

The Prevalence of Symptoms of Common Mental Disorders Among Professional Golfers

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Abstract : Objectives: This study aims to (i) assess the prevalence of symptoms of mental health disorders among a cohort of professional golfers, (ii) compare prevalence values with data from the general population and other elite athlete cohorts, and (iii) assess how players cope with mental health problems and players' opinions on the mental health support services available to them. Methods: Players competing on the 2020 Challenge Tour (n=261) were sent a questionnaire that assessed symptoms of depression, distress, anxiety, sleep disturbance, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Questions were also included to assess coping behaviors and opinions on current support measures. Results: The two-week symptom prevalence was 10.3% for depression, 51.7% for distress, 8.6% for anxiety, 10.3% for sleep disturbance, 13.8% for obsessive thoughts, and 27.6% for compulsive behavior. The prevalence of symptoms is comparable with other elite athlete cohorts, and symptoms of anxiety and distress were reported more frequently than in the general population. 67% of players who had experienced a mental health issue did not seek professional help at the time, and 61% of players did not think sufficient support was available to them. Conclusion: Mental health problems are prevalent among elite golfers; however, this study demonstrates that the majority of players do not seek help from professionally accredited practitioners. Following the discussion of this study, the European Tour Group now provides a 24/7 mental health crisis hotline for players and has educated staff members on how to identify players with mental health issues and signpost them to the appropriate support.

Keywords : elite athletes, golf, mental health, sport science, sport psychiatry

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