

Reports of domestic abuse rise after football matches. **Ria Ivandic, Tom Kirchmaier and Neus Torres Blas** find that binge drinking is the key factor – with alcohol-linked violence against live-in partners happening more often on match days.

# Football, alcohol and domestic abuse

**T**he first instances of violence associated with football can be traced back to 14th century England. In 1314, King Edward II banned football in London (the game at the time was played with a pig's bladder as a ball) due to the disruption it was causing.

Fast forward to modern times and concerns around football hooliganism in England peaked in the 1980s, leading to the Football Spectators Act 1989, which introduced specific football-related offences and the ability to ban individuals from attending matches. The act was strengthened 11 years later after violent clashes during Euro 2000. Since then, the violence around football has reduced and it is now largely considered a thing of the

past. But while public and visible violence around stadiums may have lessened, has it moved to the more private sphere of the home?

Ann, a victim of domestic violence, described her experiences: 'I used to dread the World Cup 'cos he wasn't a drinker my husband but could guarantee come the World Cup he'd drink, 'cos he'd be with all his friends watching it at whoever's house, mine, in pub, wherever, and that's where he drinks and he get even nastier when he's had a drink, not a very nice person.' (Swallow, 2017).

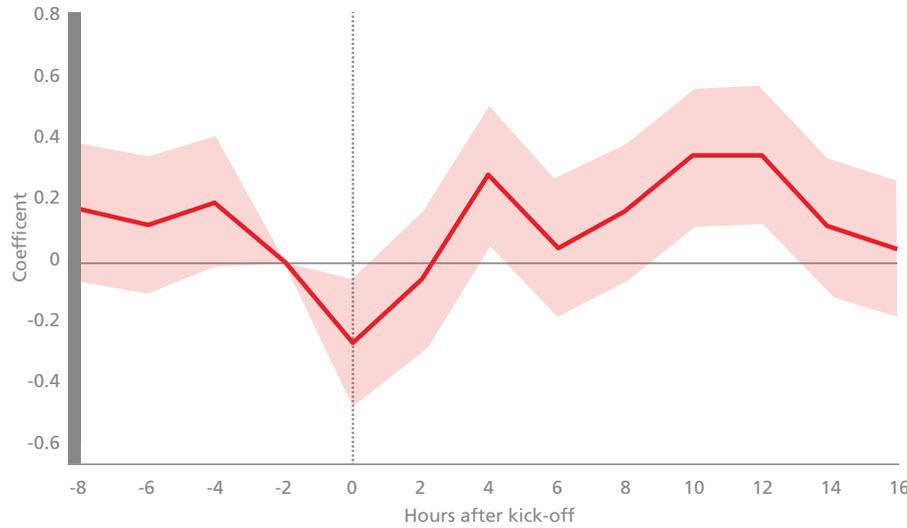
Police forces around the world have identified surges in domestic abuse reports following big sporting events in national and international competitions, like the football World Cup. But the existence

of a causal link between football and domestic abuse, and the mechanisms through which it runs, have not been comprehensively studied.

We use detailed data to estimate whether football triggers certain people to commit domestic abuse, and consequently, what are the hourly dynamics of violence against intimate partners during and after a game. We also investigate the channels through which perpetrators of domestic abuse are triggered by football – whether through heightened emotional states or increased alcohol consumption.

Our research uses detailed and confidential high-frequency administrative data from the UK's Greater Manchester police force, combining five datasets on domestic abuse calls and crimes over an

Figure 1:  
Hourly effects of a football match on current partner domestic abuse



which domestic abuse levels return to their pre-game state (see Figure 1). This pattern shows that potential perpetrators give their attention to the game during that time.

After the match, domestic abuse incidents start growing by 5% every two hours in the first four hours following the game. The highest increases in magnitude (8.5%) occur 10 to 12 hours after the start of the game and then the effect disappears around 16 hours after the game.

We use the detailed information on the type of relationship, and victim and perpetrator characteristics to understand the conditions under which the rise in abuse occurs. As Figure 2 shows, we find that domestic abuse between ex-partners is not affected by football. Similarly, abuse committed by a woman perpetrator remains unchanged. Hence, the changes in domestic abuse are driven by abuse between current partners at home in the aftermath of the game, and are

eight-year period. These records contain the timing, location, description, type of relationship, information on the victim and the perpetrator, including whether they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

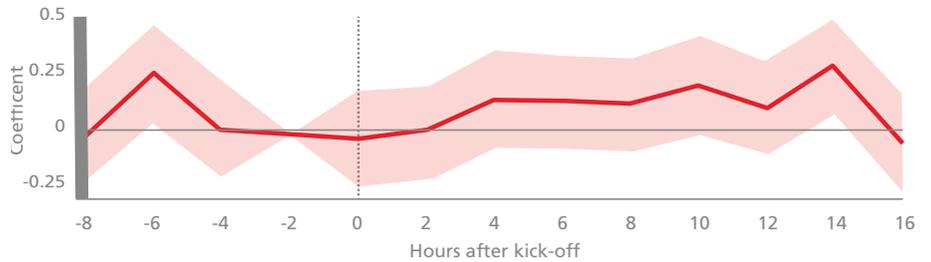
The novelty of these data allows us to investigate the channels through which football affects domestic abuse with great precision. We complement this with data on all matches involving Manchester United and Manchester City in different tournaments held between April 2012 and June 2019 – amounting to almost 800 games – with detailed data on the timing, location, result and pre-game expectations about the result of the game.

Our research design uses an event study to analyse whether there is a statistically significant change in the incidence of domestic abuse during or after football matches. To estimate the effect of the games, we calculate the expected rate of domestic abuse at any one time assuming it would have evolved similarly over time as it did in the past, in the absence of the game.

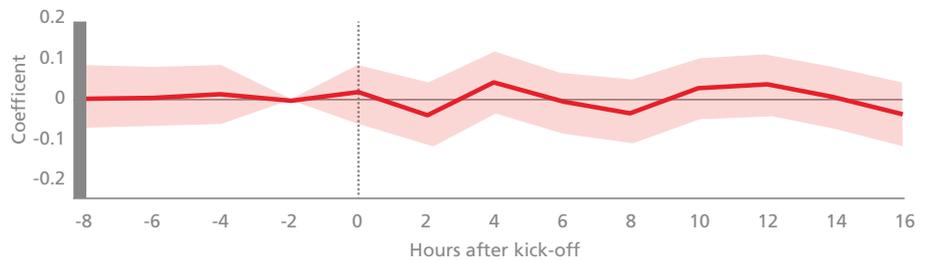
The immediate effect of a football match is a decrease of 5% in domestic abuse incidents (in absolute terms about 0.25 fewer incidents) during the game, compared with two hours before the game. This initial decrease lasts for the two-hour duration of the game, after

Figure 2:  
Domestic abuse incidence broken down by type of relationship

Ex-partners



Women perpetrator on male victim



Domestic abuse starts increasing after a football match and peaks at about 8.5% more incidents than average around 10 hours after the game started

driven exclusively by male perpetrators on female victims.

Understanding why football matches lead to domestic abuse can have important implications for public policy actions such as how to organise games or how to design information campaigns. Two main explanations have been put forward by previous research: strong emotional reactions caused by the game; and increased alcohol consumption.

The first argues that the increase in domestic abuse is caused by strong emotional reactions of football fans to the game, which are stronger after unexpected results due to the effect of reference dependence (Wann, 1993; Card and Dahl, 2011). If increased emotions are the main channel, then increases in domestic abuse should be seen immediately following the game and be stronger for unexpected results. But if alcohol is the main channel, then increases in domestic abuse should occur a few hours after a game and abuse by perpetrators who have not been drinking alcohol should not be affected.

We use detailed data on the pre-game expectations about the result of the game (betting odds from betting agencies) and detailed flags on whether the perpetrator was under the influence of drugs or alcohol to test these hypotheses. We classify a match as an upset loss if the

probability of winning assigned by the betting market was higher than 55%, yet the team lost the game; and we classify a match as an upset win if the probability of winning assigned by the betting market was lower than 45%, yet the team went on to win the game.

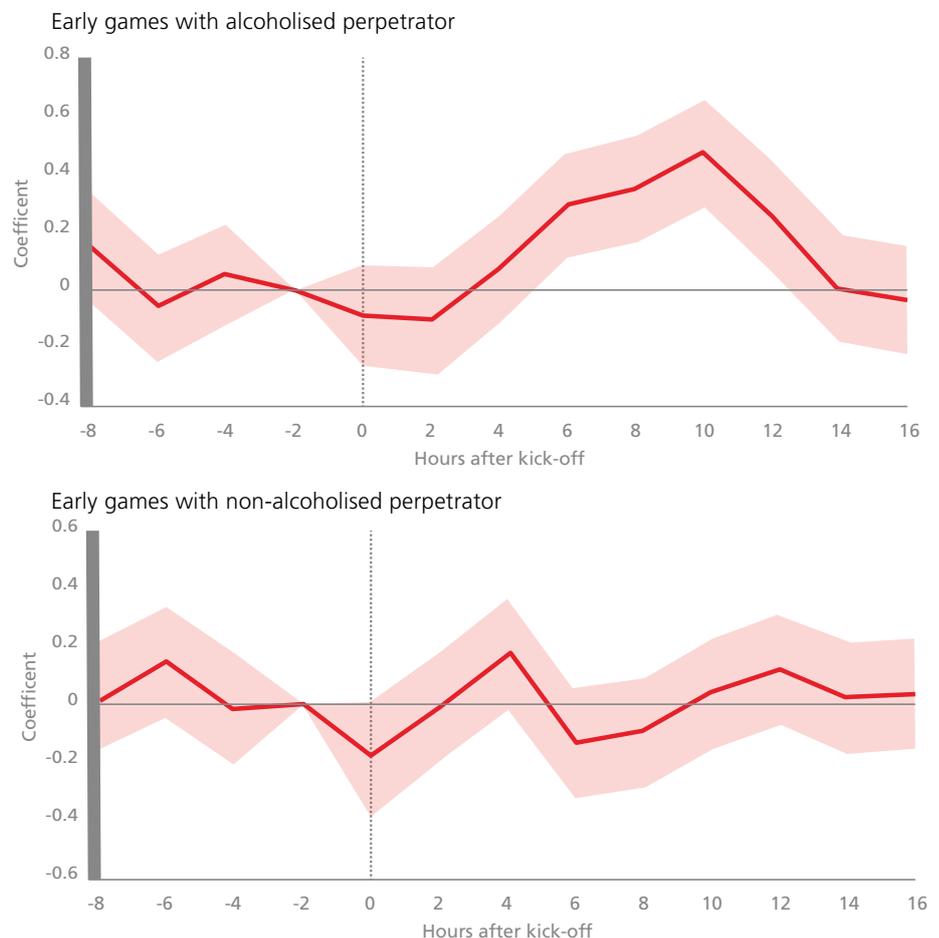
We do not find evidence that upset losses, those likeliest to induce the strongest negative emotional reaction, have any additional effects on domestic abuse incidence with or without alcohol. Moreover, we do not find any spikes in domestic abuse just after the game, hence our results do not confirm predictions on the importance of heightened emotions in triggering abuse.

To check whether football matches lead to domestic abuse through increased consumption of alcohol, we repeat our analysis looking at domestic abuse reports involving perpetrators who had been drinking alcohol and those who had not been drinking, across early games

It is not football itself that causes increased domestic abuse, but binge drinking by certain men

Figure 3 - continued overleaf:

**Domestic abuse incidence broken down by the timing of the game and alcohol involvement**



(starting before 6.30pm) and late games (after 6.30pm). We hypothesise that early games allow a longer time for drinking, as spectators would gather at a pub mid-afternoon before the start of the game and stay until closing time at 11pm.

We observe that following early games, domestic abuse incidents involving perpetrators who have been drinking alcohol start increasing after the first two hours after the match and keep increasing until they reach a maximum 10 hours later. At the peak, this equates to 0.5 incidents more than on similar non-match days, 25.3% more than average. The cumulative effect is an increase of 7.6% in all incidents over the 16-hour period. By contrast, we observe no effect when the perpetrator is sober, nor for late games.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that our research does not show that

football by itself causes domestic abuse. Football has no effect on domestic abuse dynamics of non-alcoholised perpetrators. Really, it is only through excessive consumption of alcohol that games trigger certain domestic abuse perpetrators.

This is also an important finding for policy-making as we discuss ways to reduce domestic abuse. Our research shows that a crucial way forward is to focus on policies that would reduce binge drinking, such as, but not limited to, scheduling games later in the day and reducing alcohol advertising associated with football. Moreover, our findings invite more research on whether policies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy for alcohol addicts, could mitigate the relationship between excessive alcoholisation and violent mental states.

This article summarises 'Football, Alcohol and Domestic Abuse' by Ria Ivandic, Tom Kirchmaier and Neus Torres-Blas, CEP Discussion Paper No. 1781 (<https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1781.pdf>).

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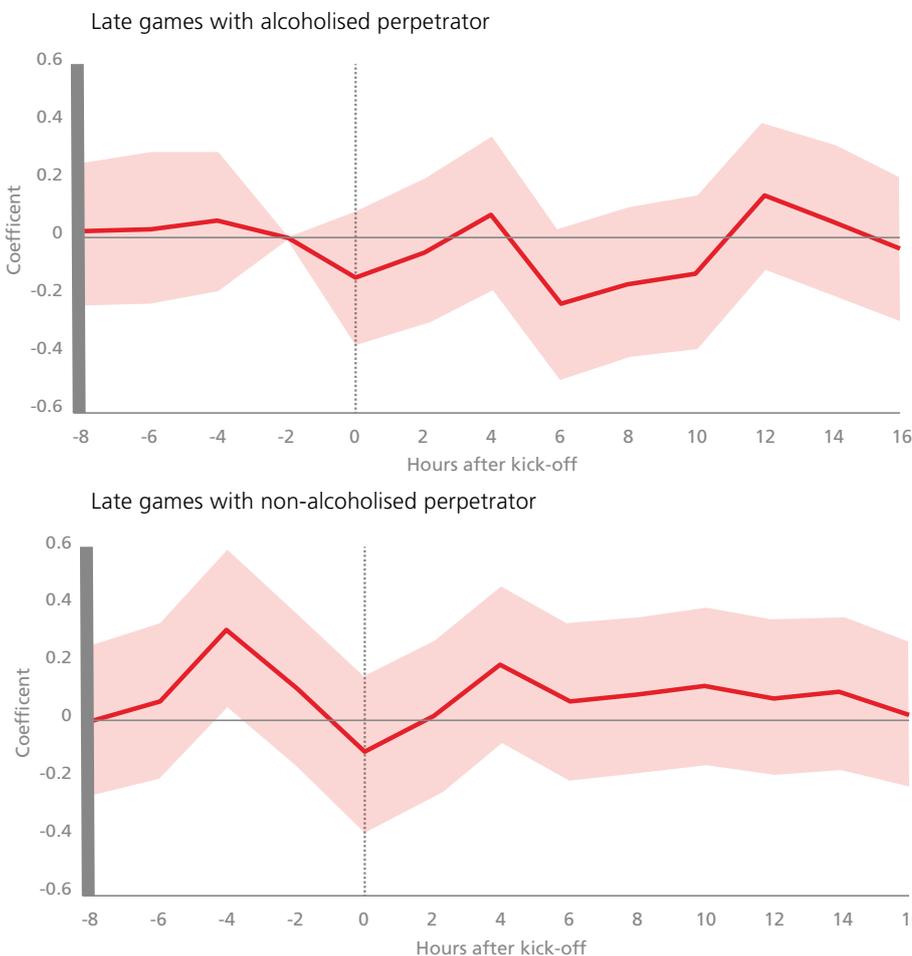
### Further reading

Jodie Swallow (2017) 'An Exploratory Study of Women's Experiences Regarding the Interplay between Domestic Violence and Abuse and Sports Events', University of Chester.

Daniel Wann (1993) 'Aggression among Highly Identified Spectators as a Function of Their Need To Maintain Positive Social Identity', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17(2): 134-43.

David Card and Gordon Dahl (2011) 'Family Violence and Football: The Effect of Unexpected Emotional Cues on Violent Behavior', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126(1): 103-43

Figure 3:- continued  
Domestic abuse incidence broken down by the timing of the game and alcohol involvement



Excessive consumption of alcohol rather than heightened emotions around football matches triggers domestic abuse

**Tom Kirchmaier and Ria Ivandic** worked with the LSE public affairs team to inform legislators about their research on domestic abuse.

# Tackling domestic abuse: research into policy

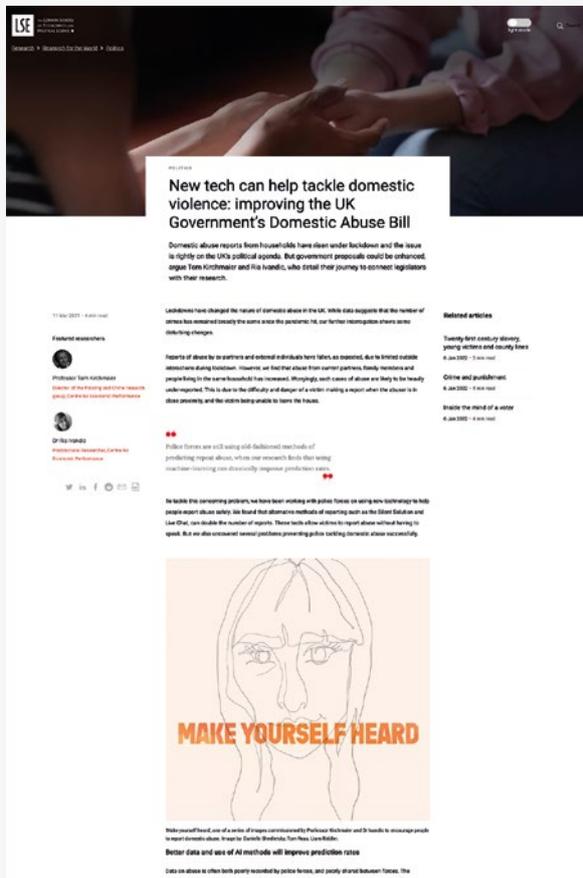
Lockdowns changed the nature of domestic abuse in the UK. While the number of crimes remained broadly the same, our research shows that abuse from current partners, family members and people living in the same household increased.

On a wider level, while police forces are still using old-fashioned methods of predicting repeat abuse, our research finds that using machine learning and better data can drastically improve prediction rates, and help the police to allocate resources quickly and more effectively.

When the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 passed through parliament, we worked with LSE's public affairs team to ensure that our findings were heard in the political debate around domestic abuse and in longer-term plans at the Home Office.

When the draft legislation was first introduced to parliament, we sent a briefing to MPs detailing our research and where improvements to the bill could be made. This was followed by meetings with MPs and members of the House of Lords. We were also invited to present our findings to the Greater London Authority's Police and Crime Committee, to discuss how they can contribute to change in the capital.

These meetings were fascinating, providing insight into the way policy-makers approach research. Politicians are adept at getting to the nub of issues quickly, and we were impressed at their interest and expertise. We were delighted, following this, to be asked to contribute to the government's domestic abuse strategy. This will ensure that our findings are properly captured in the Home Office's future work.



This is a shortened version of an article that first appeared in the LSE's *Research for the World* magazine (<https://www.lse.ac.uk/research/research-for-the-world/politics/new-tech-can-help-tackle-domestic-violence-improving-the-uk-governments-domestic-abuse-bill>)

Ria Ivandic, Tom Kirchmaier and Ben Linton (2021) 'The Role of Exposure in Domestic Abuse Victimization: Evidence from the COVID-19 Lockdown', (<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3686873>).

