

The Impact of an 8-Week Training Program on the Sportive Character and Moral Approaches of Wheelchair Tennis Players

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Abstract

Wheelchair tennis is an important sport that enables people with physical disabilities to participate actively in competitive sport. However, research focusing on the sporting character and moral attitudes of wheelchair tennis players remains limited. In this context, with the increasing prevalence of wheelchair tennis, assessing key concepts such as sporting character and morality among wheelchair tennis players is a crucial step in understanding and improving their behaviour. The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of an 8-week training programme on the sporting character and moral attitudes of wheelchair tennis players. In line with this aim, the study aims to highlight the importance of sporting character and moral values displayed by wheelchair tennis players during sporting activities. The research was conducted using a single group pretest-posttest experimental design with no control group. The research group consisted of 23 wheelchair tennis players. Data were collected using a personal information form, the Sport Character Scale and the Sport Morale Scale. The athletes received 60-minute training sessions for 8 weeks and data were collected using pre- and post-test methods. The results of the study show a significant improvement in the sporting character and moral attitudes of wheelchair tennis athletes. Significant differences were found between the athletes' pre- and post-test scores. Furthermore, regression analysis revealed that sportsmanship, disability type, and disability level significantly predicted the moral attitudes of the athletes. The results of the study

suggest that training programmes for wheelchair tennis players have positive effects on their sporting character and moral attitudes. Therefore, it is recommended that similar training programmes aimed at improving the sporting character and moral attitudes of wheelchair tennis players should be widely implemented. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to develop policy recommendations that would encourage the participation of athletes with disabilities in general sports activities.

Keywords: *Athletes with disabilities, wheelchair tennis, sporting character, moral attitudes*

Introduction

The concept of morality is generally defined as a set of rules established to regulate relationships between individuals (Akandere et al., 2009). While decisions individuals make in the face of dilemmas are associated with their moral dimension, athletes, coaches, and managers—the stakeholders of the sporting environment—tend to relate it to the individual's social dimension (Doty, 2006).

The popularity of sports is increasing globally, and it is widely accepted as a significant tool for character development in people of all ages. The sporting environment enables young people to recognize and experience cultural values that form the essence and symbols of the environment they live in, playing a vital role in their character development (Bredemeier & Shields, 1995). Although the sporting environment does not guarantee the development or enhancement of character traits, it contributes to this process. The experiences gained in a sporting environment can build character, provided that the environment is structured and planned with the aim of character development. In short, character can be learned and taught in the sporting context (Doty, 2006).

The role of sports participation in individual character construction remains a topic of ongoing debate. There is a widespread belief in society that sports participation fosters positive character development in individuals, a view supported by numerous national and international studies (Adir, 2017; Beller, 2002; Beller & Stoll, 1995; Gibbons et al., 1995; Yalız, 2011).

Wheelchair tennis represents a significant contribution to the field of competitive sports, offering individuals with physical disabilities a valuable opportunity to engage in athletic pursuits on an equal footing with their able-bodied counterparts. The popularity and prevalence of this sport are increasing, and it is attracting the attention of researchers. An evaluation of the impact of wheelchair tennis requires an understanding of the sporting character and moral attitudes of the players. Prior research has demonstrated the multifaceted impact of sports on individuals. A substantial body

of research has demonstrated that engagement in sports can positively impact not only physical health but also mental health and social relationships (Göncü & Balci, 2023; Malm et al., 2019; Sipal et al., 2023; Sweeny et al., 2017; Yongfeng & Ge, 2021). Nevertheless, research examining the impact of a distinctive sport such as wheelchair tennis on sporting character and moral values remains scarce. In light of the growing prevalence of wheelchair tennis, it is imperative to evaluate key concepts such as sporting character and morality among wheelchair tennis players in order to gain insight into and enhance their behaviours in sporting activities. The methods employed to assess key sporting traits such as honesty, compassion, and sportsmanship in wheelchair tennis players are worthy of particular note. Similarly, tools designed to ascertain the extent of moral disengagement in sports can provide invaluable insights for the comprehension and enhancement of the sporting character and moral attitudes of wheelchair tennis athletes.

Indeed, it has been asserted that sporting character reflects an athlete's capacity to adhere to ethical and moral values, thereby forming the foundation of fair competition in sports (Genç et al., 2023). Moreover, research has demonstrated that athletes who exemplify sporting character traits, such as fair play and respect, contribute to a positive social impact through their participation in sports (Claudia, 2005).

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of an 8-week training program on the sporting character and moral attitudes of wheelchair tennis athletes. In this context, supported by findings from previous research, this study seeks to emphasize the significance of sporting character and moral values demonstrated by wheelchair tennis players during sports activities.

To achieve these overarching objectives, the research aims to address the following questions:

1. Does the 8-week training program for wheelchair tennis athletes have an effect on their moral attitudes based on the type of disability?
2. Does the 8-week training program for wheelchair tennis athletes have an effect on their moral attitudes based on the degree of disability?
3. Does the 8-week training program for wheelchair tennis athletes have an effect on their moral attitudes through their sporting character?

Materials and Methods

Research Model

This study employed a quantitative research design to ascertain whether the sporting character of wheelchair tennis athletes exerts an influence on their moral approaches to sports. In particular, the study employed a one-group pre-test and post-test experimental design without a control group, which is a method commonly used in experimental research to measure cause-effect relationships between vari-

ables (Ekiz, 2003). The one-group pre-test and post-test design entails the selection of a single group through random assignment. Measurements are taken both before and after the intervention, and the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is analysed for significance. If the difference is significant and favours the post-test, it can be interpreted as the independent variable having an effect. The inclusion of pre-tests allows for an assessment of the group's similarity prior to the experiment, enabling adjustments to be made to the post-test results accordingly (Karasar, 2012).

Research Group

The research group was comprised of a single experimental group. A simple random sampling method was employed to select the participants, and 27 athletes who had participated in the National Team camp held in Antalya during the 2022-2023 season were informed about the study. However, four athletes were excluded from the study on the grounds of meeting the exclusion criteria, namely injuries or irregular attendance at the 8-week training programme. Consequently, the final research group consisted of 23 wheelchair tennis athletes, 16 male and 7 female, who met the inclusion criteria and participated in the study on a voluntary basis.

Inclusion criteria:

- a. Absence of additional injuries aside from the disability,
- b. Absence of medication,
- c. Disability degree between 40% and 80%, and
- d. Age range between 18 and 30.

Those who meet any of the following criteria will be excluded from the programme:

- a. Incurring an injury during the training process,
- b. Missing training sessions consecutively on two occasions, and
- c. Starting medication during the training process.



Data Collection Tools

The objective of this study was to examine the influence of an 8-week training programme on the sporting character and moral approaches of wheelchair tennis athletes. Data were collected through a personal information form, the Sports Character Scale and the Moral Disengagement in Sport Scale, which were administered face-to-face under the supervision of the researcher. The athletes were informed of the details of the study and the testing protocol, and the requisite approvals and consents for voluntary participation were obtained.

The following data collection tools were employed.

Sports Character Scale (SCS)

The Sports Character Scale (SCS) is a psychometric instrument designed to assess an individual's predisposition toward sports-related activities.

The Sports Character Scale (SCS) was initially developed by Jang (2013) and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Görgüt and Tuncel (2017). The scale comprises 27 items and five sub-dimensions, which are measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The sub-dimensions are as follows: Honesty (items 1-10), Anti-social (items 11-15), Compassion (items 16-21), Sportsmanship (items 22-24), and Justice (items 25-27). Five items are formulated in a negative manner (items 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15), whereas the remaining 22 items are phrased in a positive way. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating Strong Disagreement and 5 indicating Strong Agreement. The results of the validity and reliability analysis indicated that the item-total correlations ranged from 0.33 to 0.67, which is indicative of an adequate level of reliability. The internal consistency coefficient is above 0.70, and the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) fit indices are also sufficient, thus confirming the scale's validity and reliability (Büyüköztürk, 2011; Meydan & Şeşen, 2011; Seçer, 2015).

Moral Disengagement in Sport Scale (MDSS)

The MDSS was developed by Boardley and Kavussanu (2008) to measure the mechanisms of moral disengagement in athletes. Its Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Gürpınar (2015). The scale is a single-factor measure consisting of 8 items scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). All items are negatively worded, and higher scores indicate greater moral disengagement.

Figure 1
Research Process

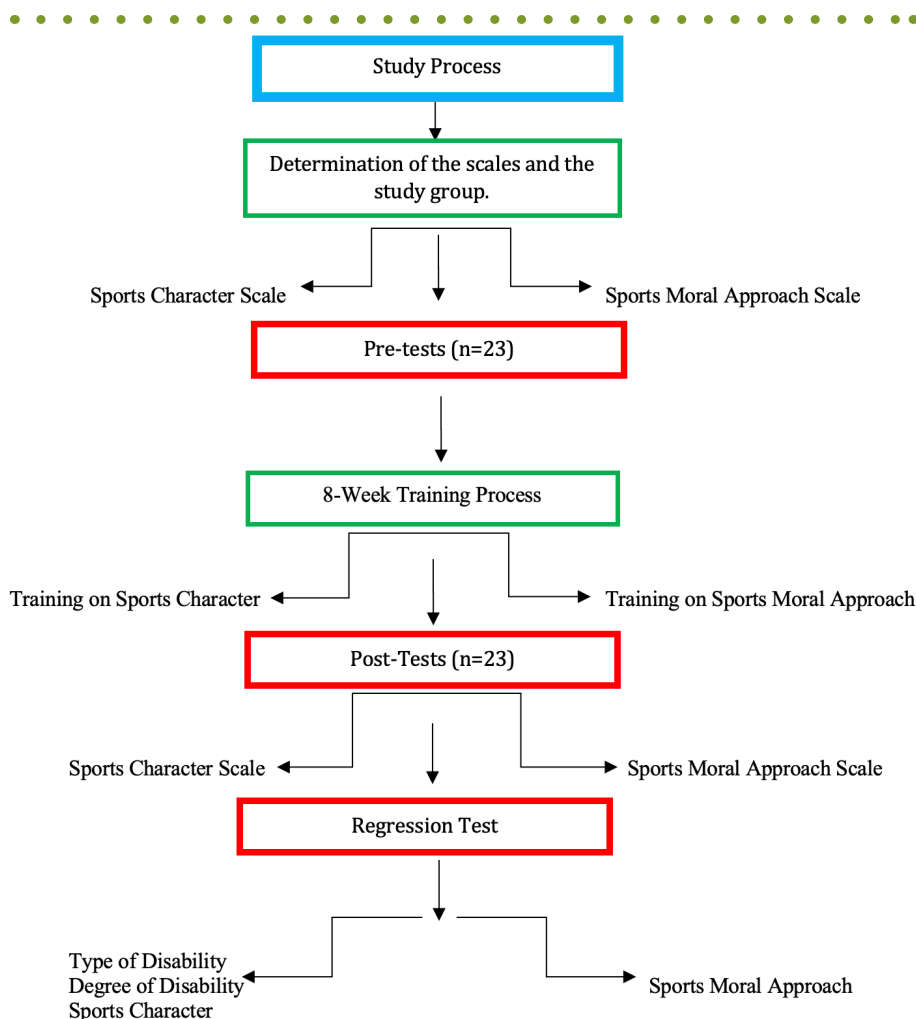


Table 1
Training Program Outline for Wheelchair Tennis Athletes

Facilitator	Sports Psychologist	
Pre-Test		Pre-test measurements of wheelchair tennis athletes
1st Session	60 min.	Fair play behaviors and their development
2nd Session	60 min.	Concepts of sport, ethics, and character; maintaining fair victory
3rd Session	60 min.	The importance of character in sports
4th Session	60 min.	The importance of ethics in sports
5th Session	60 min.	Commitment to responsibilities in sports; adherence to sports norms
6th Session	60 min.	Respect for opponents and respect for rules
7th Session	60 min.	Sportsmanship and cheating
8th Session	60 min.	The effects of sporting character on sports-related ethical approaches
Post-Test		Post-test measurements taken from wheelchair tennis athletes

Experimental Procedure

The experimental procedure was conducted in three stages over a period of 8 weeks, with a 60-minute face-to-face training session scheduled each week (total of eight sessions). Prior to the commencement of the study, the athletes were provided with comprehensive information regarding the nature of the investigation and the testing protocol. Furthermore, they were asked to consent to their participation on a voluntary basis.

In the initial stage (pre-test), the athletes completed the personal information form, the Sports Character Scale, and the Moral Disengagement in Sport Scale under the supervision of the researcher and with active participation from the athletes.

In the second stage, the athletes participated in an 8-week training programme on sporting character and moral development, with sessions lasting 60 minutes each week. These sessions were prepared and delivered by an expert sports psychologist through video and presentations.

Statistical Analysis

The data obtained from the study were subjected to analysis using the SPSS 29.00 statistical software package. To ascertain the within-group improvements, a range of statistical techniques were employed, including the calculation of the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, descriptive statistics, normality tests, paired samples t-tests and regression analysis. The total scores from the "Character in Sports" and "Deviance in Sports" scales, which were used as data collection tools, were evaluated. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Findings

Figure 3 compares the average pre-test and post-test scores for the variables 'Sporting Character' and 'Sporting Moral Approach'. The pre-test mean score for Sporting Character was 101.8696, while the post-test score increased to 107.3913, indicating a significant improvement. In contrast, the Sporting Moral Approach showed a more significant change, with a pre-test score of 25.0435 and a post-test score also increasing to 31.6087. These results suggest a significant positive impact of the applied intervention, particularly in the area of the Moral Approach, which reflects the improved ethical attitudes and behaviours of the athletes after the intervention.

Table 3 shows the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores on the Sportive Character Scale for wheelchair tennis athletes. The results show that the mean pre-test score was 101.869 ($SD = 8.667$), whereas the mean post-test score increased to 107.391 ($SD = 8.866$). This increase is statistically significant ($t_{(22)} = -6.228$, $p = 0.001$). This finding suggests that there was a significant improvement in the sporting characteristics of the wheelchair tennis players in the post-test ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that the programme or intervention used had a positive impact on the development of sporting character. These results emphasize the importance of developing sporting character in wheelchair tennis players and suggest that the programme was effective in promoting this improvement.

Figure 2

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores on Sporting Character and Sporting Moral Approach

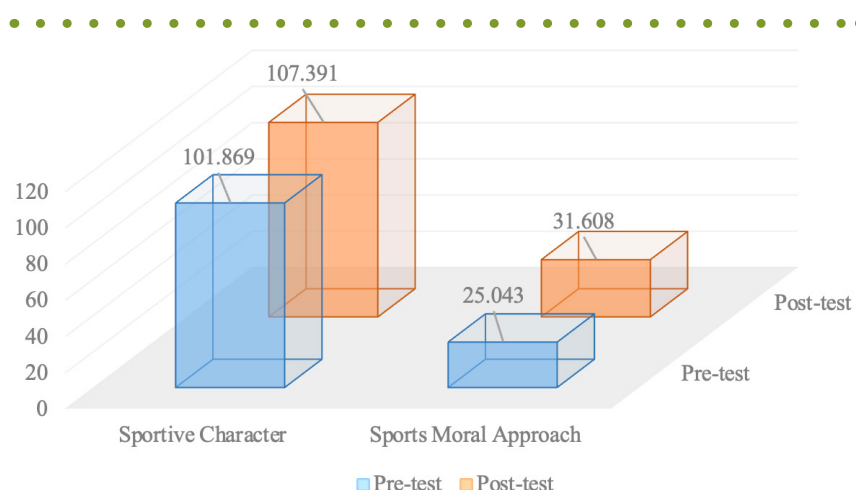
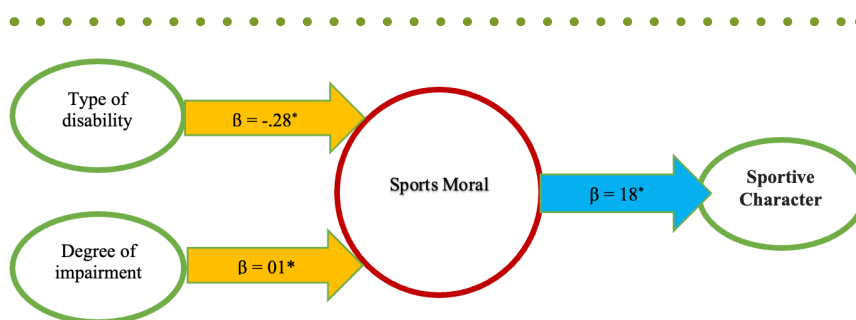


Figure 3

The Effect of Disability Type and Degree on Sports Morality and the Role of Sports Morality in Sports Character



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

Table 3

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Wheelchair Tennis Athletes on the Sportive Character Scale

Branch	Scale	Test	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	P
Wheelchair Tennis	Sportive Character	Pre-Test	23	101.869	8.667	-6.228	.001**
		Post-Test	23	107.391	8.866		

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$

Table 4 presents a comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores of the Sportive Moral Approach Scale for wheelchair tennis athletes. The results demonstrate that the mean pre-test score was 25.043 ($SD = 5.103$), while the mean post-test score exhibited an increase to 31.608 ($SD = 5.686$). This increase is statistically significant ($t_{(22)} = -3.652$, $p = 0.001$). These findings indicate a notable enhancement in the sporting characteristics of wheelchair tennis players at the post-test stage ($p < 0.01$). This implies that the programme or intervention employed had a favourable impact on the advancement of sportive character. The results suggest that the training program had a positive impact on the moral reasoning of wheelchair tennis players. The significant increase in post-test scores demonstrates that the program was effective in fostering more positive sports moral approaches among the participants.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted as the final stage of the study to examine the variables that predict moral approach in sports. In the regression model, the total score of the sports moral approach was designated as the dependent variable, while the demographic variables related to the sports moral approach (e.g., type of disability and degree of disability) and the sports character scale were included as independent variables. A summary of the model results, which includes the variables predicting moral approach in sports, is presented in Figure 3.

According to the structural model analysis presented in the figure, a negative and significant relationship was found between the type of disability and sports morality ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that as the type of disability becomes more severe, individuals' levels of sports morality decrease. A positive and statistically significant, but very weak, relationship was also observed between the degree of

disability and sports morality ($\beta = 0.01$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, there is a positive and significant effect of sports morality on sports character ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that an increase in sports morality positively influences individuals' sports character. These findings highlight the significant impact of disability type on sports morality and emphasize the role of sports morality as a determinant of sports character.

The findings presented in Table 5 provide a summary of the regression analysis of the variables that predict the moral approach in sports. The regression model indicates that the variables of disability type ($\beta = -0.288$, $p > 0.05$) and disability degree ($\beta = 0.013$, $p > 0.05$) do not exert a statistically significant influence on the moral approach. Nevertheless, the variable measuring sports character ($\beta = 0.187$, $p > 0.05$) exerts a positive influence on the moral approach, although this effect is not statistically significant. In terms of overall model fit, the $R^2 = 0.098$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.044$ values indicate that only 4.4% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by these three variables. The F -value of 0.692 ($p > 0.05$) provides further evidence that the model is not statistically significant overall. These findings suggest that the moral approach in sports may be more influenced by personal or environmental factors than by demographic factors such as disability type and degree.

Discussion and Conclusion

The principal objective of this study is to investigate the impact of an 8-week training programme on the sportsmanship character and moral approaches of wheelchair tennis players. The study aims to analyse the evolution of the athletes' personal and moral development throughout the training period. The findings of the study indicate that the wheelchair tennis players exhibited notable enhancements

in both their sportsmanship character and moral approach levels subsequent to the intervention. In particular, the increase in post-test scores related to moral approaches indicates that the training programme had a significant impact on the athletes' ethical behaviours and attitudes. This result is consistent with previous research indicating that structured interventions can enhance sportsmanship and ethical decision-making processes among athletes (Rutten et al., 2011; Spruit et al., 2019). The notable enhancement in "Moral Approach in Sports" ratings underscores the value of targeted instruction in fostering fair play and ethical conduct. While a favourable tendency was likewise discernible in the domain of "Sportsmanship Character," the alteration in moral approach was more

Table 4

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Wheelchair Tennis Athletes' Sportive Moral Approach Scale of Wheelchair Tennis Athletes

Branch	Scale	Test	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	P
Wheelchair Tennis	Sports Moral Approach	Pre-Test	23	25.043	5.103	-3.652	.001**
		Post-Test	23	31.608	5.686		

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$

Table 5

Regression Analysis Results on Predictors of Moral Approach in Sports

Variable	B	SD	β	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	p
Disability Type	-1.192	0.643	-0.288	0.314	0.098	0.044	0.692	0.499
Disability Degree	0.053	0.409	0.013					0.899
Sports Character	0.120	0.293	0.187					0.680

$N = 23$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

discernible. This indicates that athletes may experience more substantial improvements in ethical reasoning, fair play behaviours, and moral decision-making when exposed to interventions specifically focused on moral and ethical development.

Nevertheless, the regression analyses demonstrated that the model's overall explanatory power was constrained, with only a weak and non-significant effect observed for the type of disability. This finding indicates that other factors, such as personal values or environmental influences, may exert a more substantial influence on the character and moral development of athletes. It would be beneficial for future studies to investigate these additional variables in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of ethical behaviour among athletes.

The study identified notable discrepancies between the pre- and post-test mean scores of athletes with regard to their sportsmanship character and moral approaches. Furthermore, it was established that the type and degree of disability exerted an influence on the moral approaches of wheelchair tennis athletes following the 8-week training programme. While there is a paucity of studies that directly corroborate these findings, analogous research has yielded analogous results.

The study of sportsmanship character demonstrates the influence of sports on the personal and character development of individuals. The study by İmamlı and Ünver (2018) indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in sportsmanship character traits based on whether students engaged in team or individual sports. This finding indicates that the influence of team or individual sports on personal development is not a determining factor. However, a study conducted by Kaplan and Akyüz (2020) revealed a moderately significant negative correlation between sportsmanship character and achievement goals. This finding suggests that an emphasis on success may have a detrimental impact on character development, particularly in instances where the aspiration to win and the drive for competition are in conflict with the values of sport, potentially leading to unethical behaviours. In contrast, Yıldız's (2019) research indicated a positive correlation between sportsmanship character, multiple intelligences, and sport-specific achievement motivation. This suggests that the integration of cognitive and emotional capacities with sporting activities

can foster positive character traits. It is therefore evident that sports contribute not only to physical but also to cognitive and emotional development, thereby strengthening sportsmanship character. Based on the aforementioned studies, it is clear that sports play a significant role in the personal and character development of individuals. This is primarily due to the fact that the experiences of winning and losing in sports shape individuals' emotional responses and characters. While the feeling of winning boosts self-confidence, the experience of losing fosters positive character traits such as resilience and patience. Furthermore, when conducted in accordance with ethical principles, sports can facilitate the internalisation of fundamental values such as fair play and sportsmanship. In this context, the findings of our study are consistent with those of previous research, which demonstrated that the training program applied to wheelchair tennis athletes had a positive effect on sportsmanship. These studies, which emphasise the impact of sports on the character development of individuals, support the potential of structured training programmes to enhance athletes' ethical behaviour and sportsmanship.

A number of findings pertaining to moral approaches in sports have been identified in the existing literature. The study conducted by Bredemeier and Shields (1986) revealed that basketball players exhibited lower levels of moral reasoning skills in comparison to swimmers. This finding indicates that different sports disciplines may exert varying influences on the moral development of individuals. Furthermore, the study conducted by Akoğlu et al. (2019) revealed no significant difference in the levels of moral disengagement in sports. This suggests that athletes' moral attitudes may be independent of their mode of participation in sports.

Öztürk's (2018) study demonstrated that as educational attainment increased, individuals displayed more positive attitudes, accompanied by a notable enhancement in character and moral development. This finding emphasises the importance of education in the moral development of athletes. Conversely, research conducted by Kaya et al. (2023) revealed no statistically significant difference in moral disengagement tendencies in sports based on income levels among amateur football players. Nevertheless, it was noted that athletes from higher income brackets exhibited lower levels of moral disengagement in comparison to those from lower income groups. This suggests the possibility of a relationship be-



tween socioeconomic factors and moral conduct in sports. In this context, the findings of the present study are in alignment with those of previous studies in the literature. In particular, studies by Akoğlu et al. (2019), Karaman (2009), Tanyeri (2019), and Türkçapar (2012) present comparable findings regarding moral development and moral disengagement in sports. However, the studies by Gümüş (2002) and Bilge and Pektaş (2004) present contrasting findings regarding the impact of sports on moral development. This highlights the necessity for more comprehensive research on this topic in diverse contexts within the existing literature.

The study conducted by Çifçi et al. (2017) revealed a negative, statistically significant correlation between moral disengagement and personal standards among individual and team athletes. Additionally, the study identified a positive, statistically significant correlation between perceived family pressure and concern over mistakes. These findings underscore the diverse personal and environmental influences that shape moral conduct in sporting contexts. Similarly, the research by Sarı and Deryahanoğlu (2019), which involved basketball, football, handball, and volleyball players, revealed a significant relationship between moral disengagement and both performance and mastery orientation. These findings indicate that the extent to which athletes prioritise success can directly impact their moral attitudes. A more recent study by Atkinson et al. (2022) on wheelchair athletes revealed that perfectionistic tendencies were predictive of moral disengagement. Similarly, Stanger et al. (2018) found that mastery and performance orientations predicted antisocial behaviours through moral disengagement in their study of football, basketball, American football, and field hockey players. The aforementioned studies indicate that a performance-oriented approach in various sports disciplines may result in a weakening of athletes' adherence to moral values. Gümüş et al. (2016) observed that the pursuit of sporting success and associated rewards could potentially lead individuals to deviate from their moral values. They suggested that the competitive nature of sports environments may create conditions conducive to moral transgressions. Moreover, Vissek and Watson (2005) observed that as participation in sports increased, athletes' tendencies to legitimise immoral behaviours also increased. These findings highlight the intricate and multifaceted nature of moral approaches in sports, underscoring the substantial impact of individual values, environmental factors, and the intrinsic dynamics of sports on athletes' moral attitudes. In consideration of these studies, it becomes evident that the manifestation of moral behaviour and character development in the context of sports exhibits distinct patterns across various disciplines, with a multitude of factors exerting influence on moral conduct.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that the 8-week training programme implemented with wheelchair tennis players had a positive impact on the athletes' sports character and moral approach. In light of these findings, a

number of recommendations can be put forward. It is recommended that educational initiatives focusing on ethics, character, and fair play should not only target athletes but also involve coaches, administrators, managers, and parents associated with sports federations. It is recommended that these stakeholders engage in ongoing professional development activities to reinforce these values. Furthermore, extending such training programmes to encompass the entire sports community has the potential to result in more enduring and comprehensive enhancements in ethical conduct and character development. These findings underscore the significance of structured educational initiatives that facilitate a more profound comprehension of ethical and moral principles. It is evident that the advantages should extend beyond the athletes themselves to encompass the broader sports community, thereby ensuring a more pronounced and sustained impact.

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