

## Can a single concussion increase the risk of criminal behaviour?

There is growing awareness of the impact that repeated head injuries can have, particularly among professional athletes in contact sports such as boxing, American football and rugby. The Netflix documentary [\*Killer Inside: The Mind of Aaron Hernandez\*](#) underscores this impact. The documentary chronicles the life of a young NFL player whose increasingly erratic and violent behaviour culminates in him murdering his friend. After the athlete commits suicide, a post-mortem brain exam.

whether suffering just a single concussion increases the risk of criminal behaviour.

This

Results from our research show clear gender differences. The increase in violent offending following a concussion is greater for men than for women. Furthermore, those who suffer multiple concussions have an even higher risk of being charged and convicted for violent offending.

While there has been increased awareness of the impact of concussions among professional athletes, this research highlights that it can impact a much wider range of people. The potential cost of even one concussion is significant in terms of direct and indirect health effects, particularly those that involve wellbeing and justice outcomes. While progress has been made, we still need to improve the diagnosis and treatment of concussions. We need to ditch the "she'll be right" attitude. If you or someone you know takes a knock to the head, watch out for signs of concussion. These can include a glazed look, decreased mobility, poor coordination, head or neck ache, or sensitivity to light. Don't ignore these signs - seek medical advice promptly. As the research shows, failure to accurately diagnose, treat, and manage concussion can have wide-reaching impacts on New Zealand's health sector, justice system, and economy.