

Can watching pro sports on TV prevent crime?

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The entertainment provided by televised sporting events has a significant effect on crime in Chicago, reducing the number of violent, property and drug crime reports by as much as 25 percent during the hours of a given game, according to a study by the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program. The study published in the *Journal of Sports Economics* in May.

While many research studies have focused on increased aggression as an after-effect of viewing [violent video games](#), television or movies, relatively few have demonstrated whether televised sports can produce declines in [crime](#). The clear reductions in crime demonstrated by the UC Davis study imply that some individuals end up watching sports instead of committing crimes, and that entertainment may be an important and under-utilized crime prevention strategy.

"While we don't know about idle hands, our article suggests that idle eyes are the devil's playground," said Hannah Laqueur, assistant professor of emergency medicine at the University of California, Davis and a researcher with the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program. "Alternative leisure activities and entertainment can substitute for criminal activity, and the benefits may be substantial."

The researchers found substantial and significant effects for most sporting events across all crime-type categories. Crime in Chicago during Bears Monday Night Football games was approximately 15 percent lower than when the Bears were not playing, with the reductions

in crime driven almost entirely by winning games. Crime during the Super Bowl was approximately 25 percent lower, which amounts to roughly 60 fewer crimes. Violent and property crime was approximately 15 to 20 percent lower during the Super Bowl. The National Basketball Association (NBA) and Major League Baseball (MLB) games generated similar but smaller effects.

With the exception of a spike in violence after the Super Bowl likely resulting from drinking during the game, the researchers did not find related increases in crime in the hours or days immediately before or after a televised sports game.

The authors believe the reductions appear to represent foregone criminal opportunities and that whatever short-term aggression-inducing effects movies, television or video games have may be negligible in comparison to their diversionary power.

"Perhaps if sporting events aired in the summer when reruns and second-rate programming is typically available, real crime savings could be generated," Laqueur said.

For the study the researchers compared crime reports from January 2001 through December 2013 from the Chicago Police Department's Citizen Law Enforcement Analysis Reporting System by the half hour when Chicago's major professional sports teams were playing to crime reports at the same time, day and month when the teams were not playing. They also did the same analysis for the Super Bowl, NBA Finals and World Series. Chicago's sports teams included the Bears (National Football League), White Sox and Cubs (MLB), and Bulls (NBA).

The study tested Super Bowl MVP Ray Lewis's hypothesis: "If we don't have a season, watch how much evil, which we call crime, watch how much crime picks up if you take away our [game](#)...[People have] nothing

else to do."

More information: Ryan Copus et al. Entertainment as Crime Prevention, *Journal of Sports Economics* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/1527002518762551](https://doi.org/10.1177/1527002518762551)

Provided by UC Davis

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