

When the rules of the game are broken: Research studies sports injuries related to illegal activity

February 29 2008

A study published in the February issue of *Injury Prevention* estimates that more than 98,000 sports injuries in U.S. high schools in 2005-2007 were directly related to an action that was ruled illegal activity by a referee, official or disciplinary committee.

Researchers in the Center for Injury Research and Policy (CIRP) at Nationwide Children's Hospital analyzed data from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 National High School Sport-Related Injury Surveillance Study. Nine high school sports were included: boys' football, soccer, basketball, wrestling and baseball and girls' soccer, volleyball, basketball and softball.

Boys' and girls' soccer had the highest rates of injuries related to illegal activity and girls' volleyball, girls' softball and boys' baseball had the lowest. Overall, 6.4 percent of all high school sports-related injuries were related to illegal activity, with the highest proportion in girls' basketball (14 percent), girls' soccer (nearly 12 percent) and boys' soccer (11 percent).

Thirty-two percent of injuries related to illegal activity were to the head and/or face and 25 percent were concussions.

“Our research indicates illegal activity is an overlooked risk factor for sports-related injury,” said Study Co-Author Christy Collins of CIRP.

“Reducing illegal activity through enhanced enforcement of rules and targeted education about the dangers of illegal activity may reduce sports-related injuries.”

Of the nine sports studied, more than 10 percent of injuries in four sports were related to illegal activity. By definition, activities ruled illegal are not supposed to occur. Thus, injuries attributed to illegal activities should be largely preventable.

“Each sport has a unique set of rules developed to promote fair competition and protect participants from injury,” added Study Co-Author Dawn Comstock, Ph.D., of CIRP and a faculty member of The Ohio State University College of Medicine. “Thus, enforcing rules and punishing illegal activity is a risk control measure that may reduce injury rates by modifying players’ behavior.”

Source: Nationwide Children's Hospital

Citation: When the rules of the game are broken: Research studies sports injuries related to illegal activity (2008, February 29) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-02-game-broken-sports-injuries-illegal.html>

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