

Majority of NFL player arrests aren't for violent crimes

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A new UT Dallas study suggests that NFL violence is not as common off the field as it may seem.

Compared to violent offending data in other studies, the percentage of violent arrests among NFL [players](#) was higher, according to the newest UT Dallas research. But these crimes were committed by a very small number of players.

The researchers measured arrests among NFL players between 2000 and 2014. The data came from two separate NFL arrest databases created by The San Diego Union-Tribune and USA Today.

Violent crimes included murder, manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, DUI manslaughter, attempted murder, robbery, aggravated assault, sexual assault, rape, statutory rape, battery, assault, domestic violence, child abuse and kidnapping.

The study examined 774 arrests among 573 NFL players. Of those arrests, 209 (27 percent) were for [violent crimes](#). The majority of those players—440 (77 percent)—had one arrest during the period studied. But 91 had two arrests, and 42 players had three or more arrests.

"It's a repeat behavioral problem among a very small fraction of people, and it's that fraction of people who get all the attention," said Dr. Alex Piquero, Ashbel Smith Professor of Criminology and one of the study's authors. He also said that a 24-hour news cycle and social media bring

attention to each incident, which may make violence appear to be more widespread.

"These incidents are horrific, but they're not the norm. The majority of NFL players are never arrested, and if so, it's usually only once," Piquero said. "It's only an extremely small number of players who are responsible for most of the arrests. Most of these players are law-abiding citizens and don't do anything wrong. And, in fact, many NFL players are upstanding citizens who give much of themselves to their communities and charitable organizations."

The research was published online in the academic journal *Deviant Behavior*. Piquero worked with co-authors Wanda Leal and Dr. Marc Gertz, both of Florida State University.

The purpose of the study was to determine whether off-the-field violence was driven by players who primarily commit violent crimes or by offenders engaged in a variety of frequent criminal activities. Previous research has found that the more crimes a person commits, the greater likelihood that some of the crimes will be violent. Most violent crimes are committed by people engaged in a variety of frequent criminal activity.

The fact that the violence was committed by players who commit a high frequency of offenses can inform decisions on how to address NFL violence, Piquero said. He said the findings demonstrate that more training and prevention as well as earlier intervention, even before players reach the NFL, could help address violent behavior.

"Does the NFL have a violence problem? I would say no, the NFL does not have the large problem of violence that many think the league has. But it should pay careful attention to the [violence](#) that's happening outside the gridiron," said Piquero, who also serves as an associate dean

for graduate programs in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences.

Piquero and his co-authors also published a study last year that found that the overall arrest rate for the general population was nearly twice as high as the rate for NFL players from 2000 to 2013.

More information: Wanda Leal et al. Are NFL Arrestees Violent Specialists or High Frequency Offenders or Both?, *Deviant Behavior* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2016.1141015](https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1141015)

Wanda Leal et al. The National Felon League?: A comparison of NFL arrests to general population arrests, *Journal of Criminal Justice* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2015.08.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2015.08.001)

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