

## **Project Duncan**

### **Enhancing Anti-Doping Education Interventions Using Framed Messages**

Although the negative consequences of doping are documented, athletes continue to use performance enhancing substances (PES) that can have negative effects on their health. Currently, educational interventions are being developed and implemented to teach athletes about the risks of doping. The proposed research aims to enhance the efficiency of these interventions by implementing a proven health communication strategy, message framing. Message framing refers to the fact that the way in which people respond to information (i.e., messages) and subsequently make behavioral decisions is dependent, in part, on how the information in the message is presented, or framed. Individuals respond differently to factually-equivalent information depending on whether the information emphasizes benefits (gain-framed) or costs (loss-framed). A significant body of research, conducted primarily among adults, shows that when encouraging people to engage in health promotion behaviors such as avoiding doping, gain-framed messages (e.g., "Saying no to doping will help you stay healthy and allow you to feel proud of yourself as an athlete!") are more persuasive than loss-framed messages (e.g., "Doping will put your health at risk and cause you to feel ashamed of yourself as an athlete!"). The effects of message framing have not been tested in the context of doping prevention nor have they been confirmed among adolescents.

The proposed research will be conducted in two phases. In Phase I, 30 adolescent athletes will participate in focus groups to share their ideas about doping and provide feedback on a series of gain- and loss-framed messages. We will use the information gained from these focus groups to create gain- and loss-framed video messages to test in Phase II. Phase II will be conducted as a randomized control trial in which 236 adolescent athletes will be assigned randomly to view either a gain-framed or loss-framed video message. The participants will complete questionnaires to assess their intentions, attitudes, self-efficacy and perceptions of norms about doping before and after viewing their specific message as well at a three month follow up. We will compare the questionnaire responses of participants who viewed the gain-framed video to those who viewed the loss-framed video to test our hypothesis that the gain-framed messages will lead to stronger intentions to avoid doping, more negative attitudes toward doping, higher self-efficacy to avoid doping, and more positive perceptions of social norms for avoiding doping.

The first phase of this study will yield a library of anti-doping messages that are tailored and acceptable to adolescent athletes. The second phase of this research will help to determine which messages are most effective for influencing the cognitions and motivation known to be associated with doping. Education interventions, media campaigns, and other anti-doping initiatives can easily apply these findings by adopting the message frame that is found to be most persuasive. Thus, this research has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to doping prevention.