

# The Evaluation of Foreign Female Basketball Players' Thoughts on Turkey, Turkish Culture and Their Professional Sports Life in Turkey<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Athletes have to give up on activities, social life and the routines of daily life during their careers. In addition, they have to cope with stress created by difficult training and the anxiety to succeed. In this respect, athletes should not be considered only as athletic performance. They should be considered as individuals who display development and change physically, socially and cognitively as well as professionally. When all these are taken into consideration, the aim of this study is to investigate the thoughts and experiences of foreign female basketball players in Turkish Women's Basketball League (10 team players) on basketball and their athletic life in Turkey. The study was conducted using qualitative research technique, and the data was obtained using semi-structured interview technique. The data obtained showed that the most frequent problem the female basketball players faced was not getting their payment on time. The fact that the teams do not have a professional structure, experiencing communication problems and not having a mentor to support them during this difficult process are among the other problems which draw attention. On the other hand, despite these difficulties, the female basketball players stated that they were pleased with the Turkish social structure and the services offered by clubs such as accommodation, nutrition and facilities. In addition, they have stated that there is a tolerant and friendly atmosphere in Turkey in contrast to racism and discrimination. To sum up, female basketball players' thoughts on Turkey and Turkish basketball are generally positive.

*Key Words:* Basketball, Female basketball, Athlete experience, Social life, Turkey

## Yabancı Kadın Basketbol Oyuncularının Türkiye, Türk Kültürü ve Türkiye'deki Profesyonel Spor Yařantılarına İliŐkin Görüşlerinin Deđerlendirilmesi

### Öz

Bireyler yüksek standartlarda başarılı bir sporcu olmak için küçük yaşlarda spora adım atmakta, yıllar boyunca hem fiziksel hem de psikolojik olarak ağır süreçler geçirmektedirler. Sporcular, bu süreçlerde birçok aktiviteden, sosyal hayattan ve günlük hayatın rutinlerinden vazgeçmek zorunda kaldıkları gibi, zorlayıcı antrenmanlar ile birlikte başarı kaygısının yaratmış olduđu stres ile de başa çıkmak zorunda kalmaktadırlar. Sporcular bu anlamda yalnızca sportif performans odaklı düşünülmemeli, fiziki, sosyal, bilişsel, benlik ve kariyer gibi çeşitli alanlarda gelişim ve deđişim gösteren bireyler olarak bilinmeli ve bir bütün olarak düşünölmelidir. Tüm bunlar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bu çalışmanın amacı Türkiye Kadınlar Basketbol Lig'indeki yabancı uyruklu kadın basketbolcuların Türkiye'deki basketbol yapısı ve geçirdikleri sporculuk yaşamlarına dair görüş ve deneyimlerinin incelenmesidir. Çalışmanın evrenini 16 takımdan oluşan Türkiye Kadınlar Basketbol Lig'inde mücadele eden 10 takımdaki yabancı sporcular oluşturmaktadır. Arařtırma nitel arařtırma yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilmiş, veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniđiyle toplanmıştır. 13 sorudan oluşan görüşme formu ile gerçekleştirilen arařtırma sonucunda metin haline dönüřtürölen veriler, içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler doğrudusunda, kadın basketbolcuların yaşadıkları en yaygın problemin ücretlerinin düzenli olarak ödenmemesi olduđu tespit edilmiştir. Takımların profesyonel bir yapıda olmayıřı, iletişimsel sorunlar yaşamaları ve yaşadıkları bu sıkıntılı uyum süreci içerisinde bir mentör desteđi bulamamaları da diđer dikkat çeken sorunlar arasındadır. Öte yandan, yaşanan bu olumsuzlukların aksine kadın basketbolcular, Türk toplum yapısı ve kulüplerin sağladıkları konaklama, beslenme ve tesis gibi olanaklardan memnun olduklarını bildirmişlerdir. Ayrıca sporcular, Türkiye'de ırkçı ve ayrıřtırıcı bir tutumun aksine, hoşgörölü ve misafirperver bir ortamın bulunduđunu belirtmişlerdir. Sonuç olarak, kadın basketbolcuların Türkiye ve Türk basketbolu ile ilgili görüşleri genel olarak olumlu yapıdadır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Basketbol, Kadın basketbolu, Sporcu deneyimi, Sosyal hayat, Türkiye

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## Introduction

The increase in interest in sports, which bears factors such as game, competition and vigorous training, has resulted in professionalism and complexity in structure in nearly all types of sports (Özmen, 1999; Yaprak & Amman, 2009). The concept 'sports' has become an industry following the phases it went through. It is stated that the development and transformation in sports still continues, and that different fields of sports have become a part of industry within themselves. Basketball has proved that it is a great industry with NBA and Euro League, and national and local leagues in different countries (Helmer & Owens, 2000). Thanks to the efforts of the Turkish Basketball Federation, which has been active since the 1950s, Turkish basketball has developed greatly and is about to become one of the most successful countries in basketball in Europe. It is seen that Turkish basketball leagues are accepted as one of the most prominent ones in Europe with its spectators, financial power and the world famous players and trainers in the teams (http-1). In addition, it is stated that the interest in basketball in Turkey has increased with important international basketball organizations and international success of basketball clubs and the national team (http-2; http-3). The basketball leagues in Turkey are classified under categories which are as follows:

- Tahincioğlu Basketball Super League
- Bilyoner.com Women's Basketball Super League
- Turkish Basketball First League (TBL)
- Turkish Female Basketball First League (TKBL)
- Turkish Basketball Second League (TB2L)
- Basketball Teenagers League (BGL)
- Male Local Basketball League (EBBL)
- Women's Basketball Local League (KBBL)
- Unileague (TBF, 2018)

Within these leagues, there are some limitations on the number of players with whom teams can sign a contract. These limitations are only used in basketball leagues with contracts. In this context, the leagues with contracts in Turkey and the limitations for foreign basketball players are given in Table 1.

**Table1.** *The Leagues Using Contracts in Turkey and the Number of Foreign Basketball Players*

<i>League</i>	<i>The number of foreign basketball players with whom contracts can be signed in the same season</i>
Turkish Basketball Super League	8
Turkish Basketball First League	3
Turkish Women's Basketball Super League	6
Turkish Women's Basketball League	2

**\*Reference:** (TBF Guides for License, Registration and Transfer for Athletes on Contract, 2017)

This development in basketball has affected not only male basketball but also the positive development of female basketball. According to the data of 2017, there are 79 countries which have women's basketball teams and leagues which are members of FIBA (http-4). Women's basketball has become a sector with serious player transfer, transfer fees and high payments for players (http5). The fact that WNBA basketball players who played in the U.S also prefer Turkish Women's Basketball leagues has increased the interest in women's basketball leagues (http-6).

In recent years, world-famous female basketball players have come to our country thanks to investments in women's basketball leagues. The working, accommodation, training and economic conditions of national basketball players have also been improved. As a result of these improvements, the goals, expectations and the thoughts of 'athletes' in female basketball have gained prominence. Although the life of an elite athlete seems to be related to his/her branch, these athletes actually have social lives as individuals (Sellers et.al, 1997) Individuals start to participate in sports at an early age to become successful nationally and internationally. Meanwhile, they go through a difficult process both physically and psychologically (Başer, 1998). Athletes have to make sacrifices on different activities, social life and the routines of daily life in this difficult process. More than that, they also have to cope with stress caused by difficult training and success anxiety. In this respect, they also show high performance in the clubs who pay them in order to make a living, go on with their daily life, and meet their social needs as well as doing training (Bayram et al., 2016). In addition to all these factors, athletes should not be regarded just by their

athletic performance. They should be regarded as individuals who have development and change in different areas such as social, cognitive, self-confidence and career (Gybergs & Henderson, 2000).

The factor which affects people most throughout their life is probably the interaction in their daily lives. Individuals become knowledgeable by having a cultural perspective towards the world either consciously or unconsciously. They code the information around them by watching, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling, and develop attitudes and behavior in accordance (Aliyev & Öglmş, 2015). This results in changes in reactions people brought up in different cultures give to similar events. In different cultures, people may look at the same thing. However, the way they perceive it may be completely different (Şahin, 2001). In such a case, a problem arises when the person becomes a part of a system other than the one he/she is accustomed to. In this process, in which cultural change is experienced, the person may have difficulty in adaptation for some time. The individual faces uncertainty and problems such as not knowing what people expect from him/her as a stranger, what he/she should expect from them, what his/her exact role is in this new atmosphere, how he/she should evaluate events and use things (Aliyev & Öglmş, 2015). This uncertainty results in intense anxiety (Stephan, 1985). In addition to these problems, it has been found out that the uncertainty experienced in cross-cultural settings is higher than intracultural settings (Gudhkunst, 1983) and that individuals feel anxiety in many intrapersonal interactions (Koç, 2004). Moreover, the uncertainty in intrapersonal interactions results in lower-quality communication during first encounters and meetings (Hubbert et al.1999).

In the light of the factors mentioned above, it is a high probability that foreign athletes may have difficulty in adaptation to another country and culture. It may be said that foreign athletes may experience difficulties in other cultures ranging from the environment they live in to social circumstances and from language problems to their relationship with their trainers. In addition to these, negative conditions such as racist statements and negative sex discrimination may be experienced (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Eastman et al., 2001). In some circumstances, the fans may also show nationalist attitudes and statements to foreign players, state that their sense of belonging is low and even exclude these players (Kavussanu et al., 2002; Falcous & Maguire, 2005; Şahin et al., 2010). Even though the lives of athletes are classified under two main headings as sports life and social life, the relationship between the two must not be disregarded (Miller and Kerr, 2002). When an athlete is transferred to a foreign country, his/her experiences on sports and social life may be regarded as a point worth considering due to cultural differences. When regarded in terms of sports psychology, the factors affecting an athlete's performance are studied under two main headings as intrinsic and extrinsic factors. However, going into details of these factors (family, friends, trainers, private life, financial situation, living conditions, motivation, personality etc.) are important in understanding the athletes better and do what is required (Cox, 1998). In addition, different events or occasions that disturb athletes mentally may affect their performance directly (Ekmekçi, 2017).

The aim of this study is to present the thoughts of foreign female basketball players who compete in teams of Turkish Women's Basketball League on Turkey and the basketball conditions in Turkey. The pilot study of this research was conducted in the 2016-2017 season by the same researchers. In this context, interviews were made with the foreign female basketball players of 3 teams in the Turkish female in these interviews showed that there was a need for a more comprehensive study. For this reason, this study, which aims to present the thoughts of foreign female basketball players on Turkey and the basketball conditions in Turkey, was conducted with a higher number of participants.

### Method

Qualitative research method was used in the study of the thoughts and experiences of the foreign athletes in Turkish Women's Basketball League to gain more detailed and comprehensive data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The interview technique which is one of the two techniques preferred in the qualitative research method has been used as the data collection method. Interview is a free change of information between two people to find the interests, thoughts, attitudes and behavior of the source person (Balcı, 2013). A semi-structured interview form consisting of 13 questions was used in the interviews made with the foreign athletes. The interview was created with the data obtained by review of literature and thoughts on detection of the present problem. The form was referred to an expert and revisions were made with feedback, and the researchers prepared the final version of the form. Table 2 presents the questions in the semi-structured interview form which were prepared with certain objectives.

**Table 2.** *The Questions in the Semi-Structured Interview Form Which Were Used in the Interviews*

1	How old are you?
2	How long have you been playing basketball in Turkey?
3	How long have you been in Turkey?
4	What are your thoughts about Turkey?
5	Are there any problems or difficulties you have faced with your club management?
6	As we know, every athlete can have some social or technical problems with their coaches. Could you tell us about yours?
7	What are your thoughts about accommodation and food and beverage opportunities you have?
8	Could you tell us your thoughts about the sport facilities in Turkey? (Match courts and training courts / home and away)
9	How is your relationship with your team mates?
10	Could you inform us about communication problems or difficulties that you face in the Turkish society?
11	What are the thoughts about social environment that you have in Turkey?
12	What are thoughts about the managers who deal with your transfer deals?
13	Thank you for your interest is there anything that you will like to add?

The participants of the study consist of foreign athletes who work for the 16 teams competing in Turkish Women's Basketball League. As it was impossible to have contact with all the athletes due to time limitations and economic reasons, the study was conducted with a limited number of participants. The snowball sampling method which is a type of purposive sampling method has been used to choose 10 teams out of 16 teams to determine the foreign participants of the study. The snowball sampling method is an effective method to find the best people or institutions who know the most about the research problem. The number of participants increase with the answers to the question: "Who would you suggest talking to about this topic?" After a while, satisfaction is reached with the repetition of certain names and the number of topics to be addressed decreases (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The reason for preferring this method is that the teams in the league know each other and make better evaluations. In addition, it was easier to have contact with the other participants as the teams provided references for the researchers. The list of teams gained through this method is as follows:

- Bayraklı Belediye
- Çankaya Üniversitesi
- Edremit Güre Belediye Spor
- Ferko Ilgaz Hotel KBSK
- İzmit Belediyesi
- Kırçiçeği Bodrum Basketbol
- Mersin Basketbol
- Mersin BŞB. Gelişim
- Mersin Üniversitesi
- Urla Belediyesi

**Table 3.** *Turkish Female Basketball League Teams with Whom Interviews Were Made*

<i>Teams</i>	<i>Duration of Interview(dk.)</i>	<i>Interview Dates</i>
Team-1	22.21	27.02.2018
Team-2	17.17	09.03.2018
Team-3	31.22	10.03.2018
Team-4	17.45	15.03.2018
Team-5	16.57	18.03.2018
<b>Team-6</b>	<b>03.40</b>	<b>18.03.2018</b>
Team-7	16.36	21.03.2018
Team-8	34.01	23.03.2018
Team-9	27.56	23.03.2018
Team-10	49.57	27.03.2018

It should be kept in mind that the interviews were affected by limiting factors such as the busy training schedule of athletes, time allocated to researchers, and volunteerism. The data of Team-6 was not evaluated and included in the data as the interview time was too limited.

The researchers planned the interviews in accordance with dates and times determined with the participants and the interviews were conducted in places suitable for the interview. The participants were informed on the study prior to the interview and a form of approval accepting that the interview would be used only for scientific purposes was signed by both parties. The interviews were recorded with the approval of the participant for deciphering the interview. The interviews which were recorded were converted into texts, and were studied by three different researchers. The themes and codes were made with the agreement of the researcher.

## Results

The themes and codes found as a result of the study were presented in the findings. While determining themes and codes, the reliability formula ( $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}} \times 100$ ) by Miles and Huberman (2014) was used in the reliability phase. For this reason, the interview texts were studied separately by the 2 researchers and they were asked to write their findings under the categories made independent of each other. As a result of the calculations using the stated formula, it was stated that the results of 70% and over would be enough for reliability, and the statements below this percentage were not included in the evaluation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The thoughts of the participants were also included in the findings. However, the identities of the participants were left secret and the thoughts were presented using names created by the researchers. The themes and codes obtained by the findings of the study are given in Figure 1.

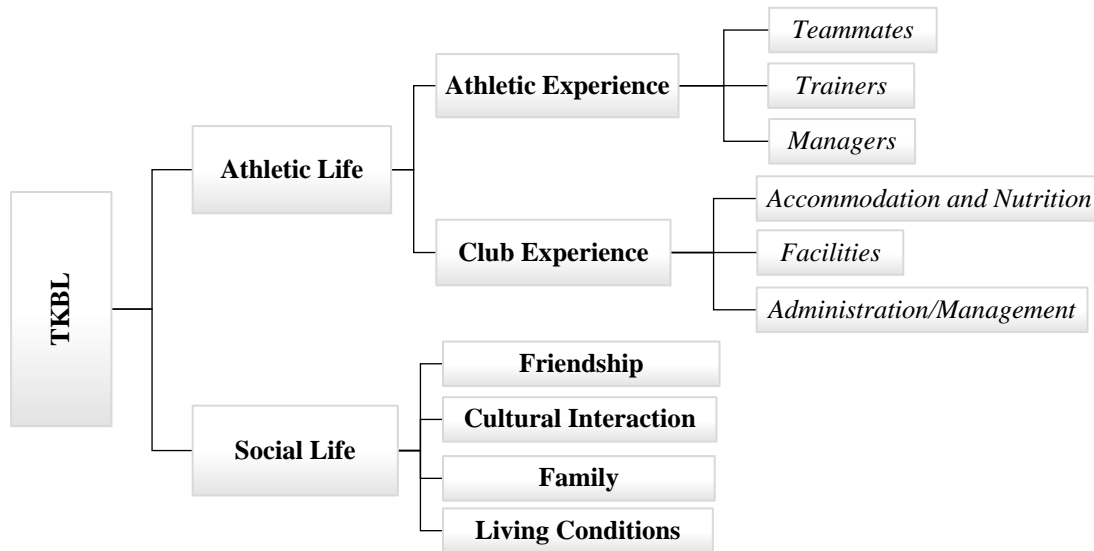


Figure 1. The Themes and Codes

As a result of the interviews it can be said that the athletes divide their lives into two as athletic life and social life. The athletes mentioned several topics under the heading athletic life such as teammates, trainers, managers, nutrition, accommodation, facilities, opportunities provided by the club and management style.

The thoughts of the participants under the heading athletic life are as follows;

### Teammates

Although the participants generally stated that they did not experience problems with their teammates, they argued that basketball has a shared language in the court while they were talking about communication problems. Female basketball players stated that the human factor is really variable and interesting, and that this could be related to cultural differences.

The participants' views on teammates is as follows;

**Lena:** "You are coming from America number one of basketball, high level, and top class. You are also African-American basketball player. They see you as a star I am sure about that. Because you are the only one in the team foreigner. Turkish girl players can sometimes be sneaky. But girls in Turkey, they go up to president

*tell on you know and everything. But as far as being sneaky you know in America people can be sneaky too. It is just not a Turkey problem.”*

**Mariah:** *“They call me like mom. Yeah I'm the mom on the team... Girls are great, they are wonderful. I hang and socialize with them but I don't hang with them a lot so...”*

**Maya:** *“We have teammates speaks English but I don't have a teammate that under stands exactly what I am thinking. So you have some over here like who go back to the managers and tell them what is going on. So that's way I think it is best, I only talk to certain people who I know or not gonna say anything.”*

**Becky:** *“May be 4-5 speak English not so much so we do google translator, pointing thing... But when we play basketball it is easier basketball like universal language so. We understand each other”*

**Angel:** *“For me I'm like you I can't deal with babies. And I am the oldest person on the team. I am very chill. You know I am very lay-back, relaxed I like quiet, and I like peace now because I am older. When I was younger I understood I was different, I was like them”*

**Joy:** *“I feel like with Turkish girls, honestly we are all women, all very pretty special and pretty different I mean one person's perception of one player is it could be different as opposed to other person's perception. As far as my, I love my teammates they are some of them silliest and goofiest people I been around.”*

### **Trainers**

Trainers were stated as another factor about which communication problems were experienced. The athletes mentioned frequent communication problems, and complained about the lack of knowledge in trainers. They also argued that the trainers were too hard on the players and that their expectations were too high.

The participants' thoughts on trainers are as follows;

**Lena:** *“Of course sometimes you feel like you know more than a coach... There are really great coaches in Turkey so I mean I definitely learnt from them and sometimes I had coaches who I learnt more than”*

**Mariah:** *“This coach is great, he speak good English. And like I just said I think it is because it's the second division a tight spot, they are trying to make to the first division and this is the first year for the president to be a president of a basketball club. Nervous or stuff like this. I think that might be only thing nervousness, stressing everybody else, everybody stressed out. That puts a lot of pressure on people”*

**Maya:** *“Coaching styles are different from what I experienced. Because I experienced coaches yelling and stuff like that but here is kind of like it is kind of funny because I hear him yell and I see his face yell but he is not yelling English so I am just like oh he is so mad.”*

**Jane:** *“He understands English. He speaks what he needs to say he understands basketball English. So you know I am used to see everything, I have seen a coach crying when I played in Russia was the first time I have ever seen that in my life so ... I am used to see different coaching styles... Too much responsibility in Turkey. So I have to play 40 minutes every game you know so I get tired”*

**Joy:** *“I mean honestly maybe I have one or two conversations about other stuff and he seems like a great guy but as far as basketball wise like last year I really did not understand why my coach would do something's, but this year I understand everything like he lays it out like exactly what he wants his intentions... And this is probably the most encouraging coach I have ever played for as far as very confident and always”*

### **Managers (Player Representatives)**

The participants stated that they did not trust managers. They said that they did not have contact with managers if they did not experience any problems. Still, they stated that they did not have too many problems with managers, and emphasized that they needed to have contact with managers to go on with their profession.

The participants' thoughts on managers is as follows;

**Lena:** *“It You know when you are player you think what is best for me, okay so there is a team, there is a manager, there is a player. Then you put it in a perspective if I was an agent I get my money from the teams so I am gonna be working to make the team happy so... So just one of those frustrating things about how to be like the middle man but I mean that is just basketball all around the world. They help you with everything you know.”*

**Maya:** "I just said my agent is in Italy., Yeah I have one, when I was here before I had whole different agent so I had American agent and I had Turkish one ... so that kind of helped because he spoke English so he come to my games sometimes and speak to me but being that only having a Italian one is hard when it comes to try to get information from the program."

**Becky:** "Yeah....and they communicate with each other too. They always call me it is just like you know American agent calls and like how is everything and my agent here he always says how is the game..."

**Tina:** "There are a few Turkish managers, they are lying, they are lazy but I am lucky".

**Angel:** "I had the same agent like years. I just felt like it was when I came here this area where I never come to and I felt like he wasn't, he did not have the expertise here. I decided to change and I am with... management. And they are awesome."

### **Accommodation and Nutrition**

The participants who stated that they were mainly pleased with the services offered by the clubs said that they really liked Turkish food. They said that the dishes were very delicious and that having a healthy diet is cheap in our country.

The thoughts of the participants on accommodation and nutrition are as follows;

**Lena:** "Food is amazing that, people are amazing; different you know I am African, American. So but most people recognize I am here for sports, they are kind."

**Mariah:** "I don't think accommodations on this team are not good at all. I believe they had a player here before, they brought in, brought into the hotel and she was not satisfied and she went to flight in the same day. And they brought me into same situation, I had a problem with it but they changed the.... but I just feel like you know sometimes they bring you here and say you are here. The food is lovely. I love the food. My favorite is probably iskender."

**Maya:** "Food absolutely adore the food here. You guys and my team mates are saying Americans don't try the food, I eat all the food here. I love it. You guys seasoning your food just like we do it and other countries I always had to bring my own sauce, but here not.... I get excited whenever I eat Turkish food."

**Lisa:** "Yeah it is very cheap, it is cheaper but it is way healthier. So I found like losing weight since I got here. It not that I changed my diet but things are..."

**Jane:** "The food... Ahahahahah... Yeah definitely. Those are huge positives that I really like about this country. The food is amazing. This is my first time staying at University or campus. So I have everything. I have people to come and clean my room, I have door, room to myself so I get the whole door and half the kitchen meals, so I have been places Russia was one of my least favorite places so I compare that to Russia I don't have many complaints about Turkey comparison with Russia"

**Angel:** "Accommodation... my residence is being paid for ...and the food wise a... I like to eat in a certain way so but of course they feed us every day ... but when I'm home I just like to kind of do my own thing... Oh Turkish food ... yeah I like it is definitely type of meals that you eat the breakfast, the breakfast here definitely different from America ....I love the markets here"

**Joy:** "I am very picky like when it comes to food I don't like a lot of things but as far as the different countries I been to out of all of them I would say Turkey is my second favorite... My favorite is South Korea. Because I was there for 3 years and I loved like I loved health cooked..."

### **Facilities**

The participants said that there were both good and bad facility centers. They stated that they liked the facility centers in general and that they were of higher quality when compared to the centers in many European countries.

The participants' thoughts on facility centers are as follows;

**Lena:** "Facilities mostly have better and most of the countries in Europe."

**Mariah:** "Facilities are about the same. I played in a lot of places. I played in Russia, played in China, played in Korea, played in Poland, Italy..."

**Tina:** “The facilities here are nice. I especially like the halls of ... University. I played in many countries and it does not have nice halls, they have old halls”

**Jane:** “; in division 2 it is little bit different but the sports facilities I have seen some gyms can be really nice and some not so nice so you know I am glad I am on a team where they have a nice gym we have a wait room you know where I live right across the street I walk one minute to the gym so I enjoyed it so far and I look at the division 1 team and their facilities are really nice. Sometimes better than ours that we have in NBA. So yeah...”

**Joy:** “It was like whole bunch of reds, flag and Atatürk I don't know his name but when I first came like every gym I went I see his picture and I ask my team mates like who is this and they explained to me who he was and how prideful of it I think it is very cool that even throughout the generations people still know who he is and they are still very proud. You know in America you can ask about certain people in American history oh that is the president but you don't get that same sense of pride that...”

### **Administration/Management**

The female basketball players complained about language problems and problems in payment. They particularly said that they experienced problems in payment. They particularly said that they experienced problems with a lot of clubs because of delays in payment, and thus could not foresee their future due to these reasons. The basketball players argued that the management of clubs did not have a professional structure and that this could lead to different problems.

The participants' thoughts on management are as follows;

**Lena:** “This is not a Turkey problem ... It is just a international basketball problem.. Especially over in Europe. Just money being late or having the fight for it. Sometimes you wait and eventually the team pays you.. Sometimes I had to deal law suits. So yeah I mean, but again it is kind of a Europe problem, it is around you know...”

**Mariah:** “I really had a problem with payment but I just feel like, you bring us all the way from a different country and we are away from home and we are doing everything we need to do, playing or whatever.. I think you should at least be professional on that aspect. Because you want us to be professional. I just feel like I shouldn't have to be worried about the payment.”

**Maya:** “I mean its different culture than where I am from like everybody is going through money problems so that's always a big thing. Yeah... In the beginning we actually won... time, the team that I played in before I at least did not get paid for my last day there. Yeah that is a difficult thing because in America if you have a job you get paid the same time like every week.”

**Maya:** “I mean you gonna have problems with every team that you go to like there is always bad communication just because I can't speak to the president because he does not speak English so I have to go to someone else and what happens is stories get changed.”

**Becky:** “Everything with this club has been good. My previous experience, in Spain it was a whole different story. So I end up leaving Spain, because of the payments, not giving me things that I asked for, game field.... It was just like we are gonna give it to you, we are gonna give it to you, like trying to hold me there because the team was not winning before I came and I helped them go up. They did not want me to leave... so when I was in Spain it was a whole different story.”

**Tina:** “I had a little trouble in the first year. There are little differences in mentality between Turkey and Ukraine. We didn't have much trouble because we solved everything when we talked. I'm not gonna tell you right now, but there were big problems. Sometimes I had a money problem. And I've had trouble with the referees. I've been in this league for 4 years. . Referees have no experience.”

**Joy:** “As far as clubs come I try to be very understanding, once I learnt the Turkish system you know how the clubs and organizations ran I try to be kind of understanding, last year I would say I was in a less professional club and that kind of turned me off the certain situations but they were very nice and they had good intentions. when I got here it was way professional as far as the club I honestly have no problems because when I first come in I tell them if you communicate with me I will be understanding as far as anything like if you communicate about pay which I been blessed to been pay early throughout the entire season which is rare. It has been pretty, it's been pretty chill I mean I am a very down sided person I don't need a lot as long as I have place to lay my head, working Wi-Fi and water, place to get food I am happy. So I am very low...”



### Friendship

Female athletes emphasized that they generally did not make friends with the others in the team, and that preferred to be alone. It may be said that this is partly due to the fact that foreign athletes have a border between private life and professional life.

The thoughts of the participants on friendship are as follows;

**Lena:** *“I mean like walking through the mall people run and look at me. I'm African and I am also big you know, I am a big woman. So yeah, initially people are, normally it is frustrating but you know if African-American were here, I would be probably looking at them because you normally attracted to what is different. So yeah it is annoying sometimes. But it is not like an issue”*

**Jane:** *I communicate with my people at home, I like to read, I am a big movie person all loner lonely stuff... Our assisting coach and the some of the girls they have to force me out because I just like being to myself a lot. There is a corner store I walk to the owner of the store... He speaks English. He just likes me because I go there all the time so we have small talk he gives me free things... So that's been my friend that I met outside of basketball so far”*

**Angel:** *“I know some words you know and for me the place I go to most is the grocery store, that's where I go the most. And I like to establish relationship with almost every cashier so It's like the communication we have for me one cashier we may speak, she may speak one or two English words I may speak one or two Turkish words... maybe you know with another cashier we have like that. Eye contact or you know point at something for me it not that hard... because... communication is everything. It is not just language you know it is body language it's you know there are lot of ways to communicate.”*

**Joy:** *“Yeah same thing and I am like okay we just gonna go for a tea and that takes 2-3 hours and I am just sitting there and they are just speaking Turkish I am like okay I am here... Like they can be annoying sometimes, but sometimes I don't wanna go because I don't wanna I don't want someone sit there and translate the entire conversation...”*

### Cultural Interaction

Turkish culture is appreciated by most foreign athletes and they say that it is sincere and friendly. The participants said that Turkey was one of the favorite places they lived in and that they did not experience any problems with Turkish culture except for language.

The thoughts of the participants on cultural interaction are as follows;

**Lena:** *“The first time I played in Turkey I was 23 so I am familiar with Turkey for almost 8 years... I feel good about it. I mean I have been here for a long time so I adapted, I kind of learnt my way around. I feel really comfortable here.”*

**Becky:** *“It is beautiful. I realized when I got here, one of my agents was telling me Asia is very close, so Turkey is like Asia and the Europe at the same time. I had like no idea. And then I was in Istanbul, I flew in there and it was like so crazy. I was in the airport for maybe 3 hours I needed to get passport control, and it was like amazing seeing all different people, different cultures... He was like 20 million people here like, this like...”*

**Lisa:** *“If I'll be completely honest the country is beautiful, esthetically, geographically you know. I have been to too many places for what I have seen I like the idea of, I feel like you guys have culture that, you guys work for each other. Street dogs, street cats and I see they have that little tag on their ears... so I'm kind of a pet person and I have pet dog myself and It is sad to see.. And on the other hand this is a very male dominant country.... ... state... I mean I've been in Spain and ah... It is just little bit different not as much as quality as I like to see...”*

**Jane:** *“So far this is been my favorite country. I played in South Korea, I played for the underage USA basketball team when I was 18 so I travelled to Germany and played throughout Europe. And played in Slovakia last year and Russia. So far this has been my favorite country I love the food and the people really hospitable towards me”*

**Angel:** "Everybody is just sincere and nice and generous and cares for your well-being. And for me that is very important you know because it makes where you are where you away from home, away from family and they except... you are... feel you know comfortable and that's how I feel"

**Joy:** "For older generations it might be their first time seeing someone like me and be a very tall black woman I can see how that can be out of... I can stare at homes sometimes to different people and they mention like how tall are you, you so tall... For older generations it might be their first time seeing someone like me and be a very tall black woman I can see how that can be out of ..... I can stare at homes sometimes to different people and they mention like how tall are you, you so tall. Or a blank face I just smile and..."

### Family

The female athletes who said that their families had prejudices against Turkish culture said that their families were a bit hesitant about Turkey. They said that Turkey was safer than most European countries, even safer than their countries. They said that they were sensitive about their longing for their families.

The thoughts of the participants on their families and the attitudes of their families is as follows;

**Lena:** "I don't know the couple or the last year there'd been bombings that kind of changed the spirit. The problem was my family. I am used travelling all over the world, just you know, what affecting me was that my family, my friend were less likely to visit, because of what was going on."

**Maya:** "Its so much pressure on you and then like they don't realize that we are not just dealing with this everyday like we have families back home someone, they have kids... And leaving your family for so long not being able to go home and seeing them... Because I actually got sick being here. I started to break... with...and doctor said it is because of the stress. So that's something that's like a really big thing. It just hard."

**Jane:** "How tough it is to be away from your family, I don't think they understand sometimes, sometimes I come right before practice but I don't think they completely understand the totality that I am away... You know I need a decent hour just to speak to my family you know what I mean or something... How much that can affect you ..."

**Angel:** "What was it in Istanbul the club the shooting at the club Istanbul? All my family was calling me like are you there I am like no, I don't even live in Istanbul. Guys I am good but you know. I feel comfortable"

### Living Conditions

Foreign athletes complained a lot of traffic. They said that they would not experience any problems as long as they had internet connection. They stated that internet was very important for them. However, they were not sure if the clubs understood this.

The thoughts of the participants on living conditions are as follows;

**Lena:** "Yeab. I don't know if you have a Wi-Fi everything is possible now. Like I said I adapted Turkey. I can travel all over this country. The number one thing I hate about Turkey is taxis. 90 % at the time I get in a taxi I feel like being cheated."

**Mariah:** "In big cities you don't have problems. Yeab here is very boring. Just because it is far far. There is nothing really to do in this city. There is not an airport. There is an airport but it is closed. It does not have regular flights. So closest one I can get out is Izmir which is three hours away. So it is really difficult. It is the only thing that I could say that is hard on me this year, lack of socialization ..."

**Maya:** "We have this one restaurant, it is a good restaurant it is like a little family restaurant we eat out we get free food. But I mean after a while you don't wanna eat the same thing. And living in such a small city we may have 3-4 restaurants and we go that's not Turkish. We don't have a KFC or McDonald's in this city. So if you want that kind of something you have got to go to Izmir and we don't have cars. I don't have a car so I just can't go... I would never drive in Istanbul. For sure never drive in Istanbul"

**Becky:** "I have never been anywhere by myself... I am too scared, I am getting lost and everything... So I just... and she turned to me and showed the screen the price and I was like thank you thank you."

**Lisa:** "A couple of weeks ago there was a taxi that literally went off the road taking me home to chase down this car and yelling, and I was like listen my... is still going on... I can't drive here."

**Angel:** *“One of my friends I was talking to yesterday we were talking about me being here and you know how it is here compared to the USA and everything and one thing I always say is I feel so safe here. When I go home it is so different. Worst thing will happen to you here is a taxi driver take you from the long way.”*

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to try to present the thoughts and experiences of foreign female basketball players in Turkish Female Basketball League (TKBL) on their life in Turkey and social structure. These thoughts and experiences were classified under two categories as athletic life and social life. Teammates, trainers, and players’ representatives were under the category athletic life. In addition, the category ‘experiences with the club’ came as a sub-heading of athletic life and its items were facilities, management, accommodation and nutrition. The themes ‘friendship, cultural interaction, family and living conditions’ appeared under the heading social life. Although no similar study was found in the literature review, there is some information that could overlap with the findings of the study (Cox, 1998).

In the literature review it was seen that scientific research on foreign athletes working professionally in Turkey was limited and that mainly focused on football (Yıldırım, 2008; Şahin et al., 2010; Yıldırım et al, 2012). It is believed that the thoughts/experiences of foreign female basketball players and the problems they face were clearly presented with the detailed interviews of the study. This may be stated as a factor that strengthens the originality of the study.

Although no similar study was found in the literature review, there are studies which focus on athletes’ social lives as well as their athletic life. For this reason, Miller and Kerr (2002) studied the athletic, academic and social experiences of athlete university students, and emphasized their connection. Miller and Kerr have argued that the quality of athletic life is effective in social life and that quality of social life is effective in athletic life. He has also added that academic life is important as well. Studies in Turkey on female basketball players are limited. On the other hand, there are studies on female athletes in general (Synder & Kivlin, 1975; Pellicia et al, 1996; Joyce et al., 2005). In these studies, Snyder and Kivlin focused on the body images of female basketball players whereas Dellicia et al, focused on the character.

In addition to the studies above, Riemer et al. (2002) emphasized that university life affected the professionalism of athletes as well as their educational and career plans. Another study focused on concepts such as the intrinsic motivation, satisfaction and self-confidence of basketball players (Treasure & Roberts, 1998).

In addition, the results were parallel to the finding of the pilot study which was conducted in the 2016-2017 season. In the pilot study the female basketball players stated that they were happy to be in Turkey and emphasized that we had better conditions than most European countries. They have motivated researchers to carry out further studies by stating that the only problem resulted from payments (Çelik et al., 2007).

When the literature is reviewed, studies on female athletes may be diversified. However, it is assumed that this study will contribute to literature in understanding the experiences and thoughts of athletes in foreign countries. This study also aims to evaluate the expectations of an athlete working in a foreign country in different perspectives. In this context, it is thought that the results of this study are important and useful as it presents detailed and comprehensive data.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Turkish Basketball leagues have had important organizations in recent years and Turkish basketball clubs have gained prominent success in Europe. This has led to an increased interest in basketball. In this respect, the thoughts/experiences of foreign basketball players about Turkey is important since Turkey hosts world-famous basketball players. For this reason, studying the thoughts, experiences and experiences of professional foreign basketball players about Turkey adds originality to the study. Some suggestions for future research based on the results of this study are as follows;

- The comparison of the results of this study with findings to be obtained in different participant groups (men teams, different leagues, length of stay in the country)
- Sharing the findings of this study and future studies with trainers, managers, player representatives and other related people,

- Carrying out activities to increase the positive thoughts of foreign female players about basketball in Turkey and to eliminate their negative thoughts and experiences,
- Informing foreign athletes about our country as they will contribute to the advertisement of our country, and to provide services that will make the athletes feel comfortable,
- It is known that several factors play a role in the high performance of athletes. The aims of the club, economic opportunities, and expectations of the athletes, facilities and accommodation are just some of these. Sports organizations must bear all these factors in mind for sustainable success.

World-famous athletes compete in leagues of the Turkish Basketball Federation. Clubs have teams with high budgets. However, except for a few teams, teams lack professional organizations that can meet the expectations of female athletes. If club managers and the Basketball Federation invest in these, the satisfaction and professional success of athletes will increase.

### Ethical Declaration

In the writing process of the study titled “*The Evaluation of Foreign Female Basketball Players' Thoughts on Turkey, Turkish Culture and Their Professional Sports Life in Turkey*”, there were followed the scientific, ethical and the citation rules; was not made any falsification on the collected data and this study was not sent to any other academic media for evaluation.

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## TÜRKÇE GENİŞ ÖZET

Spor kavramı geçirmiş olduğu evrelerden sonra bir endüstri haline dönüşmüştür. Sporun bu gelişimi ve dönüşümü hala devam etmekte olup, spor branşlarının kendi içerisinde ayrı birer endüstri kolu haline geldikleri ifade edilmektedir. Basketbol branşı ise, NBA, Euro League ve birçok ülkedeki ulusal ve yerel ligler ile ne kadar büyük bir endüstri olduğunu kanıtlamıştır (Helmer ve Owens, 2000). 1950’lerden bu yana faaliyet gösteren Türkiye Basketbol Federasyonu’nun çalışmalarının karşılığı olarak, günümüzde Türk basketbolu büyük bir aşama kaydederek Avrupa’nın basketbol branşında başarılı ülkelerinden biri olma yolunda ilerlemektedir. Türkiye basketbol liglerinin sahip olduğu izleyici kitlesi, mali boyutu ve takımların bünyesinde barındırdığı dünyaca ünlü oyuncu ve antrenörler ile Avrupa’nın en önemli basketbol ülkelerinden biri olarak kabul edildiği görülmektedir (http-1). Türkiye’deki basketbol ligleri 9 kategori altında toplanmaktadır. Bu ligler arasında takımların sözleşme imzalayabileceği yabancı uyruklu oyuncuların sayısına yönelik bazı sınırlandırmalar söz konusudur. Bu sınırlandırmalar sadece sözleşmeli basketbol liglerinde uygulanmaktadır. Basketbol branşının bu gelişimi sadece erkek basketbolunun değil, kadın basketbolunun gelişimini de olumlu yönde etkilemiştir. 2017 verilerine göre sadece FIBA’ya üye kadın basketbol takımı ve ligi olan 79 ülke bulunmaktadır (http-4). Kadın basketbolu gelmiş olduğu noktada ciddi oyuncu transferlerinin, bonservis bedellerinin, yüksek meblağda oyuncu ücretlerinin söz konusu olduğu bir noktaya gelmiştir (http5). ABD forma giymiş olan WNBA oyuncularının Türkiye Kadınlar Basketbol liglerini de tercih etmeleri de kadın liglerine olan ilgiyi arttırmıştır (http-6). Yabancı sporcuların ilk kez girdikleri kültürler içerisinde yaşadıkları çevreden sosyal ortamlarına, dil problemlerinden antrenörleri ile olan ilişkilerine kadar birçok farklı konuda sorunlar yaşayabileceği ifade edilebilir. Bunların yanı sıra ırkçı söylemler, negatif cinsiyet ayrımcılığı gibi olumsuz durumlar da söz konusu olabilmektedir (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Eastman vd., 2001). Bazı durumlarda taraftarlar da yabancı oyunculara karşı milliyetçi tutum ve söylemler ile tepkilerini göstermekte, oyuncuların aidiyet düzeylerinin düşük düzeyde olduğunu ifade etmekte ve hatta bu oyuncuları dışlayabilmektedirler (Kavussanu ve ark., 2002; Falcous ve Maguire, 2005; Şahin vd., 2010). Sporcuların hayatları her ne kadar sportif yaşam ve sosyal yaşam olarak iki ana başlık altında değerlendirilse de bu iki yaşamın birbiri ile olan ilişkisi göz ardı edilmemelidir (Miller ve Kerr, 2002). Gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmada; Türkiye Basketbol Federasyonuna bağlı, Türkiye Kadınlar Basketbol Ligi (TKBL) takımlarında görev yapan, yabancı uyruklu kadın basketbolcuların Türkiye ve Türkiye’deki basketbol ortamına ilişkin görüşlerinin ortaya konması amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmanın konusunu oluşturan Türkiye Kadınlar Basketbol Liginde görev alan yabancı sporcuların kendi görüşlerine dayanılarak görüş ve

deneyimlerinin incelenmesinde detaylı ve derin bilgilere ulaşabilmek amacıyla nitel araştırma yönteminden faydalanılmıştır (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2013).Yabancı sporcular ile yapılan görüşmelerde 13 adet sorudan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Görüşme formu, alanyazın taraması ve mevcut sorunun tespitine ilişkin görüşler sonucu elde edilen bilgiler kapsamında oluşturulmuştur. Uzman görüşüne sunulan forma, geri bildirimler ile revize edilmiş ve araştırmacılar tarafından son şekli verilmiştir. Gerçekleştirilen görüşmeler sonucunda sporcuların günlük yaşamlarını Sportif ve Sosyal olarak ikiye ayırdıkları söylenebilir. Sporcular sportif yaşam başlığı altında takım arkadaşları, antrenörler, menajerler, beslenme, konaklama, tesis, kulübün sunmuş olduğu imkânlar ve yönetim anlayışı gibi pek çok konuya değinmişlerdir. Katılımcılar genel olarak takım arkadaşları ile ilgili problem yaşamadıklarını dile getirirler de, hissettikleri iletişim sorununu ifade ederken, basketbolun sahada ortak bir dili olduğunu savunmaktadırlar. Kadın basketbolcular insan faktörünün çok değişken ve ilginç olduğunu dile getirmişler, bunun kültürel farklılıklardan kaynaklanabileceğini ifade etmişlerdir. İletişim probleminin kavramının karşımıza çıktığı bir diğer faktör de koçlar olarak ifade edilmiştir. Çoğu zaman iletişimde yaşadıkları problemleri dile getiren sporcular bazı antrenörlerin bilgisizliğinden yakınmakta, ayrıca antrenörlerin yabancı oyuncuların üzerine çok geldiklerini ve beklentilerinin çok yüksek olduğunu savunmaktadırlar. Menajere güven duymadıklarını ifade eden katılımcılar, bir sorun yaşamadıkça iletişime geçmediklerini yine de genel anlamda menajerler ile olan ilişkilerinde çok fazla problem yaşamadıklarını ve işlerine devam edebilmek adına bir bağlantılarının olması gerektiğine vurgu yapmaktadırlar. Kulüplerin sağladıkları olanaklardan genel anlamda mutlu olduklarını ifade eden katılımcılar, özellikle Türk yemeklerinden çok memnun olduklarını dile getirmişlerdir. Yemeklerin çok leziz olduğunu söyleyen sporcular, sağlıklı beslenmenin de ülkemizde çok ucuz olduğuna dikkat çekmektedirler. Ülkemizde iyi ve kötü tesislerin yer aldığını söyleyen katılımcılar, genel anlamda tesisleri beğendiklerini ve pek çok Avrupa ülkesinde gördükleri tesislerden hem sayı olarak, hem de kalite olarak daha iyi bir durumda olduğumuzu belirtmişlerdir. Dil problemi ve ödeme sıkıntılarında yakınan kadın basketbolcular, özellikle pek çok kulüp ile ödeme aksaklıkları yüzünden problem yaşadıklarını ve bu sorunlardan dolayı geleceklerini göremediklerini ifade etmiştir. Kulüp yönetimlerinin profesyonel olmayan bir yapıda olmadığını savunan basketbolcular, bunun çeşitli sıkıntıları peşinden getireceğini ifade etmektedirler. Kadın sporcular genellikle takım arkadaşları ile arkadaşlık yapmadıklarını ve tercihen yalnız kalmayı seçtiklerini vurgulamışlardır. Bu sonucun sebebinin hem dil probleminin ortaya çıktığı, hem de yabancı sporcuların özel hayatlarını, spor hayatlarından tamamen soyutlamalarından kaynaklandığı söylenebilir. Pek çok yabancı sporcu tarafından sevilen Türk kültürü, samimi ve misafirperver bulunmaktadır. Türkiye'nin yaşadıkları yerler arasında en çok sevdikleri yerlerden biri olduğunu dile getiren katılımcılar, Türk toplumu ile dil sorunundan başka problem yaşamadıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Özellikle ailelerinin Türk toplumuna karşı önyargılı olduğunu ifade eden kadın sporcular, ailelerinin Türkiye'den çekindiklerini dile getirmişlerdir. Türkiye'nin pek çok Avrupa ülkesinden ve hatta kendi ülkelerinden bile daha güvenli olduğunu savunan katılımcılar, aileleri ile ilgili özlem konusunda hassas olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Özellikle trafik probleminin yakınan yabancı sporcular, internete erişebildikleri takdirde hiçbir problem yaşamayacaklarını dile getirmektedirler. Kendileri için internetin önemini ifade ederken, kulüplerin bunu anladıklarından emin olamadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Gerçekleştirilen alan yazın taraması sonucunda Türkiye'de profesyonel spor yaşantılarını sürdüren yabancı sporculara yönelik bilimsel çalışmaların sınırlı ve futbol branşı üzerine yoğunlaştığı görülmektedir (Yıldırım, 2008; Şahin vd., 2010; Yıldırım vd., 2012). Gerçekleştirilen çalışmada yapılan derinlemesine görüşmeler ile yabancı kadın basketbolcuların görüş/deneyim, yaşadıkları sorunlar açık bir şekilde ortaya koyulduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu durum çalışmanın özgün niteliğini güçlendiren başka bir durum olarak ifade edilebilir. Yukarıda ki çalışmalara ek olarak ise Riemer vd. (2000) ise üniversite kültürünün sporcuların profesyonellik, eğitim ve kariyer planları açısından etkili olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Yapılan bir diğer çalışmada ise basketbolcu kadınların içsel motivasyonları, tatmin olma ve kendine güvenleri gibi kavramlar üzerinde durulmuştur (Treasure ve Roberts, 1998). Türkiye Basketbol liglerinin son yıllarda Avrupa'nın sayılı organizasyonlar arasında olması ve Türk kulüplerinin Avrupa'nın önemli organizasyonlarında başarılar elde etmesi Türkiye'de basketbol branşına olan ilginin artmasını sağlamıştır. Bu kapsamda basketbol branşındaki yabancı oyuncuların Türkiye ile ilgili görüş/deneyimleri önem kazanmakta çünkü Türkiye artık dünya yıldızlarını misafir eden bir ülke halini almaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, çalışmanın amacını oluşturan Türkiye'de profesyonel olarak basketbol kariyerini sürdüren yabancı kadın basketbolcuların Türkiye'ye yönelik görüş, deneyim ve yaşadığı problemlerin belirlenmesi çalışmaya özgün bir değer katmaktadır.