

Project Kavussanu

From research to application: An evidence-based psychosocial intervention for doping prevention in young athletes

The aim of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate an evidence-based psychosocial intervention aimed to reduce doping intentions in young athletes, in three countries. The intervention will focus on three variables, which have been identified in our previous cross-cultural WADA funded research as predictors of doping intentions: moral identity, which is the importance one places on being a moral person; moral disengagement, which refers to the cognitive mechanisms people use to justify unethical behavior; and moral atmosphere, which pertains to a team's shared understanding of what is acceptable behaviour, for example taking drugs may be viewed as acceptable in one team but not another. We will also examine anticipated guilt as mediator of the effects of our intervention on doping intentions, as this variable proved to be a key predictor of doping intentions in our previous study.

Participants will be 240 (80 in each country) competitive athletes, aged 16-20, of a reasonably high standard, recruited from individual (e.g., swimming, track and field, cycling) and team (e.g., football, basketball) sports. The project is anticipated to last three years. In Year 1, the main activity will be the development of the psychosocial intervention. Specifically, we will devise ways to change the variables mentioned above. Once the intervention is developed, we will pilot test it in a small number of athletes (n = 5 in each country) to refine it and ensure it runs smoothly.

In Year 2, we will implement the psychosocial intervention in a sample of 120 athletes (40 in each country). Another group of 120 athletes (40 in each country) will receive a standard educational (i.e., knowledge-based) intervention. The aim is to determine whether, in comparison with the educational intervention, the psychosocial intervention is effective in reducing doping intentions. Doping intentions will be measured using scenarios, which we have developed and used successfully in our current WADA funded project. We will also administer questionnaires to measure the variables (mentioned above), which we will attempt to change with the psychosocial intervention. Measures of all variables will be taken before and after the interventions and three months after the end of the interventions. We envisage that each intervention will consist of six meetings in groups of 8-12 athletes, which will take place (for each group) once a week, over a period of six weeks.

In Year 3, we will obtain a second set of follow up measures, six months after the end of the interventions to determine whether the effectiveness of the psychosocial intervention compared to the educational one has been maintained over time. During this period, we will also analyse the data and disseminate our findings to anti-doping agencies, sport organizations, conferences, and journals.

As indicated above, the project will be conducted in three countries. Cross-cultural research in doping intentions is scarce, but is important as it establishes whether an intervention is specific to a single culture or can be more universal.