

Part 1: Topic Outline and Research Questions

Domestic Violence and Sports Fans: Exploring the Relationship Between Sporting Events and Domestic Abuse

Domestic violence is a significant public health and social issue that affects individuals, families and communities. An increasingly important area of research is the potential relationship between sporting events and domestic violence, particularly whether incidents of abuse increase when major sporting events take place. This topic is particularly relevant because sporting events attract large numbers of spectators and supporters, while factors such as alcohol consumption, emotional intensity, social expectations and sporting rivalry may influence behaviour. Research in the UK has identified a relationship between football and domestic abuse, with studies examining how football matches and the culture surrounding them may affect the occurrence and reporting of domestic violence (Brooks-Hay and Lombard, 2018). This makes domestic violence among sports fans an important topic for investigation within sport, health and wider society.

My work will focus primarily on adult sports fans in the UK, with particular attention to football supporters and domestic violence occurring around sporting events. The investigation will consider whether there is an association between sporting events and reported incidents of domestic abuse, rather than assuming that attending or supporting sport directly causes abusive behaviour. Particular attention will be given to factors such as alcohol consumption, match results, emotional responses, masculinity, sporting culture and social environments. How domestic abuse affects victims and survivors will be considered and whether sporting organisations, clubs, governing bodies and other agencies have a responsibility to address the issue.

This portfolio will explore three main research questions:

1. Is there an increase in domestic violence incidents during or following major sporting events?
2. What factors associated with sports fandom, such as alcohol consumption, sporting outcomes and masculinity, may contribute to domestic violence?
3. What role should sports clubs, governing bodies and public health organisations play in preventing and responding to domestic violence among sports fans?

Several perspectives will be considered throughout the portfolio. From a public health perspective, the physical and psychological consequences of domestic violence will be explored, alongside approaches to prevention and support for victims and survivors. A social and psychological perspective will consider whether emotional responses to sporting outcomes, alcohol consumption, group identity and social pressures can influence behaviour. A gender perspective will examine the relationship between

masculinity, power and sporting culture, particularly given that domestic abuse is disproportionately experienced by women and perpetrated by men. The sporting perspective will consider whether clubs and governing organisations have a responsibility to challenge harmful behaviours among supporters. Finally, the media perspective will explore how domestic violence associated with sporting events is represented and whether media coverage helps raise awareness or potentially reinforces stereotypes.

The topic is contested and complex because the relationship between sport and domestic violence cannot be explained by one factor. Although some research suggests that domestic abuse incidents can increase around certain sporting events, this does not mean that sport itself causes domestic violence. Other factors, including existing abusive relationships, alcohol consumption, social circumstances and individual behaviour, may also contribute. There is therefore an important distinction between correlation and causation. Furthermore, questions remain about how much responsibility should be placed on sports clubs for the behaviour of supporters outside the stadium. This investigation will critically examine these competing perspectives to determine how sporting environments may contribute to, influence or provide opportunities to address domestic violence.

References:

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