

Top professional golfers' mental health hurt by spending more time on the road, research says

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Professional golfers are spending more time on the road, leading to

loneliness and relationship difficulties, new research says.

And unless they are in the top rank, the prize money for golfers has fallen over the last few years, the study found.

Dr. John Fry, of University Center Myerscough interviewed 20 professionals, including Ryder Cup players and a former world number one, who spoke of the stress from an increasing time spent traveling and playing.

Dr. Fry told the British Sociological Association's online annual conference today [Wednesday 14 April] that in 2019 the 46 events in the Professional Golfers' Association European Tour took place in 32 countries, compared to 28 countries in 2014. Of the 46 events, 27 were staged outside of Europe.

"Pro golfers are spending more time on the road, which leads to a range of stresses and insecurities that can impact negatively on their [mental health](#) and wellbeing," Dr. Fry said.

"Players increasingly spend large periods away from any friends and family, and struggle to form anything but superficial relationships with others on tour.

"Pro golfers needed each other's help to alleviate the stresses of life on tour, but at the same time, relationships were often tainted by tension, conflict, and rivalry.

"Many golfers experience loneliness, isolation, low social support, high psychological demands, and high job insecurity during various points of their career. They often feel they can't talk openly about these concerns. Beyond the glitz and glamor is a reality where many pro golfers experience a variety of mental health and wellbeing problems."

One [golfer](#) who had won six elite European tour events told Dr. Fry: "I don't see my kids that much—they are too old to travel now, to be able to skip school. I miss my wife, my kids, my parents. I don't see them enough, and that's what is difficult."

The former world number one told him that "the hardest part of tour life is being away from the family."

Another European tour winner said: "As I got more kids it got harder to say cheerio at the airport. I made sacrifices in terms of family life—I missed out on a lot of family barbecue type of stuff, and a few school events. It affected my kids in the school—I think they missed out on me being there, school sports days and stuff like that."

One player who had won three main tour events and one Major said that golf "can be the most wonderful life in the world but it can also be the most difficult. It can just be a lonely game. It can be gut wrenching, furious at times. It can get to a point where you don't like who you are."

A European Tour player said: "I am not surprised that many professional golfers get divorced because it can put a lot of pressure on partners."

Dr. Fry also found that while the income of the top European Tour professionals had increased over the past few years, the players on the Challenge Tour, the second tier of European professional golf, were earning less.

As an example, a player who finished 50th at the end of the 2019 Challenge Tour earned £29,000 in [prize money](#), more than 20% lower than the £37,000 earned in 2014 by a player in the same position. Touring expenses could wipe out any profit from this.

One Challenge tour player said: "I've been through financial ruin as a

result of my commitment to continuing to play, and how I was, and still am, unwilling to give up my dream. It's cost me my marriage as well. So that's the price that I've paid to continue playing golf.

"I wouldn't change it for anything, I really wouldn't. It's upsetting that it led to, in fact drastically led to, the breakdown of my marriage, but, would I do it all again? Yes—I'd always planned to be a golfer or die in the process."

Another Challenge series golfer said: "Unless you're winning or in the top five or perhaps top 10 every week you're not really making a huge amount of money. Almost definitely there are some people which it has cost them money. I would say that more than half the players who are playing, it has cost them money."

Of the interviewees, 17 were British, one was from another European country and two were from outside Europe.

Provided by British Sociological Association

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