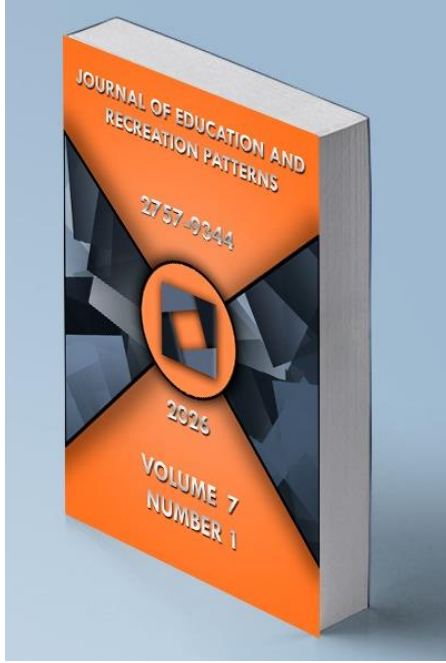




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The Unseen Face of Performance: Demographic Interactions of Effective Decision-Making and Mental Well-being in Folk-Player Athletes

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being in folk dance athletes and investigated the main and interaction effects of these variables according to age, sex, and marital status. Given that folk dance performance requires synchronization, rhythm, coordination, and continuous adaptation within a group setting, effective decision-making and mental well-being are considered critical psychological factors that may influence performance quality and adaptation. A total of 496 athletes actively participating in folk dance across various regions of Türkiye were voluntarily included in the study, which was conducted within a cross-sectional correlational design. Data were collected via the Internal Decision-Making subscale of the Scale of Effective Decision-Making in Sport and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale Short Form; Pearson correlation analysis and two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed. There was a positive and statistically significant relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being levels of folk-dance athletes ($r = .51, p < .01$). Effective decision-making levels differed significantly as a function of the sex $\times$ age interaction ($F(2,490) = 5.10, p < .01, \eta^2 = .020$), and mental well-being levels varied significantly according to the age $\times$ marital status interaction ($F(2,490) = 3.95, p < .05, \eta^2 = .016$). Cognitive decision-making processes and psychological well-being should be evaluated jointly in the context of folk-dance performance, and that decision-making and mental well-being in folk dance athletes require multidimensional examination within the framework of developmental and contextual variables.

Keywords: Folk Dance Athletes, Effective Decision-Making, Mental Well-Being, Age, Marital Status



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INTRODUCTION

Human behavior is shaped by the interaction of cognitive processes across different contexts of daily life. Decision-making stands at the forefront of these processes, enabling individuals to make rapid, accurate, and goal-directed choices in response to environmental stimuli. Decision-making is not merely an act of selecting among alternatives; it is defined as an integrated output of perceptual attention, cognitive processing, emotional regulation, and experience-based evaluation (Kahneman, 2011; Ericsson, 2018). Decision-making skill is regarded as a core performance component determining an individual's functioning in both everyday life and sport settings (Kahneman, 2011; Phillips et al., 2004).

Decision-making capacity is linked to an individual's ability to adapt to rapidly changing and complex environmental demands. Effective decisions facilitate goal attainment, whereas poor decisions can lead to performance decrements, motivational loss, and cognitive overload (Baumeister et al., 2024). In contemporary performance sciences, the quality of decision-making processes is recognized as a critical cognitive competency determining success. Effective decision-making involves not only reducing decision time but also selecting accurate information, cognitively evaluating alternatives, behaving realistically under pressure, and responding flexibly to environmental demands (Çetin & Kara, 2024). It is closely associated with cognitive clarity, attentional focus, problem-solving speed, and situational awareness, all of which determine decision quality (Phillips et al., 2004).

In sport contexts, effective decision-making is dynamic, time-sensitive, and attention-demanding. It requires athletes or performers to accurately perceive variable stimuli encountered during movement, select appropriate responses (Çetin & Kara, 2024), and execute them in a timely manner (Raab & Araújo, 2019). Decisions made during sport performance can directly affect performance fluency, coordination, intra-team communication, rhythm, and movement synchrony.

Effective decision-making is a critical processing capacity not only in elite sports but also in cultural performance domains such as folk dance, which require rhythm, coordination, synchronization, and group cohesion. Folk dances are performance contexts in which rhythmic movements aligned with music are executed synchronously within group dynamics (Ashley & Timmers, 2017; Gonçalves et al., 2018). Within folk dance, individuals must manage their own motor performance while simultaneously making rapid decisions that align with the group's movement flow. Because loss of synchrony, rhythmic disruption, or misinterpretation of environmental cues can compromise performance integrity, effective decision-making is regarded as a key cognitive competency that elevates performance quality in folk dance.

In the context of folk dance, effective decision-making does not primarily involve selecting among multiple tactical alternatives as observed in open-skill sports such as football or basketball. Rather, it refers to the ability to accurately perceive and respond to performance-related cues, including rhythm adjustments, spatial positioning, synchronization with group members, correction of movement errors, adaptation to tempo changes, and coordination with leader or team signals. Although folk dance performances are generally based on rehearsed choreographic structures, performers are continuously required to make rapid adjustments to maintain group harmony, timing, and performance quality. Therefore, effective decision-making remains a critical cognitive process within folk dance performance.

Effective decision-making in folk dance should be considered not only as a cognitive processing skill but also as a process closely linked to an individual's psychological functioning. The capacity to make correct decisions during performance is directly connected to feeling competent, coping with stress, and experiencing the performance process positively. Mental well-being emerges here as a holistic construct reflecting an individual's sense of emotional,

cognitive, and functional balance and adequacy (Tennant et al., 2007). From the perspective of self-determination theory, supporting autonomy, competence, and perceived control in decision-making processes strengthens psychological well-being; perceived uncertainty and inadequacy in decision processes can weaken mental well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Examining effective decision-making and mental well-being together in folk dance athletes allows a more integrated understanding of performance in both its cognitive and psychological dimensions. Decision-making competence and self-regulatory cognitive processes have been reported to be positively associated with psychological well-being across various performance and life contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Despite the growing literature on psychological functioning in sport, research examining the relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being in folk dance athletes remains limited. Therefore, investigating these variables together may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of performance in cultural and group-based performance settings.

From a self-determination theory perspective, effective decision-making may be associated with perceptions of autonomy, competence, and control that are relevant to psychological functioning. In the context of folk dance, successful adaptation to rhythmic, spatial, and interpersonal performance demands may be associated with feelings of competence and effective participation within the group. However, these potential mechanisms were not directly measured in the present study and should therefore be considered as theoretical interpretations rather than empirically tested pathways.

Age and sex are considered fundamental individual variables affecting decision-making processes. Accumulated cognitive experience with age strengthens the ability to evaluate environmental cues more rapidly and accurately, and this pattern supports more effective decision-making in performance contexts (Salthouse, 2010; Raab & Johnson, 2007). Age is a particularly salient factor determining the quality of decision processes in experience-based performance domains. With respect to sex, individuals may differ in risk perception, attentional processes, and feedback utilization, and these differences can influence decision-making styles (Byrnes et al., 1999; Croson & Gneezy, 2009). In folk dance, which requires group cohesion and synchronization, examining age and sex variables together contributes to a more integrated explanation of the individual foundations of effective decision-making.

Beyond the cognitive dimensions of decision-making, how individuals experience these processes and what level of psychological functioning they exhibit also constitute important components of performance. Mental well-being is treated as a holistic construct associated with an individual's sense of emotional and cognitive balance and the ability to cope with the demands of daily life and performance (Tennant et al., 2007). Increasing life experience with age can develop individuals' emotion regulation skills and stress-coping strategies, which in turn can affect mental well-being levels (Carstensen et al., 2011). The social support and emotional sharing afforded by marital status are regarded as important contextual factors supporting individuals' psychological resilience and overall well-being (Diener et al., 2018; Ryff, 2013). Examining age and marital status together offers a complementary perspective for understanding how mental well-being is shaped across different life stages.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between effective decision-making and mental well-being levels in folk dance athletes and to determine whether these psychological variables differed according to selected demographic characteristics. The relationships between effective decision-making and mental well-being were first examined; effective decision-making levels were then evaluated according to sex and age, and mental well-being levels according to age and marital status. The cognitive and psychological dimensions of performance in the folk-dance context were addressed within an integrated framework. The following hypotheses were tested:

H1. There is a positive and significant relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being levels of folk-dance athletes.

H2. The interaction effect of sex and age on effective decision-making levels of folk-dance athletes is significant.

H3. The interaction effect of age and marital status on mental well-being levels of folk-dance athletes is significant.

METHOD

Research Design

The study was conducted within a quantitative research approach via a cross-sectional correlational design. Relationships between athletes' effective decision-making and mental well-being levels were examined through correlation analysis to identify linear associations between variables. Two separate two-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to determine whether psychological variables differed according to selected demographic characteristics. Effective decision-making levels were evaluated according to sex and age, and mental well-being levels according to age and marital status.

The study was planned as a cross-sectional design aimed at identifying existing relationships between variables and testing their joint effects; data were collected at a single time point. A cross-sectional correlational design is appropriate for identifying existing patterns among psychological variables and testing the main and interaction effects of demographic variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Field, 2024).

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles and standards of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013). Ethical approval was obtained from the Mersin University Sports Sciences Ethics Committee (Decision No. 2026-012, dated 26 January 2026). Data were collected between 1 and 10 February 2026. AI-assisted tools were used to a limited extent during textual editing and language review processes.

Participants

The study sample comprised 496 licensed folk dance athletes actively participating in training, competitions, and performance activities across various regions of Türkiye who provided voluntary consent. For the purposes of this study, folk dance athletes were defined as licensed individuals regularly involved in organized folk dance activities and competitive performance settings in Türkiye. Participants were selected through convenience sampling from individuals who volunteered to participate. Of the participants, 49.2% were female ($n = 244$) and 50.8% were male ($n = 252$), indicating a balanced sex distribution. Regarding marital status, 39.9% were married ($n = 198$) and 60.1% were single ($n = 298$). In terms of age distribution, 50.0% were in the 18-25 age group ($n = 248$), 29.8% in the 26-45 age group ($n = 148$), and 20.2% in the 46 and older group ($n = 100$). Age was categorized into three groups (18–25, 26–45, and 46 years and above) to represent early adulthood, middle adulthood, and later adulthood, respectively. This categorization was based on developmental life-stage perspectives frequently used in adult development research and was also considered appropriate for maintaining adequate subgroup sizes for statistical comparisons. With respect to average weekly rehearsal hours, 50.4% reported 1-4 hours, 31.5% reported 5-9 hours, and 18.1% reported 10 hours or more.

Data Collection Instruments

The Scale of Effective Decision-Making in Sport (SEDMS)

Developed by Çetin and Kara (2024), the SEDMS is an instrument designed to assess athletes' decision-making processes. The scale consists of two subscales, Internal Decision-Making and External Decision-Making, comprising a total of 15 items. The Internal Decision-Making subscale covers items 1-7, and the External Decision-Making subscale covers items 8-15. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Items measuring internal decision-making are scored directly, whereas items pertaining to external decision-making are reverse-coded. Reliability analyses reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .85 for the Internal Decision-Making subscale and .87 for the External Decision-Making subscale, indicating high internal consistency for both subscales. In the present study, only the Internal Decision-Making subscale was used because the primary aim was to examine athletes' self-regulated cognitive decision-making processes and their relationship with mental well-being. Internal decision-making reflects individuals' capacity to evaluate situations, regulate their responses, and make effective judgments based on their own cognitive resources. Although folk dance performance involves external cues such as rhythm, music, synchronization, and leader signals, the present study focused specifically on the internal cognitive mechanisms underlying decision-making and psychological functioning. Therefore, the Internal Decision-Making subscale was considered more directly aligned with the study objectives.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale Short Form (WEMWBS-SF)

Developed by Tennant et al. (2007) and adapted into Turkish by Demirtaş and Baytemir (2019), the WEMWBS-SF is used to assess individuals' mental well-being levels. The scale has a unidimensional structure comprising of 7 items. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*); all items are positively worded, and no reverse-coded items are included. Higher scores indicate higher levels of mental well-being. Reliability analyses for the Turkish form reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .84 to .86, indicating high internal consistency.

Statistical Methods

Data were obtained from female and male folk dance athletes through face-to-face printed questionnaires and online data collection tools. Prior to analysis, the raw dataset was examined for missing data, outliers, and adherence to fundamental statistical assumptions. Data from a total of 520 participants were reviewed; 4 observations with missing data were excluded. Following this initial screening, the dataset of 516 observations was transferred to statistical analysis software, and the normality assumption was tested. The proximity of arithmetic mean, median, and mode values indicated that the distributions approximated normality. In the first stage of outlier detection, 6 observations identified as extreme values were removed from the dataset. In further examinations, Z-scores and Mahalanobis distances were considered; 2 observations falling outside the ± 3 range and 12 observations exceeding the critical value of χ^2 ($14, .001 = 36.123$) were excluded. Following these procedures, final analyses were conducted on 496 valid observations.

Prior to conducting the two-way ANOVA analyses, the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and outlier detection were evaluated. Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis coefficients, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, and graphical inspections. Homogeneity of variances was examined using Levene's test, and the results indicated that the assumption was met ($p > .05$). Univariate and multivariate outliers were

assessed using boxplots, Z-scores, and Mahalanobis distances. Only the data meeting and the assumptions required for parametric analyses were included in the final analysis.

Box plots and scatter diagrams were examined to detect univariate outliers; no observations were found to meaningfully affect the analysis results according to the criteria recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). All assumption tests were performed on Jamovi 2.6.2 statistical software. Model fit was evaluated by χ^2/df , CFI, TLI, SRMR, and RMSEA fit indices. Model fit results are presented in Table 1 and normality test results in Table 2.

Table 1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for Data Collection Instruments

	CMIN/DF (χ^2/df)	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA
SEDMS	67/14 = 4.78	.91	.89	.08	.10
WEMWBS-SF	64/14 = 4.57	.92	.90	.05	.09

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results presented in Table 1 indicate that the fit indices obtained for both the SEDMS and the WEMWBS-SF were at borderline acceptable levels. For the SEDMS, the χ^2/df ratio (4.78) was within acceptable limits, and CFI (.91) met the .90 threshold; TLI (.89), however, fell slightly below the recommended .90 cutoff, and RMSEA (.10) reached the upper boundary of acceptable fit. The CFA results for the WEMWBS-SF indicated that the χ^2/df ratio (4.57) was within acceptable limits; CFI (.92) and TLI (.90) supported adequate model-data fit. SRMR (.05) and RMSEA (.09) values were within recommended criteria, supporting construct validity for both instruments in the present sample (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2023). Although the overall fit indices supported the usability of both instruments in the present sample, some indicators were at borderline acceptable levels. Therefore, the measurement results should be interpreted with appropriate caution, and future studies are encouraged to further examine the psychometric properties of these instruments in different folk dance samples.

Table 2

Normality Test Results for Data Collection Instruments

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
SEDMS	496	4.29	-.181	-.963	.111	496	.000
WEMWBS-SF	496	4.24	-.433	-.857	.128	496	.000

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results presented in Table 2 were statistically significant for both variables, indicating formal departures from normality ($p < .001$). In large samples (n

> 300), however, normality tests are known to be highly sensitive to minor deviations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Skewness and kurtosis values were considered alongside the formal test. The skewness and kurtosis values for both scales fell within acceptable limits (± 1), indicating that the distributions were suitable for parametric analyses (Kim, 2013; Field, 2024).

FINDINGS

Table 3

Correlation Analysis Results for the Instruments

<i>N</i> = 496	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	Cronbach's α
1. SEDMS	4.29	.47	1	.511**	.83
2. WEMWBS-SF	4.24	.56		1	.84

Note. ** $p < .01$

The correlation analysis results presented in Table 3 revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between SEDMS and WEMWBS-SF scores ($r = .511, p < .01$). This finding indicates that as effective decision-making levels increased among folk dance athletes, mental well-being levels also increased. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient indicates a medium-sized association between the two variables (Cohen, 2013). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were $\alpha = .83$ for the SEDMS and $\alpha = .84$ for the WEMWBS-SF, indicating good internal consistency for both instruments. This finding supports H1, which predicted a positive and significant relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being levels of folk-dance athletes.

Table 4

Two-Way ANOVA Results for Effective Decision-Making Levels by Sex and Age

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
Sex	3.535	1	3.535	16.188	.000**	.032
Age	2.394	2	1.197	5.482	.004**	.022
Sex $\times$ Age	2.229	2	1.114	5.103	.006**	.020
Error	107.014	490	.218			

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; $R^2 = .071$, Adjusted $R^2 = .061$

The two-way ANOVA results presented in Table 4 indicated that sex had a statistically significant main effect on effective decision-making levels ($F(1,490) = 16.188, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .032$). This finding indicates that effective decision-making levels of folk-dance athletes differed significantly by sex. Age also produced a significant main effect on effective decision-making levels ($F(2,490) = 5.482, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .022$). The interaction effect between sex

and age was statistically significant as well ($F(2,490) = 5.103, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .020$). This result indicates that age-related variation in effective decision-making levels differed depending on sex. Both independently and jointly, sex and age had significant effects on effective decision-making levels. These results confirm H2, which posited that the interaction effect of sex and age on effective decision-making levels of folk dance athletes would be significant. The partial eta-squared values indicate that the main and interaction effects were small in magnitude (Cohen, 2013).

Figure 1

Distribution of Effective Decision-Making Levels by Sex and Age

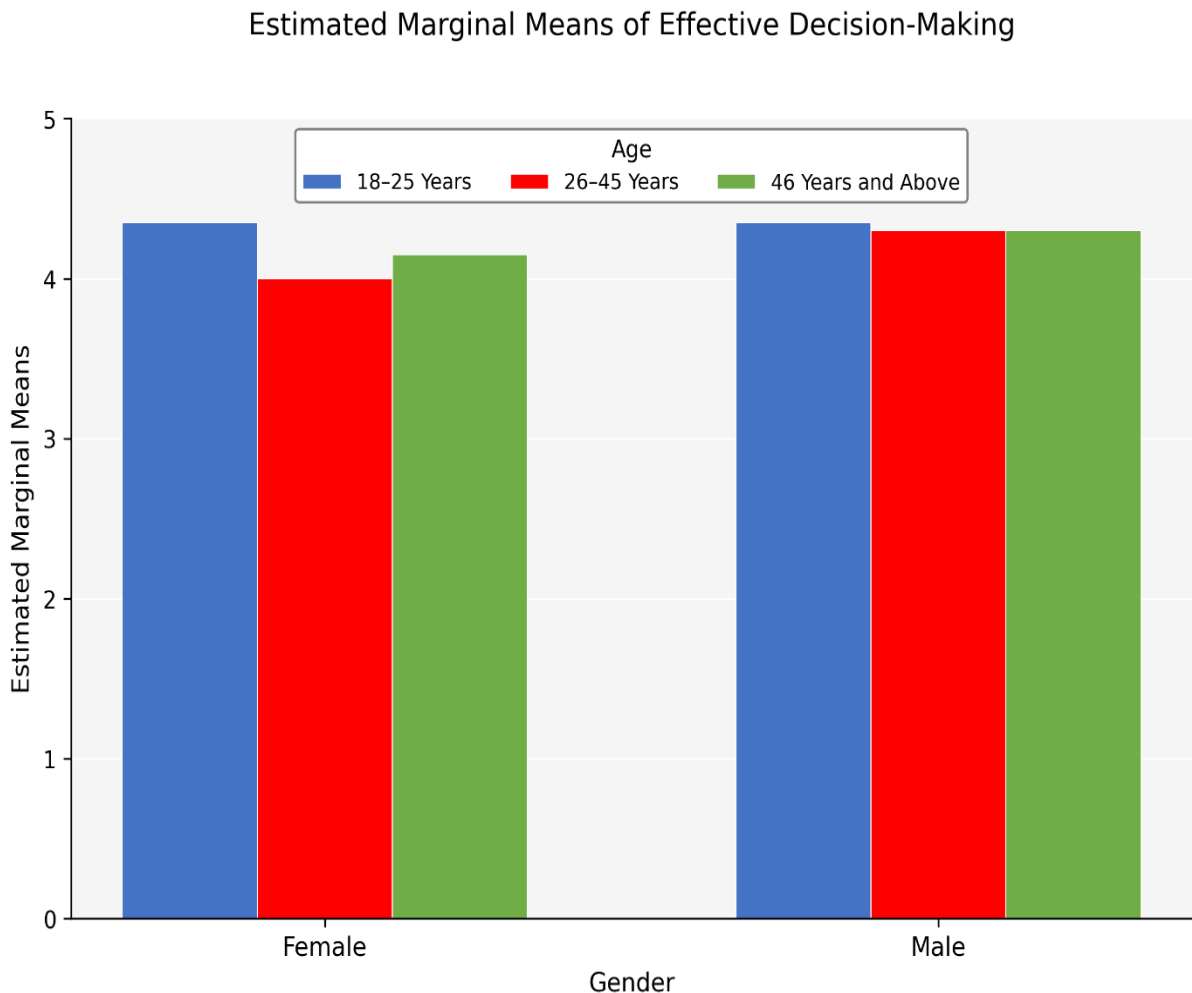


Figure 1 shows that effective decision-making levels of folk-dance athletes exhibited different patterns across sex and age groups. Male athletes had generally higher effective decision-making levels than female athletes across all age groups. Among female athletes, effective decision-making levels were comparatively lower in the 26-45 age group, whereas a more balanced distribution was observed in the 18-25 and 46 and older groups. This visual pattern supports the interaction effect between sex and age on effective decision-making levels.

Table 5*Two-Way ANOVA Results for Mental Well-Being Levels by Age and Marital Status*

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial η^2
Age	.008	2	.004	.012	.988	.000
Marital Status	1.603	1	1.603	5.064	.025*	.010
Age × Marital Status	2.501	2	1.250	3.950	.020*	.016
Error	155.090	490	.317			

Note. Two-way ANOVA results for mental well-being levels according to age (18-25, 26-45, 46 and older) and marital status (married/single). ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; $R^2 = .026$, Adjusted $R^2 = .016$

The two-way ANOVA results presented in Table 5 indicated that age did not have a statistically significant main effect on mental well-being levels ($F(2,490) = .012$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$). Marital status, however, produced a significant main effect ($F(1,490) = 5.064$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .010$). The interaction effect between age and marital status was also statistically significant ($F(2,490) = 3.950$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .016$). This result indicates that the effect of age on mental well-being did not follow a linear pattern on its own; it varied when considered alongside the individual's social context (marital status). Variation in mental well-being levels across age groups was shaped by marital status. These findings support H3, which predicted that the interaction effect of age and marital status would be significant.

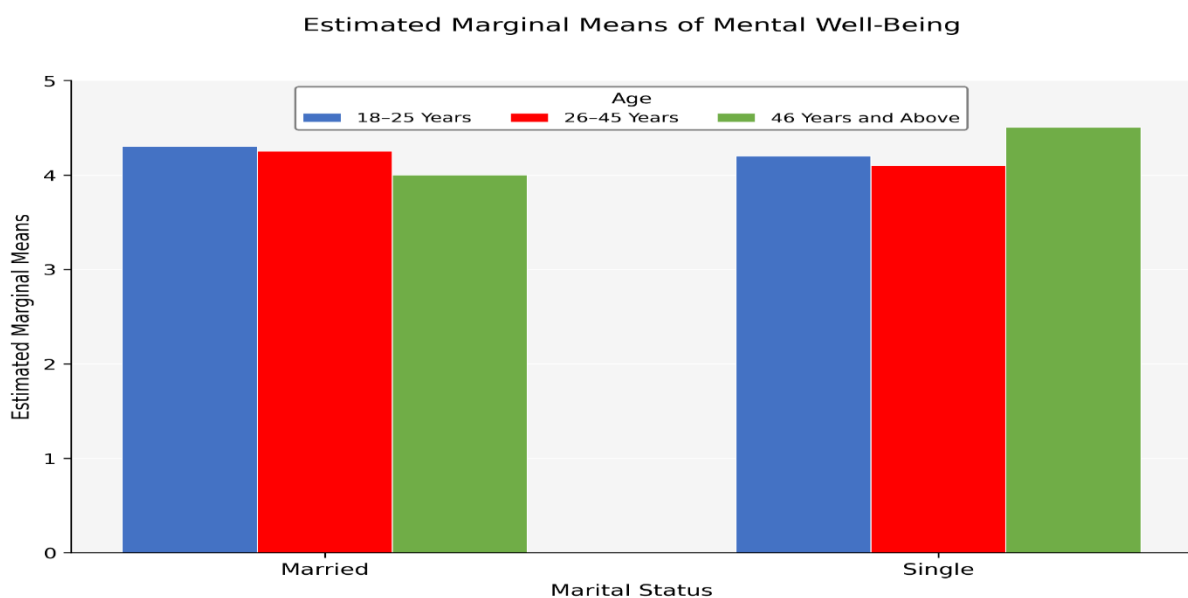
Figure 2*Distribution of Mental Well-Being Levels by Age and Marital Status*

Figure 2 shows that mental well-being levels of folk-dance athletes exhibited different patterns according to age and marital status. Married athletes displayed a relatively more balanced distribution of mental well-being levels across age groups, whereas age-related variation was more pronounced among single athletes. Single athletes aged 46 and older had higher mental well-being levels compared with other age groups. This visual pattern supports the interaction effect between age and marital status on mental well-being levels.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being in folk dance athletes and how these variables differed according to age, sex, and marital status. The findings indicate that decision-making processes are not merely a cognitive output oriented toward performance; they present a multidimensional structure that should be considered in interaction with the individual's psychological functioning and well-being.

A positive and statistically significant relationship was found between effective decision-making and mental well-being levels of folk-dance athletes ($r = .511, p < .01$). This result confirms H1. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient indicates a medium-sized association (Cohen, 2013), which is theoretically consistent with self-determination theory. According to this framework, autonomy and competence perceptions supported during performance contribute to strengthened psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2024). The proposed mechanism is straightforward: Effective decision-making skill may be associated with greater perceived control over performance and lower stress levels, whereas lower stress may, in turn, be associated with higher mental well-being. Research on decision-making competence, self-regulation, and psychological adjustment supports this interpretation, as more functional patterns in decision processes tend to be associated with more positive psychological outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Diener et al., 2018).

This relationship takes on particular salience in the folk-dance context. Folk dance is a group-based performance environment that demands synchronization and rhythm under real-time constraints. Correct and timely decisions in such settings reduce error probability and sustain performance flow. Athletes who experience fewer disruptions are likely to evaluate their own performance more positively and to feel psychologically more balanced as a result. The positive correlation between effective decision-making and mental well-being in this sample is consistent with the view that cognitive and psychological dimensions of performance operate as complementary rather than independent structures. Decision-making competence may be associated with higher perceived control, and perceived control may, in turn, be associated with psychological well-being. The cross-sectional design, however, precludes confirmation of this directional sequence.

Both the main effects and the interaction effect of sex and age on effective decision-making levels were significant. This result confirms H2. The small partial eta-squared values indicate, however, that these effects had limited practical magnitude despite statistical significance (Cohen, 2013). The main effect of age is consistent with the role of accumulated experience in performance-related decision processes. Cognitive experience and pattern recognition increase with age, and both facilitate faster and more accurate evaluation of alternatives in dynamic environments (Salthouse, 2010; Raab & Johnson, 2007). The main effect of sex and its interaction with age point to a different mechanism: decision-making processes are sensitive not only to experience but also to individual differences in attentional focus, risk perception, and feedback utilization. Sex-based differences tend to emerge in decision components such as risk assessment and strategy selection, and the literature indicates that these differences are reshaped through experience and shifting role expectations as individuals age (Byrnes et al., 1999; Croson & Gneezy, 2009).

In performance contexts that require group cohesion and synchronization, this interaction carries practical weight. Age-related experience does not operate uniformly across male and female athletes; it combines with sex-specific cognitive and emotional regulation patterns to produce differentiated decision-making profiles. The implication is that age and sex explain decision-making performance more effectively when considered jointly than when treated as independent predictors. A question that remains open is whether the observed interaction reflects stable dispositional differences or context-dependent adaptations to the group performance environment. Longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to adjudicate between these possibilities.

The interaction effect of age and marital status on athletes' mental well-being levels was significant, whereas the main effect of age alone was not. This result confirms H3. The absence of an age main effect is itself informative: it indicates that mental well-being is not a straightforward developmental trajectory that improves or declines with chronological age. Rather, age gains meaning as a predictor only when considered alongside social context, in this case marital status. This pattern is theoretically consistent with the life-course approach. Emotion regulation and stress-coping strategies develop as individuals age, but the translation of these developmental gains into mental well-being depends on contextual resources. Close relationships and perceived social support are among the most robust of such resources (Carstensen et al., 2011). Marital status may serve as a protective function for psychological balance in middle and later adulthood through the emotional sharing and support it affords. When these relational resources are limited, age-related regulatory gains may not translate into equivalent well-being benefits (Ryff, 2013). The interaction finding indicates that mental well-being does not follow a linear age trajectory but displays distinct patterns depending on social context.

Taken together, the results position effective decision-making and mental well-being as interrelated constructs in folk dance athletes. The positive correlation suggests that perceived control and competence during performance may support psychological functioning; the demographic interaction effects indicate that both constructs are shaped by developmental and contextual characteristics rather than isolated individual traits. These conclusions carry an important qualifier: all observed effect sizes were small. Therefore, the observed interaction effects should be interpreted with caution. Although statistically significant, the magnitude of these effects was limited, indicating that demographic characteristics explained only a small proportion of the variance in effective decision-making and mental well-being. Consequently, these findings should be viewed as preliminary group-related patterns rather than strong practical effects and require replication in different samples and contexts. The relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being may be influenced by variables not measured in the present study, such as age, sex, rehearsal characteristics, performance experience, team cohesion, self-efficacy, perceived social support, and other contextual factors. Therefore, the observed association should be interpreted with caution, as unmeasured confounding variables may partially account for the relationship between the two constructs. Multivariate models that incorporate these potential pathways would clarify how much of the variance in mental well-being is attributable to decision-making competence per se versus shared antecedents.

Furthermore, because the present study employed a cross-sectional design, the findings should be interpreted as associative rather than causal. The direction of the relationship between effective decision-making and mental well-being cannot be determined, and future longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to clarify the causal mechanisms underlying these relationships.

Conclusion

Effective decision-making and mental well-being were positively correlated in folk dance athletes ($r = .511$), suggesting that decision-making capacity during performance is associated with psychological well-being. Effective decision-making levels varied by the sex $\times$ age interaction (partial $\eta^2 = .020$). However, given the small effect size, this finding should be interpreted as a modest demographic pattern rather than a strong practical effect. Mental well-being levels varied by the age $\times$ marital status interaction (partial $\eta^2 = .016$) but not by age alone, indicating that psychological well-being may differ according to social context rather than chronological age alone. All observed effect sizes were small. The findings suggest that the cognitive and psychological dimensions of folk dance performance are related; however, the cross-sectional design and limited explained variance require cautious interpretation. Future studies employing longitudinal and multivariate approaches may help clarify the mechanisms underlying these relationships.

Recommendations and Limitations

Based on the study findings, developing interventions that jointly support effective decision-making skills and mental well-being levels in folk dance athletes' performance processes is recommended. Intentionally structuring decision-demanding scenarios during training and rehearsal processes may strengthen athletes' cognitive and psychological adjustment. Decision-making-based psychoeducation programs structured with attention to age and social context differences may support athletes' cognitive and psychological adaptation. Psychological support and awareness-based programs that account for individual characteristics such as age, sex, and marital status may contribute to the performance integrity of folk-dance teams.

This study was conducted within a cross-sectional design and does not permit causal inferences. The relationships between variables were not tested through structural models or longitudinal designs, which limits explanation of the causal direction of the findings. Data collection through self-report scales may introduce participant bias. The sample was limited to folk dance athletes, which may restrict generalizability to other sport disciplines or performance domains. Future research employing longitudinal designs, different sample groups, and comparative designs across different sport disciplines and cultural performance domains may increase the scope and generalizability of the findings. Another limitation of the present study is that both effective decision-making and mental well-being were assessed using self-report measures administered within the same survey. Consequently, common method variance may have influenced the observed relationships between the study variables. Although established and psychometrically supported instruments were used, future research may benefit from employing multiple data sources, behavioral measures, or temporal separation of assessments to reduce the potential impact of common method bias.

Although significant interaction effects were identified, detailed simple effects and post hoc subgroup comparisons were not performed. Future studies may benefit from conducting more comprehensive follow-up analyses to better understand subgroup-specific patterns.

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Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest

Ethics statement: This study was conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics principles and the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013). Ethical approval was obtained from the Mersin University Sports Sciences Ethics Committee (Decision No. 2026-012, dated 26 January 2026). All participants provided voluntary informed consent prior to participation. The authors declare that they take full responsibility for the content of this manuscript in case of any dispute.

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