

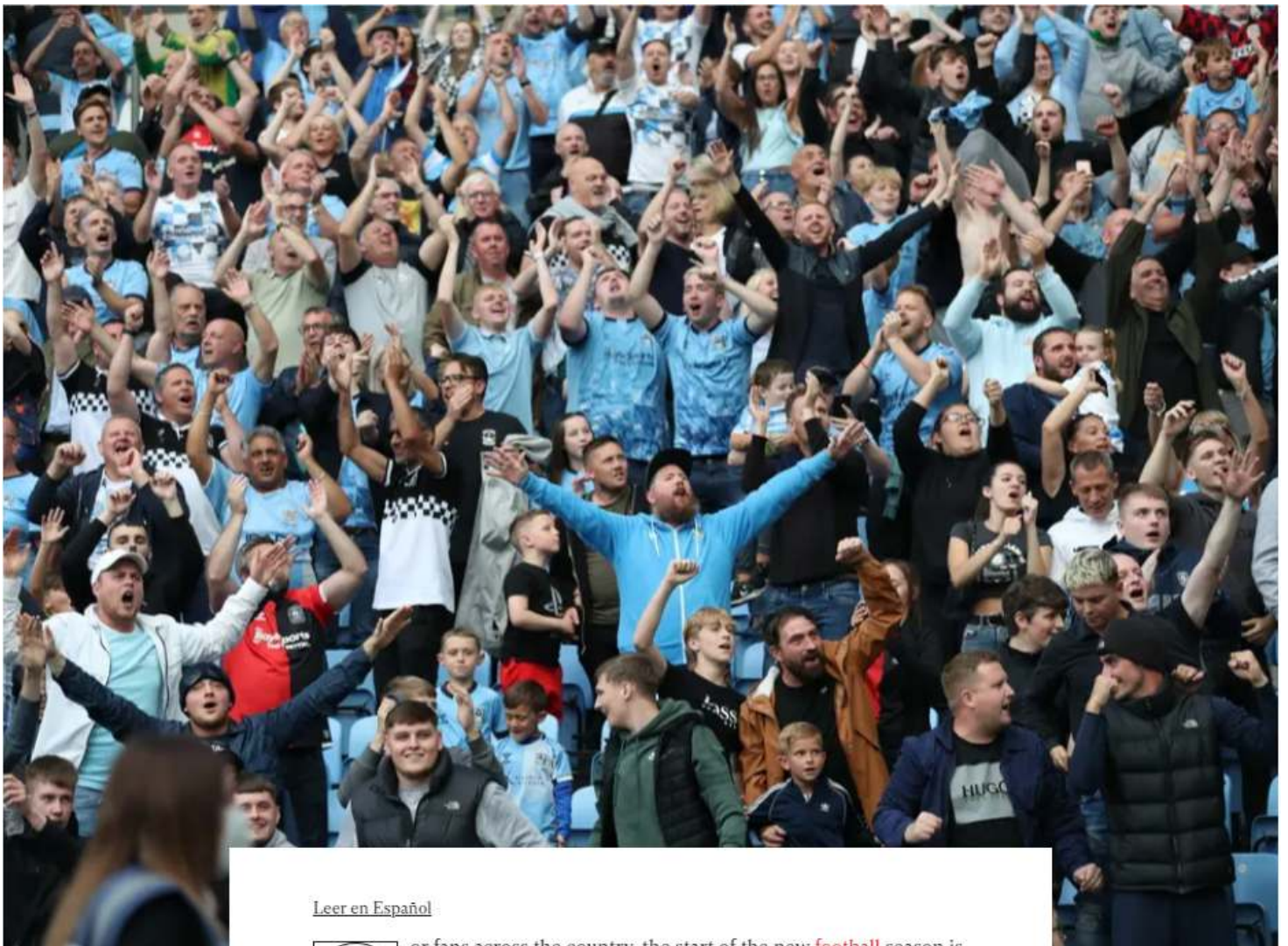
# ‘The excuse he needed to vent his violence’: The fear football elicits for domestic abuse victims

Exclusive data shows 20 per cent rise in domestic abuse referrals after England lost to Italy in Euros final. By

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For fans across the country, the start of the new **football** season is a moment of heady excitement; the return of rolling out of bed and straight into the pub, of half-time pies, of songs in the streets, of slurred debates about whether it was a penalty, of stumbling back home with a kebab in hand. It's a ritual for thousands, an essential part of British culture.

But for **domestic abuse** victims living with violent partners, the prospect of eight months of match after match can conjure up feelings of terror, dread and apprehension.

Recent study found domestic abuse increases when football matches kick off before 7pm (PA Wire)

While football does not engender domestic abuse, it can nevertheless inflame pre-existing patterns of violence and give perpetrators an excuse to ramp up their mistreatment. For Emma, the weekend games became an excuse for her partner to abuse her.

"I can vividly remember occasions where Fulham were playing and the violence escalated," she tells *The Independent*. "The emotional violence of threats and the abuse towards me. The name-calling and cigarette packets being thrown at me if someone had missed a penalty."

She said the abuse worsened when Fulham lost a game – noting she would stay with her parents or a friend when football matches were on.

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For victims of domestic violence, the England final isn't something to celebrate

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"I would avoid going to the pub with him and his friends," she adds. "Football is just another excuse. Abuse is abuse. It is because someone thrives from having that power over someone. I would deliberately try and avoid seeing him after football matches."

Charlotte tells a similar story. "Whenever there was a football game, it would usually involve my ex drinking in the day. Looking back, he used alcohol as an excuse to let go and be violent. I always thought to myself, 'If you know you are going to be violent after drinking, why do you carry on drinking?' I would think, 'Do you care about me that little?'"

The 50-year-old, who now works as chief executive of a domestic abuse shelter, said she did not understand domestic abuse back then like she does now.



*"His dream night was to go out, watch football, get drunk and get in a fight with someone. He actively pursued it."*

Charlotte

"Now I know it was just an excuse," she adds. "With the big matches, whether it was **Chelsea** or England, it didn't matter whether they won or lost, the threat of violence was ever-present. It was almost the excuse he needed to vent his violence. Alcohol was his mechanism to enable the violence."

Charlotte notes her ex's violent drunken rages after football matches tallied with a wider pattern of coercive control, sexual violence, financial abuse, emotional manipulation and physical violence which all took place while sober. Ms Kneer says he loved and relished the "violence" which he associated with football.

"If he went out to watch a football match, he was excited about the violence which may ensue with other men," she adds. "He was excited as it was a time to be involved in a punch-up. His dream night was to go out, watch football, get drunk and get in a fight with someone. He actively pursued it."

Charlotte's violent partner was eventually jailed for seven years in 2011. While he was charged with two counts of threats to kill and three counts of actual bodily harm against Charlotte, he was also jailed for other domestic abuse-related charges against two other women.

"I'm really glad I was able to turn such a negative experience into something positive," Charlotte chips in. "The work I do now running refuges is saving women's lives. And campaigning nationally and internationally to change domestic abuse policies is raising awareness of what amounts to an insidious human rights abuse in the home."

Research has repeatedly shown a link between domestic abuse and football matches. Exclusive data, seen by *The Independent* from the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV), now shows a 20 per cent rise in referrals after England lost to Italy at Wembley stadium in the recent Euro 2020 final.



“The number of people being referred to us by the police and domestic abuse agencies increased,” Mark Groves, chief executive of the NCDV, which provides free emergency restraining orders for domestic abuse survivors, says.

“There was no change before the Euros final on 11 July, then once the football finished, suddenly for around the last two weeks of July, we saw a very sudden 20 per cent increase in referrals. We can safely assume this is something to do with football.”

He noted the NCDV receives around 7,000 requests for ‘non-molestation orders’ each month but then the number of referrals shot up to around 8,000 in the month of July – adding that the surge in referrals came after England lost the Euro final.

Research also found the number of domestic abuse cases reported to Lancashire police force in the 2002, 2006 and 2010 World Cups surged by 38 per cent on the days when England lost. While incidents increased by 26 per cent when the team either won or drew a match.

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Meanwhile, a recent study, carried out by the London School of Economics and Political Science, found domestic abuse increases when football matches kick off before 7pm. The research suggests alcohol is to blame instead of magnified emotions after a team’s loss. Researchers looked at eight years of police data for the Greater Manchester area alongside almost 800 games played by Manchester United and Manchester City.

Ruth Davison, chief executive of Refuge, which is the UK’s largest provider of shelters for domestic abuse victims, said they strived to ensure women in need of support during the Euros, one of the biggest world sporting events, were aware of their services.

“Regardless of who wins and who loses at football, domestic abuse is systemic, purposeful behaviour and happens all year round. Football tournaments do not cause abuse – abuse is a choice a perpetrator makes – but they can exacerbate pre-existing abusive behaviours,” she says.

“Now, as a new football season starts, our message to women and girls experiencing domestic abuse is clear: You are not alone, Refuge is here for you.”

*Anyone who requires help or support can contact the National Domestic Abuse Helpline which is open 24/7 365 days per year on 0808 2000 247 or via their website <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>*