

The link between England football victories and the recorded increase in alcohol-related domestic abuse is likely to be causal

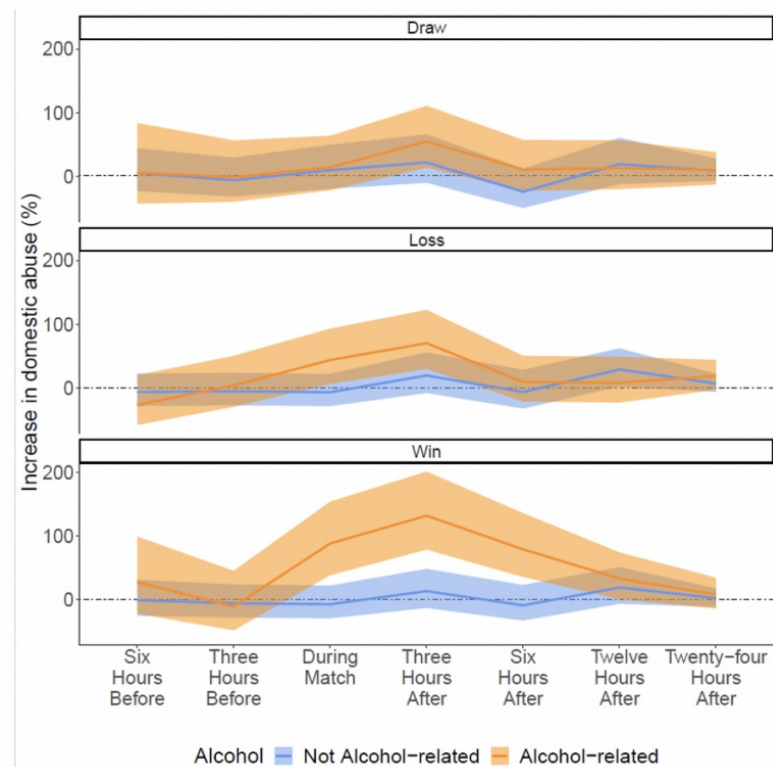
[Anna Trendl](#) writes that, while the exact mechanism by which national football victories lead to an increase in the number of domestic abuse cases is complex, the evidence shows that alcohol plays a key role in this relationship.

There can be no doubt that football is England's most popular sport and that the England national football team is the most closely followed of all the nation's teams. This reaches fever pitch during international tournaments such as the FIFA World Cup. For many this is a time of positivity, community, and national pride, but some evidence shows a darker side to these events. During the last World Cup the National Centre for Domestic Violence ran national awareness campaigns with the striking headline 'If England gets beaten so will she' overlaid on the image of a woman's bloodied face. This was the conclusion of a [study](#) published in 2014, which found that reported cases of intimate partner violence increased by 38% when England lost and by 26% when they won or drew in the tournament.

Our research, with access to more detailed and expansive data, has been able to examine what might be driving the association between national football tournaments and domestic abuse. While the link between football fandom and domestic abuse is complex, experts have long pointed to alcohol as an important factor in this relationship. Sport spectatorship and alcohol consumption are inextricably linked, and this is especially true in the context of English football fandom. On the day of England's quarter final victory against Sweden in the 2018 World Cup, hospitals across the country [reported a record number of alcohol poisoning cases](#). Several studies have documented the [link](#) between alcohol intoxication and violent behaviour. While alcohol may not be the direct cause of violent behaviour, it can act as an aggravating factor by lowering inhibitions. According to a [report](#) published by the Office for National Statistics, in the year ending March 2018, victims of violent crime in England and Wales believed that their perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol in 39% of cases.

In the UK, the term domestic abuse encompasses a wide range of behavioural patterns, from physical and sexual violence to psychological, emotional, financial abuse, threatening behaviour, stalking and harassment, either within a family or an intimate relationship. It is [estimated](#) that 6.2% of adults aged 16 to 59 have experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales in the year ending March 2018, with women being twice as likely (7.9%) to have reported experiences of domestic abuse compared to men (4.2%).

To explore the role of alcohol in the link between football and domestic abuse, [we analysed](#) ten years' worth of crime data from the second largest police force in England (West Midlands Police). We focused on English national football team matches (World Cups and UEFA Euro Championships) in this period. Our results show a 47% increase in the number of reported alcohol-related domestic abuse cases on days when the England team wins in these tournaments, and an 18% increase on days after an England match. We found no increase in the number of non-alcohol-related domestic abuse cases on England match days. In fact, when we look at the exact time pattern of the England win effect we see that the increase in the number of alcohol-related cases starts in the three-hour period of the match, peaks in the next three-hour period, and then gradually declines to its original levels in the 24-hour period after the match. This pattern is highly consistent with the effect of prolonged alcohol-fuelled celebrations following an England victory.

Figure 1: Domestic abuse cases and England team wins

Characteristics of the England win effect

The data also reveal that the increase mostly stems from male-to-female alcohol-related domestic abuse cases (overall 78% of domestic abuse cases in the dataset involve a male perpetrator and a female victim). In addition, a similar increase can be observed for non-domestic, alcohol-related violent cases on England win days, suggesting that the effect of a national victory on the propensity for alcohol-related violence is not limited to domestic settings.

We also explored the effect for rugby, the nation's second most popular sport. Using data on England's matches from the Six Nations rugby tournament, we found that England matches had no impact on the number of alcohol- or non-alcohol-related domestic abuse cases when the England national union rugby team won, lost, or drew.

Is this a causal effect?

It might be argued that the link between football and domestic abuse is not necessarily causal, and that there are potential confounding factors, including increased policing on match days (higher detection rates), and awareness campaigns before the tournament (higher reporting rate). Assuming that increased policing would result in a higher number of recorded cases perpetrated in a public location (as opposed to a dwelling), and awareness campaigns would increase the number of newly reported cases (cases where there were no prior record for the same victim-offender pair), we found no evidence for either of these alternative explanations.

Instead, we argue that the link between England football victories and the recorded increase in alcohol-related domestic abuse is likely to be causal. First, we see that the effect is specific to England win days, and only to alcohol-related cases, which limits the set of possible confounding factors that are synchronised with England wins and only affects alcohol-related abuse. Second, the days on which England plays are randomly allocated by the draw of a ball from an urn, so this is close to a randomised controlled trial, the gold-standard for inferring causality. Third, the time pattern of the increase (which starts in the three-hour period of the match, peaks in the following three hours, and then gradually declines) is highly consistent with a causal link between England wins and alcohol-related domestic abuse. Finally, the effect replicates using data from a different region of the country.

The exact mechanism by which national football victories leads to an increase in the number of domestic abuse cases is evidently complex, and much of this remains unexplored. What this evidence shows us is that alcohol plays a key role in this relationship. Previous analyses show that alcohol-related domestic abuse cases increase around common drinking times (e.g., weekends, Christmas), and it is likely that England victories increase alcohol-related domestic abuse predominantly via creating an opportune time for drinking and consequently increasing levels of alcohol consumption in the population.

Note: Data were provided by West Midlands Police, who did not constrain the research agenda or have editorial control over publication. The above draws on the author's work [published in *Social Science & Medicine*](#).

If you have been affected by the issues discussed in this article, these organisations can offer help and support: [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#); [Women's Aid](#); [Men's Advice Line](#); [Galop](#).

About the Author

Anna Trendl obtained her PhD from the University of Warwick.

Photo by [Frank Luca](#) on [Unsplash](#).