

Economic Impact of Fighting in the NHL

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A research question to be explored using data is as follows: What is the economic impact of allowing fighting in the NHL on fan attendance and TV viewership? Researching this question will provide valuable insights into the effect of player effects on specific areas of revenue.

Research Design

Examining the economic impact of fighting on fan attendance and TV viewership would be done best using a quantitative research design. According to Creswell & Creswell (2023), quantitative research examines the relationship between variables in order to test an objective thesis. The research question at hand is asking about specific, measurable variables that can be examined using statistical analysis. The research study will use a deductive approach, starting with a hypothesis that fighting in the NHL has a positive impact on fan attendance and TV viewership. A deductive approach puts its theory early in the paper to be tested rather than developed (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This hypothesis can be tested using historical NHL data. It could also be tested by using a quantitative survey design to measure fan's attitudes toward fighting and how that affects their attendance or viewership (Creswell, 2023).

Based on my research data, independent and dependent variables have been identified. Hatcher (2013) interchangeably calls an independent variable a predictor variable as well, since it predicts the outcome of the dependent variable. Independent variables include the frequency of fighting as well as overall aggressive play that may lead to increased revenue from fan attendance and TV viewership. A dependent variable can also be described as a response variable since its outcome is a direct response to the independent variable acting on it (Hatcher,

2013). Dependent variables will include fan attendance and TV viewership, as the outcome of both variables relies on the frequency of fighting.

Literature Review

Using Google Scholar, an initial literature search was conducted to find relevant articles to the research question. The following keywords were used: “NHL fighting and fan attendance,” “NHL fighting and TV viewership,” and “NHL fighting and revenue,”

The keyword phrase “NHL fighting and fan attendance” returned 5,210 results and there were six directly relevant articles identified. The phrase “NHL fighting and TV Viewership” returned 4,040 results and there were three directly relevant articles identified. The phrase “NHL fighting and revenue” returned 7,780 results and there were four directly relevant articles identified. Alternative keywords include *revenue*, *aggression*, *physicality*, *viewership*, *broadcast*, *violence*, *revenue*, and *economic impact*.

Three articles were selected for their relevance to my topics. The first two articles specifically discuss the trending relationships between my independent and dependent variables. My dependent variables are TV viewership and fan attendance. The final article discusses fighting in the NHL as a profit maximizing strategy, examining whether fighting really does generate more revenue for the league. My selected articles are as follows:

1. Fortney, T. A., Tedesco, L. J., Kopydlowski, N. J., Korzelius, J. F., Desai, S. S., & Popkin, C. A. (2022). National Hockey League fights per game and viewership trends: 2000–2020. *Frontiers in Sports Analytics and Living*, 4, 890429.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2022.890429>

Reasoning: This paper directly compares NHL fights per game to viewership trends, which is half of my hypothesis.

Abstract: Though once considered an integral part of professional hockey, fighting carries significant health risks to players. Fighting has remained legal in the National Hockey League (NHL) due to its purported economic and entertainment value. However, fights per game have diminished over the past 20 years, challenging the necessity of fighting to promote fan attendance.

2. Krochak, E., Soebbing, B. P., & Kono, S. (2022). The impact of fighting in the NHL on attendance. *Leisure/Loisir*, 47(3), 517–525.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2022.2159866>

Reasoning: This paper directly compares NHL fighting to game attendance, which is the other half of my hypothesis.

Abstract: Sports spectators often enjoy violence in sports games they attend. Our research note attempts to provide an examination of how violence in National Hockey League (NHL) games, specifically fighting, impacts regular season attendance as a percentage of its capacity.

Furthermore, we look to understand if there are differences in this relationship between US and Canadian franchises along with differences after the NHL adopted policies to deter fighting in the game. Our sample period covers the 1980/1981 through 2019/2020 seasons. Results for Tobit regression estimations find fighting regardless of time period or country does not impact regular season attendance. However, we do find differences between the countries after new fighting rules were adopted. We provide some discussion as to why these findings occur, and how future leisure research can provide some further explanation into this relationship.

3. Rockerbie, D. W. (2015). Fighting as a profit maximizing strategy in the National Hockey League: more evidence. *Applied Economics*, 48(4), 292–299.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2015.1078446>

Reasoning: This paper examines fighting in the NHL as a way to bring in additional revenue, and whether fighting in the NHL actually leads to increased revenue.

Abstract: This article estimates the effect of fighting in hockey games on attendance in the National Hockey League (NHL) over the 1997–1998 through 2009–2010 seasons. After estimating a system of equations developed from a model of a profit-maximizing club owner, it was found that fighting had a small negative effect on attendance implying that encouraging fighting on the ice is not a profit-maximizing strategy. The results are quite robust when incorporating capacity constraints on attendance and exogenous ticket pricing. Other factors that determine club performance and market size were found to significantly affect attendance. The empirical results also suggest that NHL club owners are maximizing profit.

Developing a Literature Map

My literature map will have two main parts: TV viewership and Attendance, linked together by the topic of fighting in the NHL. The gap in the research is where all three interests overlap but there is no research conducted yet (Longhorn, 2025). Specifically, I'll be looking at whether fighting brings in extra fan attendance as well as if fighting increases TV viewership. My literature map will have three overlapping circles with each one labeled as "TV Viewership," "Attendance," and "Fighting in the NHL."

Hypotheses

A null hypothesis predicts that there is no relationship or significant differences exist between variables whereas an alternative hypothesis predicts expected results and typically includes descriptive keywords such as "more," "less," "higher," or "lower," (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 238). Below are two sets of hypotheses, both including a null and alternative hypothesis.

Set 1

Null hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between the frequency of fighting in the NHL and TV viewership or fan attendance.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): The frequency of fighting in the NHL positively influences TV viewership and fan attendance.

Set 2

Null hypothesis (H0): The level of aggression in NHL games has no effect on the overall TV rating or the attendance of fans.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): NHL games with higher levels of aggression, including fighting, result in higher TV ratings and increased fan attendance.

Conclusion

My research question will examine the relationship between fighting in the NHL and the impact it has on TV viewership and fan attendance. There is limited literature available on the topics as separate entities, and virtually no literature available on the relationship between all three variables which renders this a useful gap in research to pursue. The outcomes of this research could be used to add, revise, or abolish certain NHL policies regarding fighting, ticket sales, or broadcasting.

References

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Hatcher, L. (2013). *Advanced statistics in research: Reading, understanding, and writing up data analysis results*. ShadowFinch Media, LLC.

Longhorn, D. (2025). *AA-5221 - Week 1 - Literature Search* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFSd5GpC9To>