



Explaining Referee Attrition in APSJ Referees

How the data was collected from the Sample of Officials who Left in Fall of 2018

In Spring 2019, APSJ contacted Referees who had quit Refereeing in the Fall of 2018 and asked them a series of questions to gain a better idea of why they had quit Refereeing Hockey. Interviews were completed by phone, completely voluntary and used the survey on this document's final page.

This research was undertaken to explore reasons why officials quit and propose possible solutions to address attrition. All referees who quit at the end of the 2017-2018 season were asked to participate (total officials who quit = 33) by phone and email with 14 agreeing to phone interviews and 1 completing the online survey.

The sample was made up of 15 participants with the following characteristics:

- 12 participants had 1-3 years of experience and 3 with 4-6 years of experience
- 6 participants were between the ages 13-15, 7 participants were 16-18, 2 participants were older than 26 years old

Results

The main reason the participants gave for starting to referee was focused on having a job and to make money (11 of 15 participants). Other reasons included "it looked like fun" (2 participants), "it looked like a challenge (1)" and "stay involved in the hockey community" (1).

The main question in the survey asked participants to agree or disagree with different reasons a they quit. These results are shown on page 3 with some type of a life change (other activity, moving, new job) being agreed with by 14 out of 15 participants. The option about Referee harassment was agreed with 3 times.

Participants were also asked if there was any reason for quitting that was not captured by the agree or disagree section with 10 participants responding "no". The remaining 5 participants said, "coaching", "I do not like having to recertify every year", "issues knowing who to contact", "busy with own hockey", "having 2 young children".

Participants were then asked to name their main reason for quitting. Here are the responses:

→So I had time to coach hockey...
→New job on weekend making hours unavailable for officiating.
→Inconsistent hours
→school focus
→Difficulty with the Assignall website
→Moved
→not enough time...because of playing hockey, homework.
→getting a job (2)

→I was afraid of making a mistake then what the coaches would say...yelled at...being asked questions...it would be off-putting for the rest of the game.
→Parenting
→Found another job.
→found it hard to keep up with changes (half- to full-ice, regular season to playoffs)
→having another job...still TKing
→having another job at No frills...still

The final 2 questions focused on the Referee returning to the ice to Referee again. The first question, about returning immediately, yielded only one person who gave a concrete example of how they would return immediately: “if APSJ paid my \$100 registration fee¹”. The other responses were variations of “No”.

The final question focused on the Referee’s “becoming a Referee ever again”. The participants responded with 8 “Maybes”, 5 “Yes’s”, and 2 “No’s”

Discussion

In other research, Referees who have not quit were asked about the reasons they think that other Referees quit, why they themselves started refereeing, and why they themselves keep refereeing². Numbers 1-5 below describe other research completed by wpgrefs.com about active Referees with letters a to i providing a comparison to the non-active Referees in this study:

- 1) Active Referees felt that young Referees will quit because of harassment or fear of harassment (February 2019 & February 2020)³.
 - a. What active Referees thought would make young Referees quit was not accurate. In the current sample, Referees were more likely to agree that life changes caused them to quit (14 out of 15 former Referees) rather than harassment (3 out of 15 former referees).
 - b. Furthermore, only 1 former Referee chose harassment as the main reason.
- 2) Active Referees felt that experienced Referees quit because they have other activities they choose to do (February 2019 & February 2020).
 - c. The sample of former Referees did not include anyone with 7+ years of experience. Therefore, conclusions about reasons why experienced Referees quit cannot be discussed at length.
 - d. However, one hypothesis is that experienced Referees would quit because of other activities as well.
- 3) The top 3 reasons that active Referees predicted that they would quit were: being harassed (~18%), lack of moving up in levels (~15%), and other activities (~14%) (October 2019).
 - e. The prediction of the active Referees was not accurate as being harassed and lack of moving up was not identified by former Referees.

¹ In 2019-2020, APSJ set aside \$100 for this Referee if he worked 10 games including 2 mentorships. The Referee did not Referee in 2019-2020.

² The full results of this other research can be found on wpgrefs.com/survey-results

³ The citation, in this case “(February 2019 & February 2020)”, refers to the report dates found on wpgrefs.com/survey-results

- 4) Active Referees reported that the top 3 reasons they started Refereeing were: “make money” (~22%), “passion for the game” (~19%), and “stay involved when no longer playing or coaching” (~10%) (February 2021).
 - f. The former Referees in the current article overwhelmingly reported (11 out of 15 former Referees) said they started to make money or have a job.
 - g. This result, that so many fewer active Referees (~22%) select “money” as the reason to start than former Referees (73%), suggests that those who start for reasons other than money may be less likely to quit.
- 5) Active Referees said that the top 3 reasons they keep Refereeing were: “it’s fun” (~17%), “make money” (~15%), and “passion for the game” (~15%). Furthermore, active Referees with 4+ years of experience were less likely to select “money” as a reason to keep Refereeing than those with 1-3 years of experience (February 2021).
 - h. There is no direct comparison from the between the former Referees and active Referees as, by definition, former Referees cannot give a reason for why they are still Refereeing.
 - i. However, that active Referees with 4+ years of experience list “money” as lesser factor in continuing suggests that other benefits of being a Referee (skill development, community, being in the game, teamwork) is more important than money for those that continue Refereeing than for those who quit.

Implications for Referee Recruitment and Retention

The most common refrain from the media about Referee recruitment and retention focuses on Referee harassment. Referee harassment needs to continue to be addressed by minor hockey administrators as 1 incident of harassment is too much. However, retention of Referees needs to diversify to tap into other reasons that Referees start such as “passion for the game”, skill development, and staying involved in the game.

Programs such as 2 mentorships per Referee per season, harassment/Kudos reporting system, end-of-season wind-up, and Hockey Manitoba’s #thankthestripes initiative should be valuable in helping Referees feel a part of something bigger. People need to feel like they are a part of a community with the opportunity to succeed. This research, with Referees quitting due to finding other activities, suggests that a focus on a variety of reasons why Referees start is absolutely imperative to reduce the rate that referees quit.

Limitations of Research and Future Questions

There were three main limitations to this research:

- The sample in this study was only 15 participants.
- The sample was mostly teenagers.
- The sample was from Charleswood and St. James in Winnipeg.

Therefore, this is good exploratory research, however, a larger and more diverse sample would provide a more complete picture of why Referees quit.

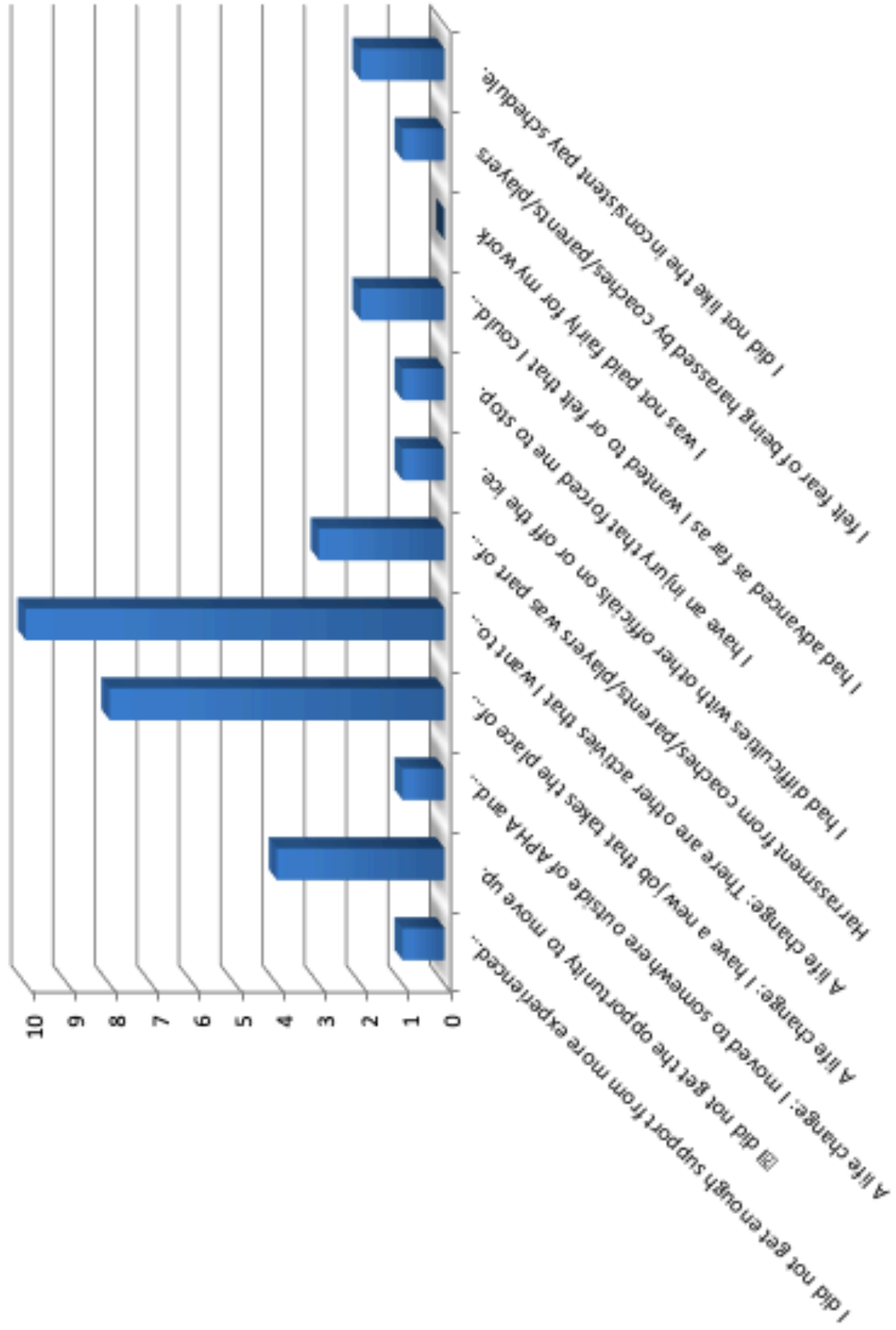


Table 1: This table quantifies the number of people that agreed with each statement about why one quits Refereeing hockey.

APSJ Exit Interview Used in Spring 2019

- 1) Why did you start refereeing?
- 2) How many seasons had you signed up to be a referee before you quit?
 - a. 1-3 Seasons
 - b. 4-6 Seasons
 - c. 7+ Seasons
- 3) What is your age bracket?
 - a. 13-15
 - b. 16-17
 - c. 18+
 - d. I would prefer not to disclose
- 4) I am going to read out a list of possible reasons referees quit, please agree or disagree with each as they apply to you quitting:
 - a. Agree/Disagree a. I did not get enough support from more experienced officials
 - b. Agree/Disagree b. I did not get the opportunity to move up
 - c. Agree/Disagree c. I moved to somewhere outside of APHA and SJAMHA
 - d. Agree/Disagree d. I had a life change such as getting a new job, having kids etc.
 - e. Agree/Disagree e. I did not like being harassed by coaches/parents/players
 - f. Agree/Disagree f. I had difficulties with other officials on or off the ice.
 - g. Agree/Disagree g. I have an injury that forced me to stop
 - h. Agree/Disagree h. I had advanced as far as I wanted to or felt that I could advance
 - i. Agree/Disagree i. I was not paid enough per game
 - j. Agree/Disagree j. I felt fear of being harassed by coaches/parents/players
 - K. Agree/Disagree k. I did not like the inconsistent pay schedule.
- 5) Are there any other reasons for quitting that are not captured by the above list?
- 6) What was your #1 reason for quitting?
- 7) Is there anything that could be done to have you come back to refereeing immediately? If so, what?
- 8) Would you ever see yourself becoming a referee again in the future? **YES/NO/Maybe**