

Death for Performance – What would athletes trade-off for success?

The formalisation of the anti doping policy through the World Anti Doping Code (WADC) has been one of the most significant changes in sports policy. Put simply, the drive towards drug free sport has changed the way sport is run, and, most importantly the role given to doping in sport by athletes and fans. Evaluating the effect of the anti doping policy is difficult without clear baseline measures (Mazanov & Connor, 2010). In essence, we do not know if anti-doping strategies, through WADA and NADOs, have actually reduced the use of performance enhancing drugs because there few pre-WADC studies. However, there is one measure that provides a potentially valuable insight into how the WADC has influenced athletes; responses to the Goldman Dilemma. The Dilemma asks whether athletes would pursue sporting success (an Olympic Gold Medal) via an undetectable performance enhancing drug that would kill them in five years time; 52% reported they would take the drug (Goldman et al, 1984). The dilemma was offered to elite athletes across a 15 year period with stability of response found by Goldman et al across this time. This gives a very powerful athlete intention to use base-line measure. We have no insight into how athletes would respond to this dilemma in the post-WADC world. Replicating Connor & Mazanov's (2009) test of the Goldman Dilemma with a sample of the general population, this research project tests if elite athletes are willing to accept the Faustian bargain to achieve sporting success. We hypothesise that anti-doping education and enforcement strategies since 2000 have reduced the willingness of athletes to accept the bargain offered in the Goldman dilemma. That is, less than 52% of contemporary athletes would accept the bargain. The research design calls for a market survey company to conduct telephone based interviews with a representative sample of (n=250) Australians in the general population and (n=250) elite sports people in an Olympic sport who have competed at State representative level or above. A repeat of the Dilemma, given that the last iteration is 15 years old, is desperately needed, particularly given the immense changes wrought by the WADC. This study will provide the only indicative longitudinal evidence that WADA, NADOs and the WADC have had an effect on athlete intention and willingness to dope since the founding of the anti-doping program in 1999. If the rate drops as expected, then it provides evidence that anti-doping rules, education and enforcement have actually worked. While some methodological issues will remain, Goldman's work is the only pre-WADA data that is available and re-testing will allow for an examination of the effectiveness of anti-doping strategies. This is highly significant, novel and potentially ground-breaking research that is very economical.