

CERC IN HEALTH EQUITY AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING *PERSPECTIVES:* **A TRUE WIN FOR CANADA: ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SPORTS CULTURE**

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A FIFA display at The Tenor, Yonge and Dundas. Photo by Shapi John, 2026

On my commute home, I passed a FIFA pop-up ad featuring a bright, glowing heart right in the center of a soccer field. FIFA is an international soccer tournament held every 4 years, featuring men's national teams from across the globe. This year, the tournament is hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States. One of FIFA's most recognized benefits is the international financial boost, with these games adding several billion dollars to the global economy each cycle. The marketing team behind this heart clearly meant to portray

fans' love for the sport and their teams. However, what the ad doesn't show is the sharp rise in violence both at home and abroad, stemming from heightened emotions, irresponsible alcohol consumption, and a culture that excuses bad behaviour—otherwise known as “Football Hooliganism.”

While sports are often celebrated for building character and community, they also exist within a gendered domain that reinforces hegemonic masculinity - the socially dominant form of manhood in a patriarchal society. This version of masculinity places assertiveness and strength on a pedestal while condoning dominance, aggression, and misogyny toward women, and is seen to be linked to violence against women.



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Given that gender inequality is the core driver of domestic violence, it is important to consider how these dynamics manifest in sporting contexts. For example, research reveals violent patterns that occur during FIFA matches, with domestic abuse rising by 26% when a supported team wins or draws, and spiking even higher to 38% when the team loses. In particular, team victories are linked to elevated alcohol-fueled celebrations, which in turn cause alcohol-related domestic violence cases to jump by 47% following a win.

These patterns however, are not limited to sporting events. Extensive research confirms that domestic violence rises during public holidays, extremely hot days, and weekends, with risk spiking by 43.5% on Saturdays and 50.6% on Sundays. As Canada prepares to host the FIFA matches during peak summer heat, we must acknowledge these facts, remain vigilant, and confront this reality directly to better support those at risk. During matches themselves, domestic violence reports gradually increase as the games progress, peaking right after the final whistle, then slowly declining. Some experts suggest that the culture of “Football Hooliganism” alongside a game's heightened competitive atmosphere, and increased alcohol consumption during these sporting events may contribute to this pattern.

MYTH: *Associations with domestic violence and sports have to do with the type of sport played, such as being high-contact or inherently violent.*

FACT: *There is more association between the emotional investment of a game, as opposed to whether it's a contact sport or not. Soccer is not considered a violent sport and is played non-contact, yet studies show a significant association between their major sport events and increased reports of domestic violence incidents.*

MYTH: *Violence against women is not a problem in this day and age.*

FACT: *Females represent over 90% of international sexual violence cases, with an average age of 26 and are perpetrated mainly by a stranger or recent acquaintance.*

MYTH: Violence only increases in the countries that actually host these sporting events.

FACT: In reality, violence during these tournaments increases worldwide, regardless of who is hosting. For example, Costa Rica is a country that wasn't a host of the games and yet still saw emergency calls rise by up to 45% during the last FIFA cycle in 2022.



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However, we cannot simply blame the individual because these travel destinations deliberately create what experts call “tourism bubbles,” which are places marketed and branded as safe escapes where people can leave the norms and expectations of “back home” behind. A popular example is Las Vegas’ infamous slogan, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.” These bubbles are inherently gendered, racialized, and sexualized, catering to the male tourist gaze and reinforcing patriarchal norms. These destinations tend to prioritize protecting their reputation as safe and desirable than on addressing violence, often leading some authorities to turn a blind eye to sex and gender-based abuse.

For instance, in 2021, a British teenager accused a group of male travellers of gang-raping her while on vacation in Cyprus. Instead of providing the victim with proper legal proceedings and representation, local authorities claimed the teen was “defaming the country”, forcing her to retract her statement and in turn charged her with a 4 months sentence for “public mischief”. She was accused by the Cyprus courts for damaging Cyprus's travel image and of fabricating the entire attack, ultimately prioritizing their tourism reputation over investigating her allegations.

The courts later deemed the case had been wrongfully dismissed for failing to protect the teens' rights, ultimately pressuring her into retracting her statement. Silencing survivors only reinforce the permissive environments that allow gendered violence to persist within tourism bubbles.

So where does that leave us? Awareness is the first step towards accountability, but speaking up is the only way for change to occur. A true win for Canada this season would be by staying safe and aware - and if you see something, say something.

If you or someone you know has been victimized please don't hesitate to contact local authorities or hotlines:

For domestic violence help - <https://www.thehotline.org>

- Call: 1-800-799-SAFE*

For a suicide hotline - <https://988.ca>

- Call: 988*

For drinking support - <https://helpwithdrinking.ca>

- Alcoholics anonymous - <https://www.aa.org>*

For families dealing with addiction recovery -

<https://www.farcanda.org>

- 1-855-377-6677*

For immediate assistance call 911.

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