

# Reported cases of alcohol-related domestic abuse increase following the victory of the England national football team

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This manuscript was compiled on April 29, 2019

Previous research has suggested a link between large-scale televised sport tournaments and increased rates of reported domestic abuse(? ), (? ), but the role of alcohol in this relationship has not been explored. Using crime data from the third largest police force in England, serving a population of 2.9 million(? ), we show that the number of reported alcohol-related domestic abuse cases increases by 61% following an England victory in a national football tournament. The effect is driven by male to female alcohol-related cases, and is absent from male to male, female to male, and female to female cases. A three-hour analysis reveals that the increase starts in the three-hour period of the match, peaks in the three hours following the victory, and gradually declines to its baseline level 12 hours after the match. This temporal pattern, along with the random allocation of match days strongly indicates a causal effect of an England victory on alcohol-related domestic abuse.

domestic abuse | football

“If England gets beaten, so will she” - read the poster as part of the “The Not-So-Beautiful-Game” awareness campaign launched by the National Centre for Domestic Violence in the wake of the 2018 FIFA World Cup (? ). While the link between sporting events and domestic abuse has been the focus of a number of smaller studies(? ), large-scale quantitative investigations of this relationship are relatively scarce. The most extensive study in the topic found that an unexpected loss of the local National Football League (NFL) team resulted in a 10% increase in the rate of reported male to female intimate partner violence (IPV) in the US(? ).

In England, most studies have focused on the link between football (soccer) and domestic abuse. Football’s history is inextricably linked to England, and it is by far the most popular sport in the country (? ), with the 2018 World Cup attracting a record number of 44.5 million viewers(? ). One of the earliest examinations of the link between football and domestic abuse used daily data from 33 out of 39 police forces in England from the period of June-July in 2009 and 2010 (World Cup tournament year)(? ). They tested whether the reported number of domestic abuse cases increased significantly on days when the England national football team won, lost, or drew, compared to the same days in 2009, and other, non-match days during the tournament in 2010. The study found that rates of reported domestic abuse increased significantly when England lost or won (about 33-35%), but did not change on days when they drew.

A more comprehensive investigation, using daily counts of domestic abuse in Lancashire from the 2002, 2006 and 2010 World Cup, found a 38% increase in the number of reported domestic violence cases when the England team lost, and a 26% increase when they won or drew(? ). These estimates

had been widely discussed in the British media before the 2018 World Cup, and the figures were also quoted on the posters in the Not-So Beautiful Game Campaign. While domestic abuse is predominantly understood as a pattern of ongoing behaviour involving a series of occurrences, rather than a one-off incident triggered by football (? ), these studies, and other qualitative investigations(? ) nevertheless suggest that national football tournaments can create an environment for abusers that is conducive to domestic abuse.

Why would national football tournaments, such as the World Cup or the European Championship precipitate domestic abuse? England’s participation in these tournaments are times of heightened patriotic emotions and a strengthened sense of “Englishness”, fuelled by media narratives that often use war references, and a “us vs. them” rhetoric to generate and represent an English national identity(? ). Previous qualitative research has suggested that televised contact sports can serve as vehicle for the male sports fan to redefine, and express his masculinity in a way that allows dominance, control, and can ultimately manifest in the perpetration of domestic abuse(? ? ), given susceptibility to such behaviours. We speculate that this observation is especially pertinent in the context of England’s participation in national football tournaments, owing to the popularity of the sport in the country, the associated media attention, and the resulting heightened sense of national consciousness.

Qualitative investigations suggest that alcohol can be a significant factor in the link between football and domestic abuse. Alcohol has a strong association with domestic abuse(? ): those with alcohol-problems are more likely to be perpetrators and, when alcohol is involved, there is evidence that the violence might result in more serious injuries. However, it is generally understood that the role of alcohol should be

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considered in the context of a range of social, biological and psychological factors, and that alcohol is not the direct cause of domestic abuse (? ? ). One explanation for the co-occurrence of domestic abuse and alcohol is that, for some men, drinking and violence plays an instrumental role in the construction and expression of masculinity, especially when the problem of masculine deficiency is present (e.g., by unemployment)(? ). It has also been suggested that some perpetrators use alcohol to deflect responsibility for their actions, using alcohol as a “shield” that protects them from being seen as a violent abuser(? ).

In the US, the relationship between unexpected NFL losses and IPV did not depend on alcohol-involvement in the abuse case(? ), while England-based quantitative studies did not look at the role of alcohol in particular. Given the strong association between drinking culture and football in England(? ), a relationship continuously reinforced by the marketing practices of the alcohol industry(? ), we hypothesize that alcohol plays an important role in the relationship between national football tournaments and domestic abuse.

To explore this hypothesis, we test if the daily number of reported domestic abuse cases recorded by the West Midlands Police in England between 2010 and 2018 increase on days when the England national team plays in the World Cup or the European Championship, and whether the effect, if any, depends on alcohol-involvement in the reported case or the result of the match. We find that alcohol-related domestic abuse significantly increases following an England victory. Our rich dataset further allows us to investigate various aspects of this win-effect, including the temporal pattern of the increase, and exploring whether the link between football and domestic abuse depends on the gender of the perpetrator and victim. We conduct various robustness checks of the win-effect. We also examine if the increase extends to other types of criminal behaviours apart from domestic abuse, and whether similar links exist between rugby and domestic abuse. Finally, we test if the abuse perpetrated on England match days is characteristically different from abuse occurring on non-match days.

In the UK, the term “domestic abuse” refers to a wide range of behaviours, from physical and sexual violence to psychological, emotional, financial abuse, threatening behaviour, stalking and harassment, either within a family or an intimate relationship(? ). Recent changes to the definition introduced the concept of coercive control, which recognises domestic abuse as a pattern of incidents, which can include any of the above behaviours. Previous research has mostly focused on IPV, the largest subcategory of domestic abuse. While IPV is more common than abuse perpetrated by family members(? ), our dataset does not contain information about the exact relationship between the victim and perpetrator, therefore we cannot separate the two types of abuse, and we will refer to them collectively as “domestic abuse”.

Our dataset contains all cases of domestic abuse that have been reported to the West Midlands Police between 2010 and 2018, but the vast majority of all domestic abuse incidents in fact never get reported (according to the Crime Survey of England and Wales, only 17% of all domestic abuse victims reported the abuse to the police between April 2017 and March 2018(? )). This substantial reporting bias, and its potential correlation with other contextual factors warrants a careful

interpretation of the estimates from any quantitative study investigating domestic abuse, and highlights the importance of utilising a mixed methods approach to explore the factors facilitating domestic abuse.

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**Fig. 1.** Placeholder image of a frog with a long example caption to show justification setting.

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| Species              | CBS  | CV   | G3   |
|----------------------|------|------|------|
| 1. Acetaldehyde      | 0.0  | 0.0  | 0.0  |
| 2. Vinyl alcohol     | 9.1  | 9.6  | 13.5 |
| 3. Hydroxyethylidene | 50.8 | 51.2 | 54.0 |

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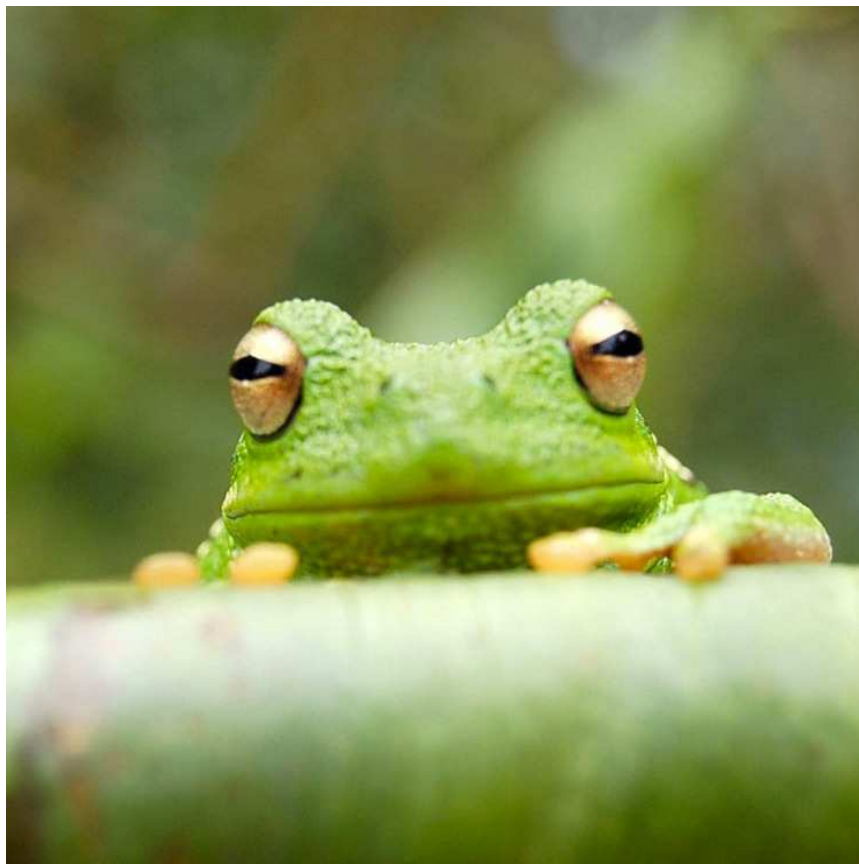
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