

# Violence and abuse among fan culture growing concern for soccer, new research finds

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Soccer players are concerned for their physical safety due to a fan culture seen as increasingly more violent and abusive, according to new UCD research.

The first of its kind, the [report](#) "The Impact of Violence Towards Footballers in Their Workplace" by FIFPRO, the global players' union shows the stress players are being put under by their own supporters after a rise in physical and verbal attacks post the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the survey of 41 national players' unions, 76% said [workplace safety](#) and health was of growing concern to players—with 66% of male respondents saying fan culture had become more violent and abusive in recent years.

This was reflected in women's soccer too were 34% of unions indicated growing instances of violence and [verbal abuse](#) on match day.

Despite the growing safety concerns, 85% of respondents agreed with the statement that "in most instances the relationship between fans and players is very positive and should be cherished."

"We are seeing a growth in the number of incidents of disorder in European football, at all levels of the professional game," said lead author Dr. Joel Rookwood, from the UCD School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science.

"The expansion of European competitions has provided additional opportunities for problematic fan conduct to compromise player safety and welfare, particularly in the men's game."

The report found that abuse can have serious repercussions with almost 90% of unions saying the threat of violence had impacted on the performance by players and contributing to [mental health issues](#) such as depression.

In all, 98% of unions reported they would welcome increased use of technology such as security scanners and [facial recognition](#) to catch and

deter perpetrators, with the majority saying more should also be done to ban violent fans.

Two-thirds of those surveyed said fans throwing objects was one of the most commonly occurring issues regarding greatest threat to player safety, particularly for goalkeepers because of their close proximity to fans.

There were approximately 114 instances of fireworks or missiles disrupting matches last season, according to the report, with several players suffering significant injuries.

"We cannot continue to allow a culture in which footballers are the victims of unchecked and normalized aggression in their working environment: on the pitch, during team travel, at training grounds, official events, and in their [private lives](#)," said Alexander Bielefeld, FIFPRO Director of Global Policy & Strategic Relations (Men's Football).

"Given the mounting levels of violence, it is important football stakeholders, social partners and [public institutions](#) increase cooperation to identify measures that ensure the [safety](#) of players, staff and spectators. Clubs, leagues, and federations have a responsibility to ensure that players, as employees, have a safe working environment to perform at their peak."

**More information:** The Impact of Violence Towards Footballers in Their Workplace. [fifpro.org/en/reports/2023-workplace-violence-against-footballers](https://fifpro.org/en/reports/2023-workplace-violence-against-footballers)

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