rater reliability coefficient was found to be .96 for the anxiety-fear subscale, .95 for the avoidance subscale, and .96 for the total scale. The test-retest reliability was .97, and Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency was .96 for the fear-anxiety subscale, .95 for the avoidance subscale, and .98 for the entire scale. The scale demonstrated convergent, discriminant, and criterion validity, and it was found to effectively differentiate social anxiety disorder (SAD) from other disorders. The cut-off score is 25 for subscales and 50 for the total score (Soykan et al., 2003).

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, originally developed by Tennant et al. (2007), was adapted into Turkish by Keldal (2015). It comprises 14 positively worded items, assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. The total score ranges from 14 to 70, with higher scores indicating a better psychological state.

## **2.3. Statistical Analyses**

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26. The distribution of the data obtained from students was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, which were found to fall within the reference range of -1.5 to +1.5, indicating that the data followed a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). For statistical analysis, independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed. To determine between which groups significant differences existed following ANOVA, the Bonferroni post hoc test was applied. Additionally, a simple linear regression analysis was

conducted to examine the effect of university students' social anxiety levels on their mental well-being.

### 3. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis values, and reliability coefficients of the data, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics, Skewness-Kurtosis values, and reliability coefficients of the scales

Scales	n	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	$\alpha$
Social Anxiety	253	2,14	0,63	0,342	0,151	0,942
Mental Well-Being	253	3,46	0,85	-0,001	-0,744	0,935

As shown in the table, the students' mean social anxiety level was  $2.14 \pm 0.63$ , while their mental well-being level was  $3.46 \pm 0.85$ . An examination of the skewness and kurtosis values for the scales used in the study revealed that all values fall within the reference range of -1.5 to +1.5, indicating that the data were normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Furthermore, reliability coefficients calculated from the participants' responses showed that the Cronbach's alpha values for both scales were above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency and strong reliability (Alpar, 2016). Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distributions of the demographic characteristics of sports sciences faculty students.

**Table 2.** Frequency and percentage distributions of the demographic characteristics of sports sciences faculty students

Scale	Different	F	%
Gender	Men	91	36,0
	Women	162	64,0
Class	1. Class	48	19,0
	2. Class	61	24,1
	3. Class	73	28,9
	4. Class	71	28,1
Department	Coaching	64	25,3
	Physical Edu and Sport Teacher	58	22,9
	Recreation	60	23,7
	Sport Management	71	28,1
Engagement in sports	Yes	189	74,7
	No	64	25,3
Housing situation	With Family	124	49,0
	Student Dormitory	50	19,8
	Student Apartment	42	16,6
	Relative	37	14,6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>100,0</b>

A total of 253 university students participated in the study, 36% of whom were male and 64% were female. Among the participants, 28.9% were in their third year of study. The students were enrolled in the following departments: 28.1% in sports management, 25.3% in coaching, 23.7% in recreation, and 22.9% in physical education and sports teaching. Regarding their physical activity, 74.7% of the students reported that they actively participate in sports, while 25.3% indicated that they do not. In terms of housing conditions, 49% of the students live with their families, followed by 19.8% living in student dormitories, 16.6% in student houses, and 14.6% living with relatives (Table 2).

The social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared according to gender using an independent samples t-test, and the results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Comparison of social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students according to gender

Scales	Gender	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Social Anxiety	Men	91	2,23	0,65	1,87	0,06
	Women	162	2,08	0,61		
Mental Well-Being	Men	91	3,42	0,77	-0,63	0,52
	Women	162	3,49	0,89		

According to the results of table 3, there were no significant differences in social anxiety and mental well-being levels between male and female students ( $p > 0.05$ ). The social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared according to class level using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and the results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Comparison of social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students according to class level

Scales	Class	n	Mean	SD	F	p	Difference
Social Anxiety	1. Class <sup>1</sup>	48	1,99	0,58	2,09	0,10	-
	2. Class <sup>2</sup>	61	2,07	0,52			
	3. Class <sup>3</sup>	73	2,27	0,69			
	4. Class <sup>4</sup>	71	2,15	0,68			
Mental Well-Being	1. Class <sup>1</sup>	48	3,33	0,84	3,15	0,02*	4>2
	2. Class <sup>2</sup>	61	3,26	0,82			
	3. Class <sup>3</sup>	73	3,51	0,86			
	4. Class <sup>4</sup>	71	3,67	0,82			

\* $p \leq 0,05$

There were no significant differences in social anxiety levels according to class level [ $F(3,249) = 2.09, p > 0.05$ ]. However, it was found that mental well-being levels of university students significantly differed according to class level [ $F(3,249) = 3.15, p \leq 0.05$ ]. To identify which groups exhibited this difference, a Bonferroni test was applied. According to the Bonferroni test results, the mental well-being levels of students in their fourth year were found to be higher than those of students in their second year.

The social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared according to their field of study using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and the results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Comparison of social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students according to their field of study

Scales	Department	n	Mean	SD	F	p	Difference
Social Anxiety	Coaching <sup>1</sup>	64	2,16	0,74	1,96	0,11	-
	Physical Edu and Sport Teacher <sup>2</sup>	58	2,24	0,64			
	Recreation <sup>3</sup>	60	1,97	0,55			
	Sport Management <sup>4</sup>	71	2,17	0,57			
Mental Well-Being	Coaching <sup>1</sup>	64	3,72	0,80	5,11	0,00*	1>4
	Physical Edu and Sport Teacher <sup>2</sup>	58	3,49	0,76			
	Recreation <sup>3</sup>	60	3,50	0,88			
	Sport Management <sup>4</sup>	71	3,17	0,86			

\* $p \leq 0,05$

There were no significant differences in social anxiety levels according to the field of study [ $F(3,249) = 1.96, p > 0.05$ ]. However, it was found that mental well-being levels of university students significantly differed according to their field of study [ $F(3,249) = 5.11, p \leq 0.05$ ]. To identify which groups exhibited this difference, a Bonferroni test was applied. According to the Bonferroni test results, students in the coaching department had higher mental well-being levels compared to those in the sports management department.

The social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared according to their physical activity participation using an independent samples t-test, and the results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Comparison of social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students according to their physical activity participation

Scales	Engagement in Sport	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Social Anxiety	Yes	189	2,07	0,61	-2,66	0,00*
	No	64	2,32	0,68		
Mental Well-Being	Yes	189	3,53	0,83	2,31	0,02*
	No	64	3,25	0,87		

\* $p \leq 0,05$ 

It was concluded that there were significant differences in social anxiety and mental well-being levels based on physical activity participation ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Students who actively engage in sports had lower social anxiety levels and higher mental well-being levels compared to those who do not engage in sports.

The social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared according to their housing situation using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and the results are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Comparison of social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students according to their housing situation

Scales	Housing situation	n	Mean	SD	F	p	Difference
Social Anxiety	With Family <sup>1</sup>	124	2,10	0,63	0,30	0,81	-
	Student Dormitory <sup>2</sup>	50	2,16	0,70			
	Student Apartment <sup>3</sup>	42	2,16	0,72			
	Relative <sup>4</sup>	37	2,20	0,37			
Mental Well-Being	With Family <sup>1</sup>	124	3,70	0,76	16,26	0,00*	4<1,2,3
	Student Dormitory <sup>2</sup>	50	3,50	0,77			
	Student Apartment <sup>3</sup>	42	3,40	0,96			
	Relative <sup>4</sup>	37	2,67	0,62			

\* $p \leq 0,05$ 

There were no significant differences in social anxiety levels according to housing situation [ $F(3,249) = 0.30$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ]. However, it was found that mental well-being levels of university students significantly differed according to housing situation [ $F(3,249) = 16.26$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ]. To identify which groups exhibited this difference, a Bonferroni test was applied. According to the Bonferroni test results, students living with relatives had lower mental well-being levels.

The effect of social anxiety levels on mental well-being was examined using simple linear regression analysis. The results are presented in Table 8. It was concluded that social anxiety levels

of university students did not have a significant effect on mental well-being [ $F(1,367) = 1.88, p > 0.05$ ].

**Table 8.** The effect of social anxiety levels on mental well-being levels of university students

	<b>B</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Mental Well-Being	-0,11	-1,37	0,17	0,086	0,007	1,88	0,17

*Note.* Independent variable: Social Anxiety

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the effect of social anxiety levels on the mental well-being of students in the Faculty of Sports Sciences. When the findings were evaluated within the context of the relevant literature, it was observed that social anxiety is an important variable in individuals' academic, social, and sporting experiences. High levels of social anxiety can negatively affect individuals' group interactions and team dynamics, while mental well-being was found to be related to psychological resilience and quality of life. In this context, the consistency of the research findings with existing studies will be discussed, and suggestions will be made for reducing social anxiety and enhancing mental well-being.

The results revealed that university students' social anxiety levels were moderate and showed certain differences among individuals. Mental well-being levels were generally found to range between moderate and high, with a wider distribution among students. It was determined that the data followed a normal distribution, which supported the applicability of parametric tests for the analyses. Moreover, the high reliability coefficients of the scales used reinforced the consistency and validity of the results. These findings provide a solid foundation for assessing the relationship between students' social anxiety levels and mental well-being. A review of the literature shows that the findings of the current study are consistent with some previous studies (Çakır, 2024; Tunç, 2015; Baltacı & Hamarta, 2013; Aslan, 2020). These studies support the idea that university students' social anxiety levels are generally moderate, and their mental well-being varies depending on individual factors. However, there are also studies in the literature that reached different results compared to our study. For example, the study by Kocaoğlu and Çekiç (2021) revealed that students' social anxiety levels were higher and had a more pronounced effect on their mental well-being. In light of these findings, it can be stated that the relationship between social anxiety levels and mental well-being among university students should be examined more comprehensively. Future research should investigate the factors that determine the interaction between these two variables in greater detail and

assess the impact of individual and environmental variables. Furthermore, developing intervention programs aimed at reducing social anxiety and enhancing mental well-being may be beneficial for improving students' academic and social quality of life.

When evaluating the research findings in terms of the gender variable, no significant difference was found between social anxiety and mental well-being levels. This result indicates that social anxiety and mental well-being levels do not vary based on gender. However, different findings have been reported in the literature on this topic. Researchers such as Kermen et al. (2016), Kuyumcu (2012), Andromahi & Dimitar (2014), and Amr et al. (2013) suggest that gender could be a determining factor for social anxiety and mental well-being, while İzgiç et al. (2000) also reached a similar conclusion. In contrast, studies by Gümüş (2002), Tzgül & Dost (2004); Tunç (2015) found, in line with the current research findings, that gender was not a determining factor. Therefore, it can be suggested that the effect of gender on social anxiety and mental well-being may vary depending on the sample, cultural factors, and the measurement tools used. Specifically, considering that individuals may have different experiences within the framework of societal roles and social expectations, gender differences may be identified in certain contexts, but it is common for these differences not to be observed in different samples. For this reason, future research should more thoroughly examine cultural factors and individual differences to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the effect of gender on social anxiety and mental well-being.

In the study, social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared based on their class level. The analyses revealed that there were no significant differences in social anxiety levels according to class level. However, a statistically significant difference was found in mental well-being levels across class levels. Detailed analyses to identify which groups exhibited this difference revealed that the mental well-being levels of students in their final year were higher than those of students in their second year. This finding suggests that students' mental well-being may improve positively as their educational journey progresses. This result is consistent with the study by Danışman et al. (2023), which supports the idea that the educational process can positively impact mental well-being. However, it should also be noted that studies providing findings both parallel and contradictory to our study exist (Xiao & Huang, 2022; Saygın, 2008; Baltacı et al., 2021; Yıldırım et al., 2011; Işık & Çelik, 2020; Fisher et al., 2011; Ağırtaş & Güler, 2020; Sheridan et al., 2015; Aslan & Koç, 2018; Alemdağ & Öncü, 2015; Sun, 2023; Bardakçı & Arslan, 2021; Ye et al., 2021). Therefore, further research in this area is needed. In conclusion, the necessity of more

comprehensive and in-depth studies on the social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students becomes apparent.

In this study, the social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared based on their field of study. The analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in social anxiety levels between departments. However, it was found that there were statistically significant differences in mental well-being levels between departments. Detailed analysis revealed that students studying coaching had higher mental well-being levels compared to students studying sports management. This finding suggests that the psychosocial well-being of students can vary based on their educational processes and professional orientations. While studies in the literature (Çakır, 2024; Çetinkaya & Honça, 2017; Gönener et al., 2017) show results similar to this study, there are also studies with different findings (Karademir & Açak, 2019; Carver, 2021). This research demonstrates that university students' social anxiety and mental well-being levels are related to the departments they study. In particular, the higher mental well-being levels of students in coaching programs support the positive effects of sports and physical activity on psychological health. However, the absence of significant differences in social anxiety levels across departments suggests that social anxiety is a widespread issue among university students and can persist regardless of departmental differences. The conflicting findings in the literature indicate that more research is needed in this area. Future studies are expected to contribute to reducing social anxiety.

In this study, the social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared based on their participation in regular physical activity. The analysis showed that these two variables significantly differed depending on whether students engaged in physical activity. The findings indicate that students who engage in regular physical activity have lower social anxiety levels and higher mental well-being levels. This result suggests that physical activity may positively contribute to individuals' psychosocial well-being and may play an effective role in reducing social anxiety. Numerous studies in the literature show that regular physical activity increases mental well-being and improves psychological health. These results support the findings of our study (Eime et al., 2013; Toluç, 2020; Zarrett et al., 2009; Erkut & Tracy, 2002; Crust & Swann, 2011; Purcell et al., 2019; Baltacı et al., 2022). In conclusion, this finding is consistent with the current literature and emphasizes that exercise can be an effective tool in improving university students' psychological health. Future research could examine the long-term effects of exercise on psychosocial well-being and compare the effects of different types and intensities of exercise. Additionally, research could be conducted to better understand the underlying mechanisms by which exercise affects individuals'

psychological health. This study highlights the importance of sports and physical activity in university student support services and suggests that sports programs should be encouraged to support students' psychological well-being.

In this study, the social anxiety and mental well-being levels of university students were compared based on their accommodation status. The analysis revealed that accommodation status did not create a significant difference in social anxiety levels. However, a statistically significant difference in mental well-being levels was found based on accommodation status. Detailed analysis showed that students living with relatives had lower mental well-being levels compared to those living under other accommodation conditions. This finding suggests that the social environment and level of independence experienced by individuals may affect their psychological well-being. Living conditions have a significant impact on individuals' mental health, and especially insecure or controlling living conditions may increase stress and anxiety. University students' accommodation situations can affect their psychological adaptation, and living away from home may influence their social and emotional support systems. Research in this area has shown that the social environment and the level of independence individuals experience have a substantial effect on their psychological well-being (Arnett, 2000; Cobanoğlu & Köse, 2024; İnan et al., 2024). Therefore, it is suggested that creating psychosocial support mechanisms for university students, especially guiding individuals living with family or relatives toward gaining independence, could be an important strategy to improve their mental well-being.

The simple linear regression analysis revealed that social anxiety levels did not have a statistically significant effect on mental well-being. This finding indicates that social anxiety does not directly and strongly affect individuals' mental well-being. This result could be explained by factors such as individuals being able to develop different coping mechanisms despite their social anxiety levels or other variables affecting mental well-being being more influential. Additionally, it should be considered that the effect of social anxiety on mental well-being may occur indirectly, with mediating variables potentially guiding this relationship. In this regard, future research should include variables such as social support, psychological resilience, and self-esteem for more comprehensive analyses.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings suggest that university students' social anxiety and mental well-being levels are influenced by various demographic and lifestyle factors. Specifically, participation in physical activity, academic year, and field of study play important roles in mental well-being. The absence of a direct effect of social anxiety on mental well-being suggests that this relationship may be more complex and indirect. Especially, more detailed examination of individual and environmental factors that reduce social anxiety will be crucial for developing strategies to enhance mental well-being. Additionally, the role of regular physical activity in reducing social anxiety and supporting mental well-being should be addressed at both individual and institutional levels, with encouragement for the widespread implementation of sports programs in universities.

Future research should delve deeper into the dynamics between social anxiety and mental well-being, examining how these variables are shaped in different cultural contexts and evaluating their long-term effects.

Furthermore, intervention programs should be developed to offer more comprehensive solutions to reduce individuals' social anxiety levels and support their psychosocial health. In this context, interdisciplinary approaches and the implementation of psychological support mechanisms would be an important step to support students' academic and social success.

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**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

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