

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Bibliometric Analysis of Postgraduate Theses on Exercise Addiction in Türkiye

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## Main Points

- In recent years, there has been a significant increase in research on exercise addiction in theses and dissertations in Türkiye.
- Theses on exercise addiction in Türkiye cover multidisciplinary, mainly sports sciences and psychology.
- Exercise Addiction Scale-17 and Exercise Addiction Scale-21 stand out as the most commonly used scales in research on exercise addiction.
- Other scales with established validity and reliability in the current literature can also be preferred in research studies.
- In the context of exercise addiction, while master's level theses are commonly prepared, doctoral and medical specialization theses are also crucial for conducting more comprehensive and in-depth research.

## Abstract

The aim of this study is to delineate the common characteristics and research trends of postgraduate theses related to exercise addiction in Türkiye, thereby providing a guiding resource for researchers and practitioners in this field. In this bibliometric analysis, a total of 86 theses were obtained from the Council of Higher Education Thesis Center using the search term exercise addiction. Out of these theses, 84 met the inclusion criteria, providing a comprehensive overview. The majority of these theses were written in Turkish (92.85%), with an average page count of 91.01 pages. The subjects of the theses varied widely, with sports being the most prevalent area of focus (76.19%). Health sciences institutes were the primary contributors to research in this area (44.04%), emphasizing the multidisciplinary nature of the topic. The Exercise Addiction Scale-17 emerged as the most commonly used scale (58.33%), indicating a standardized approach to assessing addiction levels. Participant profiles ranged from regular exercisers to diagnosed patients, highlighting the diverse scope of research. Furthermore, the distribution of theses by publication year showed an increasing trend, with 2022 being the most active year. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights for researchers and practitioners, guiding future studies and interventions in this important area of study.

**Keywords:** Addictions to exercise, bibliometrics, dependency, exercise, scales, sports

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## Introduction

With the increasing awareness of healthy living in today's society, there has been a noticeable rise in the tendency to exercise (Martínez - Montoro et al., 2023). Exercise is considered an important component for maintaining and enhancing physical

health and is widely recommended (Lu et al., 2021; Pinckard et al., 2019). However, in some individuals, an excessive passion and addiction towards exercise can develop. This condition is referred to as exercise addiction and has been gaining increasing attention in recent years (Colledge et al., 2020; Weinstein & Szabo, 2023).

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Exercise addiction manifests itself with symptoms such as allocating excessive time and energy to exercise in one's life, experiencing anxiety and restlessness when unable to exercise, and neglecting other activities (Landolfi, 2013; Weinstein & Szabo, 2023). It is known that this condition can negatively impact an individual's physical health and lead to social and psychological problems. Exercise addiction has become an important research topic in sports psychology and mental health fields (Berczik et al., 2012). Therefore, analyses of research on exercise addiction allow us to understand the structure and development of the scientific literature in this area, enabling us to acquire extensive knowledge about exercise addiction.

Bibliometric analysis is the numerical analysis of publications produced by individuals or institutions in a specific field, during a specific period, and in a specific region, along with the relationships between these publications (Cihad et al., 2021; Cinar et al., 2021; Kacmaz et al., 2022). This type of analysis is used to understand the structure, development, and impact of scientific literature and is widely used in areas such as science policy, research evaluation, and knowledge management. Additionally, bibliometric analyses for postgraduate theses include qualitative and quantitative analyses of academic works produced by universities, institutes, or research centers (Cinar et al., 2021). In bibliometric analyses, topics such as the distribution of theses by year, which universities produce more theses, and which departments contribute more theses are examined (Cihad et al., 2021; Cinar et al., 2021). These data can serve as guidance for future research and help identify research trends in a particular field (Cihad et al., 2021).

In light of this information, the aim of this study is to conduct a descriptive analysis of the content of the theses on exercise addiction available in the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) Thesis Center. This analysis will help us understand the current state of academic research conducted in the field of exercise addiction and contribute to enhancing the knowledge base in this area. Additionally, it aims to serve as a guiding resource for future research planned in the field of exercise addiction in the coming years. The results of this study will contribute to the literature on exercise addiction, thus aiding in the advancement of research in this area.

## Material and Methods

This research was designed to conduct a bibliometric analysis of postgraduate theses focusing on exercise addiction in Türkiye. The main page of the "National Thesis Center" website of the Turkish Higher Education Council was searched with the search terms "Exercise Addiction" and "Egzersiz Bağımlılığı" in the "Search Term" section set to "All" (CoHE, 2024). Following the search, access was obtained to all accessible theses, and these theses were examined from a bibliometric perspective.

The inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: the thesis must be available in the CoHE National Thesis Center, it must be a master's, doctoral, or specialization thesis, the publication language must be Turkish or English, and the term "Exercise Addiction" must be present in the thesis title. Exclusion criteria included instances where the term "Exercise Addiction"

appeared in the title but the actual study was not related to this topic.

Researchers utilized a thesis review form developed by them for the examination of the theses. The thesis review form includes the following questions.

1. What is the type of postgraduate thesis?
2. What is the distribution of languages of postgraduate thesis?
3. How does the distribution of postgraduate theses vary by page numbers?
4. What is the distribution of postgraduate theses by subject area?
5. How are postgraduate theses distributed by institute?
6. How is exercise addiction assessed in postgraduate thesis?
7. What is the population of subjects in postgraduate thesis?
8. How do the theses distribute by publication year?
9. What indexes are used in postgraduate thesis?
10. How do the theses distribute by the universities they were conducted at?
11. What are the participant numbers like in postgraduate thesis?

Since the current research does not involve the collection of data from participants, it does not require any Ethics Committee approval or consent.

## Statistical Analysis

Within the scope of the study, each review dimension identified in the thesis review form developed by the researchers was transformed into a spreadsheet using the Microsoft Excel program. Each row contains demographic information related to the theses, including basic information such as thesis title, publication year, author, university name, etc. The obtained numerical data are presented as numbers (n) and percentages (%).

## Results

A search with the keywords "Exercise Addiction" in postgraduate theses yielded 86 theses. Two theses were excluded as they were not relevant to the topic. The study focused on a total of 84 theses, comprising 78 master's theses, 4 doctoral theses, and 2 specialization theses in medicine. Of all the included postgraduate theses, 78 were written in Turkish, while 6 were written in English.

The examined theses varied widely in page numbers, ranging from 45 pages to 217 pages. The average page count of the theses was calculated as 91.01 pages. The average page counts of the theses were found to be as follows: specialization (162 pages), doctoral (133 pages), and master's (87 pages). It was observed that the theses consisted of 3 theses with 50 pages or fewer, 30 theses with 51-75 pages, 23 theses with 76-100 pages, 17 theses with 101-125 pages, 6 theses with 126-150 pages, and 5 theses with 150 pages or more.

Upon examining the subject areas of the theses, it was observed that they mainly focused on sports (64 theses), psychology (12 theses), nutrition and dietetics (5 theses), and psychiatry (3 theses).

When investigating the institutes where the theses were conducted, it was found that 37 theses were from health sciences

institutes, 19 theses were from graduate education institutes, 15 theses were from social sciences institutes, 11 theses were from education sciences institutes, and 2 theses were from medical faculties.

An examination of the scales used in the theses revealed that the Exercise Addiction Scale-17 (EAS-17) (49 theses) was the most preferred scale by researchers. This was followed by the Exercise Addiction Scale-21 (EAS-21) (31 theses), Exercise Addiction Inventory (3 theses), and Exercise Addiction Scale for Youth (1 thesis).

A total of 48 theses were conducted with participants engaged in regular exercise. Sixteen theses were conducted with high school and university students, 13 theses were with licensed athletes, 4 theses were with the general population, and 3 theses were with diagnosed patients.

Upon examining the participant numbers included in the examined theses, it was found that studies were conducted with a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 3747 participants. The average number of participants in the theses was calculated as 414.28 participants. The theses with the highest number of participants were conducted with 3747, 1578, 956, 828, and 795 participants. The theses with the lowest number of participants were conducted with 30, 43, 60, 63, and 69 participants (Table 1).

When examining the distribution of theses on exercise addiction by year, it was determined that the first thesis was conducted in 2005, and the year 2022 (22 theses) was identified as the year with the most intense research activity (Figure 1).

When examining the indexes used in the theses, Exercise (44 theses) was the most commonly used index. This was followed by dependency (40 theses), exercise addiction (30 theses), sports (21 theses), sportsmen (12 theses), university students (10 theses), scales (7 theses), and fitness (7 theses) indexes (Figure 2).

When examining the distribution of postgraduate theses by universities, it was observed that the highest number of theses was prepared at Mersin University (six theses). This was followed by Gazi University with five theses, and Ege University and Üsküdar University with four theses each. Adnan Menderes University, Bayburt University, Gaziantep University, Istanbul Gelişim University, Munzur University, and Selçuk University each had three theses.

### Discussion

Exercise addiction has become an increasingly prominent area of research in recent years. In this study, a bibliometric analysis of postgraduate theses on exercise addiction in Türkiye was conducted, and the findings were examined. These findings illustrate the general profile and trends of academic research on exercise addiction in Türkiye.

Firstly, as a result of the conducted examinations, it was observed that the examined postgraduate theses exist in various types. These theses include master’s theses, doctoral theses, and medical specialization theses. Particularly, it was observed that master’s theses are more prevalent among other types. Similarly, in studies conducted with a similar search model, it has been

noted that master’s studies outnumber doctoral and medical specialization studies (Kacmaz et al., 2022). This indicates a significant interest in academic research on exercise addiction and suggests that more postgraduate-level studies can be expected in this field in the future. The lower number of doctoral and medical specialization theses may suggest that such studies require longer processes and tend to conduct more in-depth research (Cihad et al., 2021; Cinar et al., 2021). The increase in the number

**Table 1.**  
*Distribution of Postgraduate Theses by Variables*

Variables	n	(%)
<b>Thesis Type</b>		
Master’s	78	92.85
Doctoral	4	4.76
Specialization in Medicine	2	2.38
<b>Language</b>		
Turkish	78	92.85
English	6	7.15
<b>Thesis Page Numbers</b>		
50 pages and below	3	3.57
51 – 75 pages	30	35.71
76 – 100 pages	23	27.38
101 – 125 pages	17	20.23
126 – 150 pages	6	7.14
151 pages and above	5	5.95
<b>Subject Areas</b>		
Sports	64	76.19
Psychology	12	14.28
Nutrition and Dietetics	5	5.95
Faculty of Medicine	3	3.57
<b>Institutes</b>		
Institute of Health Sciences	37	44.04
Graduate School of Education	19	22.62
Institute of Social Sciences	15	17.85
Institute of Educational Sciences	11	13.09
Faculty of Medicine	2	2.38
<b>Scales Used in Theses</b>		
Exercise Addiction Scale-17	49	58.33
Exercise Addiction Scale-21	31	36.90
Exercise Addiction Inventory	3	3.57
Exercise Addiction Scale for Youth	1	1.19
<b>Participant Profile</b>		
Regular Exercisers	48	57.14
Students	16	19.04
Licensed Athletes	13	15.47
General Population	4	4.76
Diagnosed Patients	3	3.57
<b>Participant Numbers</b>		
0 – 50	2	2.38
51 – 100	7	8.33
101 – 200	10	11.90
201 – 300	20	23.80
301 – 400	24	28.57
401 – 500	8	9.52
501 – 1000	10	11.90
Over 1001	3	3.57

n, number of participants, %, percentage.

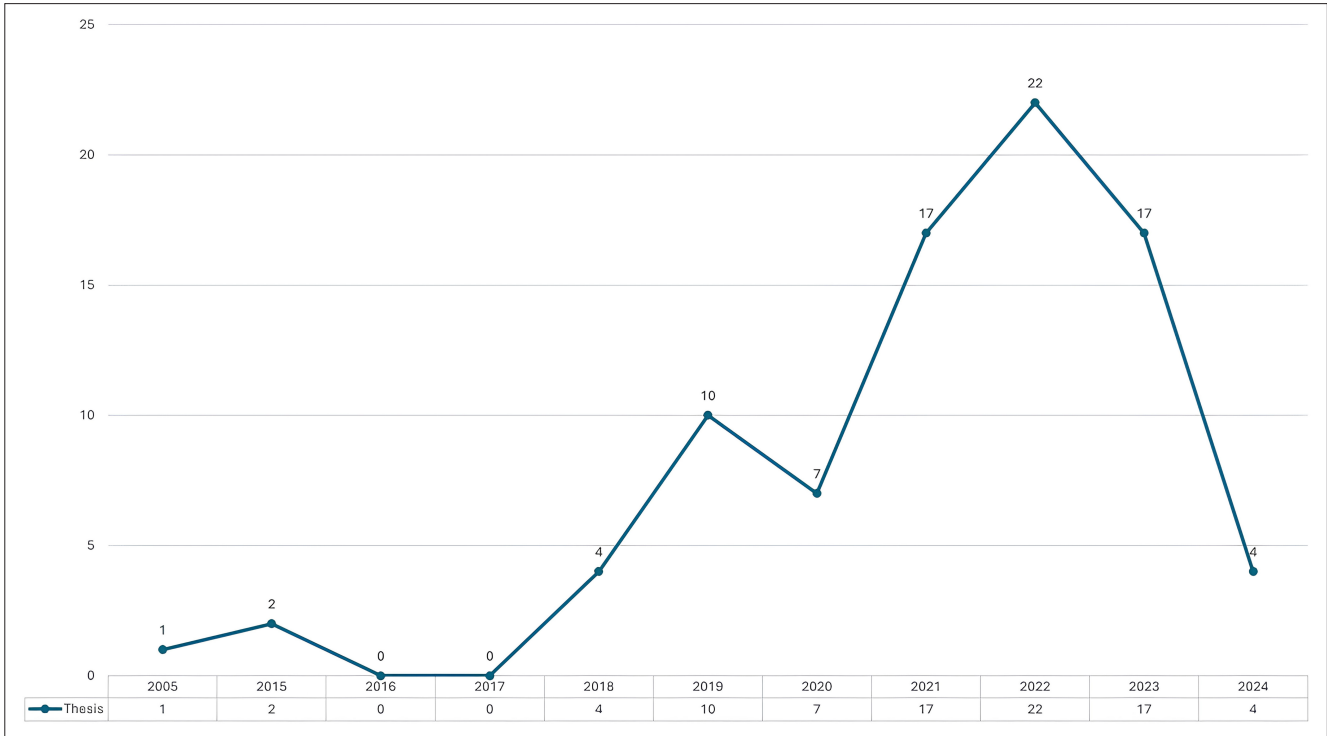


Figure 1. Distribution of postgraduate theses by year.

of such theses may indicate that research on exercise addiction is progressing towards a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding.

As a result of the conducted examination, it is observed that the majority of the examined postgraduate theses are written in Turkish. Several reasons may account for the predominance of Turkish-language theses in the CoHE National Thesis Center.

Firstly, the language of instruction in Turkish higher education institutions is generally Turkish. Therefore, students are expected to write their theses in their native language. Additionally, according to the rules set by the CoHE, it is essential for theses in postgraduate programs with Turkish as the language of instruction to be written in Turkish (CoHE, 2022). However, it has been observed that a few theses are written in English. With the reasoned opinion of the advisor and relevant board decisions,

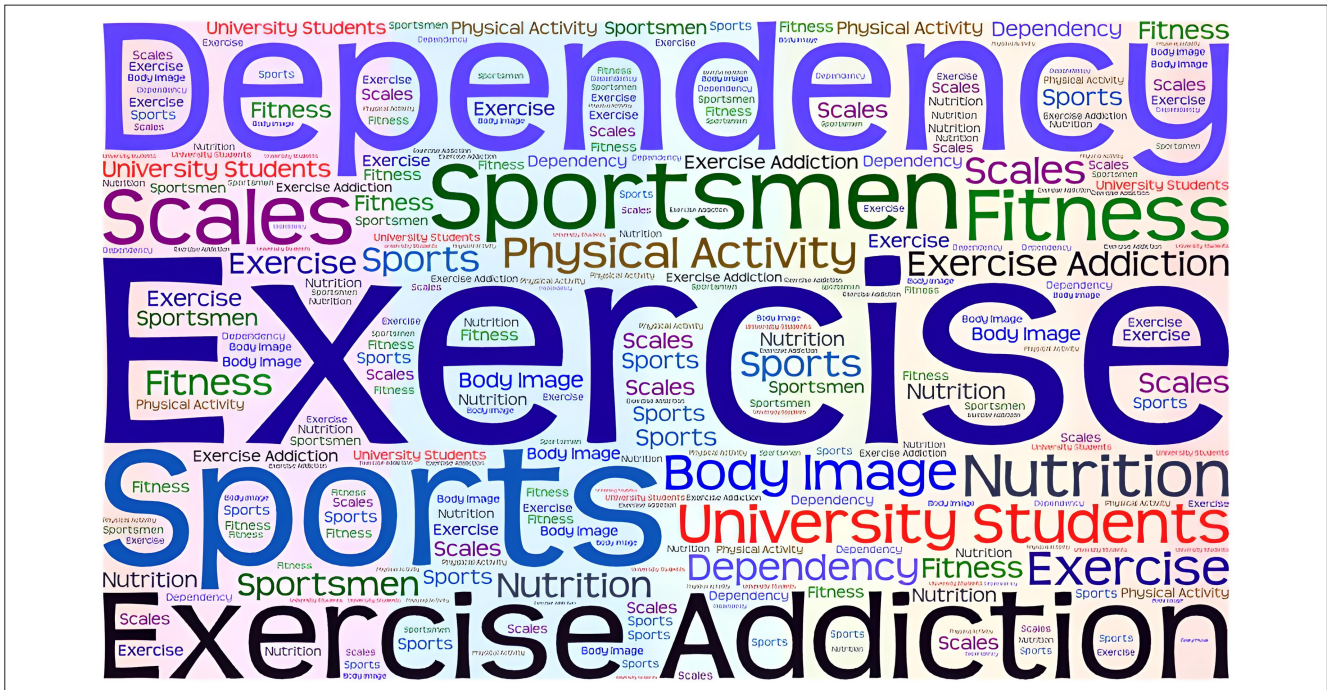


Figure 2. Indexes used in postgraduate theses.

theses can also be written in English, provided that a comprehensive Turkish summary is provided (CoHE, 2022). This linguistic diversity may contribute to the dissemination and development of scientific knowledge in the field of exercise addiction, fostering a more comprehensive understanding.

The findings of this study indicate that postgraduate theses are generally of moderate length, but some are shorter or longer. According to the findings of this study, when examining the page numbers of theses, it is observed that they show a wide range of distribution. Postgraduate theses on exercise addiction generally exhibit a moderate level of scope and detail. Additionally, the average page numbers of medical specialization and doctoral theses were higher compared to master's theses. This suggests that medical specialization and doctoral theses are addressed in more detail (Cihad et al., 2021; Cinar et al., 2021).

The findings of this study indicate that various disciplines contribute to research on exercise addiction. Among the examined theses, the most common subject area is the field of sports sciences. It is observed that the number of theses conducted in the field of sports is significantly higher compared to other subject areas (Di Lodovico et al., 2019). This suggests that research on exercise addiction is often conducted in fields such as sports science, exercise physiology, and sports psychology. Topics such as the effects of sports on health and behavioral characteristics observed in athletes may constitute the focus of exercise addiction research (Godoy-Izquierdo et al., 2023). Additionally, a significant number of theses are found in the field of psychology. The discipline of psychology plays an important role in understanding the psychological factors underlying exercise addiction and in treating this addiction (Colledge et al., 2020). The presence of theses on exercise addiction in other fields such as nutrition and dietetics and psychiatry also indicates that exercise addiction is a multidimensional issue and that various disciplines contribute to research in this area (Strahler et al., 2021; Trott et al., 2020). Bringing together research from different disciplines can contribute to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of exercise addiction and the development of effective intervention strategies. In conclusion, the distribution of postgraduate theses by subject areas indicates that research on exercise addiction is approached with an interdisciplinary perspective and examined from various perspectives (Bruno et al., 2014).

When examining the distribution of postgraduate theses by institute, it is observed that the majority of theses are conducted in the Institute of Health Sciences compared to other institutes. This suggests that exercise addiction is considered an important research area from the perspective of health sciences and that there is a high level of interest among health professionals in this topic. It is believed that research conducted in health sciences institutes can integrate the effects of exercise addiction into clinical and practical applications to a greater extent (Ozdemir & Akpınar Kocakulak, 2023; Yıldız, 2023). On the other hand, the number of theses conducted in the Graduate School of Education and the Institute of Social Sciences is also noteworthy. This indicates that the field of exercise addiction requires a multidisciplinary approach and that educators and social scientists can play an important role in this area (Bruno et al., 2014). Since exercise

addiction has not only physiological effects but also psychological and social dimensions, it is important for different disciplines to come together and work on this topic (Bruno et al., 2014; Hausenblas & Mann, 2018).

When examining the commonly used scales in postgraduate theses, it is observed that the EAS-17 is the most preferred scale. This scale is widely used in research on exercise addiction and is designed to assess individuals' exercise habits and level of addiction (Tekkurşun Demir et al., 2018). The reason for the frequent use of EAS-17 is its brevity and the proven reliability and validity (Tekkurşun Demir et al., 2018). In addition to EAS-17, the EAS-21 also emerges as a commonly preferred scale. Similar to EAS-17, EAS-21 is a scale used to assess the level of exercise addiction but is more comprehensive and includes more subscales (Ikizler & Yeltepe, 2007). This scale is preferred by researchers who want to examine different aspects of exercise addiction in more detail. Additionally, other scales such as the Exercise Addiction Inventory (Terry et al., 2004) and the Exercise Addiction Scale for Youth (Dokuzoğlu et al., 2022) are also present in the theses, but their frequency of use is lower compared to EAS-17 and EAS-21. Moreover, using other scales with established validity and reliability in the literature related to exercise addiction may be beneficial (Aydin et al., 2023). Therefore, scale selection in research on exercise addiction is an important decision, and researchers should choose scales that are suitable for their research purposes and target population.

When examining the distribution of research according to the publication year of the theses, it is observed that there is an increasing trend in research on exercise addiction over time. It was determined that the first thesis was conducted in 2005, with the most intensive research activity occurring in the year 2022 (Yeltepe, 2005). This increase can be associated with the growing recognition of the importance of exercise addiction. The increasing interest in physical activity for maintaining individuals' physical health and concerns that this process may increase the risk of exercise addiction may have encouraged researchers to conduct more studies in this area. Additionally, the increase in research on exercise addiction indicates an increase in systematic research and scientific knowledge in this field (Di Lodovico et al., 2019; Strahler et al., 2021). Acquiring more knowledge about the effects of exercise addiction on physical and psychological health, developing effective intervention strategies in this regard, and raising awareness in the community are important aspects of increasing research on this topic (Landolfi, 2013; Lichtenstein & Hinze, 2020). The increasing number of studies on exercise addiction by publication year emphasizes the necessity for more research in this field and the importance of continuously updating the scientific literature in this area. In this context, the continuation and diversification of research on exercise addiction will contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in this field and the development of more effective intervention methods. In addition, the distribution of theses according to publication years also shows the trend in this regard. Accordingly, we see an increasing trend in exercise addiction, especially between 2016 and 2019 and 2020 and 2022. We think that this may be due to the tendency of researchers to introduce a topic that has not yet been mentioned in the literature or to publish new certain topics in the literature and receive

more citations. As a matter of fact, the trend, which started in 2016, increased as researchers from different departments wrote theses on this subject and reached its maximum in 2022. In this context, it can be said that theses on this subject will decrease after 2022, and the trend will change.

When examining the most frequently used indexes in postgraduate theses, it is observed that research on exercise addiction generally revolves around specific keywords. At the forefront of these indexes are keywords such as “Exercise,” “Addiction,” and “Exercise Addiction.” The majority of research conducted in the field of exercise addiction seems to focus around these keywords in order to identify fundamental concepts and connections. Additionally, specific words such as athletes, university students, and scales are also commonly used. This suggests that researchers tend to associate exercise addiction with specific subgroups or scales and conduct more specific studies in this regard. The frequent use of the exercise addiction scale, in particular, suggests that researchers may have focused their studies on scale-based assessment methods in this field. The intensive use of these indexes indicates a concentration of research on specific concepts and measurement tools in studies related to exercise addiction (Ikizler & Yeltepe, 2007; Tekkurşun Demir et al., 2018).

When examining the distribution of theses across universities, it is observed that research on exercise addiction is conducted in various universities. This distribution reflects the interest of different universities and academic units in the field of exercise addiction. Considering the distribution of postgraduate theses according to universities examined in the study, it is noted that Mersin University hosts the highest number of theses. Other universities such as Gazi University, Ege University, and Uskudar University also have a significant number of theses, indicating substantial research activity in the field of exercise addiction by both academics and these universities (Ayılğan, 2022; Ö. Demir, 2021). These studies conducted at different universities reflect a wide range of research and academic activities in the field of exercise addiction (Cihad et al., 2021; Kacmaz et al., 2022). This demonstrates that research on exercise addiction promotes inter-university collaboration and knowledge sharing.

When examining the findings related to the number of participants in postgraduate theses, a wide range of participant numbers is observed. Studies with a low number of participants generally involve research conducted on a specific group or population. For example, research focusing on specific groups such as licensed athletes or diagnosed patients may have limited participant numbers (Bodur, 2021; O. Demir, 2018). While these studies are important for understanding the exercise addiction behaviors or effects within specific subgroups, their generalizability may be limited. On the other hand, studies with a high number of participants typically involve research conducted on the general population or large samples (Ö. Demir, 2021; Kürtül, 2021). Such studies may enhance the generalizability of findings and deepen the overall understanding of exercise addiction.

#### Limitations and Future Directions

A limitation of the study may be that only postgraduate theses conducted in Türkiye were subjected to bibliometric analysis.

This situation may indicate the exclusion of data and findings that could have been obtained from the international literature.

The findings of this study contribute significantly to providing a deeper understanding of exercise addiction and updating clinical practices. Analyzing postgraduate theses related to exercise addiction may enhance awareness among healthcare professionals, educators, and researchers and facilitate the promotion of a multidisciplinary approach. Furthermore, standardizing assessment tools and fostering inter-university collaboration could help make clinical practices in the field of exercise addiction more effective. In this context, academic research on exercise addiction has significant potential to contribute directly or indirectly to clinical practices.

In conclusion, while the current study offers valuable insights into the characteristics and trends of postgraduate research on exercise addiction in Türkiye, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations in revealing temporal trends or changes in research focus. As highlighted, future research endeavors could benefit from incorporating longitudinal analyses to track the evolution of the field over time. By periodically revisiting the bibliometric analysis at intervals, researchers can discern shifts in prevalence rates, emerging patterns in research emphasis, and advancements in assessment tools and methodologies. Such longitudinal investigations would not only enhance our understanding of the dynamic nature of exercise addiction but also enable us to identify evolving areas of interest or potential gaps in knowledge. Ultimately, this approach would facilitate more informed decision-making for future research endeavors and clinical practices.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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**Informed Consent:** N/A.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

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