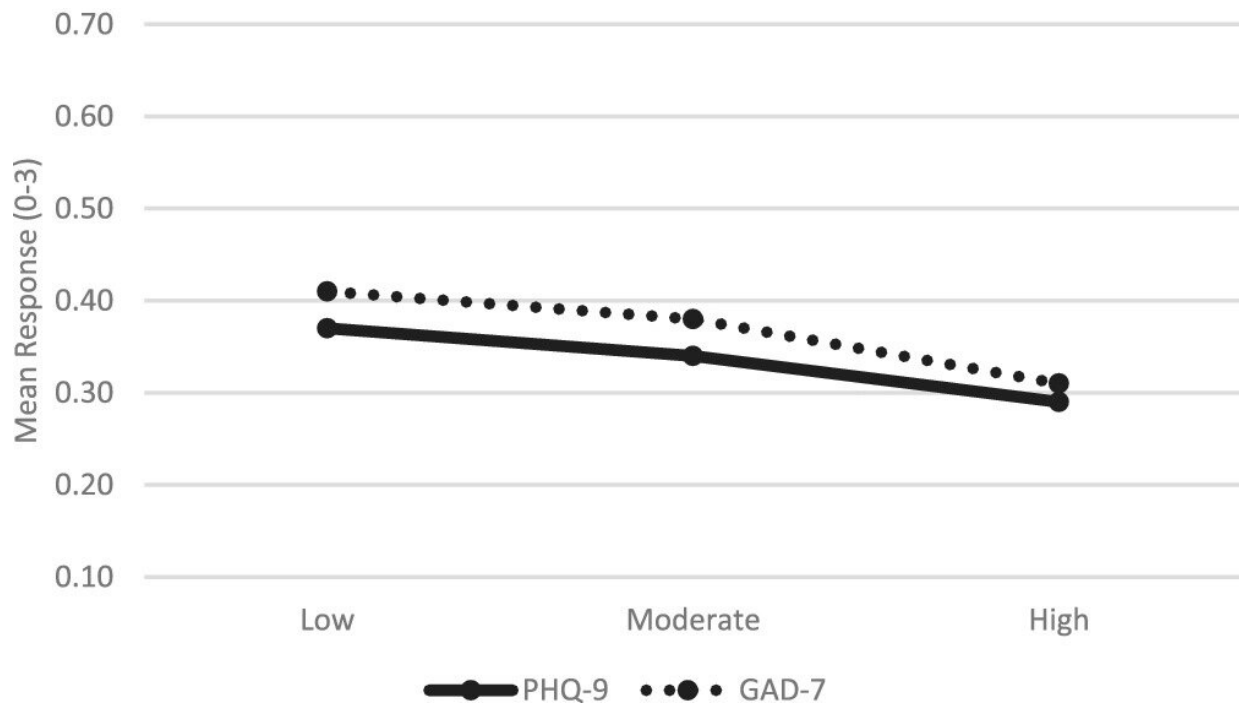


Study: Fantasy football fanatics more likely to feel down and anxious

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Low mood (PHQ-9) and anxiety (GAD-7) toward FF as a function of FF experience. Credit: DOI: 10.1002/hbe2.316

Those who invest the most time playing, researching and thinking about their fantasy football teams have significantly worse mental health than other players of the online game as a result, a new study suggests.

Sport psychologists at Nottingham Trent University found that players

who engaged most with fantasy football were more likely to suffer from low mood and anxiety when playing or thinking about the [game](#).

They were also more likely to report disruption to their everyday lives as a result of their fantasy football, such as at work, in their home life and with personal relationships.

The researchers gathered information from about 2,000 fantasy football players for the study, who played across a range of different platforms.

It is thought to be the first study to look at mental health of those who play fantasy football, where individuals are able to create their own virtual team of players to earn points and compete against others.

It is a rapidly growing pastime, played by millions globally—the downloading of fantasy gaming apps worldwide is predicted to hit 258 billion in 2022.

The study, done via online questionnaire, showed that while the majority of players experienced no mental health concerns regarding their fantasy football, there were significant correlations between poor mental health and players' levels of engagement.

The researchers found that while only a quarter (25 percent) of participants overall reported mild low mood—which can include sadness, anger, frustration, tiredness and low self-esteem—when playing, researching or thinking about the game, this increased to almost half (44 percent) among high engagement players.

Similarly, mild anxiety rose from a fifth of participants (20 percent) to more than a third (34 percent) and functional impairment—disruption to players' lives—more than doubled from 14 percent overall to 37 percent in players who spent most time engaging with the game.

High engagement was classified as those who played in six or more leagues concurrently, played for more than 45 minutes a day, researched for more than an hour a day—such as listening to podcasts or browsing [social media](#) for fantasy football content—or spent more than two hours a day thinking about their fantasy football.

Interestingly, the team also found that increased experience in fantasy football—when an individual had been playing for 11 years or more—had the opposite effect, with players reporting significantly better mental health than those that had been playing for a shorter amount of time.

The researchers suggest this could be because those able to better manage their mental [health](#) may continue to play the game, or because players had been able to develop various coping mechanisms to deal with the highs and lows of the game.

They argue that more should be done—by the game developers and the players themselves—to monitor the amount of time being dedicated to fantasy football.

"Browsing social media we could see there was an abundance of anecdotal evidence linking fantasy football with [mental health concerns](#), but no research had ever explored the issue," said lead researcher Dr. Luke Wilkins, an expert in sport and exercise psychology in Nottingham Trent University's School of Science and Technology.

He said: "While it's positive that only a [minority report mental health issues](#) in relation to their fantasy football, it is concerning that higher levels of engagement appear to increase the likelihood of experiencing issues with mood and anxiety and seem to be having a negative impact on players' lives.

"Fantasy football is unwinnable for the vast majority that play and it is possible that the more a person is invested the more negatively impacted they will be when they 'lose."

"Our study highlights the general positives that the game can bring, but also warns of the potential negatives, and provides justification for the idea that more should be done to monitor the amount of time being dedicated to playing [fantasy football](#)."

Participants in the study were from 96 nationalities, had an average age of 33 and the vast majority (96 percent) were male.

The researchers are carrying out further work focusing on a group of high-engaged [fantasy football](#) players and tracking the [mental health](#) of players over the course of a Premier League season.

The current study, which also involved Newman University, Anglia Ruskin University and Derwent Rural Counselling Service, is published in the journal *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*.

More information: Luke Wilkins et al, Exploring the mental health of individuals who play fantasy football, *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/hbe2.316](https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.316)

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