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**Investigation of Beliefs Regarding the
Effects of Nutritional Supplements on
Athletic Performance in Individual and
Team Sports**

**Bireysel ve Takım Sporcularında Besin
Takviyelerinin Sportif Performansa
Etkisine Yönelik İnançların İncelenmesi**

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TİASAD

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Öz: Bu çalışmada bireysel ve takım sporlarında yer alan sporcuların gıda takviyelerine yönelik tutum ve inançlarını bazı demografik değişkenler açısından incelenmiştir. Nicel ve kesitsel araştırma deseniyle yürütülen çalışmada 181 (82 erkek, 99 kadın) gönüllü sporcu yer almıştır. Verilerin toplanmasında Kişisel Bilgi Formu ile “Spor Besin Takviyeleri İnanç Ölçeği” kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde SPSS paket programı kullanıldı ve anlamlılık $p < 0,05$ olarak kabul edilmiştir. Araştırma bulgular incelendiğinde; katılımcıların takviye inanç düzeyleri ile cinsiyet, milli sporcu olma, sportif başarı düzeyi ve takviyelerin performansa katkısına duyulan inanç arasında istatistiksel açıdan anlamlı bir fark saptanmıştır ($p < 0,05$). Yaş değişkeni özelinde 22 yaşındaki sporcuların, diğer yaş gruplarında yer alan sporculara göre daha yüksek bir inanç skoruna sahip olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte; ilgilenilen spor dalı, boy, kilo, beslenme eğitimi, algılanan ekonomik durum ve spor geçmişi değişkenleri inanç düzeyinde anlamlı bir farklılık oluşturmamıştır ($p > 0,05$). Sonuç olarak, araştırma grubundaki sporcuların besin takviyelerine yüksek düzeyde inandıklarını ve spor branşındaki profesyonelleşme düzeyinin bu inanç düzeylerini olumlu yönde etkilediğini göstermiştir. Bu doğrultuda, gıda takviyesi ve ergojenik desteklere olan güvenin özellikle yaşça daha büyük, erkek ve profesyonel sporcularda daha kuvvetli olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Besin takviyeleri 1, İnanç Düzeyi 2, Bireysel ve Takım Sporları 3

Abstract: In this study, the attitudes and beliefs of athletes involved in individual and team sports towards dietary supplements were examined in terms of some demographic variables. The study, conducted with a quantitative and cross-sectional research design, included 181 (82 male, 99 female) volunteer athletes. In the collection of data, a Personal Information Form and the “Sports Nutritional Supplements Belief Scale” were used. In the analysis of the data, the SPSS package program was used and significance was accepted as $p < 0.05$. When the research findings were examined; a statistically significant difference was found between the participants’ supplement belief levels and gender, being a national athlete, level of sporting success, and belief in the contribution of supplements to performance ($p < 0.05$). Regarding the age variable, it was determined that athletes aged 22 had a higher belief score compared to athletes in other age groups. However; the variables of the sport branch of interest, height, weight, nutrition education, perceived economic status, and sports background did not create a significant difference in the level of belief ($p > 0.05$). As a result, it was shown that the athletes in the research group had a high level of belief in nutritional supplements and that the level of professionalization in the sports branch positively affected these belief levels. In this direction, it is understood that trust in dietary supplements and ergogenic aids is stronger especially in older, male, and professional athletes.

Keywords: Dietary supplements 1, Belief Level 2, Individual and Team Sports 3

Introduction

Nutrition is the most critical factor for a living organism to survive and meet all its requirements. Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) persistently

emphasizes the importance of a varied, balanced, and adequate diet to prevent non-communicable and chronic diseases. Including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy protein sources in our daily meals is the fundamental recommendation of the WHO (Aureli et al., 2025; Tafuri and Latino, 2025). When it comes to athletes, the direct effect of nutrition on performance has now been proven by countless scientific studies. Today, it is known that many athletes, from amateur to elite levels, resort to nutritional supplements to boost their performance during training or demanding competition periods (Yu and Ding, 2025). The perceptions, thoughts, and attitudes developed by athletes towards these products are the most fundamental factors determining how widespread supplement use will become. In fact, the regular meals we consume daily are more than sufficient for the physiological needs of the metabolism. Despite this, there are strong motivational sources that push athletes to use supplements. Increasing the body's resistance to diseases or pushing sporting success to the upper limits with ergogenic aids are at the forefront of these reasons (Sapuppo et al., 2024). As such, the main thing that determines the orientation towards food supplements is the level of psychological belief behind this use. Looking at the literature, a striking detail stands out: Even just believing that the physiological effects promised by the product will materialize significantly increases the rate of use (El khoury et al., 2023). Especially in athletes with a high expectation of success, this deep belief can often overshadow scientific facts and evidence (Maughan, 2018). When this internalized state of belief is also blended with the placebo effect, supplement use ceases to be a mere physiological support and almost turns into a safe psychological haven for the athlete. Furthermore, as a person's trust in a certain type or brand of supplement increases, their belief that the product will maximize their performance thoroughly strengthens (Saito et al., 2020). However, this situation has a serious dimension that fundamentally shakes the athlete's nutritional habits. Organic macro and micronutrients that can be obtained naturally have gradually begun to be replaced by synthetically produced foods in laboratory environments. Seeing supplements as an indispensable part of success disrupts the natural nutrition routine on the one hand, while paving the way for risks such as psychological dependence and obsessive eating disorders on the other (Wiss and Lafata, 2024). Moreover, these beliefs are not always formed by the athlete's own independent choices; environmental factors are incredibly influential. The guidance of coaches, the social pressure created by friend groups within the team, and especially the aggressive marketing tactics in digital media in recent years play the leading role in constructing this perception (Hurst et al., 2024). For all these reasons, it is essential to get to the root of the matter by moving beyond the traditional questions in sports nutrition such as "which supplement should we use?". Examining the belief in food supplements through a multidimensional lens is a highly important factor. This is exactly the starting point of our research. Our main purpose is to discuss the

athletes' perception of belief towards food supplements in all its aspects and to illuminate the ongoing uncertainties regarding this concept in the sports sciences literature.

Hypotheses

H1: Male athletes have significantly higher levels of belief regarding nutritional supplements compared to female athletes.

H2: As athletes' athletic achievement and professionalism levels increase, their belief in the contribution of nutritional supplements to performance also increases.

Method

Research Design

This research was designed using a quantitative cross-sectional research model to examine athletes' belief levels in food supplements in relation to different demographic variables. The cross-sectional design model is widely used to determine the relationships between variables at a single point in time (Karasar, 2020; Fraenkel et al., 2012).

Research Group

The study group consisted of 181 volunteer athletes, whose ages ranged between 18 and 22, including 82 males (45.3%) and 99 females (54.7%) who were actively doing sports during the data collection period. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method based on accessibility and voluntary participation. To ensure the homogeneity and suitability of the sample, only participants who were between the ages of 18 and 22, regularly engaged in sports, and had at least one year of sports experience were included in the study. Participants who were not actively engaged in sports during the data collection process, lacked sufficient sports experience, provided incomplete or inconsistent responses in the data collection tools, or did not give informed consent were excluded from the study. This approach ensured that the sample consisted of individuals with adequate sports backgrounds while minimizing potential biases related to data quality. Additionally, a post-hoc power analysis was conducted to evaluate the adequacy of the sample size. Based on the total sample size ($n = 181$), a medium effect size ($d = 0.50$), and an $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level, the statistical power of the study was calculated to be above 0.80; indicating that the sample size is sufficient to detect significant differences between groups (Cohen, 1988). Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013).

Table 1. Frequency table regarding demographic information of the participants

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	45.3
	Female	99	54.7
Age	18 Age	27	14.9
	19 Age	17	9.4
	20 Age	48	26.5
	21 Age	47	26.0
	22 Age	42	23.2
Height	150-160 cm	47	26.0
	161-170 cm	93	51.4
	171 cm and above	41	22.7
Body weight	50-60 kg	47	26.0
	61-70 kg	68	37.6
	71 kg and above	66	36.5
Sporting level	Amateur	98	54.1
	Professional	83	45.9
Have you received nutrition education?	Yes	94	51.9
	No	87	48.1
Type of sport	Individual Sports	80	44.2
	Team Sports	101	55.8
Do you believe that supplements affect athletic performance?	Yes	104	57.5
	No	77	42.5
Perceived economic status	High	41	22.7
	Medium	64	35.4
	Low	76	42.0
Years of experience in sports	1-4 Year	51	28.2
	5-8 Year	47	26.0
	9-12 Year	45	24.9
	13 Year and above	38	21.0
Are you a national athlete?	Yes	92	50.8
	No	89	49.2

When Table 1 is examined, 45.3% of the participants are male and 54.7% are female; the age distribution consists of 14.9% aged 18, 9.4% aged 19, 26.5% aged 20, 26.0% aged 21, and 23.2% aged 22; according to height, 26.0% are 150-160 cm, 51.4% are 161-170 cm, and 22.7% are 171 cm and above; in terms of body weight, 26.0% are 50-60 kg, 37.6% are 61-70 kg, and 36.5% are 71 kg and above; 54.1% of the participants are at the amateur level and 45.9% are at the professional level; the rate of those who received nutrition education is 51.9% and the rate of those who did not is 48.1%; in terms of sport type, 44.2% are involved in individual sports and 55.8% in team sports; the rate of those who think that supplements are effective for athletic

performance is 57.5% and the rate of those who think they are not effective is 42.5%; 22.7% perceive their economic status as high, 35.4% as medium, and 42.0% as low; in terms of years of sporting experience, 28.2% are 1-4 years, 26.0% are 5-8 years, 24.9% are 9-12 years, and 21.0% are 13 years and above; additionally, 50.8% of the participants stated that they are national athletes, while 49.2% stated that they are not.

Data collection tools

The data collection tool in the research consists of two parts; the "Personal Information Form" created by the researcher to determine the demographic information of the participants in the first part, and the "Sports Dietary Supplements Belief Scale" to determine the beliefs of the athletes, were administered to the participants.

Personal Information Form

Personal information form prepared by the researcher; It consists of variables such as gender, age, height, weight, family income, place of residence and type of sport.

Sports nutrition supplements belief scale

The "Beliefs About Dietary Supplements in Sport Scale," developed by Hurst et al. (2017) to determine the belief levels of research participants regarding sports dietary supplements, and adapted into Turkish with validity and reliability studies conducted by Karafil et al. (2021), was used. The scale, which has a unidimensional structure, consists of 6 items. The scale is a 6-point Likert type, scored between "Strongly disagree (1)" and "Strongly agree (6)." An increase in the scores obtained from the scale indicates that individuals' beliefs in the effects of sports dietary supplements on performance have increased. In the adaptation study conducted by Karafil et al. (2021), the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.86.

Statistical analysis

The data were analyzed using the SPSS package program. For the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics were first calculated. The normality assumption of the data was evaluated by examining skewness and kurtosis values. After determining that the data showed a normal distribution, the Independent-Samples t-test was used for comparisons between two groups. One-Way ANOVA was applied for variables with more than two groups. In cases where significant differences were found, the Tukey post-hoc test was used to determine the source of the difference. The level of statistical significance was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis Values for Scales and Sub-Dimensions

Variables	Median	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Sports Supplement Belief Scale	32.43	3.35	-0.857	0.314

In Table 2, skewness (-0.857) and kurtosis (0.314) values were calculated to evaluate the distribution of the data. Since these values were within the acceptable range of ± 1 , it was accepted that the data showed a normal distribution (George and Mallery, 2010).

Results

Table 3. T-test analyses regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants

Sports Nutrition Supplement Belief Scale		
Variables	N	Mean $\pm$ SD
Gender		
Female	82	31.16 $\pm$ 3.34
Male	99	33.97 $\pm$ 2.65
Statistics		t= 6.175
		p= 0.00
Athletic Level		
Amateur	98	31.34 $\pm$ 3.44
Professional	83	33.72 $\pm$ 2.75
Statistics		t= -5.067
		p= 0.00
Have you received nutrition education?		
Yes	94	32.81 $\pm$ 2.94
No	87	32.02 $\pm$ 3.71
Statistics		t= 1.603
		p= 0.10
Type of sport		
Individual Sports	80	32.76 $\pm$ 3.22
Team Sports	101	32.17 $\pm$ 3.44
Statistics		t= 1.166
		p= 0.35
Do you believe in the effect of supplements on athletic performance?		
Yes	104	32.00 $\pm$ 3.53
No	77	33.01 $\pm$ 3.01
Statistics		t= -2.008
		p= 0.04
Are you a national athlete?		
Yes	92	34.02 $\pm$ 2.43
No	89	30.79 $\pm$ 3.39
Statistics		t= 7.363

p= 0.00

p<0.05*

When Table 3 is examined, it is observed that there is a statistically significant difference between the variables of gender, athletic level, whether you are a national athlete, and whether you believe in the effect of supplementation on athletic performance and the total score of the sports nutrition supplement belief scale (p<0.05), whereas it was determined that there is no statistically significant difference between the variables of nutrition education and the type of sport you are interested in and the total score of the athlete belief scale (p>0.05).

Table 4. Analysis of variance regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants

Sports Nutritional Supplements Belief Scale		
Variables	n	Mean±SD
Age		
18 Age (a)	27	30.44±3.30
19 Age (b)	17	30.35±3.77
20 Age (c)	48	30.97±3.38
21 Age (d)	47	34.02±2.31
22 Age (e)	42	34.45±1.94
Statistics		F= 17.334
		p= 0.00
Height		
150-160 cm (a)	47	32.63±3.15
161-170 cm (b)	93	32.48±3.23
171 cm and above (c)	41	32.09±3.85
Statistics		F= .302
		p= 0.74
Body Weight		
50-60 kg (a)	47	32.55±3.07
61-70 kg (b)	68	32.41±3.53
71 kg and above (c)	66	32.37±3.39
Statistics		F=.040
		p=0.96
Perceived Economic Status		
Good (a)	41	32.63±3.23
Medium (b)	64	32.75±2.84
Low (c)	76	32.06±3.78
Statistics		F= .814
		p= 0.44
Years as an Athlete		
1-4 Year (a)	51	32.80±3.18
5-8 Year (b)	47	31.48±3.38
9-12 Year (c)	45	32.80±3.20
13 Year and above (d)	38	32.68±3.59
Statistics		F= 1.721
		p= 0.16

$p<0.05^*$

When Table 4 is examined, it has been determined that there is a statistically significant difference between the age variable and the total score of the sports nutrition supplement belief scale ($p<0.05$). In addition, as a result of the analysis, it was observed that the total scale scores of athletes aged 22 were higher than those of athletes in the 18, 19, and 20 age groups. It was determined that there is no statistically significant difference between the variables of height, body weight, perceived economic status, and years as an athlete and the total score of the sports nutrition supplement belief scale ($p>0.05$).

Discussion

This study was conducted to examine the belief levels of individuals aged 18–22 who actively engage in sports toward ergogenic aids and sports nutrition supplements in the context of various demographic and socio-sportive variables. The main findings obtained from the study clearly reveal that athletes' beliefs in supplement products do not exhibit a homogeneous structure; rather, they are shaped around factors such as gender, age, competition level, and the status of representing the national team. When the sports science literature is examined, it is observed that supplement use is increasingly shifting from a rational nutritional strategy to a psychological tool of assurance. The sociological and psychological dynamics underlying these differences must be discussed in detail. One of the most striking findings of the study is that male athletes' belief scores regarding nutritional supplements (33.97) are statistically significantly higher than those of female athletes (31.16). This situation shows a strong parallel with the predominant trends in the literature. The fact that men, regardless of whether they participate in team or individual sports, focus more on muscle mass development physiologically and evaluate success in sports within the triangle of strength, explosiveness, and hypertrophy makes them much more open to ergogenic supplement use (Montuori et al., 2021). Gender norms and the industrial sports media's perception of the male body as resilient and muscular directly expose male athletes to aggressive food supplement marketing (Cook et al., 2014). In female athletes, the fact that training and performance goals are generally shaped around endurance, aesthetic appearance, or maintaining overall body composition may relatively restrain belief in high-dose synthetic or concentrated supplements. Another critical result emerging from the study is that individuals competing at a professional level and those with national athlete status have a much higher belief in food supplements compared to amateur athletes. While the mean total score of the scale in amateur athletes is 31.34, this value increases to 33.72 in professionals, and similarly reaches a high level of 34.02 in national athletes, which is not a coincidence. In addition, the psychological pressure brought by wearing the national jersey, the expectations of success at the national level, and the anxiety created by sponsorship agreements push the athlete to firmly believe in any material that promises to guarantee success (Connor et al., 2013). At the amateur level, the lower pressure to win and the fact that participation in sports is generally limited to recreation or mental release philosophy prevent this deep cognitive obsession with supplement use. When the

age variable is analyzed, it was determined that the belief levels of 22-year-old athletes, who constitute the oldest age group in the study, were statistically significantly ($p=0.00$) higher than those of athletes aged 18, 19, and 20. This finding clearly shows how life experience in sports and physical wear transform the belief system. The fact that younger athletes have genetically higher recovery rates after training and have not yet fully been exposed to elite-level competitive stress may not make them feel a physical need for supplements (Everett, 2025). However, as age progresses and full transition to professional/senior categories occurs, increasing training intensity, increasingly dense competition schedules, and accumulated chronic fatigue may transform older athletes into a profile that is more dependent on synthetic recovery tools and therefore more strongly convinced of nutritional supplements. On the other hand, contrary to expectations, the study found that variables such as having received nutrition education, type of sport, physical measurements, and perceived socioeconomic status had no significant effect on supplement belief. In particular, the absence of a statistically significant difference ($p=0.10$) between athletes who stated they had received nutrition education and those who had not is quite thought-provoking. This situation indicates that the content quality and pedagogical approach of existing nutrition education provided at institutional or club level are insufficient (Asokkumar and Salazar, 2020). It is understood that athletes place much more trust in popular culture icons on digital platforms, perception managers, experienced role model athletes within the team, and coaches with insufficient scientific background, rather than scientific and clinically based dietitian recommendations (Ritson et al., 2023). The fact that those who answered “no” to the direct effect of nutritional supplements on athletic performance (mean 33.01) had a significantly higher mean in the belief scale compared to those who answered “yes” (mean 32.00) reveals the conceptual complexity of the situation and the internal contradictions of athletes. This statistical contradiction suggests that athletes do not perceive supplements directly as muscle or speed enhancers, but rather encode them as a psychological assurance, a ritual, and a refuge used for preventing injuries, correcting cellular deficiencies, or coping with competitive stress.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the research was conducted with a sample group consisting of individuals aged between 18 and 22, which limits the generalizability of the findings to older or professional master-level athletes. Second, because the study utilized a cross-sectional design, it provides a “snapshot” of the participants’ beliefs at a specific time and cannot establish causality between variables. Finally, the data were collected through self-report measures; therefore, the results are subject to social desirability bias, as participants may have provided responses they perceived as more acceptable in a sporting context rather than their true personal practices.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that in young adults and elite athletes, belief in nutritional supplements is not merely a compensation for an inadequate diet; rather, it is a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon deeply rooted in sports culture, becoming an integral part of it in male, older, professional, and national team athletes. The data obtained in our study confirm that competitive performance and professional career pressure are the strongest factors leading athletes to move away from natural nutritional foundations and to unconditionally believe in the outcomes promised by the ergogenic industry. This strong and uncontrolled belief shows that if not intervened early, it may carry destructive risks such as polypharmacy, kidney and liver toxicities, psychological eating disorders, and even unintentional doping violations that can end an athlete's career.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that sports organizations and clubs move beyond generic nutrition guidance and implement evidence-based, pedagogical programs that address the psychological drivers of supplement use. Since nutrition education alone did not significantly differentiate belief levels in this study, future training programs should include critical media literacy components to help athletes navigate the aggressive marketing tactics of the ergogenic industry. Furthermore, coaches and support staff, who serve as primary role models, should be provided with scientific training to ensure they can offer accurate guidance, thereby reducing the athlete's reliance on popular culture trends and perceived psychological assurance.

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