

Calls growing to end hockey violence

By Communications Staff

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Researchers at The University of Western Ontario - one an expert on sports and the Olympics and one an expert on the effects of violence - have joined forces with the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness (CCAA) and other groups to continue work to bring attention to the problem of violence in hockey.

Kevin Wamsley, a Professor and Acting Dean in the Faculty of Health Sciences, and Peter Jaffe, Academic Director at the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children in the Faculty of Education at Western, are leading the study.

“Our kids watch violence in hockey during NHL games and they get the wrong message. They come to believe it is just part of the game,” says Wamsley. “That is unacceptable in other sports and it should be unacceptable in hockey.”

Jaffe, a hockey fan and assistant coach of one of his boy’s teams, is reiterating a call for a complete ban on fighting in hockey.

“The good news is that there is a growing consensus that it is time for an end to violence, as the evidence mounts that the danger is real,” says Jaffe. “So far though, we have seen nothing but discussion and reviews from hockey officials at all levels. The time has come for decisions and change.”

The CCAA points to a young Ontario Hockey Association player who died after hitting his head on the ice during a fight and to several Junior and NHL stars who have suffered serious head injuries from dangerous blows to the head.

The CCAA is a national non-profit, non-government charitable organization dedicated to eliminating child abuse through advocacy, education, public awareness and prevention programs.

“When players are told, coerced or simply expected through the culture of the game, to fight or deliver dangerous hits in hockey, one has to wonder when this becomes a form of abuse,” says Ellen Campbell, President, CEO & Founder of CCAA.

The CCAA joins with Western’s Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children, the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, the Ontario Principals’ Council and the Centre for Prevention Science (CAMH), in putting forward a joint motion:

- Whereas hockey players, coaches, parents and the general public are increasingly concerned about the level of violence in hockey due to recent well publicized incidents;
- Whereas current medical research has identified the long-term negative health effects of hockey violence such as brain injuries (mild to severe concussions) from hits to the head;
- Whereas hits to the head can come from intentional contact with elbows, shoulders and fists;

- Whereas hockey violence can be addressed by stricter enforcement of the rules governing the game and clearer messages from coaches and parents that violence will not be tolerated;
- Whereas hockey violence can be inadvertently promoted by the glorification and portrayal of hockey violence as entertainment thus reinforcing the misconception that hockey violence is an integral part of the game and Canadian culture;

Be it resolved that the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness, Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, Ontario Principals' Council, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children in the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario, and Centre for Prevention Science lend their voices to the Hockey Canada's national hockey summit to discuss player safety and address the links between violence as entertainment and violence on the ice.

"How do we teach young athletes that violence doesn't belong on the ice when we show replays of fights on giant screens at the games, feature them as highlights on television and sports channels, and set them to music on rock-em, sock-em videos?" says Ray Hughes, a National Coordinator for school violence prevention programs, a collaborative effort with both Western and the Centre for Prevention Science (CAMH).

"For too long we have ignored the negative impact of media violence - sport is a prime culprit when it models abusive behavior as a primary entertainment value," says David Wolfe, Director of CAMH.