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A lack of empirical evidence on sport officials' mental health: a scoping review

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY ABSTRACTS

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Abstract

Sport officials—who are essential to organized sport—are tasked with applying competition rules, maintaining fair competitions, and ensuring athlete safety. However, sport officials experience stress, burnout, and non-accidental violence, with incidence of these events increasing worldwide. This has led to rising attrition rates and recruitment issues among sport officials, with many sport organizations concerned for their operational capacity. Possibly, the effects of stress, burnout, and non-accidental violence contribute to sport officials' negative mental health outcomes. To develop a clear understanding of how sport officials' mental health is affected by their occupation, it is necessary to identify the mental

health outcomes they experience, and to what extent. The purpose of this scoping review was to identify and examine the empirical research surrounding sport officials' mental health. Using Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, 1206 articles were identified across three databases: PubMed, Web of Science, SportDiscus, PsycINFO. Following screening, 18 studies met the inclusion criteria for exploring sport officials' mental health. Participants (N = 7941) in the included studies were mainly European male soccer and basketball referees. Most studies utilized quantitative inquiry (n = 15) rather than qualitative methods (n = 2) or framework development (n = 1). The research demonstrates that sport officials frequently experience negative mental health outcomes including anxiety, depression, burnout, lower mental health literacy, and high levels of stigmatization. These outcomes are influenced by gender, age, and experience. Researchers should continue examining how this profession impacts sport officials' mental health and implement effective management strategies.