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Evaluating the public's perceptions of football referees living with mental health symptoms and disorders

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY ABSTRACTS

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- [Paul Gorczynski](#)*
- [Tom Webb](#)*

Abstract

Introduction: We examined changes in public perceptions of football referees before and after disclosure of a mental disorder. **Materials and methods:** Individuals 18 years old and over participated in a cross-sectional survey study. Participants were asked to assume the role of a member who worked for Professionals Game Match Officials Limited, the body who oversees officiating for the Premier League. Participants were first presented with a neutral vignette of a fictitious referee who was of exceptional ability and who had not disclosed a mental disorder. Participants were then presented with three separate vignettes, each referring to the same referee who then disclosed different disorders (major depressive disorder (MDD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), substance use disorder (SUD)). Following the presentation of each vignette, participants were asked whether they would sign the elite referee to the league. **Results:** 376

individuals participated in the study. Participants were most knowledgeable about MDD, and least knowledgeable about GAD. Repeated measures ANOVAs compared the effects of disclosure of a mental disorder on the likelihood of being signed to the league. After disclosure of each mental disorder, participants indicated they were significantly less likely to sign a referee ($p < .01$). Of the three disorders, participants were least likely to sign a referee who disclosed SUD. Discussion: Disclosure of mental disorders by an elite referee may carry career related consequences, like not being signed to a league. Mental health literacy strategies for key front office staff may address the effects of stigma related to mental health symptoms and disorders.