

## **Project Barkoukis (Greece, UK, Russia)**

### **Support athletes blow the whistle against doping**

The use of drugs and other illegitimate methods to improve performance is a major problem in contemporary sports and evidence shows that increasingly more young people engage in such practices every year. So far, efforts to prevent doping have focused on detection and punishment, whereas research has mainly focused on the psychosocial predictors of doping onset and maintenance (Barkoukis, 2015; Ntoumanis et al., 2014). Recently a new practice, whistleblowing has been proven effective in identifying large scale incidents of doping use. However, this area is still underexplored. Past evidence has largely been focused on the psychosocial predictors of PED use. This line of research supported a novel and integrated social cognition model of adult elite athletes' intentions to use PED, and identified the ethical/motivational profiles of athletes who reported PED use (Lazuras, 2015). Specifically, Barkoukis et al. (2013) and Lazuras et al. (2015) highlighted causal associations between distal (e.g., achievement goals, motivational regulation, moral beliefs) and proximal (e.g., attitudes, normative beliefs, situational temptation) determinants of PED use intentions. Past evidence also identified important normative processes that may help understand the social influences and contexts that encourage doping use (Lazuras et al., 2010). These findings can be effectively transferred to the study of whistleblowing, where related behavioral models have not been studied extensively and the effects of normative influences have been unnoticed. Also, the extension of these integrative models to whistleblowing can be enriched by the consideration of additional variables empirically associated with corruption, and be used in developing policy recommendations and educational interventions empowering athletes to whistleblow.

Therefore, the aim of the proposed project is to utilize behavioral models developed to understand the decision making process towards doping behaviors. It is important to empirically examine whether the psychosocial processes underlying decisions relevant to doping behaviors can also help explaining whistleblowing intentions among athletes. Most importantly, additional variables causally associated with corruption in sport in the scientific literature, such as sports identity and anticipated regret, will be also included in the proposed model of intentions towards whistleblowing. Based on previous research on doping behaviors, the research questions and hypotheses of the proposed study have been formed as follows:

RQ1: What predicts athletes' intentions to whistleblow?

H1: Motivational and moral beliefs will predict intentions to whistleblow indirectly, through the effects of more proximal predictors (attitudes, normative, affective and behavioral control beliefs).

H2: The effects of normative beliefs (perceived social acceptance of PED use) on intentions to use PED will be moderated by sports identity.

H3: Situational temptation will mediate the effects of normative beliefs (perceived prevalence of PED use in sports) on intentions to whistleblow.

RQ2: What is the motivational profile of athletes intending to whistleblow? Is this profile different compared to the profile of athletes who do not intend to whistleblow?

H1: Athletes intending to whistleblow will demonstrate an adaptive motivational profile (high task orientation, high intrinsic motivation, high morality), as compared to athletes not intending to whistleblow.

**The operational objectives of the project are the following:**

- a) Examine the psychosocial processes that predict athletes' intentions to whistleblow.
- b) Investigate whether whistleblowing represents a moral/ethical issue, or whether it is driven by other factors, such as motivational regulation, normative and attitudinal beliefs.
- c) Identify the psychological profile of adolescent athletes intending to whistleblow.

As a result of the project, policy-makers, educators and professionals involved in anti-doping policy and prevention will be provided with updated empirical findings on the variables that predict stronger whistleblowing intentions among athletes. This will be an asset to future efforts to tackle PED use in sports because it will provide the necessary evidence to establish solid policies favoring whistleblowing and to form interventions that empower athletes intending to whistleblow through a normative environment in favor of whistleblowing.