

Identifying the Attitudes and Beliefs about Performance Enhancing Drugs: From the 'Couch Potato' to the Athlete

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Abstract

Social science research has much to offer the field of anti-doping in sport. In particular, health psychology models that address behaviour change may be the key to identifying the decision making process around compliance with anti-doping policy. Constructs of the Health Action Process Approach (HAPA), such as decisional balance, ambivalence, self-efficacy, situational temptations, and perceived reward for effort, may impact an athletes desire to engage in performance enhancing behaviours or for support personnel to facilitate this behaviour. Thus, health psychology methods and clinical techniques have been incorporated into a mixed methods research design to identify those factors that may be linked to compliance or non compliance with anti-doping policy in sport. This approach has been highlighted in the research priorities of both the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) and the Australian Sport and Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA).

Five experimental groups were incorporated in the design of this study: non-active participants, regular exercisers, amateur sporting club members, professional athletes, and coaches or trainers. The sample size for each experimental group is 50 (n=250). Each participant was presented with a randomised selection of scenarios describing a sports person in a number of different settings (e.g. in competition, with an injury). Participants were asked to provide their view in relation to what the advantages and disadvantages might be for the athlete in the scenario in using and not using performance enhancing drugs or methods. A sub-sample of participants also contributed to qualitative interviews that extended upon these factors.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis focused on the different influencing factors of performance enhancement identified across the different levels of engagement in sport. The issues and factors highlighted will contribute to a pool of items for consideration in a measure developed to assess attitudes to performance enhancement in sport.