

Project Connor

Legitimizing the fight: Cross-cultural perspectives on anti-doping strategies in the Pacific

The fight against doping in sport requires the support of a range of people and organizations, including governments, sporting organizations, athletes, athlete support personnel and the public. Crucial to this support is the perception that the anti-doping fight is a 'good thing' to do. Anti-doping activities need to be perceived as legitimate in order for stakeholders to accept, support and buy into anti-doping messages and strategies. This study investigates how people perceive the legitimacy of this regulation with the objective of identifying a host of factors that influence their perceptions.

There are cornerstones to establishing organizational legitimacy. First, there needs to be a legal basis (e.g., UNESCO, CAS, WADC and member nations' legislation). Second, countries/regions must have a duly constituted organization to administer anti-doping programming. Third, the organization must abide by the rules and processes in the WADC and national laws as well as more universal principles of procedural fairness, transparency and rights of appeal. Fourth, the anti-doping fight needs to be considered fair and reasonable in a way that reflects the spirit of sport. Fifth, there needs to be sufficient resources devoted to education, testing and punishment strategies. Sixth, stakeholders need to believe in anti-doping activities and their inherent 'good'. Seventh, the processes of doping control need to be less onerous than the perceived threat of doping. Last, the outcomes of the anti-doping fight need to be tangible and realized so that stakeholders see that a difference is being made.

Problematically for the fight there is a growing crisis of legitimacy. Doping rules and processes are continually challenged, sporting organizations and some countries only partially buy into the anti-doping message, resources are sparse and cultural differences ignored. Further, criticisms of the value of anti-doping regulations take aim at the manner in which the anti-doping fight is undertaken. This research empirically examines whether or not these challenges have merit and, in doing so, explain the dimensions that inform perceptions of legitimacy.

Drawing on a small but growing body of literature, this study explores the problem of maintaining perceptions of the legitimacy of anti-doping work by interviewing a range of stakeholders in the Pacific region—specifically, New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the Oceania RADO. These nations have been selected as they enable a comprehensive comparison of different models used to fight doping 'on the ground' and any impact these differences may have on perceptions of legitimacy.

The target populations for this research will include athletes, support personnel, administrators, bureaucrats, civil servants and politicians. Within each jurisdiction, the systematic selection of participants from as many groups as possible will enable the identification of similarities and differences as well as any 'unique features' in terms of individuals' perceptions of the legitimacy of anti-doping work in various sporting contexts. This research will generate an in-depth understanding of the views of stakeholders regarding the legitimacy of the fight, and most importantly will create a set of concrete policy and procedural changes that can be made to improve the fight against doping in sport.